

## **Advancing the priorities of Caribbean small island developing states towards achieving the 2030 Agenda**

Good morning colleagues a lot has been said regarding the present situation of the world and the region in which we all live. The most recent report paints a picture which in most respects is not one which reflects an image of being on the road to great progress.

And while the news isn't great the report of the realities is important because we cannot do better if we don't recognize that the present course of events national, regionally and globally is taking us to a place where we don't want to go.

Thus, given the facts how then do we advance the priorities of the Caribbean SIDS towards achieving the 2030 agenda. Each of my colleagues will inform you of the work each is doing. How we the less than 0.01 % contributors to greenhouse gas emission face climate change impacts every day which make our struggle for survival so elusive because we are unable to effect the change which is well outside of our abilities, but we meet negotiate and press on.

For The Bahamas our experience is perhaps the most unique and inconceivable as we've dealt with "twin-tragedies", that being the strongest hurricane on record to make landfall in the Atlantic region, and 6 months later, the impact of COVID-19. Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19 created "the perfect economic storm" for The Bahamas, resulting in a combined macro-level economic impact of \$7.5 billion dollars according to UNDP. Further, both events severely impacted our largest economic product Tourism! And 5 years later, we are still dealing with the impacts.

As a Big Ocean State, The Bahamas, takes note of the fact that Oceans are the least financially supported areas globally with less than 0.1% financing. In The Bahamas there are more than 160 conservation areas with an estimated management cost of more than \$200 Million per year by 2027. At present 17% of The Bahamas is under some type of conservation program and we are moving towards an overall 20% goal.

Having a deep respect for nature and our environment we embarked on national legislative, and regulatory reforms. We created a National Statistical Department whose legal mandate is to gather the necessary data analyze and present it in a form that can aid policy decisions. The data must also be accessible to all in a digital space which allows public and private access. Because to plan everyone must know and understand.

And then we moved toward a more digital space as we borrowed funds from the IDB (\$30 M) to embark upon a digital Transformation process to have a digital society utilizing SMART technology supported by ubiquitous connectivity with integrated efficient and paperless government services.

Because to advance in the 21 century you must know your needs and be able to sustain and maintain a communication culture where data is generated and shared and understood. And technology is integrated into everything we do.

After undertaking these actions, we now stand back and look at what we have so far and we understand that science is now informing us that should we desire a country and people which are thriving and advancing, there is a need to prioritize our efforts toward resiliency and adaption

So to achieve resilience, The Bahamas has prioritized the following:

- a. It Energy Independence
- b. Enhanced Its Food Security
- c. Engaged in Adaptive- Sustainable Development
- d. Have an intentional Youth Empowerment program

## **Energy Independence**

Our government continues to roll out a progressive SDG agenda and the implementation of renewable energy systems is at the top of that list. In collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, The Bahamas is executing an \$80 million project, aimed at mitigating the impact of climate change and provide reliable and affordable energy.

As part of our focus on transitioning to renewable energy, we have allocated \$22 million to adopt solar technologies on sites in several of our islands being the largest Archipelago in the Caribbean region.

We are advancing efforts to pilot ocean thermal energy conversion (OTEC) across 9 islands in The Bahamas, to support the provision of clean and affordable drinking water, that is carbon neutral to produce, while providing excess clean energy into the grid.

Despite our negligible carbon footprint, The Bahamas has committed, to achieving an economy-wide reduction of GHG emissions of 30% by 2030, including having at least 30% of renewables in the country's energy mix, and increasing the sales of electric and hybrid vehicles which will represent 35% and 15% (respectively) of total sales by 2030.

In addressing the issue of poverty, Agricultural production in The Bahamas focuses on four main areas: crops, poultry, livestock, and dairy. And to achieve food security we are prioritizing the following in the agricultural sector:

- Empowering local farmers by training them on new and innovative farming practices, providing spaces for local community markets and food fairs and providing financial support to community cooperatives especially female farmers through start-up financial support like land grants and tax exemptions
- Supporting agricultural technology throughout the archipelago and using schools as starter programs to introduce agriculture to the next generation through a hands on positive and technology driven lens
- Investing in self driven agricultural initiatives such as a \$400,000 feed mill to support livestock farmers thus reducing feed imports
- As a part of the sustainable food program, the establishment of 38 new eggs houses on 12 islands, with the aim for 13 million eggs production. this towards significantly reducing if not eliminating the need for the importation of eggs into the country.
- Establishing hydroponic trailers and greenhouse parks throughout the country for the growth of leafy greens vegetables which increases not only the quantity of leafy vegetables but the quality of nutrients available to residents in the communities.

The focus on the agricultural sector allows us the ability to feed ourselves all while adapting to the environmental changes which climate change will bring via drought and sea level rise

Then there are our efforts towards adaptative sustainable development

The Bahamas is at great risk and extremely vulnerable given its geographical features as a low-lying, sea encircled country. If projected sea level rise is reached by 2050, between 10-12% of our territory will be lost.

- Thus, we have revised our building codes in light of this eventuality to build infrastructure which can withstand the increasing threat of more numerous and stronger storms
- Engaged in environmental restorations on areas impacted by climate change and previous development situation in an attempt to slow the progress and impacts of sea level raise and storm surges
- We have Implemented environmental legislation which requires environment and social impact assessments for all development projects and an open and mandatory public consultation process for the public input

- Implemented the legal requirements for the development of Environmental Management Plans which require mandatory monitoring of the environmental and social safeguards required by the EIA assessments in order to maintain environmental and social sustainability.

### **Notwithstanding our efforts however**

It is estimated that 3.3 billion people are living in countries with high human vulnerability to climate change. Analysis by the International Federation for the Red Cross found that 97.6 million people were affected by climate- and weather-related disasters in 2019.

The costs of climate change impacts are astronomical. We in the Caribbean know from your own experience, the loss of life and costs to communities caused by Hurricanes. A report on 55 economies hit hard by climate change found they had lost about \$525 billion in the last two decades due to the impacts of global warming.

On this road to 2030 it is imperative that our partners some who singularly, has inflicted more than \$ 1.9 trillion in damage to other countries from the effects of their GHG emissions need to be compliant with the agreements they and we have all agreed to implement as citizens of this one planet. If we cant resolve this issue which knows no boundaries then all our hard work or investments will be lost in one hurricane, one forest fire, a series of prolong drought and the slow onset of the sea level rise as it swallows us up

The Bahamas, along with our Caribbean neighbors, need resources and support to make our infrastructure and countries more resilient to the threats posed by climate change. We have advocated for the creation of dedicated, accessible, and affordable financing. We have called for enhanced regional cooperation and increased geographical ties, as this will lead to stronger economic growth, resilience, and response to the challenges of a changing climate. Because of predatory lending with private financial institutions and withdrawal of funding from UN partners, developing SIDS should not have to choose between directing resources to the SDGs or reducing our debt to creditors.

## **But let's look to a better brighter way – the YOUTH**

For more than 30 years The Bahamas has had a dedicate youth program with the establishment of the Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture. Through that Ministry Youths have always had a voice. BUT now their reach has expanded to the global negotiation spaces with the establishment of the Climate Change and SDG Ambassadorship programs. These programs are seeded in the Office office of The Prime Minister and these Ambassadors are operating at the highest level of government, working side by side with the policy makers.

The youth ambassador program is also featured most prominently with the annual hosting of a Climate Youth conference and an SDG conference. Both conferences are held in July during the period of our nations Independence.

And to show that this Youth Ambassador office is not a mere token space each of the Ambassadors programs are also afforded a fiscal budget, official passports and all the accoutrements which are afforded to traditional ambassadors in the foreign service.

They have a committee of youth which they select and lead and they are responsible for the development and implementation of a platform within government to address national needs with their perspective in mind. We understand that they are the inheritors and thus they have a contribution to make, and we will continue to work with them to archive a holistic future for our country.

So in summary all things for The Bahamas can only be achieved, implemented and counted as successes, only through the lens of Climate Change and the necessary and appropriate financing programs which take into account, the elephant, which is trampling and ravaging everything we put our hands to do on the road to 2030. Thus, for us SDG 13 and a fit for purpose, concessional financial support are the principle driving factor which impacts our ability to accomplish the other 16 goals on the road to 2030 Agenda

Thank you