

PRIVATE SECTOR DISASTER REVIEW MEETING

September 27, 2017

Introduction

Against the reality that sustained winds of relatively low hurricane strength (*category 1 is 74-95 mph; sustained winds for Hurricane Maria were reported by the Met. Office as being 84 mph*) can cause significant damage to existing infrastructure in St. Kitts and Nevis, the fact that we have no motherland from whom to seek aid, and the recognition that the indirect impact associated with a regional disaster can have its own catastrophic effect on the economy, requires that we take a critical look at existing policies.

Represented below is the assessment of activities surrounding Hurricanes Irma and Maria and the areas identified for improvement and further discussion.

GENERAL REVIEW

National Mitigation Council Meetings

1. Early this year, as is customary, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the various disaster mitigation committees that form part of the Mitigation Council met to ascertain the status of hurricane preparedness. The need for urgent shelter maintenance was identified. All other areas were either already prepared or on track to be ready by June 1st.
2. Prior to the passage of Hurricane Irma, shelter maintenance again surfaced as an area of concern as several locations were still not ready. As a result, the official list of shelters was not provided until the day prior to the storm. At this meeting, the private sector raised its concern over the fact that the shelters were not ready and there was no plan to open the shelters prior to the passage of the storm. The Government's position on **this changed prior to the passage of Hurricane Maria and shelters were opened** to accommodate persons living in coastal areas.
3. Communication service providers, (telecommunications, radio, Ham Operators, etc) was identified as a ready-sector, however, it was noted at the pre-Hurricane Maria Meeting, that there was no communication at the national level.

Private Sector Post Hurricane Review

1. **General Supplies (food, building material, etc)** – all of our food is dispatched to us through a Florida port. The supply chain was disrupted because Florida was impacted by the same storms that impacted us.

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Private Sector Post Hurricane Review cont'd

2. **Hubs** – there is need to look outside of the existing framework options for options to enhance post-disaster business continuity. Florida and Puerto Rico are two main hubs providing services to the region and this season both were hit.
3. **Communication Network** – there is need for restructuring. The present process on paper suggests that ZBC (ZIZ Broadcasting Corporation) will supply all media houses with information to share with their respective audience, however this did not work. It also did not cover print media. There was under-utilization of services such as the ability to blast text messages. Quite a bit of miscommunication ran wild across social media channels with no access to a source which could verify the data.
4. **Direct/Indirect Impact** – the impact on tourism as a result of other countries being devastated; the impact caused by no access to the internet; the impact caused by other countries that serve as a hub being devastated etc.

Lessons Learnt

1. There is need for the creation of plans (where they don't exist) and the publication of information that supports business continuity. This includes critical areas such as telecommunications, banking, transportation, electricity and water).
2. There needs to be a mitigation plan that positions resources in areas not likely to be impacted by the same storm as would impact St. Kitts and Nevis.
3. The increase in housing stock and the potential burden on the national purse for assistance to replace/repair roofs suggests the need for more weather resilient roofing.
4. There needs to be a clearly defined post-storm security plan that facilitates a speedy recovery process.
5. A plan to provide shelter and medical care in the event of widespread devastation as well as a plan for returning nationals (jobs, housing, additional burden on water supply).
6. Existing plans cover a single hit in a season, with an estimated impact that may/may not cover existing number of homes or businesses. The plan needs to be updated for closer to a total devastation impact.
7. A National Plan (whether public or private sector driven) needs to include prepositioning of all necessary resources and contingencies for multi-country impact.

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LOOKING AHEAD – IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

MITIGATION

Infrastructure Improvements

1. Enhance and enforce construction standards
2. Insist on use of cisterns in private houses above certain size
3. Construction of zonal cisterns for rationing of water or purchase of water delivery trucks
4. Create an Infrastructure Restoration Plan
5. Review ways to improve and extend hurricane insurance cover
6. Explore and implement coastal protection
7. Generators and shutters should be included in the duty-free allowance being provided by government for the next 6 months.

Mobilization

1. Plan for mobilization and prepositioning of heavy-lifting and other equipment.
2. Fuel storage and supply plan
3. Suggest to the Contractors' Association that they establish a plan to mobilize assistance in consultation with engineers and architects
4. Suggest to Bankers Association that they establish a plan for accessing money post-disaster.

Communication

1. Create a Communications Restoration Plan (should include more extensive use of satellite phones)
2. Create a private sector awareness plan
3. Create a public awareness plan

Supplies

1. Stockpile relief supplies and bedding in dedicated warehouses
2. Stockpile essential building materials before each hurricane season. Sell off right after season.

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Humanitarian Care

1. Establish a national committee of NGOs to co-ordinate support of government relief efforts.
2. Suggest HTA &/or Tourism Authority plan for shelter, relief and evacuation
3. Private sector policy on layoffs in cases of temporary business closures
4. Establish zonal committees
5. Establish guidelines to protect the jobs of nationals who have travelled and are unable to return to work on time.

Security

1. Establish a security plan including provision for a prison break

Incentives

1. Promote use and increase stocks of private generators
2. Improve stocking by retailers of essential supplies and equipment
3. Review feasibility of provision by social security of benefits during layoffs caused by natural disaster.
4. Tax concessions should be considered for companies giving major contributions to relief efforts.

Other

1. An economic impact risk assessment needs to be done and should include
 - Property values and investment
 - Insurance costs
 - Supply chain
2. Review of investment climate and property values given the confidence jolt of the hurricanes and global warming and effect on economy

ENHANCED RECOVERY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recovery Fund

1. SKN or regional statutory disaster fund including monies from SIDF
2. An annual government budgetary allocation
3. Social Security contribution

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Recovery Fund cont'd

4. Offer of special interest-bearing government instruments backed by the consolidated fund. Statute should provide investment and spending parameters and committees.
5. A portion of the fund should be used to enhance infrastructure and other advance preparedness with a portion allocated for relief
 - emergency medical relief plan
 - plan for emergency shelters on a large scale
 - emergency communications plan, internal and external
 - damage control for the tourism sector
 - plan for maintenance of essential services
 - plan for essential operation of legal system
 - damage control for offshore education sector
6. Establish an administrative structure to implement.
7. Implement other fiscal measures

Recovery Plans

1. Companies providing critical services (telecommunications, banks etc.) need to be strongly encouraged to have recovery plans
2. Companies providing regional support services need to have plans.



NEXT STEPS

1. Appoint a small committee to strategize the components of a Private Sector Disaster Mitigation Plan (for wider membership review at next meeting)
2. Discuss the plan and collaborate with government on incorporating this plan into the existing National Emergency Plan.
3. Begin sharing suggestions with wider membership so that we can be safer during the rest of the season.