



**UNITED NATIONS AND
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

VIRTUAL DIALOGUE

**Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable population
subgroups including elderly, youth, women, persons with
disabilities, and migrants**

**BAHAMAS NATIONAL STATEMENT
TO BE DELIVERED BY**

**Honourable Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary
Ministry of Social Services and Urban Development
Michael Foulkes M.P.**

**Tuesday, 8 December, 2020
9:00am to 3:00 pm**

DRAFT # 3

Thank You Madam Chair.

The Bahamas, like many other countries, is still grappling with the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lingering catastrophic impact which Hurricane Dorian created on the economy of The Bahamas.

Hurricane Dorian left 3.4 billion dollars in destruction. COVID 19 resulted in the further disruption or closure of key industries, including tourism, fishing, and streamlined services in the banking sector as well as the informal sector, where many women are employed. All aspects of our life, education, health, sanitation, recreation, water, agricultural industry and food security are threatened.

The impact greatly diminished our country's capacity to advance the platforms, pillars and initiatives for women and girls, especially so for The Bahamas, as services, resources, development and funding must be replicated and expanded for more than twenty islands.

Our women with exacerbating conditions of vulnerability especially women in the Family Islands, women with disabilities, migrant, elderly, unemployed and indigent women have been disproportionately affected by Hurricane Dorian and now COVID-19.

Thankfully, these vulnerable population subgroups were able to benefit from our comprehensive approach to COVID-19 economic recovery which focused on seven critical areas including:

Financial and tax deferral Assistance for SME businesses
Food Assistance,
Rent Assistance,
Bed, Uniform and Footwear Assistance,
Burial Assistance
Financial Assistance and
Unemployment Benefit Assistance.

The Bahamas recognize that it is critical that we include a gender mainstreaming approach to all efforts moving forward and we acknowledge that **access to international funding is critical.**

We are most thankful for Director Diane Quarless, Lydia Geny and the entire ECLAC Family for the gender responsive COVID-19 policy briefs, funding for our Department of Gender and Family Affairs in January 2020 and with providing updates on the COVID-19 Regional Research.

The input and voices of women were taken into account as a gender sensitive approach informed the key National Strategies, Initiatives and Partnerships instituted by the Government for COVID 19. Some of our best practices, solutions and Gender Responsive Social protections mechanisms include:

1. Establishing COVID 19 National Recovery multi-sectoral advisory committees which include 50% women stakeholders from private, civil society, and government.

2. Allocating \$86 million in direct support, for social assistance for COVID-19, thereby expanding the social safety net by some \$140 million.
3. Expanding Food Assistance needs of Hurricane Dorian, COVID19 and regular Social Services CLIENTS, with a budget allocation of \$26 million for the National Food Distribution Task Force.
4. Hosting virtual Town Hall meetings in partnership with various entities, for the elderly, women, children, men, persons with disabilities, and migrants. These virtual sessions provided information, tips, coping skills, referral pathways for help and essential services.
5. Implementing UN Women, ECLAC, UNFPA Key Messages, COVID 19 Policy Papers, Referral Pathways and Spotlight Initiative ideas to Mitigate Gender Based Violence.
6. Enforcing Emergency visitation guidelines for our child-care and senior residential facilities, to ensure those institutions remain COVID-free.
7. Implementing Digitization Unit which allow officials to manage client information from the time they register for Assistance until they become sufficiently independent of needing social assistance.
8. Establishing the distribution of Emergency Food Assistance coupons directly to persons with disabilities from the Disability Affairs Division office, which updates the National Registry of Persons with Disabilities
9. Ensuring that Persons with Disabilities worked directly with NEMA and the EOC Team to ensure proper representation of Persons with Disabilities (PwD)
10. Fostering partnership with The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and The Media to ensure that messages concerning Hurricane Dorian and COVID19 were accessible to The Community of PwD via Sign Language
11. Ensuring that Interpreter and written information had a jaw screen reader for the blind.
12. Providing complimentary wheelchairs, walkers, crutches for persons with disabilities.
13. Publishing emergency WhatsApp listing of "essential services", and implementing a 24 hours cell phone service to field calls which was beneficial to The Community of PwD.
14. Employing Urban Renewal Staff to go into the communities to ensure that elderly, migrants, persons with disabilities and indigent families receive food, coupons and application access for rent assistance.

15. Conducting training virtual sessions to educate and inform The Community of PwD how to access the benefits of National Insurance and Social Services Assistance and how to use NGOs to enhance leadership skills and assist PwD.
16. Purchasing a mobile APP to serve as a portal whereby PwD and their families can have access to accurate, timely and reliable information with regard to disability-related services and support.
17. Increasing funding for more than 2000 pre-schoolers to attend school which benefits mothers who are able to maintain employment.
18. Increasing allocation for scholarships for University of The Bahamas and Bahamas Technical Vocational College for all students who qualify.
19. Allocating \$27 million for regular social protection assistance, and \$48 million to National Insurance Board unemployment benefits.
20. Allocating \$25 million for Small Business Development Centre to ensure funding, training and upgrading of skills for women and youth.
21. Launching \$1.5 million Youth Self Starter Business Programme that provides grants, loans, training and business support for young Bahamians aged 18 to 30.
22. Approving \$52.7 million in loans and grant funding for more than 950 micro and small businesses and advancing a business tax credit and deferral initiative to minimize further private sector job losses, protecting roughly 5,400 vulnerable jobs.
23. Encouraging the availability of Government capital for SMEs owned by young women to produce Masks, and reusable grocery bags.
24. Donating sewing machines to urban community for young women to engage in Urban Renewal Sewing programmes as an entrepreneurial venture.
25. Providing funding, capacity building, and grant writing seminars in partnership with Civil Society Bahamas to strengthen more than four hundred NGOs.
26. Formally requesting IOM to provide support for migrants as they relocated following Hurricane Dorian and welcoming the establishment of IOM offices in New Providence and Abaco.
27. Partnering with IOM in providing financial, food and rebuilding support to migrant populations in Abaco and Grand Bahama.
28. Facilitating partnerships with Bahamas and American Red Cross to provide millions of dollars for the rebuilding of homes in Grand Bahama and within the migrant populations in Abaco.

29. Supporting Government partnership with the Caribbean Institute Women in Leadership (CIWIL) – Bahamas Chapter for training of women to become more prepared to sit at the table and be a part of the decision-making process.
 30. Reducing approval time for import and export permits for Farmers and Implemented telemedicine Veterinary Services for livestock farmers
 31. Allocating \$1 million dollars for Emergency Food Production Plan to assist farmers in the clearing Agricultural Land.
 32. Reinforcing food security and sustainability mechanisms by investing in backyard farming kits for communities and increased funding for production of poultry and pork.
 33. Embracing technical trainings provided by CARICOM, ECLAC, IDB and UN Women to strengthened dialogue with alliances between governments, ministries, agencies and departments
- and
34. Partnering with IDB to conduct National Women Health Survey

Madam Session Chair,

We are most grateful for this opportunity to share our initiatives of social protection measures as we wrestle with COVID 19 economic fallout. We are thankful for this Virtual Dialogue, and would welcome the opportunity to engage further on the information highlighted in this presentation.

I thank you Madam Chair.