

TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS - THIRD REGIONAL PLATFORM

The Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) is an archipelago of 40 islands and cays in the North Atlantic, southeast of the Bahamas and 145 km North of Hispaniola. The TCI consist of two island groups; the Turks Islands to the east of the Turks Island Passage in the Atlantic Ocean and the Caicos Islands to the west of the passage.

The population of the TCI is 31,458 (2012 Census Preliminary Report). The majority of the population reside in Providenciales (23, 769) while Grand Turk, the nation's capital, is the 2nd most populated island with a population of approximately Three Thousand Five Hundred (3,500).

The Turks and Caicos Islands stands by its mantra, "Beautiful by Nature", and has one of the best protected coastal resources, ecosystems, flora and fauna in the world. Nevertheless, the islands are exposed to natural and anthropogenic threats owing to its geographic location. Risks associated with meteorological hazards are significant, as Turks and Caicos Islands lie within the trajectory of tropical storms and hurricanes. Its vulnerability is exacerbated by the effects of wind damage, inland flooding and storm surges.

TCI was significantly affected by two weather systems during 2008. Hurricane Hanna impacted the island during the period 31 August to 3 September 2008 bringing torrential rainfall and resulting in major flooding in many communities of the islands. Hurricane Ike on the other hand which passed just south of the islands on the 6th and 7th September, impacting the islands as a dangerous Category 4 hurricane with 135mph winds. The total impact of these two weather systems on TCI was estimated at \$213.6 million. In 2011, Hurricane Irene also created considerable damage and impacted fisheries and tourism which are main contributors to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country.

In recent years, the TCI has also experienced a number of health-related emergencies such as communicable disease outbreaks; Influenza A H1N1 (2008), Tuberculosis (2010-11), Hand Foot and Mouth Disease (2012) and the Norovirus (2012).

The Caribbean region as a whole is located within a seismically active zone, with a well documented earthquake history. While the TCI may not be as susceptible to the earthquake hazard, based on its topography and location, it is highly susceptible to Tsunamis. There is also the potential for tele-tsunamis from sources across the Atlantic. According to the Caribbean Tsunami Information Center (CTIC), since 1842, at least 3,510 people have lost their lives to tsunamis. This is greater than the number of persons impacted in the Northeastern Pacific.

The Disaster Risk Management Framework adopted by the Turks and Caicos Islands is in keeping with the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) approved structure which is being promoted as part of the conceptual framework for Disaster Risk Management at the regional level. The logical framework established is also in keeping with the priority areas as stipulated in the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA).

The framework is headed by a Governor with advice from an Executive which comprises key decision makers as well as the Deputy Governor who has the responsibility for the Civil Service. There is an appointed Permanent Secretary with portfolio responsibility for Disaster Management. This is also supported by other key government officials pertinent to law and order, health, infrastructure, legislature, finance and planning and disaster management. The framework is then divided into three thematic areas notably Pre-disaster Activities, Response and Recovery with relevant agencies and entities and their work programmes clearly promulgated. Accomplishments to date:

Hazard Mapping and Assessment have been undertaken for flood and wind hazards. A Hazard and Vulnerability Analysis (HVA) was conducted in 2006. This saw the production of storm surge inundation maps and the identification of critical infrastructure.

Since 2009, Risk Reduction has been primarily driven by a project, Regional Risk Reduction Initiative (R31) which seeks to address the risk exposure of the islands by providing a network of regional infrastructure programmes, policies and protocols to strengthen their capacity to predict and prepare for natural hazards, thus improving resilience and reduce risk and subsequent loss. The R31 project is funded by the European Commission through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

This will see an:

- Increased capacity in hazard mapping and associated vulnerability assessments to be further incorporated into spatial information systems to inform planning and development processes.
- Strengthened capacity in response, rescue and recovery - The TCI now has a Turks and Caicos Emergency Response Task-Force (TCERT)
- Strengthened local disaster management structures and capacities in terms of tools and best practices to support Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management. (Disaster Management Capacity Assessment Reports, 2010)

The Platform of Disaster Risk Reduction is functional. In promoting Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM), the national mechanism for coordination and policy guidance using a multi-sectoral and inter-disciplinary approach has been institutionalized. The platform is a synthesis of partnerships among ministries, agencies and departments, the tourism and business sector which is a main driver of the economy and civil society, mainly driven by non-governmental organisations. Greater physical presence of the international donor community is however needed to strengthen the existing capacities especially in the areas of climate change adaptation, sector planning, and research and development as it relates to early warning systems for greater hazard monitoring and assessment.

The role of the youth in disaster risk reduction cannot be overemphasized. Education is another area which requires support to integrate disaster risk reduction in the curriculum and to ensure that a cadre of young persons may begin to explore the disciplines relevant

to disaster risk reduction as viable career options. The Turks and Caicos Islands through a partnership with the Department of Disaster Management and Emergencies (DDME), and the Department of Health and Education will be embarking on two risk management projects namely: Disaster Risk Reduction – Sanitation and Hand Hygiene Initiative across all public schools and the development of a Critical Incident Management Plan to be used as template to be replicated across public school by 2013. This is supported by the CARICOM/Brazil/FAO Cooperation Living Schools Project.

The DDME has also provided support to the developmental approval process as well as commenting on emergency response plans for the tourism sector and has recently commenced capacity building for oil spills both on land and at sea with special focus on international shipping accidents. There is a draft Oil Spill Contingency Plan (2012).

While the Turks and Caicos Islands can attest to a number of achievements, there is still much to be achieved. Efforts to now mainstream the community-based disaster risk management programme is a priority area to ensure that vulnerable communities may function for the effective planning and mitigation of the risks to which they are prone.

There is the need for legislative support for Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management and the disaster risk management framework of the TCI. It is against this background that Post-HFA 2015, the country's vision includes:

The strengthening of technical capacities of the Department of Disaster Management and Emergencies staff comparative to that of counterpart countries, the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders and chairs of sub-committees be included in job descriptions and more accountability required with a more proactive approach to Disaster Risk Management.

Improved Land Use Planning through the development and implementation of a National Mitigation strategy aimed at ensuring that disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation strategies are both an integral part of the sustainable development process in TCI is being presented. The formalization of the integration of Disaster Risk Management in the Development Approval Process through legislation is also another area which needs greater attention.

As the international community places greater emphasis on disaster risk reduction, there is growing interest in the potential of risk financing solutions as part of the overall disaster risk management strategy. Social protection programmes could provide effective instruments for managing risk. We call on the international donor community to begin the dialogue for effective partnership to achieve our mutually desired outcomes.

The Turks and Caicos Government remains committed to mainstreaming disaster risk reduction to build a safer and disaster resilient nation.