

***National Rebuilding and Economic Partnership Consultation
19th February 2018***

***Input from Builders and Construction Association of Dominica
(BCAD) on
“Building the World’s First Climate Resilient Country – Our
Collective Responsibility”***

1 Introduction.

1.1 Scope of Presentation

The time limit for this presentation does not allow any professional analysis or comments to drive discussions on the technical and economic realities that will be encountered in achieving any level of climatic resilience in the infrastructural or housing construction sectors of our country. To begin with, the scope of “resilience” has to be carved out within our ability to afford, not just initial capital cost but also, the whole life cycle costing of our developmental projects, including our readiness for resiliency in maintenance protocol and operational redundancy.

Therefore, BCAD has decided to concentrate its presentation on “Our Collective Responsibility”.

2 Our Collective Responsibility

It would be reasonable to assume that resilience in a nation is irrelevant if there is no resilience in its people. Building sustainable climatic resilience depends to a very large extent on enthusiasm of the people about the relevance of such a cliché. The economic realities of their involvement, and the developmental strategy’s ability to sustain their livelihood and peaceful co-existence, will of necessity precede their sense responsibility. If all the exciting attributes of the building is from outside, and the people are just spectators, they will sooner or later come to the reasonable conclusion that the overall goal is to reduce and displace their relevance in their own land.

In recent times, and with every storm, this is the reality of the Dominican economic space for the private sector. Public Sector development and procurement is not geared or rather very wanting towards building resilience in its people, and the harnessing of local human resources and talent in the rebuilding of the nation.

Four examples and issues will help amplify our point:

1. Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) Bailey Bridges: Post Tropical Storm Erika, in December 2015, the Jamaica Defence Force undertook, with a local contractor providing predominantly equipment services, the erection of a first Bailey bridge on the Trafalgar-Wotten Waven Road. It remained incomplete for about 10 months, and was completed by a totally different local contractor about November 2016. Last December, the JDF completed its work on another Bailey bridge to complete the crossing of that route from Trafalgar to Wotten Waven. A new local contractor provided equipment services to them, and the bridge still remains unfinished, presumably abandoned for another extended time. Conversations with the JDF revealed that Dominica failed to facilitate and to obtain relevant technology transfer in erecting these Bailey bridges. It is heartbreaking when one recalls a conversation with the CTO about this issue post-Tropical Storm Erika. Sadly, if there is another storm, the JDF has to come again; our governing policies seem to ensure that we remain a dependent people.

2. Training: For a few years now, there has been an increasing shortage in skilled personnel in most productive sectors throughout the country. This is partially due to:
 - a. An agonizing absence of meaningful training in skills, and
 - b. Migration of skills to better paying regional territories.

While BCAD, under project funding from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) through the Ministry of Trade, implemented a pilot programme to initiate the alleviation of this issue in 2013, realizing partial certification of about 45 construction employees out of a target of 500, the Ministry of Education or its TVET Council has yet to show any responsible collaborative effort in that area.

3. Public Procurement: While the Construction Sector, after its effort at post H Maria cleaning, wait on open transparent facilitating fiscals incentives such as the removal of VAT on capital investments in the rebuilding efforts, and procurement opportunities to propel growth, we are repeatedly greeted with news of awarded contracts conceived from secret procurement events that deny opportunities of participation for our local professionals and businesses.

As with the Post TS Erika era, there has been an effort to create a permanent emergency condition to justify non-transparent public procurement practices. There have been very little, if any, public procurement events which allow opportunity for showcasing collective responsibility. Hence, BCAD is on record as indicating that,

“While there may be a greater market for construction services post-Hurricane Maria, it will only enable growth and increased productivity of local construction businesses if they are afforded fair and transparent opportunities to access work.”

“In a post-Hurricane Maria environment, given our recent past, there is a risk that the local sector may find reduced work in an increased market unless the enabling environment is facilitated to allow transparent public procurement practices with some attention given to meaningful local participation in a transparent and fair process.”¹

4. Housing: For three years we have sought to establish with the public sector a framework for collaborating on the delivery of public housing. BCAD’s concerns on the denial of real opportunity for the involvement of local professionals and businesses in the supply of sustainable resilient public housing are well documented. It is sufficient to repeat that, “BCAD is very concerned that there is the real danger that housing contractors [the backbone of the sector] will disappear through their non-inclusion in the government’s housing programme. Moreover, we are loosing the opportunity to prepare our local housing sector for export.”²

3 Conclusion

Responsibility comes with empowerment; empowerment is the child of opportunity and nurturing. There cannot exist any collective responsibility at any level of society without providing opportunity and support towards empowering its people.

We caution, that to achieve sustained enthusiasm in appreciating our collective responsibility, much greater tangible attention has to be injected in the national policies dealing with training and involvement of its people. Openness to sharing of information, broad opportunity for non-discriminatory involvement, openness to criticism, constructive or otherwise, and inclusion of opinions and contribution of a broad cross-section of its people in the development strategy are the hallmark of leadership that works towards sustainable empowerment of its people.

¹ Presentation To The Government Of The Commonwealth Of Dominica On Improving The Growth Environment For The Construction Sector – Post Hurricane Maria, 18th October 2017

Building resilience in a nation cannot be reasonably conceived without the involvement of its people. Any attempt to do so largely from outside may result in a pseudo-effort at economic growth and more appropriately a new type of new colonization. Its people will quickly become less relevant than they were 15 years ago, relegated to largely providing labourer type support to an imported technical, professional and managerial class.

We strongly encourage and will support a programme that will lead to enthusiasm towards a collective responsibility of the Dominican people towards the rebuilding of our nation in a more resilient way to both sustain and recover from the impact of climatic and other natural perils with greater caring and respect for both persons and property.

BCAD

Roseau 19th February 2018.