

CARPHA- IDB Regional Tourism Health Information, Monitoring and Response Systems and Standards to Enhance Sustainable Tourism Project



**Remarks by Dr. Lisa Indar
on the occasion of signing of IDB grant for tourism and health
CARPHA Headquarters, January 26, 2016**

On November 6 2015, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) approved a grant under the Regional Public Goods Initiative to CARPHA valued at US\$ 800,000 (Grant ATN/OC-15265-RG) for the conduct Regional Tourism Health Information, Monitoring and Response Systems and Standards to Enhance Sustainable Tourism Project.

The genesis of this project lies in the fact that the health of Caribbean economies is closely related to the health of its tourism industry given that the Caribbean is the most tourism-dependent region in the world. Enhancing sustainable tourism is thus essential for promoting economic development, poverty eradication and improvement of quality of life.

However tourism growth and sustainability in the Caribbean are facing Health, Safety and Environmental Sanitation (HSE) threats, including disease outbreaks/crises and deficiencies in environmental sanitation, resulting in declined tourism arrivals. The consequences of reduced tourist numbers for millions of people in the Caribbean whose livelihoods depend on the sector can be serious, contributing to adverse economic and social burden on Caribbean economies. Diarrheal illness resulting from consuming contaminated food or water is the most common health problem faced by visitors to the Caribbean. From 2000 to 2005, 56 foodborne outbreaks were reported in hotels at an estimated cost of US\$250M. One outbreak in 2012 resulted in 1,256 ill persons and a 20% decline in arrivals. High and increasing levels of visitor arrivals increase the potential risk for visitors and locals transmitting or acquiring diseases from each other. This was typified by the H1N1 pandemic of 2009, Chikungunya in 2013 and now Zika

Inadequate health monitoring/response systems, the absence of standards & certification and lack of training has contributed to the spread of disease outbreaks, food safety and environmental sanitation issues in the region; and without adequate information management systems, standards and associated training, these HSE threats can become a severe tourism crisis. It is critical therefore that to sustain Caribbean tourism, efforts be made to monitor and respond to travel related illnesses and support the hotel and tourism operators to adopt proper health and environmental sanitation practices.

This IDB funded Regional Tourism Health Information, Monitoring and Response Systems and Standards to Enhance Sustainable Tourism Project will address the HSE threats impacting on sustainable tourism in the Caribbean by developing:

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- A regional tourism health information, surveillance, monitoring & response system (THMRS)
- Credible Caribbean-wide HSE tourism standards and certification
- A training program to build capacity in food and environmental safety

The project will be implemented from 2016-2018 by CARPHA, through its regional tourism and health program, in collaboration with CTO and CHTA along with National Focal Points and a Private-Public Teams in each country. It will be implemented in 6 IDB countries in 6 countries: Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago

The key benefit of this project will be fewer, less costly outbreaks and other negative public health events occurring in the tourism industry and thereby a healthier, safer, more reputable Caribbean for both visitors and locals.

Another major benefit will be an innovative, regional THMRS system. Establishing this system is critical to improving countries' capacities to support the overall health surveillance system of the tourism-dependent Caribbean economies, enabling countries to collect real-time data which will inform health service delivery decisions/policies, strengthen national and regional health monitoring efforts to trigger a rapid coordinated response to outbreaks and other crises and thus prevent tourism HSE incidents.

Countries will also have a set of credible Caribbean-wide HSE tourism standards which will contribute to the comparative advantage of Caribbean tourism as a standards-based certified destination. The project will build human resource capacity in health, food safety, and environmental management and promote public-private sector intersectoral partnerships at national and regional levels support a cohesive and coordinated approach to deal with HSE tourism threats.

The project will also promotes a regional collective benefit and integration since countries could easily emulate the models that would be generated in this project and this will contribute to increases in tourist arrivals, improved economic activity, increased foreign exchange earnings, and higher employment generation in tourism sector.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the IDB and other tourism partners CTO and CHTA for collaborating on this important and critical tourism and health initiative. I would also like thank CARPHA team for their hard work and support in making this project and today become a reality.