

# Biosecurity Governance, International Diplomacy and the Risk of Pandemic Outbreak in the Caribbean

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# Introduction 1

- Today we have received a comprehensive summary of the ongoing and escalating threat of Emerging Infectious Diseases along with a synopsis of the drivers: climate change, VBD, tourism and increased traffic via air, land and sea due to trade
  - None of these risk factors are readily modifiable due to the inter-linked, globalised nature of socio-political and economic systems
- Risk: likelihood of harm associated with a particular hazard
- Regarding biosecurity threats unprecedented globalised geo-political factors, ready access to technology, travel, trade
  - Create a scenario where means, motive and opportunity can easily coincide
  - We can quickly move from threat to an adverse biosecurity event and the concomitant high cost to human life, social and economic development

# Introduction

- This discussion uses the Essential Public Health Framework (EPHF) and reflections on the local response to pandemic influenza and Ebola preparedness as a backdrop to discuss key areas related to biosecurity governance, international security and the risk of pandemic outbreak in the Caribbean
- Public Health: what society does **collectively** to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy or have improved health
- PH in the Americas Initiative: 11 EPHFs defined
  - EPHFs: the **indispensable** set of actions, under the primary responsibility of the state, that are **fundamental** for achieving the goal of public health which is to improve, promote, protect, and restore the health of the population through **collective** action

# Reflection on Local Experience

- The EPHF provides a basis for the “Health Authority” to lead in certain aspects **but** strategic partnerships were needed to achieve effective and efficient planning for biological hazards
- Locally key partners in the process included
  - Ministries responsible for finance, defence/security, agriculture, tourism etc.
  - Regional and international partners : PAHO/WHO (IHR strategy operationalised) , CARPHA
  - NGOs and other civil society organisations
- De-briefing and feedback identified gaps/ areas for improvement
  - Not unique to Barbados or CARICOM

# Evidence Gaps

- EPHF 10 speaks to research in PH and EPHF 11 speaks to reducing the impact of emergencies & disasters
  - Previous speakers referenced the “spectacular failures” at a global level in handling biosecurity threats
- An unmet need exists not only for enhanced technical skills but also for researchers and academics to be actively involved to
  - Map and evaluate the process and thus provide the evidence to translate into policy
    - Numbers are important to understand the scope of the problem
    - Contextual factors are also necessary i.e. qualitative approaches to clarify what worked, what didn't and why. Too costly at all levels to repeat the same mistakes

# Gaps in Engagement of Multi-sectoral actors and Capacity building

- EPHF 4: Social participation. How do we get the message out that biosecurity, like NCDs is an all of society concern?
  - How to strengthen the power of civil society to change lifestyles and to actively participate in planning and decision-making related to biosecurity?
    - Locally much emphasis placed on risk-communication and good media relations
    - Some threats more familiar/acceptable e.g. H1N1 vs. Ebola
    - Key actions included providing fora for town hall type meetings, engaging workplaces, schools, faith-based organisations etc. and community-based simulations
- Given the evolving nature of biosecurity threats
  - Need to build capacity in risk- and behaviour change communication
    - Avoids the opposite effect of scare-mongering and triggers desired actions

# Capacity Building: International Engagement

- International Health Regulations (IHR)
  - Currently broad uptake by CARICOM member states as signatories
    - The established communication and other links enables rapid sharing of information and triggering of alerts
- Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA)
  - No CARICOM states listed on the site as signatories
- Points to ponder
  - What are the facilitators and barriers for SIDS and other states with small open economies and many of which have been graduated from lower income status to be meaningfully engaged at the global level

# A CARICOM Approach

- Given our vulnerabilities from geo-political and economic standpoints, a CARICOM-wide approach is merited
  - The likelihood of containment to one state is low given much movement of people for tourism and business
  - Achieve economies of scale: human and other resources
- Mechanisms exist for collaborative planning, monitoring and evaluation and sharing of the lessons identified
  - Exemplar: the Port of Spain Declaration on NCDs and its evaluation
- Challenges
  - Relatively weak infrastructure for secure sharing of big data
  - Gaps in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity

# Summary

- Support the call for multi-sectoral approach with an emphasis on **health in all policies**, social participation and pillars of governance
- Capacity building for social engagement and risk communication are more straight forward, however discussion needed for
  - Optimising IHR functionality and role of GHSA in the regional agenda
- A CARICOM-wide approach is merited given our SIDS vulnerabilities
- Translational research to help guide policy development and to assess implementation
- Data sharing challenges to be addressed

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