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Statement

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Members of the Media;

Management and Staff of CDB;

Viewers tuning in online;

Good morning.

In 2017, the Caribbean Development Bank redoubled its efforts to increase approvals and accelerate implementation in sectors and areas that offer real potential for changing the lives of many vulnerable people in our societies.

Today I am going to discuss the Bank's operational performance over the past year; partnerships; our commitments; how we made a difference in 2017; and our disaster recovery and rehabilitation response.

2017 was another successful year for the Bank's financing activities. Once again, we exceeded our approval targets for loans and grants. Total approvals reached USD364 mn compared with USD306 mn in 2016 and USD292 mn in 2015. The total approvals for 2017 included USD104 mn in grants.

The Bank again exceeded the disbursement target for the year. Total disbursements stood at USD233mn, as compared to USD206mn in 2016 and USD159mn in 2015.

As we know, there is an inextricable link between disbursements and progress in projects across our Borrowing Member Countries (BMCs).

This achievement is therefore reflective of the ongoing effort that we as the region's development bank are making, to more appropriately respond to the persistent regional challenge of insufficient implementation capacity.

As the President mentioned, disaster risk management and resilience-building featured prominently in the Bank's work in responding to the needs of our BMCs.

In addition to these two areas of focus, CDB approved a number of projects. Allow me to highlight just a few, which we believe have significant developmental potential for our Region's communities and citizens.

In the British Virgin Islands, we approved a USD9.3 mn project to support education reforms and a Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Loan in the amount of USD65.2 mn.

In Antigua and Barbuda, the Bank approved USD45.9 mn for the Second Road Infrastructure Rehabilitation Project, and USD29 mn for a Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Loan.

In 2017, the Bank also announced the approval of USD18 mn to improve the quality of, and access to, basic education in Haiti for 68,000 people.

For Suriname, CDB approved USD29.8 mn to establish a more energy-efficient street lighting network.

And in Grenada, the Bank sharpened its focus on food security, approving USD5 mn for climate-smart agriculture and USD1 mn to strengthen food safety management systems.

Allow me a few moments to talk about our flagship poverty reduction programme, the Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF).

In 2017, we continued to address the needs of the most vulnerable in our Region through BNTF.

The ninth cycle started last year, with USD40.8 million in resources from our Special Development Fund.

In this cycle, we expanded our areas of support to include entrepreneurial development, importantly with a focus on youth entrepreneurship.

BNTF strengthened and initiated private sector partnerships to catalyse additional resources, and boost already available funding to address poverty in communities across participating countries.

The programme's ninth cycle also takes into account climate change risk adaptation opportunities and the integration of renewable energy technology.

It is estimated that our Region needs at least USD30 billion to close its infrastructural development gap over the next decade, to compete on a

global scale, reduce poverty and drive sustainable growth.

As the President mentioned earlier today, CDB has mobilised a sizeable portfolio of concessionary financing through grants and loans at very low interest rates to help close this gap.

The aim is to accelerate investment in social and economic infrastructure, without creating unsustainable public debt.

In 2017, under the United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Partnership Fund, CDB approved a total of 56 mn Pounds Sterling for projects in Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

With a USD20 mn contribution from our partners, Agence Francaise de Développement and the European Investment Bank, we approved a streetlight retrofitting project for Jamaica, further advancing our clean energy agenda.

Through the African Caribbean Pacific - European Union Natural Disaster Risk Management Programme, Grenada and St. Kitts and Nevis will benefit from the completion of climate vulnerability risk assessments for the water sector.

Funding from the Programme will also support similar studies in the road transport sector in Guyana and Saint Lucia.

CDB approved energy audits for government buildings in Anguilla, Grenada and St. Kitts and Nevis. These projects are being supported through grants from the Sustainable Energy for the Eastern Caribbean programme and the Canadian Support to the Energy Sector in the Caribbean Fund.

So how did CDB make a difference in 2017?

Throughout the year, our interventions transformed the lives of people across the Region.

I will highlight just a few this morning.

In terms of economic and social infrastructure, we continued to work on a number of projects that connected communities, made our roads safer, and

improved access to a more reliable supply of potable water.

Already, the USD39 mn Fifth Road Project in Belize, which will link the International Airport to Belize City, is changing lives. Every day, 20,000 people are using the first section of road opened from the airport to Haulover Bridge.

In 2017, road safety infrastructure upgrades were completed on 80 km of roadway in Belize. These improvements included improved signage and road markings, access for people with disabilities, and the creation of bicycle paths.

Through a comprehensive education programme, 10,600 people were trained in road safety practices, most of them youth. We estimate that this combined effort has resulted in the avoidance of approximately 100 road fatalities.

In Grenada, the refurbishment of the Marketing and National Importing Board's pack house was completed through CDB funding. The upgrade has resulted in an increase in the export of agricultural produce, and is having a transformational impact on the 2,000 farmers who sell their produce through the facility.

In Guyana, the USD44 mn Fourth Road project, now nearing completion, has upgraded 31km of road in West Coast Demarara. The upgrade included a wider road corridor, improved drainage, and new pedestrian and bicycle lanes as a road safety feature. This is a first for Guyana and is already being utilised by pedestrians and cyclists alike.

Through an investment of USD8 mn, nearly 6,000 households in Nevis now have access to an adequate and reliable potable water supply. By the end of 2017, six water storage tanks were installed across the island, along with three pumping stations, and 30km of pipelines for water distribution, all provided through this project.

In The Bahamas, CDB provided USD42 mn to improve the reliability, quality of and access to the water supply systems serving communities on New Providence and six Family Islands. Approximately 1,200 households now have access to improved water supply.

Earlier, I mentioned that we have embarked on a new cycle of BNTF.

Last year, with our partners in 10 participating countries, 152 projects were completed.

Here is a snapshot of what we achieved:

- 36,300 students in eight countries are now learning in better classrooms and schools, and benefiting from enhanced teacher competence;
- Approximately 23,000 people are now certified at either the National Vocational Qualification or Caribbean Vocational Qualifications level across five countries including Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis and St. Vincent and the Grenadines;
- 210 teachers were trained, mainly in the areas of early childhood development in five countries;
- 6,600 households across eight countries now have improved access to water and sanitation; and
- 44,700 in communities across six countries have better roads, including farm access roads.

Let's shift our attention now to the education sector.

In 2017, CDB focused on three key areas in the education and training sector.

First, we supported the development of the CARICOM Human Resource Development Strategy and created a regional framework of action and results for Mathematics Education.

Secondly, we invested in the improvement of skills for competitiveness. The Bank completed a state-of-the-art Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Centre in Jacmel, Haiti, and upgraded facilities for TVET in Jamaica.

Thirdly, we addressed the issue of instructional effectiveness and instructional leadership capacity.

In Antigua and Barbuda, 488 teachers and school administrators benefitted

from training to enhance learning outcomes for students.

We know that the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) sector plays an important role in Caribbean development, accounting for between 60% and 70% of Gross Domestic Product, and for approximately 50% of employment.

The Bank is channeling most of its support to the private sector, through MSMEs, which account for 70% to 85% of private enterprises.

In 2017:

- 115 MSMEs accessed credit valued at USD5 mn provided through the CDB;
- We helped MSMEs in eight BMCs to access regional and international markets through trade missions, market research, export development strategies, and food safety training and certification; and
- We launched the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Toolkit. This online tool is already offering guidance and practical assistance to BMCs in successfully preparing and managing PPP projects.

As I prepare to close, I will quickly speak about CDB's response to the 2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season.

As at the end of 2017, the Bank had approved USD104 mn in Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Loans, Immediate Response Loans, and Emergency Relief Grants.

They will benefit approximately 134,000 people in Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda and the British Virgin Islands, who were affected and displaced by Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Such cataclysmic weather events are the new normal for our Region.

This is why our interventions in economic and social infrastructure are rooted in climate resilience.

The impact of these storms was not just infrastructural but social and psychological.

It is difficult to quantify the full effects of the loss of life; separation of families; or the disruption of livelihoods.

For the first time, the Bank has incorporated community resilience and psychosocial support services in its recovery programming.

Looking ahead to 2018, we will deliver on our commitment to fast-track the implementation of rehabilitation and reconstruction projects, by placing greater emphasis on the supervision of projects.

This year, we will begin to implement approved road and maritime infrastructure projects in Antigua and Barbuda, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Guyana, and Montserrat.

The Bank will continue to advance energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives across our BMCs.

We will address the issue of youth unemployment through skills development projects in Belize and Grenada.

The Bank will also boost its support for regional food security, underpinned by climate-smart agriculture.

CDB will operationalise the Cultural and Creative Industries Innovation Fund approved in 2017.

These projects demonstrate our unwavering commitment to being more responsive to the needs of our BMCs.

This morning, we have heard the Bank's plans for delivering strong results for Caribbean communities, strengthening our Region's resilience, building back better, and putting our countries on a sustainable development path.

This path will not be without challenges but CDB remains committed to partnering with our BMCs to make extreme poverty in our Region a thing of the past.