

CMO CONCERNED ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

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Adapting to climate change will require more than financial resources, technology and public health infrastructure.

Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Joy St. John, says education, awareness raising and the creation of legal frameworks and an environment that encourages people to take well informed, long-term, sustainable decisions are also needed.

She made the comments as she delivered opening remarks at the launch of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded project entitled 'Piloting Climate Change Adaptation to Protect Human Health' at the Courtyard by Marriott, while she noted that Barbados is the only country in the Western Hemisphere that was selected to be a part of the global pilot project.

She added that even if greenhouse gas emissions are reduced in the near future, the earth's climate will continue to change and as such, adaptation response strategies, policy and implementation measures to increase the resilience to the impact of climate change, must be implemented now, to bring about future reductions in diseases, injuries, disabilities and death.

"... This workshop seeks to maximise the opportunities for learning locally relevant lessons to increase the adaptive capacity of the public health community. The selection process for this project was no easy task because it identified only those countries that exhibited evidence of significant population vulnerability to climate change, heightened awareness of health risks from climate change, a strong commitment from international agencies – the World Health Organisation, the Pan American Health Organisation by extension and UNDP country offices and least basic national capacity to respond," she said.

With that in mind, the CMO noted that there were other special reasons for Barbados being an ideal choice, in particular, the high proportion of our population and visitors living on coastlines as well as the fact that we are a water-stressed country.

She explained that the project no doubt recognises that climate change has multiple influences on human health, but she noted that despite the increasing understanding of health risks associated with climate change, there has been limited implementation of strategies, policies and measures to protect the health of the most vulnerable population.

"It can be denoted that climate change affects the most fundamental requirements for health – clean air, safe drinking water and sufficient food and secure shelter. Therefore it is easy to understand why all populations would be affected by climate change and why some are more vulnerable than others... children in particular, living in poor countries are among the most vulnerable to the resulting health risks and will be exposed longer to the health consequences," she said. (JRT)

Article can be found:

<http://www.barbadosadvocate.com/newsitem.asp?more=businessNewsID=722&NewsID=18686>

