



20
23

COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS

UPDATE

THE BAHAMAS

This document was prepared by the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Jamaica, The Bahamas, Bermuda, Turks and Caicos & Cayman Islands.

This document was not subject to official editing. Any errors are the responsibility of the authors. Comments or suggestions concerning the contents of this document should be addressed to the UN Resident Coordinator at jamaica.rco@un.org.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations	_____	04
Executive Summary	_____	05
Introduction	_____	06
Political Developments	_____	06
Economic Developments	_____	07
Human Rights Developments	_____	08
Progress on the SDGs	_____	10
Emerging Opportunities and Challenges	_____	12
Conclusion	_____	14

Abbreviations

BNSI	Bahamas National Statistical Institute
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DOS	Department of Statistics
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MSDCF	Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
NDP	National Development Plan
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDR	Sustainable Development Report
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UPR	Universal Periodic Review

Executive Summary

The previous CCA update for The Bahamas was written approximately one year after the current administration was elected to office. As such, it contained information on the government's preliminary efforts to steer the country on a pathway towards economic prosperity, climate resilience, and peace. In October, Parliament was dissolved and a second Speech from the Throne was issued and outlined the legislative and policy priorities for the new legislative session – this will be discussed in subsequent sections of this update.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



This year marked the 50th anniversary of The Bahamas' independence and the pursuit of economic growth remains a priority. Two years into its current term, the administration notes that the economy has successfully rebounded, but that debt servicing obligations remain burdensome.

As such, the government has renewed its commitment to continue to, among other efforts, promote economic diversification, introduce programmes/policies which alleviate stresses associated with the high cost of living, and develop national infrastructure.

A major priority for the current political administration continues to be the development and seeking out of climate finance opportunities. Last year, the administration adopted legislation on carbon credits.

13 CLIMATE ACTION



The administration is aggressively undertaking efforts to develop mechanisms and policies to develop a viable carbon market and exchange. While doubts have been expressed by some, it is projected that The Bahamas could “build a fund worth up to \$60bn by 2050 to finance environmental and climate change.”^[1]

In addition to addressing the climate crisis, gender-based violence (GBV) remained on the government's agenda and culminated with the passage of the contested Protection against Violence Bill, 2023 – which women's rights advocates and activists noted fell short of the comprehensive gender-based violence bill that it replaced.^[2]

As it relates to other crimes, the previous CCA Update noted that there appeared to be an increase in crime in 2022. In the most recent crime report (2022), it was noted that while there was an overall decrease in crime, the following was recorded: homicides increased by 8%; armed robberies increased by 34%; robberies increased by 29%; stolen vehicles increased by 11%; rape increased by 15%; attempted rape increased by 67%; and unlawful sexual assault increased by 11%. The numbers for 2023 will not be available until 2024. This information does, however, provide a concerning snapshot regarding the upward spike in violent crime between 2021 and 2022.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



[1] Simmons, F. (2023, November 8). Bahamas in up to \$60bn boost via carbon credits. Available at <http://www.tribune242.com/news/2023/nov/08/bahamas-60bn-boost-carbon-credits/>

[2] Dames, C. (2023, October 12). CEDAW rep says new bill fails human rights standards. Available at: https://thenassaanguardian.com/home/cedaw-rep-says-new-bill-fails-human-rights-standards/article_e613a97e-f2ce-55ad-9e52-71d4a5f1b295.html

[3] Royal Bahamas Police Force. (2023). Meet the Press: Nationwide Crime Analysis 2022 vs 2021. Available at <https://www.royalbahamaspolice.org/statistics/Meet%20The%20Press%202023.pdf>

Finally, political instability in Haiti is a key concern for the administration, given the expectation that it will cause an influx of Haitian migrants to The Bahamas. In addition to a former Prime Minister of The Bahamas serving as a member of the three-person Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Eminent Persons Group (EPG) established to “support in designated priority areas, including security, governance, the electoral process, and long-term development planning and advocacy”; The Bahamas has committed personnel support to a multinational force led by Kenya whose aim is to contribute to the stabilization of the crisis in Haiti.

Introduction

The CCA is a key instrument designed to reflect the United Nations integrated, forward-looking and evidence-based joint analysis of the context for sustainable development, in view of achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. It forms the basis of UN programmatic support through the Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF).

This document is the third CCA update of the current cycle and provides an overview of major changes that have taken place in 2023 and highlights the data that has become available since then. At the time of this update, The Bahamas is experiencing a strong rebound in economic activity despite geopolitical instability. And while the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer a primary focus for the administration, there was a dengue outbreak in the latter part of 2023 with which the government has had to contend. The first three sections will outline developments on the political, economic, and human rights front in The Bahamas during 2023.

The latter two sections of the report will: 1) highlight SDG progress (and the government’s policy efforts to advance these) and 2) delve into the upcoming threats and opportunities as identified by the Agencies, Funds and Programmes that contribute to programming in The Bahamas. For this report, the inputs of the different UN entities, civil society, and the government will be sought.

Political Developments

In August, the Commissioner of Police read a proclamation from the Governor General stating that Parliament would be prorogued until October 2023. Prior to the opening of the new legislative session, a new Governor-General was appointed, and a sitting Cabinet Minister (the Hon. Obediah Wilchcombe) unexpectedly died resulting in a by-election – which was held in November. Following the reopening of Parliament in October, changes were made to Cabinet appointments and portfolios which resulted in the decoupling of some Ministerial portfolios and combination of others – e.g. the newly established Ministry of Labour and Public Service, the Ministry of Immigration and National Insurance, and so on. The new session of Parliament opened with a Speech from the Throne by the newly appointed Governor-General, Cynthia Pratt.

The priorities were summed up as a “focus on strengthening personal security, economic security, and national security” through the following: job creation for Bahamians; prioritizing public health, mental health and wellness initiatives, and introducing catastrophic healthcare coverage; introducing economic empowerment zones; comprehensively reviewing the energy sector, and a host of additional intended pursuits.^[4]

Economic Developments

In 2022, the Bahamian economy had just begun to recover from the effects associated with COVID-19 but was faced with inflationary pressures. However, 2023 saw the country make a strong economic comeback. The International Monetary Fund estimated that in 2022, real GDP growth reached 14.4 per cent and unemployment fell to 8.8 per cent with an especially high performance in tourism. Interestingly, the IMF statement note that labor force participation, particularly among men, remained below pre-pandemic levels.

Some of the notable developments in 2023 included the fact that international flight and cruise arrivals significantly exceeded their pre-pandemic levels leading to a projected 4.3 percent expansion in the year. With respect to inflation, it was noted that after peaking at 7.1 per cent in July 2022, inflation fell to 2.3 per cent in July 2023.

Table 1 showing data derived from official sources and IMF staff^[5]

	Projections			
	2022	2023	2024	2025
Real GDP (annual % change)	14.4	4.3	2.3	1.8
Unemployment Rate (%)	10.8	8.8	8.8	8.9
Current Account Balance (% of GDP)	-8.2	-6.2	-6.1	-5.8
CPI Inflation (% end of period)	5.5	3.6	2.9	2.4
CPI Inflation (% period average)	5.6	3.4	3.1	2.6
Fiscal Overall Balance (% of GDP) 1/	-5.8	-4.1	-2.6	-2.0
Government Debt (% of GDP) 1/	88.9	84.2	83.2	81.9

The Bahamas National Statistics Institute (BNSI), via the Department of Statistics, produced the following graph depicting increases in GDP over a five-year period.

Graph 1 showing Real vs Nominal GDP 2018 -2022^[6]



[4] Brown, K. (2023, 12 October). Govt outlines agenda in Speech from the Throne. Available at https://www.thenassaanguardian.com/home/govt-outlines-agenda-in-speech-from-the-throne/article_3418c71b-2598-59c7-8a00-2e419dd8972f.html

[5] International Monetary Fund. (2023, November). Bahamas: Staff Concluding Statement of the 2023 Article IV Mission. Available at <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/11/27/cs112723-bahamas-concluding-statement-2023-article-iv-mission>

[6] Bahamas National Statistical Institute. (2023). Real vs Nominal GDP 2018 -2022. Available at <https://www.bahamas.gov.bs/wps/portal/public/gov/government/tut/p/b1/04>

The previous CCA drew attention to the government's determination to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio. Since the administration took office, there have been positive developments in this regard. A recent report by the Central Bank of The Bahamas noted that the ratio of the direct charge to GDP "decreased by an estimated 5.5 percentage points on a yearly basis to 80.4 percent at September-end. In addition, the national debt-to-GDP declined to an estimated 80.1 percent compared to 89.1 percent in the third quarter of 2022."^[7]

Human Rights Developments

National Framework Policy for Immigration: In February the administration unveiled a multisectoral policy framework to relocate residents of shanty towns throughout The Bahamas. Residents include Bahamian citizens, residents with work permits, and undocumented migrant. Concerns were raised by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate housing expressed deep concern that the lifting of a Supreme Court injunction (preventing the demolition^[8] of homes in irregular settlements) may result in forced evictions and demolitions in The Bahamas. Demolitions began in November 2023 and while there was some backlash from civil society, this had no effect on demolition progress.

Universal Periodic Review (UPR): The Bahamas participated in the fourth cycle of the UPR in May after which it supported 164 (70%) of the 233 recommendations received by the Human Rights Council. Notably, the government agreed to "consider two recommendations which spoke directly to gender discrimination, including criminalizing marital rape, and providing Bahamian women with the same rights as Bahamian men to confer citizenship on their children or spouses."^[9] It is also noteworthy that the government indicated that there "had been no reported cases in the Bahamas where anyone had experienced alleged discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation."^[10] Given that no mechanism exists that systematically gathers information on discrimination towards members of the LGBTQ+ and other marginalized, vulnerable, or other underrepresented communities, this is unsurprising, but also speaks to the need to ensure that this gap is remedied through effective policy/legislative mechanisms.

OHCHR Country Missions in 2023:

In August, the OHCHR deployed Attiya Waris, Independent Expert on foreign debt, other international financial obligations and human rights, on a 10-day visit to The Bahamas following which she "urged the international community to increase assistance to The Bahamas and other small island States that face elevated threats from natural disasters resulting from climate change." She also encouraged the government to pursue economic diversification to mitigate the vulnerabilities associated with a tourism-based economy susceptible to severe climate shocks.^[11]

[7] Hartnell, N. (2023, 21 December). Deficits overwhelm growth six-fold in driving debt hike. Available at <http://www.tribune242.com/news/2023/dec/21/deficits-overwhelm-growth-six-fold-driving-debt-hike/>

[8] Available at <https://twitter.com/adequatehousing?lang=en>

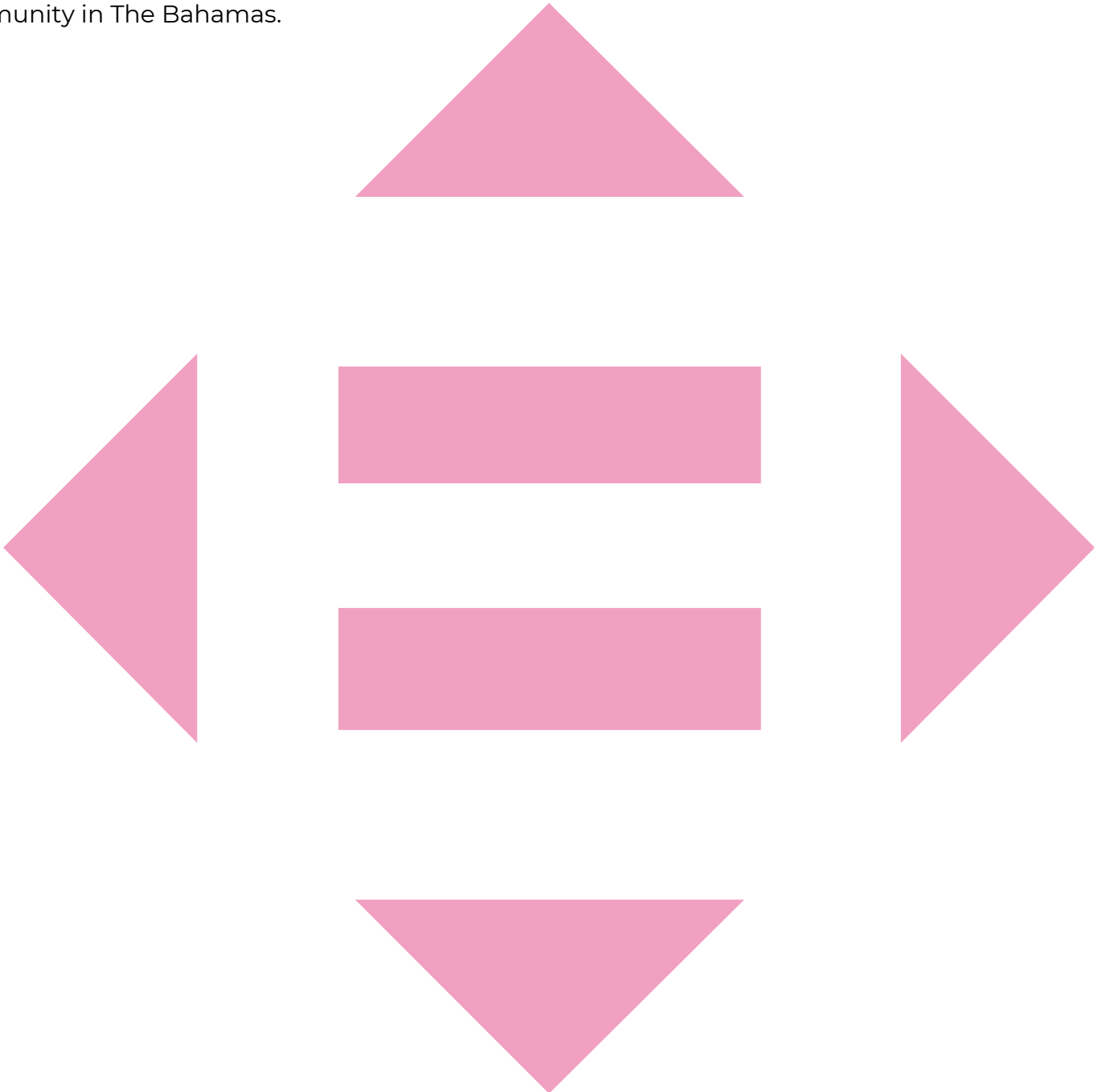
[9] OHCHR. (2023). Human Rights Council Adopts Universal Periodic Review Outcomes of the Bahamas, Burundi and Luxembourg. Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/10/human-rights-council-adopts-universal-periodic-review-outcomes-bahamas-burundi-and#:~:text=The%20Bahamas%20was%20commended%20for,payments%20to%20the%20most%20disadvantaged.>

[10] Ibid.

[11] OHCHR. (2023). UN expert urges international support for The Bahamas amid climate crisis. Available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/09/1140327>

The OHCHR Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions undertook a mission to The Bahamas in November. The group commended the government for its ratification of human rights treaties, tabling of the Ombudsman Bill, and establishment of the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee. That said, there were areas of concern that were highlighted in the Working Group's statement of preliminary findings. Concerns pertained to, inter alia, pre-trial detention in cases where bail is burdensome, violations of the rights to have an attorney physically present during police interrogations and pre-trial proceedings, the conditions (overcrowding, limited yard time, etc.) of detention, as well as concerns about the treatment of children, older persons, migrants, and persons with psychosocial disabilities.

Establishment of a Regional OHCHR Office in The Bahamas: At the conclusion of its fifty-fourth regular session in October, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to the establishment of a regional office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the Caribbean Community in The Bahamas.



Progress on the SDGs

The previous CCA Update noted that the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2040 (explicitly aligned with the SDGs) had not been officially adopted. There has been a promising development in this regard as the Governor General noted in this year's Speech from the Throne. That is, the government indicated that a strategic national development plan, which aims to cover a 50-year period will be developed and encompass, inter alia, all the administration's proposed steps towards securing greater economic security and growth. Coupled with the introduction of this new NDP will be a Bahamas National Development Plan Bill which is expected to be introduced during this legislative period.

Figure 1 showing SDG Progress in The Bahamas as at 2023



Furthermore, in keeping with key LNOB expectations to include those who are marginalized, underrepresented, or otherwise left out of national development processes, the administration announced the introduction of a new Local Government Bill to “make local government in the Family Islands more effective and invest in critical Family Island infrastructure.”^[12]

The previous CCA Update noted that during 2021, the Government of The Bahamas presented its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) during the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York. To date, though, the document has not been made available to the public.

The previous CCA also highlighted that progress towards each of the SDG indicators, as tracked by the United Nations, only provides a partial picture of country-level SDG progress. However, the 2023 Sustainable Development Report (SDR) provides some insight into progress but lacks the^[13] detail and precision that a central SDG data tracking or monitoring entity/mechanism could provide. In lieu of that, Figure 1, derived from the 2023 SDR shows that while moderate progress is being made across the SDGs, gaps remain. That is, The Bahamas is on track with achieving 44.4%, made limited progress on 35.2%, and shows worsening progress on 20.4% of the SDGs.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Sachs et al. (2023). Implementing the SDG Stimulus. Sustainable Development Report 2023. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/bahamas-the>

With respect to the SDGs that the country is on track or making limited progress on achieving, these include improvements on, or existing positive conditions in relation to, SDG 2: prevalence of undernourishment, SDG 3: maternal mortality rate, SDG 5: demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods, SDG 6: population using at least basic drinking water services, SDG 7: population with access to electricity, SDG 9: Rural population with access to all-season roads; and SDG 11: Proportion of urban population living in slums. The inclusion of SDG 5 and SDG 11 among the goals that are being achieved does not capture the fact that abortion remains illegal in The Bahamas (with some exceptions) and the latter provides an excellent example about the need to tailor the SDGs to any given context – i.e. the number of individuals residing in irregular settlements is not captured in official statistics, but the government has undertaken assessments, which remain unavailable to the public.

Major challenges remain with the country's record of achievement on the following indicators: SDG 4: Participation rate in pre-primary organized learning. SDG 13: CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion and cement production; SDG 14: Mean area that is protected in marine sites important to biodiversity; SDG 15: Mean area that is protected in terrestrial sites important to biodiversity; and SDG 16: Homicides. Apart from SDG 16, the report indicates that progress on those SDGs remains stagnant.

When compared to SDR 2022's overall progress on the goals, there are some concerning developments on some of the SDGs. That is, SDGs 5, 7, and 12 saw regressions in SDR 2023. SDG 11 was unreported in SDR 2022, but is reported as on track in SDR 2023.



Emerging Opportunities and Challenges

The following areas could provide opportunities for achievement of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development as well as the possibility of support by development partners, including the UNCT. Unfortunately, the results of the 2022 population survey have not been published.

1 NO POVERTY



ECONOMIC PROSPERITY/SUPPORT

On November 2, 2023, the Ministry of Finance published two policy frameworks to guide the granting of government lending and guarantees, in keeping with the requirements under sections 37 and 42 of the Public Debt Management Act, 2021. The government has received assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat to prepare these documents, “as part of the deliverables under the ongoing technical assistance programme aimed at strengthening the governance framework for public debt management in The Bahamas.”

Though it has not yet been fleshed out, the government has indicated its desire to address the cost-of-living crisis that exists in the country. In addition to creating job opportunities in a range of industries, including in the orange economy, the government intends to revise public service salaries – which, if they are updated in 2024 -will be the first time it has been done since 2016.

As the second CCA Update noted, the government is committed to enhancing food security to enable the national food supply to withstand extreme shocks – environmental or otherwise. Indeed, government officials have expressed optimism in achieving CARICOM’s goal to reduce imports by 25 percent by 2025. Strategies that have been mentioned include “precision agriculture techniques, remote sensing technologies and data analytics.” The Bahamas still imports approximately 90% of its food supply – with no clear indication that this will decrease significantly in one year.^[14]

The Ministry of Agriculture, Marine Resources and Family Island Affairs committed to creating a National Food Policy in 2023 to promote food security in The Bahamas. The policy is intended to “encompass a holistic approach and incorporate regulations, legislation and other aspects to assist the farmers who have not really gotten the attention they deserve for a long time, help to drive domestic investment throughout the country and find ways to initiate food production to help to fight food insecurity.”^[15]

2 ZERO HUNGER



[14] Simmons, F. (2023, October 11). PM: Caribbean half-way to 25% food import slash goal. Available at <http://www.tribune242.com/news/2023/oct/11/pm-caribbean-half-way-25-food-import-slash-goal/>

[15] Government of The Bahamas. (2023). MOAMRFIA To Create National Food Policy. Available at <https://www.bahamas.gov.bs/wps/portal/public/gov/government/notices/national%20food%20policy>



HEALTH AND WELLNESS

In this new legislative session, the administration has committed to improving the health infrastructure on the Family Islands as well as undertake greater efforts to “prioritize public health, mental health and wellness initiatives, and is moving aggressively to implement the second phase of National Health Insurance, with the introduction of catastrophic healthcare cover.”



CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Building on efforts outlined in the previous CCA Update, this administration is seeking to expand its efforts toward pursuing creative climate finance solutions. In this context, working with Resilience Capital Ventures, the government is operationalizing the Bahamas Sustainable Investment Programme – the priorities for which focus on climate-resilient infrastructure, national clean energy transition, conservation of coastal zones, reduction in biodiversity loss, regenerative agriculture, carbon sequestration, and participation in natural asset-backed carbon credit programmes. The government is seeking to secure a \$500 million USD facility.^[16]

Additionally, the government released its draft Carbon Markets and Greenhouse Gases Regulations in August. These regulations outline “the process for the sale of carbon credits by a company managing those credits and reveals that the prime minister will be responsible for final approval of an asset purchase.”^[17] This latter portion of the regulations could undermine principles of transparency and accountability.

Key challenges involve groups that are marginalized, vulnerable, or otherwise left behind in national development processes. Efforts will be required to ensure that while the country pursues economic stability, it also lays the foundation for and promotes greater social inclusion and cohesion in a meaningful manner. This entails adopting a human rights-based approach to development processes – by integrating groups left out of national development processes at the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages. While it is encouraging that the administration intends to establish a Youth Advisory Council, it is essential that this body is representative and empowered to influence policy.

[16] Office of the Prime Minister. (2023). Prime Minister Davis' Remarks at the Launch of The Bahamas Sustainable Investment Programme At COP 28. Available at <https://opm.gov.bs/prime-minister-davis-bahamas-sustainable-investment-programme-launch-cop28/>

[17] Robards, C. (2023, 21 August). Govt releases draft Carbon Markets Greenhouse Gases Regulations. Available at https://www.thenassauguardian.com/business/govt-releases-draft-carbon-markets-greenhouse-gases-regulations/article_2c47a07e-fe58-58dd-9462-ef5506927fa3.html

Conclusion

At the time of this CCA Update, The Bahamas is experiencing a period of economic recovery. That said, it is critical that the 'leave no one behind' (LNOB) principle is foregrounded in policy and practice. Ensuring that data is captured to this end would assist greatly in determining the extent to which Agenda 2030 in The Bahamas is truly being realized.

