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## Jamaica Observer Editorial

# Climate change issues not sexy but deadly to ignore

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*Dominica damage*

*Flood damage in Dominica caused by unseasonal rains just before Christmas Day last year. (PHOTO: CDEMA)*

We hope that during the revelry of the Christmas holidays, enough of us took time to share the grief of our brothers and sisters in St Vincent and the Grenadines, St Lucia, and Dominica, who suffered great damage from deadly floods.

We extend our sympathies with the full knowledge that Jamaica could easily have been affected by the unseasonal rains that wreaked such damage, given that we share this geographical space called the Caribbean with the affected islands.

Dr Ralph Gonsalves, the prime minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines, has estimated that the damage to his country alone is in excess of US\$60 million.

We shudder to think what the final figure will be when the damage to St Lucia and Dominica is tallied.

We are, however, heartened by the response so far of the region, led by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), which quickly sent fact-finding missions to all three affected Caricom states in an effort to determine their needs and make arrangements to aid recovery efforts.

Barbados, we are told, is making available a coast guard vessel to help transport emergency supplies, Trinidad and Tobago has already sent relief supplies, while Jamaica has been making arrangements to assist in the areas that require intervention.

CDEMA has also told us that the University of the West Indies has regional engineers on standby awaiting formal requests from the impacted states for the rehabilitation and recovery of bridges, roads and other infrastructure.

Based on the damage we have seen in the print and electronic media, recovery will not be an easy task. However, we believe that with all Caricom states pooling their resources, the job will get done.

This episode, though, should give the region cause to take a serious look at how we build, especially given the effects of climate change. For it is clear to us that the Caribbean is particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon which, we expect, will trigger increasingly adverse weather conditions each year.

Sir Ronald Sanders, in his piece in this week's Sunday Observer, has reminded us that the Inter-American Development Bank has estimated that the Caribbean tourism industry will lose more than US\$900 million a year by 2050 due to the effects of climate change.

And that figure is likely to jump to US\$2 billion by 2053.

Add to that the loss of life and damage to infrastructure associated with violent weather systems and you get a picture of the dilemma that we face as a region.

Sir Ronald also pointed to a Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre report showing that the region is at risk for dramatic rises in temperature with damaging effects on sensitive ecosystems that cannot tolerate even small changes in climate if they occur at a rapid pace.

That is not information that we should scoff at, for it is obvious from our experiences over the past few years that the weather systems have been growing in intensity. Climate change issues might not be sexy, but they are deadly to ignore.

We should not wait until the impact on us is so great that we have difficulty addressing our weaknesses.