Since its creation in 1976, Habitat for Humanity’s work has impacted more than 22 million people in 78 countries, supporting families achieve their goal to have a decent place to live. HFH Trinidad and Tobago has been part of this journey for more than 22 years reaching families in the country and creating a long lasting impact, because a home helps people to achieve the strength, stability and independence they need to build a better life for themselves.

During the last years the UN has been leading the international community in reducing poverty levels through the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, in that context, housing ensures sustainable development, access to clean water and sanitation are integral to safe, healthy, adequate housing The Goals for the U.N. 2030 Agenda for SDGs, are catalyzed by housing.

Research shows that safe, adequate and affordable housing leads to benefits in health, education and economic opportunity. The process of housing improvement itself is often a ladder out of poverty for families. Housing is a driver, catalyst and contributor for 13 of the 17 SDGs. Housing is a platform for household resilience and sustainability, driving human development index and outcomes in health, education and standard of living, including indicators in nutrition; child mortality; school enrollment; energy; water; sanitation and durable, healthy construction. Housing as a process can create a sense of place and dignity, building community cohesion as well as one’s social and financial network and assets. These changes benefit the larger community, reducing inequality and building resilience against economic and natural disasters.

Within these development areas, one issue that we cannot ignore and that is a real threat in the Caribbean is the increasing number and severity of natural disasters.

Category 5 hurricanes Maria and Irma, both in 2017, remind us how powerful storms can become and create destruction, loss of life, and impact to economies in the Caribbean. For some countries, damages could exceed the size of their economy, such as Dominica. When devastated by hurricane Maria, damages are estimated to be 226% of their GDP. That means it would take Dominica at least 5 years to recover to the place it was before the hurricane.

Climate change puts the spotlight in our countries’ vulnerabilities, making them more obvious. Further increase in sea-water temperatures may lead to stronger and more frequent storms, affecting the poor and vulnerable who live in the most exposed places.

We, as Habitat for Humanity, have a role to play and HFH T&T as a well-established organization with capable leaders has an even more important role to play in the Caribbean. Adequate housing builds resilience and reduces vulnerability to economic, social and climate-related shocks and disasters. Through adecuate shelter and proper land-usage, we can reduce the effects of natural events and help societies to become more resilient.

As Habitat for Humanity International, we seek to continue looking for the best ways to build the capacity we need in the Caribbean in order to help government and communities to stand strong against disasters. For this, we need local partners to help us become a beacon in the region. Being an two-island country, part of the English-speaking Caribbean itself, Habitat Trinidad & Tobago is a key player to make Habitat for Humanity a stronger organization in the Caribbean to be able to serve more families in the region and I look forward to continue strengthening our relationship for the benefits of those in need in the country.

In Partnership,

Ernesto Castro-Garcia

Area Vice President

HFH International, Latin America and the Caribbean