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Economic Commission for  
Latin America and the  
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## Planning for resilience: an integrated approach to tackle climate change in the Caribbean

### Introduction

The Caribbean subregion is exceptionally vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events. Vulnerability is a key multidimensional concept at the heart of resilience building, relating to each country's multiple spatial and socioeconomic risks and conditions. In fact, due to its geographical location and concentration of population and activities in low-lying coastal areas, the Caribbean is the second most hazard-prone region in the world. With 84 per cent of its population living near the coast, recurrent disasters may also be a driver of migration and population displacement – as witnessed in Barbuda in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and in the Bahamas following Hurricane Dorian, when entire island-populations were displaced post-disaster. Moreover, impacts of extreme weather events on Caribbean small economies are of national proportions. For example, in the hurricane season of 2017, the total cost of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the British Virgin Islands and in Sint Maarten exceeded their respective national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (ECLAC, 2019).

The poor, rural communities, indigenous people and vulnerable groups – including female-headed households, pregnant women, children, those with illness, the elderly, and persons with disability – are usually the most seriously impacted in cases of disasters and extreme weather events, bearing disproportionate levels of mortality and injury. This is a consequence of inequalities in access to housing, basic infrastructure, water, adequate health care, food

Key recommendations to promote integrated approaches for resilience building:

- **Reinforce institutional mechanisms for integrated development planning**
- **Strengthen evidence-based planning**
- **Promote bottom-up collaboration, integrating indigenous and other marginalised communities**
- **Mainstream gender and youth**
- **Improve communication and outreach**
- **Conduct capacity building for resilience**
- **Develop sustainable financing mechanisms**
- **Explore international cooperation**

and nutrition, education, technology and information, among others. Vulnerable groups, including women and girls, face systemic barriers which negatively affect their adaptive capacity, increasing their exposure to climate change and disaster risk. Climate change is, therefore, recognized as a factor contributing to perpetuate inequalities and perceived

as a threat to sustainable development, poverty reduction, and the overall achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Background

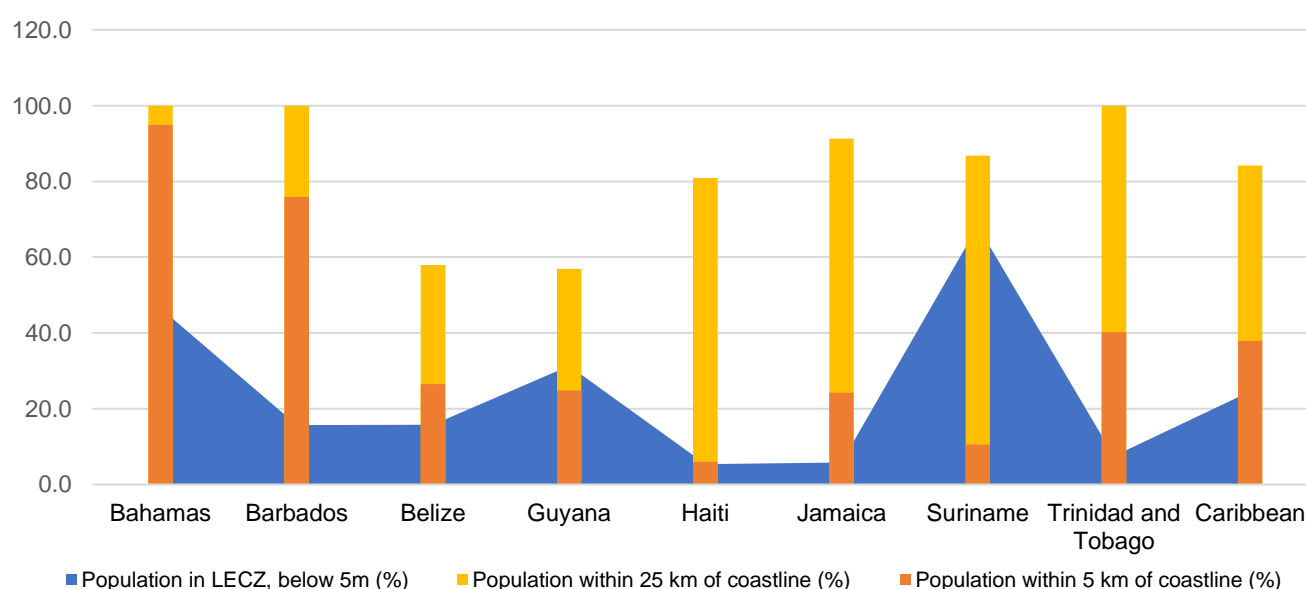
*Due to their small land size, the majority of Caribbean countries' population, infrastructure, and activities, are situated within 25 km of coastline and in several countries over 20 per cent of the population lives in low elevation coastal zones (LECZ), as represented in figure 1. Both factors – coastal exposure and low-lying geography – contribute to increased Caribbean countries' vulnerability to recurrent disaster related hazards and climate change impacts. Risks of flooding may be heightened by complex hydric systems and low adaptive capacities. These fragilities are further exacerbated in a context of high public debt coupled with a period of fiscal consolidation and decline in foreign direct investment, since it restricts Governments' capacity to sustain social spending and invest in their adaptive capacity and in the resilience of their infrastructure (ECLAC, 2019).*

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup> provides a unique opportunity to address the

persistent vulnerabilities facing the Caribbean subregion, including poverty, inequality, and environmental risks. Through it, governments have committed to address the long-standing structural economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities hindering the attainment of the SDGs.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, ECLAC has emphasized the importance of planning as a key tool for policy coherence, stressing that the SDGs are integrated and indivisible, and proposing to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development (ECLAC, 2019, 2018, 2018b). The agenda includes SDG target 17.14 to: “enhance policy coherence for sustainable development” as an essential means of implementation. Other resilience-specific targets include the support to positive economic, social and environmental links by strengthening national and regional development planning (11.a); adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and developing and implementing holistic disaster risk management at all levels (11.b); integrating climate change measures into national policies,

Figure 1: Caribbean coastal vulnerability



Source: IDB (2017) and WB (2013).

<sup>1</sup> A/RES/70/1, “Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

strategies, and planning (13.2); and integrating ecosystems and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes and poverty reduction strategies, and accounts (15.9).

International frameworks such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) on Financing for Development, the Paris agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the New Urban Agenda – including its Subregional Action Plan for the Caribbean – and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, provide further grounds to leverage SIDS response for incorporating resilience within sustainable development.

In particular, the Paris Agreement established a Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) on “enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change”, “contributing to sustainable development and ensuring an adequate adaptation response”. Sendai’s goals to prevent natural catastrophes stresses the importance of understanding disaster risks, strengthening disaster management governance, investing in risk reduction and resilience building. In its turn, the Subregional Action Plan for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in the Caribbean calls for the development of national framework action plans aiming to foster policy coherence across different levels of government. It is expected that the document will support Caribbean countries in generating the broad technical changes required for a new generation of integrated physical and development planning ambitions, setting a path towards more sustainable, resilient and inclusive communities.

## Threats and Opportunities

***Despite the solid policy ambition, Caribbean countries face significant implementation challenges, including limited capacities to develop evidence-based sustainable development plans that mainstream the SDGs, the SAMOA Pathway, the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework,***

***among others. The climate crisis – primarily a consequence of greenhouse gas emissions from developed countries – is already posing an unjust burden on SIDS, threatening their long-term economic, social and environmental viability. In a context of high debt and fiscal stress it will be difficult for indebted Caribbean SIDS to address key aspects of the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs. Furthermore, as populations continue to grow and relocate — partly as a result from disasters —, efforts to promote resilience planning must be put in place to help national and local authorities prioritise and attract investment in an inclusive manner, making use of limited data and resources and adjusting to rapidly changing contexts.***

Caribbean countries have recognized limited capacity to implement, monitor and evaluate progress in the achievement of national and internationally agreed development goals. Statistical gaps limit Caribbean countries’ capacity to develop indicators to measure long-term progress in achieving the SDGs. Identified challenges include weak statistical regulations, lack of coordination among agencies producing official statistics, financial constraints, scarcity of data on environmental indicators, outdated data on the social sector, inefficiencies in data sharing and dissemination, and lack of dedicated capacity to produce SDG indicators (ECLAC, 2019b).

Maintaining coherence among the different international frameworks is critical for the repositioning of resilience policy, promoting increased synergies between policies to support the identification of national priorities, to ensure internal consistency, and to prevent duplication of efforts. In the Caribbean, the establishment of processes for policy coherence is still a challenge since it requires a whole-of-government approach, breaking silos across sectors.

Notwithstanding the inhibiting context, the subregion is making progress and promoting innovation in localizing the 2030 Agenda. Countries have held consultations to improve national

ownership of the global Agenda and have identified priority goals and indicators for measuring progress in achieving the SDGs. Several countries benefitted from mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support (MAPS) missions to help advance national level SDGs implementation<sup>2</sup>. Previous experience of mainstreaming other cross-sectoral issues such as gender, youth and environmental concerns, together with sustainable development planning practice, knowledge and access to data on climate change, present an opportunity for Caribbean countries to extract lessons and to integrate country resilience building experiences into development planning.

Furthermore, the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean is recognized as an excellent regional platform for peer-learning in addressing the challenges to sustainable development. International, regional, and subregional cooperation remains pivotal in supporting the efforts of countries, their national and local authorities, as well as communities and businesses, towards resilience building.

At the global level, climate programmes are promoting the strategic integration of climate resilience into development planning through mechanisms for climate financing<sup>3</sup> clearly establishing the link between evidence-based planning and implementation. This approach has emphasized strategic coherence among development policy objectives in order to activate funding by a variety of financial instruments, thereby effectively mainstreaming climate resilience into short-, medium- and long-term budgetary instruments (Pervin et al, 2013).

Caribbean SIDS need special attention and support to augment investment through bilateral and multilateral channels in order to secure adequate, sustainable, and timely means of implementation in

capacity-building, financial and technical assistance and technology transfer, in accordance with international commitments<sup>4</sup>. Existing mechanisms such as the CDCC-RCM may require strengthening in order to provide effective support and achieve better implementation (ECLAC, 2019b).

## Integrated sustainable development planning as a mechanism to achieve greater resilience in the Caribbean SIDS.

***Integrated development approaches are defined as approaches that simultaneously advance multiple benefits across the three dimensions of sustainable development (social, environmental and economic), as represented in figure 2. Such approaches ensure that poverty eradication and resilience building efforts are closely intertwined. They require strong political will as a basis for effective governance, policy coordination and coherence across government departments and stakeholders. This political will may be channeled in different ways and responses must be tailored to the needs of countries based on their specific context and priorities, institutional structure and capacities: through legislation; elements of national development policies; policies, strategies and action plans; and climate objectives within sectoral policies and programmes (Pervin et al, 2013).***

While integrated planning and policy coherence are relatively new concepts, Caribbean countries have made significant strides in establishing interministerial working groups and coordination mechanisms, mandated to pull all actors together, and are addressing budgeting for cross-disciplinary action, skills and incentives for collaboration, and specific legislative frameworks for sustainable development<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Such is the case of Aruba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>3</sup> For example, mechanisms under the UNFCCC Adaptation Fund.

<sup>4</sup> ECLAC's Debt for Climate Adaptation Swap initiative aims to respond to the Caribbean's vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters and the region's high level of debt. In order to close the financing gap for the SDGs, ECLAC has called for the creation of a Caribbean Resilience Fund as part of a debt alleviation

strategy based on the climate change swap proposal, and for donors to use pledged resources to finance a gradual write-down of the Caribbean SIDS multilateral debt stock held at various multilateral institutions as well as the bilateral debt stock of Member States.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the proposal of a Sustainable Development Institute in Grenada, a dedicated entity technically and financially resourced with the mandate to coordinate the implementation of the National Plan. The country is also proposing sustainable development

However, limited fiscal space and institutional capacity to implement policies is hampering resilience building efforts in the Caribbean. Capacity constraints across the policy cycle continue to limit Caribbean countries ability to conduct integrated planning. Commonly identified individual and institutional challenges include limited capacity for data collection, management and dissemination, for research and analysis, technical capacities to incorporate disaster risk management (DRM) into public investment projects, and in the development and update of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.

Transitioning to integrated sustainable development planning and implementation implies strengthening institutions and promoting interaction between equitable growth, poverty eradication and the environment. The importance of stakeholder engagement in this process cannot be overstated. Building more robust partnerships in advancing sustainable development requires a

whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. The importance of civil society organizations should be emphasized, working together with academia, statistical bodies, local community associations, integrating gender considerations, youth and private sector participation to promote resilience, translating sustainable development objectives into decisive action.

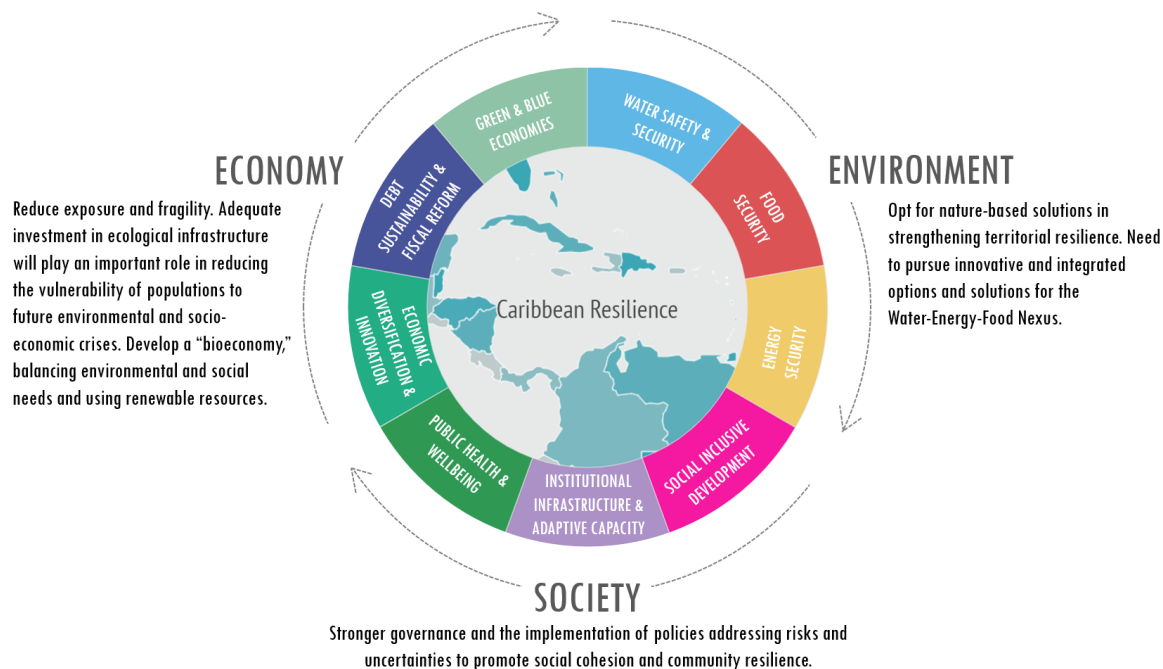
## Policy Recommendations

*Building resilience to climate change requires integrated action at multiple levels, addressing overlapping vulnerabilities and promoting multi-sector and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Specific recommendations for integrating resilience within the planning cycle include:*

**Reinforcing institutional mechanisms for integrated development planning:** A critical foundation for resilience building is the appropriate

Figure 2: An integrated approach to Caribbean resilience planning

## INTEGRATED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLANNING TO ADDRESS EXPOSURE AND VULNERABILITY



Source: Authors' compilation.

legislation in support to the implementation of the National Development Plan priorities (Government of Grenada, 2019).

institutional basis, as well as the legislative apparatus, including updated policies and strategies promoting integration. Strategic integration should include the appointment of *resilience focal points* in sustainable development ministries and agencies that have specific resilience training and are tasked with mainstreaming resilience.

Good governance may also imply incremental reform to promote effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, addressing embedded behaviours and internal consolidated practices.

**Strengthening evidence-based planning:** To realize sustainable development, resilience building approaches need to be mainstreamed into each stage of the national planning cycle. Empirically backed policy options rely on the important role of information systems in driving the climate mainstreaming agenda by providing evidence of the effects and impacts of climate change, and developing an improved understanding of the differentiated human rights impacts of climate change on women and men, boys and girls. Such systems should include: disaggregated data collection by relevant factors, such as sex, age, disability, ethnicity and geographical location; the development of gender-specific indicators; mapping the effects of climate change upon women, men, girls and boys, the elderly, persons with disabilities, poor, rural and remote communities.

It is important to promote appraisal approaches – including reliable and complete *community-based*

development and implementation, urban planning, informal and non-permanent housing programming, with guidelines and follow-up tools informed by anticipated demographic and environmental changes, including foreseen migration and displacement patterns<sup>6</sup>.

Continuous effort is required to strengthen data collection systems and capacities, in both the public and private sectors, to reflect multidimensional vulnerabilities in measurements of growth, poverty and natural resources. Efforts must be made to improve data availability and sharing arrangements. This will include increasing the collaboration between the National Statistics Offices and other government bodies to ensure that data collection systems are better coordinated, transparent, and feed more directly into the policy process<sup>7</sup>.

Most Caribbean countries have developed M&E mechanisms for social and economic development policies, plans and projects. However, these mechanisms are often not fully operational. Further efforts are required to fully establish integrated planning capable of bridging the gap between policy formulation and implementation – offering the required assessment methods to establish programme and policy evaluation processes that are fit for purpose, and to effectively measure progress towards the 2030 Agenda and other international and nationally defined goals.

**Promoting bottom-up collaborative approaches to resilience building:** New democratic

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