



2020 IN REVIEW

INTERVIEW WITH THE
PROGRAMME OFFICER

FACING 2021 HEAD ON

ECLAC CARIBBEAN'S
PLANS FOR THE SUBREGION

COVID-19 IMPACTS

POPULATION IMPACTS AND POLICY
RESPONSES TO THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC IN THE CARIBBEAN



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About us

Issued on a monthly basis, The Hummingbird offers insights into the latest projects, publications, technical assistance missions and research carried out by ECLAC Caribbean. In addition to these, sneak previews are provided of the most salient upcoming events, alongside enriching follow-ups to previously covered issues. With a view to featuring a variety of facets of Caribbean life and lifestyle, The Hummingbird also zooms in on cultural activities and landmark occurrences through an eye-opening regional round-up.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor: Johann Brathwaite
Copy Editor: Denise Balgobin
Publication Design: Blaine Marcano

Please see our contact details on the back cover of this magazine.

International Days

4 January

World Braille Day

24 January

International Day of Education

27 January

International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust

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18 January

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**THE ESCAZÚ AGREEMENT:
HOW TO BECOME A STATE PARTY**

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What is it? Why is it so important?

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Read more in #ECLAC's #PreliminaryOverview of the Economies of #LatinAmerica and the #Caribbean: <http://bit.ly/3nqEC6p>

GDP GROWTH PROJECTIONS

YEAR	2020	2021
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	-7.7	3.7
SOUTH AMERICA	-7.3	3.7
CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO	-8.5	3.8
CENTRAL AMERICA	-6.5	3.8
THE CARIBBEAN	-7.9	4.2

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ECLAC Caribbean's 2020 in review

Interview with the Programme Officer

The Hummingbird recently caught up with ECLAC Caribbean's Programme Officer, Johann Brathwaite, and had a one-on-one chat to highlight the work of the subregional office during 2020.

The office is well known for conducting research and analysis on sustainable development challenges and opportunities facing the Caribbean. What were some of the areas of research the office engaged in during 2020?

There's no short answer for this question, given the variety of subjects our research covered in 2020. Let me start by noting that COVID-19 compelled us to incorporate its impact in the Caribbean within several research activities we had already planned at the beginning of the year.

For example, The Caribbean Outlook 2020, which addressed opportunities for achieving sustainable development, was practically ready to be published in late February, and had to be revisited to incorporate the impact of COVID-19 on the Caribbean. The revision is certainly evident in the renamed title: "Forging a people-centred approach to sustainable development post-COVID-19".

We also conducted research on the impact of the pandemic-imposed restrictions in the Caribbean across six critical sectors, and proposed policy recommendations to ensure a swift post-pandemic recovery.

That study also reported on recommendations made in the UN Secretary General's initiative called "Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and beyond", making a case for greater external concessional financial support to the fiscally challenged economies of the subregion.

Two of the office's flagship publications, the Economic Survey of the Caribbean and the Preliminary Overview of the Economies of the Caribbean examined the performance of Caribbean economies in 2019, and projected the subregion's economic performance for 2020-2021, respectively.

Given the importance of disaster and risk management (DRM) for Caribbean economies - the subregion is prone to natural disasters of increasingly high frequency and intensity - we assessed the types and application of technologies and innovative approaches related to DRM in the subregion, and were able to evaluate and recommend strategies to advance the use, accessibility and uptake of these technologies and innovative approaches within the Caribbean.

Disasters can often lead to population displacement and migration due to sudden or progressive changes in the environment which adversely affects lives or living conditions. In partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), we



explored how extreme weather events and climate change could amplify inequalities and risks faced by women, girls and marginalized groups when they migrate or are displaced.

On the topic of the environment, single-use plastics have now been acknowledged as a major threat to public health and the natural environment. Many countries have now implemented various sanctions to limit or control the use of such plastics in their economies. We examined the economic implications of a ban on single-use plastics in Trinidad and Tobago, identifying a revised incentive framework, enhanced waste management infrastructure, public education and awareness-raising initiatives as important policy elements to be undertaken in the implementation of the ban.

You may be aware that advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been exposing privacy rights to new threats by reducing the amount of control that people have over their personal data, while increasing the possible negative consequences resulting from access to it. This development motivated us to examine the data protection laws of six Caribbean countries, with a view to identifying gaps and weaknesses and making targeted recommendations for revision of existing legislation, or adoption of new legislation. This study aims to facilitate bringing Caribbean

countries into compliance with regional and international standards.

On issues related to enhancing data capacity in Caribbean statistical offices, there is awareness of the challenge of assuring statistical confidentiality in populations of small size. Challenges in this regard have often led to severe restrictions in access to detailed and disaggregated census tables. In other parts of the world, statistical offices use disclosure control methods to safely publish detailed and disaggregated census tables. We therefore examined the problem of statistical disclosure control in the Caribbean, and recommended which of the methods used in other parts of the world would be most appropriate for Caribbean statistical offices.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) contribute the most to disability-adjusted life years globally. This, considered alongside the Caribbean's ageing population and high rates of childhood obesity, inspired an ECLAC study on the topic. It makes the case for renewed focus on addressing NCDs, given their potential to increase future financial and social welfare burdens in particular. The study also observes that many Caribbean countries are currently not on track to achieve the sustainable development goal (SDG) target, to reduce premature

mortality from non-communicable diseases by one-third.

This is just a snapshot of the work we accomplished over the past year.

Sounds like quite a bit of research was undertaken during the course of the year! Before I move on, I want to follow-up on two things you said right at the beginning. You mentioned the Caribbean Outlook 2020. Can you say a little more about that?

Certainly. The Caribbean Outlook, the ECLAC flagship publication for the Caribbean, was first published two years ago, and is issued biennially. It is intended to offer perspective on the threats and challenges faced by the Caribbean, and to propose innovative solutions to the issues that must be confronted, if the Caribbean is to achieve progress consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and other key global agendas. This particular edition of the Outlook addresses the unique, unprecedented development challenge presented to the subregion in the wake of COVID-19. It explores creative problem-solving and the embrace of effective response, recovery and resilience-building strategies post pandemic, with a view to ensuring that Member States' commitments under the relevant global agendas stay on course.





ECLAC Caribbean's 2020 in review (continued)

You also touched on research done on the impact of pandemic-imposed restrictions across six sectors. What were those sectors, and broadly speaking, what was the impact?

Yes, sectoral focus in the research was given to education, energy, health, international transportation, social protection, and of course, tourism - the principal engine of economic growth in most Caribbean economies. The research revealed that, while the imposed safety restrictions were essential and effective in slowing the spread of infection in the countries of the Caribbean, the economic and social impact of lockdowns and border restrictions has been severe across the subregion. The disruption of these economies has served to exacerbate already difficult circumstances in countries, saddled with unsustainable levels of public debt and very limited access to concessional external financing, given their status as upper middle- and high-income countries. We have therefore been strongly advocating the

need for access to long-term, low-cost financing for the Caribbean to stimulate growth, development and resilience building.

Great...thank you for those insights. The power of the office to convene high-level meetings is one of its distinguishing characteristics. What inter-governmental and/or other subregional events did the office convene last year?

Several high-level meetings were convened by ECLAC to spotlight the impact of COVID-19 on critical sectors with broad economic and social reach. For example, a meeting of Finance Ministers held in April highlighted Caribbean liquidity, solvency and debt challenges that had been exacerbated by the fiscal demands on governments, struggling to manage the socio-economic fallout from COVID-19. It was clear from the meeting that Caribbean countries were severely financially challenged. That meeting also considered how the financial needs and vulnerabilities of the Caribbean, might be promoted at the global

level by United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres through his initiative, "Financing for Development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond". This high-level dialogue, co-convened by Jamaica and Canada, was intended to draw the much-needed attention of the international community to the economic and financial devastation wrought by COVID-19 globally.

ECLAC also worked with UN Women to convene virtually a "Briefing of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Machineries for the Advancement of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: The response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis from a gender perspective". The meeting analysed different economic and social scenarios of the COVID-19 crisis and their differentiated impacts on women in the short, medium and long term. Countries shared information on the main initiatives that their governments undertook, with special consideration for the needs of women and gender inequalities in the framework of



the current crisis.

In addition to those meetings, in September we convened the sixth meeting of the Caribbean Development Roundtable, which brought together subregional experts and practitioners to explore financing subregional development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond; short-term solutions to the liquidity and debt challenges in the Caribbean; and resilience-building and economic restructuring post-COVID-19. At the same time, the 28th Session of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee gathered government ministers from across the subregion to consider development challenges facing their States during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as strategies to promote recovery, resilience and advance the sustainable development of the subregion.

In December the office also organized a virtual dialogue - mainly for representatives of social sector ministries - on population impacts and policy responses to the COVID-19

pandemic in the Caribbean. The dialogue addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable groups and the adaptation of policy responses and services, within the context of the agreements adopted in the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development. It also helped to identify the main socioeconomic problems and priority actions aimed at enhanced social protection, as well as the difficulties, challenges and lessons learned in response to the crisis, and key cooperation needs.

As you can see, the influence of COVID-19 is evident throughout our work during 2020.

Indeed! Now it is widely known that, in addition to the subregional dimension of the work of the office, CDCC member States and Associate Members can directly request technical assistance to address national needs. In light of COVID-19, was the office able to deliver any technical assistance, and if so, how did the office manage those

obligations?

We were able to provide technical assistance to a number of countries, although some of it was via remote or online means, whilst other forms of assistance required the use of local resources and interventions. For example, we were able to provide technical assistance to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago in preparing for their first Voluntary National Review, which as you know is the process through which countries assess and present the progress they have made in achieving the SDGs at the High-Level Political Forum in New York.

Additionally, having supported the preparation of Grenada's National Sustainable Development Plan 2020-2035, we are providing further technical assistance in the establishment of a national planning agency, the Sustainable Development Institute of Grenada. We also provided technical assistance to Grenada's Central Statistical Office in the preparation of an anonymized microdata file from



ECLAC Caribbean's 2020 in review (continued)

the Women's Health and Life Experiences Survey 2018 (a survey of violence against women), for dissemination to researchers.

The office also provided various other instances of technical advice to several Ministries and agencies in Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, with respect to avenues for clustering of the cruise-ship and yachting industries. The Department of Gender Relations of Saint Lucia benefitted from the office's assessment of the implementation of Gender Equality Frameworks and Practices in the country.

You may also recall the United Nations Secretary-General's initiative which I referred to before, - Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and beyond - to secure much-needed additional financing to developing countries for sustainable development in the light of COVID-19 and other challenges. The office provided technical support to that process through advice to Jamaica, who co-convened the process along with Canada. There was general agreement amongst global leaders that debt swaps and the establishment of regional resilience funds were crucial for assisting developing countries addressing increasing debt due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as aiding in their economic recovery and building resilience in the post-COVID-19 era. This process is still ongoing. Thus, in spite of the travel limitations imposed on the office by COVID-19, we were still able to respond to requests for support at the national level.

Enhancing the capacity of Caribbean countries has been a strong point within the subregional headquarters,

particularly in REDATAM and more recently the Damage and Loss Assessment (DaLA) methodology. How much capacity-building was the office able to deliver last year?

Our office was able to organize several capacity-building and awareness-raising events over the past year, utilizing online platforms. An online damage and loss assessment (DaLA) methodology training course, which was developed in coordination with the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES) to complement in-country DaLA training conducted by the office, was piloted in January and February 2020. Also, we hosted a virtual training workshop in September on the construction of SDG Indicators, based on population and housing census data processed using the REDATAM software.

Training was also done on evidence-based policy planning for sustainable development, where the participants benefitted from each other's lessons learned and best practices, while reinforcing their knowledge of and capacity for designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation frameworks, within the ambit of national development planning.

In October, the office partnered with ILO, UN-Habitat and CCRIF SPC on the Leaving No One Behind workshop, which primarily focused on strengthening the understanding of policymakers on universal and comprehensive social protection systems and their components, as well as promoting the design and implementation of socially-inclusive recovery measures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We convened a seminar on sustainable development and disaster risk management (DRM), which served to increase knowledge and awareness on the value of integrating DRM into national development plans and strategies for resilience building; and identified policies and operative linkages for financing the management of the COVID-19 pandemic under a DRM framework. The online platforms allowed us to carry out some capacity-building, although one cannot overlook the advantage of the face-to-face modality.

Any additional thoughts about 2020?

Yes. I would like to point out that the programme of work does not encompass all of the work and activities of the office, since there are many ad-hoc activities that we participate in as the need arises. For example, the office ran a campaign to raise awareness of the increased risk of gender-based violence in the time of COVID-19. We also collaborated with the Social Development Division of ECLAC, our headquarters in developing the English version of ECLAC's community of practice (COP) platform on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The debt for climate adaptation swap initiative continues to advance; in fact, proposals on the initiative were included in the options considered by global Ministers of Finance and Heads of State, during the Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 discussions. Progress is also being made in articulating a clear proposal on how to establish and operationalize a Caribbean

Resilience Fund in the Caribbean; it would be the first of its kind. These are just a few examples of very important work being undertaken by the office - work which goes beyond the mandated programme of work which we deliver annually.

The advent of COVID-19 required the office to think creatively and make adjustments to properly manage the delivery of its work plan, while simultaneously undertaking additional research and analysis of COVID-19 itself, to provide guidance to Caribbean governments as well as the other activities which I just highlighted. Given the circumstances under which we have had to operate in the last year, I wish to congratulate my colleagues who turned in the stellar effort needed to achieve this noteworthy accomplishment for the benefit for our stakeholders.

It does sound like a significant achievement, so I offer my congratulations as well. How have the member States responded to all of the work being done by the office?

We received positive feedback from Member States and were assured that our recommendations both in the Financing for Development (FFD) process and in the Ministerial dialogue were very much in line with their needs.

The countries signaled their appreciation of the virtual meeting: "The Role of Ministries of Social Development in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Caribbean", as a unique platform to share experiences, while identifying common challenges and good practices.

Countries have also sent us letters of appreciation for our technical support in the preparation of their VNRs, alignment of national development plans with the SDGs, and strengthening their statistical institutional capacity. These are a few of the examples which immediately come to mind.

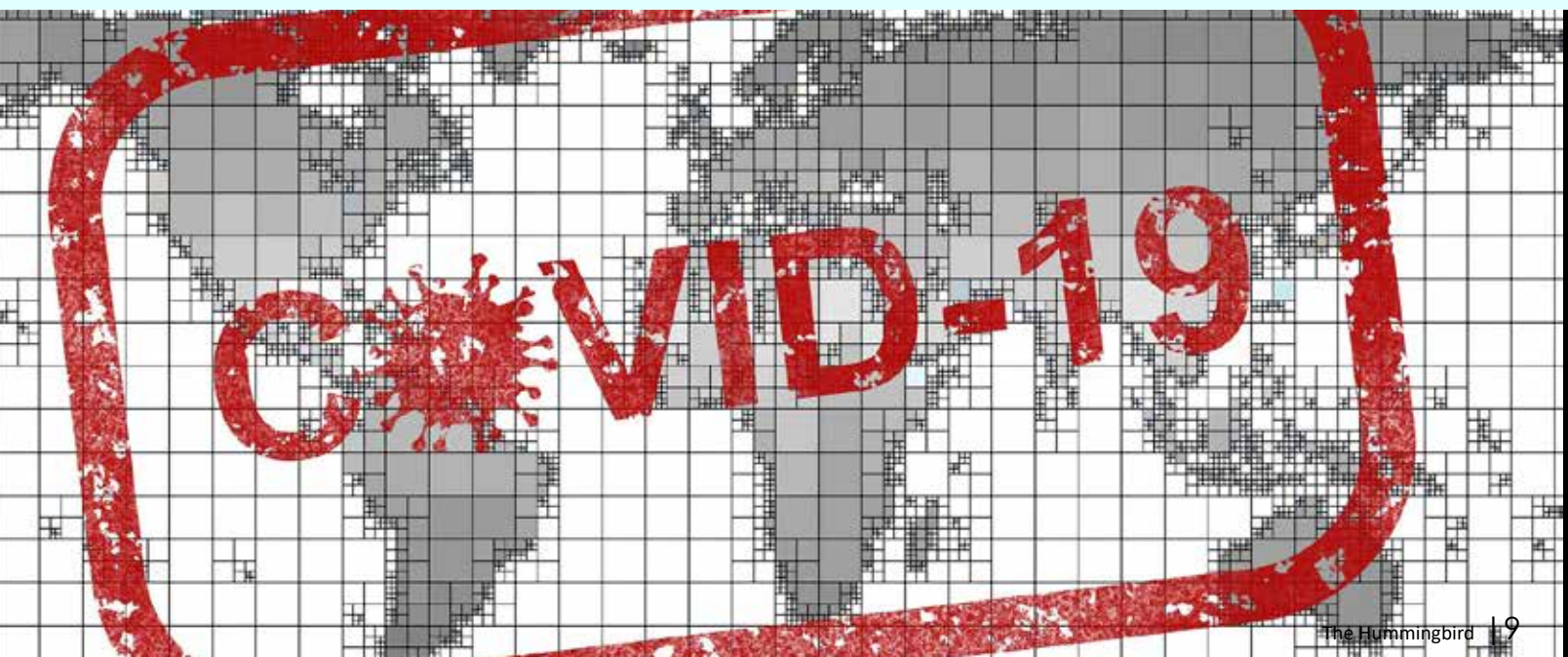
Finally, can you give us a sneak preview of what's on the 2021 programme of work?

Broadly speaking, we will be looking at issues related to

gender and development; population and development; climate adaptation and mitigation; SDG implementation progress and the state of financing SDG implementation; education and sustainable development; statistics; and institutional infrastructures and their impact on integrated decision-making. We will also be doing some capacity-building on analysing trade patterns and trade dynamics; online dissemination of census and household survey data – you may recall that censuses are due to be conducted within the next year or two, COVID-19 permitting; preparing voluntary national reviews; and in the areas of ICT for development and environmental development.

Well, thank you very much for your time and this insight into the programme of work of the office in 2020. I look forward to speaking with you next year to hear all about 2021.

Thank you...stay safe. ■





FACING 2021 HEAD ON

ECLAC Caribbean's plans for
the subregion



As the Hummingbird shared a recap of ECLAC's work in the last year, it is also important to look forward to what the organization has planned for 2021. Several senior staff members were happy to share the following information with the newsletter.

READ MORE 

Facing 2021 head on - ECLAC Caribbean's plans for the subregion

ECLAC Caribbean's Programme Officer shared with the Hummingbird how the office re-oriented the focus of its work in 2020 in response to impact of COVID-19 in the Caribbean. Colleagues, as you look ahead to 2021, what are some of the areas that ECLAC has identified as needing strong focus?

The pandemic has had a severe negative impact on all Caribbean countries which were already challenged by high debt and steep debt service payments. In addition, the threat of an active hurricane season and ongoing climate change effects remain live issues to address. As such, we will continue to focus on both debt reduction and the creation of the Caribbean Resilience

Fund. In fact, we hope to have a proposal for the setting up of such a fund for the endorsement of member States very soon. We also are focused on making recommendations to address post COVID-19 recovery in various sectors. Among these are the education and health sectors, the tourism and energy sectors and social welfare sectors.

There are also issues relating to trade policy in which member States have an interest. Other key areas relate to SDG implementation support in the Caribbean, including technical assistance in National Development Planning processes; monitoring of the SDGs (statistics to advance sustainable development);

the review of the status of institutional infrastructures and their impact on integrated decision making in the Caribbean; and support to Caribbean countries' VNRs processes. Additional areas of work include applying geospatial technologies to disaster risk management in the Caribbean, and operationalizing the member States' request at the last CDCC Session to reposition the CDCC Regional Coordinating Mechanism as the Caribbean SIDS Mechanism for Sustainable Development. This new mechanism would facilitate an integrated approach to the subregion's development efforts, including monitoring, evaluating, and reporting across multiple development agendas.



Photo: ECLAC officials during online meeting



As you know ECLAC is not primarily a funding agency. Instead, our focus is on technical support, providing capacity building to member States.



You mentioned debt reduction and a Caribbean Resilience Fund. Can you say a little more about those two initiatives, and what they mean for the subregion's economies?

For some time now we recognized that two challenges have limited the ability of member States to address the sustainable development goals. The first is the high debt burden and debt service costs which have reduced fiscal space and ushered in a long period of fiscal consolidation. This has been characterized by raising taxes and restricting expenditure in the context of low growth despite growing expectations. The second is the lack of long-term low-cost development finance to address a number of challenges including post disaster reconstruction, climate change effects and green investments to jump start economic growth.

For these reasons ECLAC has promoted the idea of a

debt for climate adaptations swap initiative. In addition, we have also pursued for the establishment of a Caribbean Resilience Fund to attract finance to the subregion, especially aimed at subregional resilience building projects. We expect to have a proposal for members States to consider in a few months.

How will ECLAC aid in these areas of focus?

As you know ECLAC is not primarily a funding agency. Instead, our focus is on technical support, providing capacity building to member States. We will continue to participate in the FFD process, which is aimed at addressing the financing needs of developing countries in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, as a think tank, we will continue to focus on post COVID-19 strategies to build forward better. We will also continue to lobby for debt reduction for Caribbean States and our important work on capacity

building with respect to damage and loss assessment following natural disasters.

ECLAC will also continue to encourage and facilitate the participation of Caribbean countries in the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), through direct technical assistance for the preparation of their Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the HLPF. In addition, we provide support to Caribbean Youth Organizations in their preparatory process leading up to the HLPF, through the ECOSOC Youth Forum – this is an important forum where Caribbean youth voices can be heard.

Colleagues, thank you very much for your time and this insight into the priorities of the office in 2021. Good luck in the year ahead!

Thank you. ■



Antigua and Barbuda to chair the ECLAC Regional Conference on Social Development

Antigua and Barbuda is set to host the Fourth Meeting of the Regional Conference on Social Development (RCSD), which will be held virtually in November 2021, and where the depth of COVID-19's effects on the population will be examined.

The forthcoming host country was announced during the Fourth Meeting of the Presiding Officers of ECLAC's RCSD in Latin America and the Caribbean, which was attended by Government authorities and international officials, in the framework of the XII Ministerial Forum for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized jointly with the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP).

During the meeting, participating countries approved the proposed work plan for implementation of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (RAISD), discussions on which will continue at the Fourth Meeting of the Conference.

The RAISD, which was approved in Mexico in October 2019, and the axes of which have

become a priority during the COVID-19 crisis, can contribute to tackling the current emergency as well as moving towards a transformative recovery with equality at the center. It was approved in the framework of the Third Regional Conference on Social Development, which is a technical and political instrument that promotes implementation of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The virtual Meeting of Presiding Officers, which was held in January 2021, afforded Latin American and Caribbean countries the opportunity to exchange experiences and explore solidarity-inspired cooperation activities.

The meeting was inaugurated by ECLAC Executive Secretary Alicia Bárcena, who affirmed that "Inequality defines our region. The measures implemented by governments allowed for partially mitigating the social impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Social protection systems have a central role to play at this historic juncture."

Bárcena stressed that in order to connect the emergency to the recovery, it was necessary to put emphasis on vaccinating the entire population, on expansionary fiscal and monetary policies, on creating jobs oriented towards environmental sustainability, and on expanding regional integration and cooperation.

Following the opening session, Bárcena made a presentation entitled "Social Challenges and the Agenda for Inclusive Social Development in the Time of COVID-19", in which she explained that in 2020, the region's countries took 263 emergency social protection measures to confront the pandemic, allowing them to partially mitigate the social impact of the crisis.

Participating in the meeting were 35 delegations from ECLAC's member States and associate members, represented by 18 ministers, two deputy ministers and 15 senior social development authorities. ■



Trinidad and Tobago Minister presents on Digital Transformation at XII Ministerial Forum for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Trinidad and Tobago's Minister of Social Development and Family Services, Donna Cox, made a presentation at the XII Virtual Ministerial Forum for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Forum was jointly hosted by the UNDP, ECLAC and the Government of Colombia during the period 12 to 14 January 2021.

Minister Cox's contribution was made during a roundtable discussion on Inclusive Digital Transformation as a Mechanism for Productivity, Inclusion and Resilience. The roundtable also featured contributions from Ministers of the Governments of Argentina, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guyana and Honduras.

Aimed at facilitating dialogue around public policies for social protection systems, digital transformation and effective governance, amongst other areas of interest, the Ministerial Forum highlighted achievements in the field of social and human

development, and also charted responses to the new challenges of the region in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

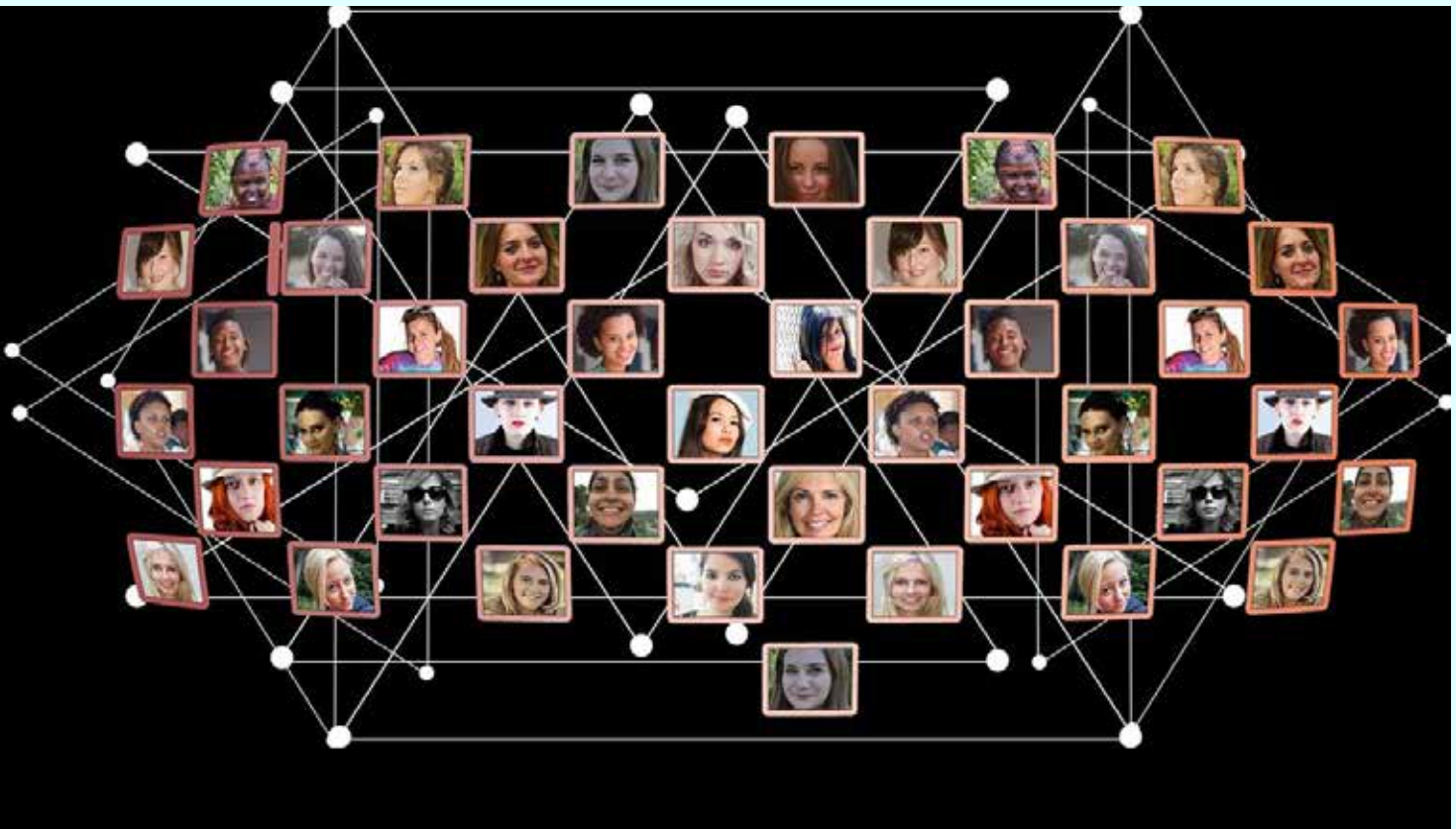
Minister Cox highlighted that Trinidad and Tobago, like other countries around the region, seized the opportunity presented by COVID-19 to accelerate its digital transformation agenda. Special mention was made of the Government's National Development Strategy Vision 2030, the National ICT Plan, which outlines the blueprint for the country's digital transformation agenda and the recent creation of the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation.

She said: "We have embraced the opportunity to Rethink, Reset and Rebuild and also brought some of the Ministry's core strategic initiatives to the forefront." She also elaborated on some of the digitalization initiatives that were introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic by the Ministry of Social Development

and Family Services and other Government Ministries and Agencies, such as those of Education, Public Administration and Digital Transformation, and the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

Minister Cox told the Forum that during the height of the pandemic, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services capitalized on a web-based solution to facilitate the digitalization of client data to upgrade data management processes, improve service delivery and enhance the customer experience.

The Minister also shared with her regional colleagues, the Government's intention to set a new transformative agenda to chart a roadmap to recovery and build a more inclusive post COVID-19 environment for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. ■



Virtual dialogue held to discuss “Population impacts and policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Caribbean”

While Caribbean governments have been relatively successful, compared with other regions, in controlling the spread of COVID-19, measures such as border closures, quarantines and confinement of people, have generated a considerable contraction in economic activity. This has had a particularly harsh impact on certain population groups including women, youth, migrants, and persons with disabilities, exacerbating the conditions of vulnerability that affect and impair their rights.

To support Caribbean governments in their efforts to mitigate these economic and social consequences, ECLAC subregional headquarters recently hosted a virtual dialogue

on “population impacts and policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Caribbean,” organized within the framework of the Regional Conference on Population and Development. Representatives of government and civil society exchanged experiences, best practices and lessons learned about how best to alleviate the effects of the crisis for these population groups.

Participants discussed the need to implement emergency social protection measures to prevent households falling into destitution and to limit damage to the economy as a whole. These included: income support programmes; emergency public assistance; relief on utility bills;

food support; special education programmes to facilitate participation in virtual learning; psychological support services; and the provision of hygiene kits.

For older persons and those suffering from chronic illnesses, measures to contain the spread of the virus itself are a matter of life and death. Migrants also have greater vulnerability to COVID-19 due to their living and/or working conditions and difficulties they face in accessing health services. Persons with disabilities, meanwhile, face new social barriers, for example job seekers who now face an even more challenging labour market. The increased acceptance of flexible working arrangements could, however, be leveraged to create

new employment opportunities for those with disabilities.

The crisis has led to an increased risk of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against women and girls. Renewed efforts are needed to ensure that gender-based violence is addressed through action plans, greater public awareness, provision of shelters and other conflict management and support services. Employers and social protection systems also need to recognize the burden which is being placed on caregivers, who are often women.

Young people are missing out on educational and employment opportunities, and curricula and training need to be adapted to improve the availability and quality of online learning, with a longer-term focus on training young people to meet the needs of digital economies.

The difficulties in accessing health services risk an increase in sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and, at worst, maternal mortality and morbidity. Governments must ensure continuity of sexual and reproductive health services, including for persons with HIV, and should consider the use of more flexible mobile teams, free condom distributions and promotion of clinic hotlines.

Resilience in the face of crises is a fundamental part of any sustainable development strategy, and the virtual dialogue highlighted how COVID-19 emergency response measures are an essential step towards - rather than a distraction from - longer-term international goals and commitments contained in the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ■



Jamaica gets US \$500m Tropical Cyclone Zeta/Eta pay-out from CCRIF SPC policy

Jamaica's Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Nigel Clarke announced on 25 January 2021 that the Government received a payment of US \$500 million in December last year in respect of the 2020/21 Excess Rainfall policy, held with the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility Segregated Portfolio Company (CCRIF SPC).

The Minister said the pay-out was in response to the intense and persistent rainfall associated with Tropical Cyclones Zeta and Eta in October and November, respectively. The heavy rainfall caused loss of life and significant damage, particularly to the country's road network. The funds would be used primarily to cover the costs of repairs to the most damaged sections of our road network, the Minister said.

"We know from experience of Jamaica's susceptibility to natural disaster events including flooding, and the significant damage it can cause to our infrastructure, which is why we have implemented a multi-layer strategy with a menu of financial instruments to manage the financing of disaster risk," Dr. Clarke said.

"As we continue to simultaneously respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, this payout, and certainly our participation in CCRIF generally, as well as other similar facilities, reduces the need for the shifting of fiscal resources from other priority areas to respond to disasters," he added.

The Minister said the country's subscription to CCRIF SPC forms part of the Government's larger, multi-year framework developed to manage the financing of disaster risk. The Minister said the Government continues to work on Catastrophe Bonds through the World Bank, the placement of which has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ■



2021 designated as year of fruits and vegetables

UN Secretary-General António Guterres' message

Fruits and vegetables are the cornerstone of a healthy and varied diet. They provide the human body with an abundance of nutrients, strengthen immune systems and help lower risks for a number of diseases. Yet, despite these tremendous benefits, we do not consume enough of them.

By declaring 2021 as the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables, we are taking a closer look at a critical sector and urging the adoption of a more holistic approach to production and consumption that benefits human and environmental health.

A key moment in the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables will be the Food Systems

Summit, where we will call on all stakeholders to intensify efforts to make food systems more inclusive, resilient and sustainable.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the role our food systems play in fighting hunger, ending poverty and protecting our planet. Yet, today, rising populations, increased urbanization, the growing scarcity of natural resources, agricultural pollution and land use change, high levels of food loss and waste and the impacts of climate change are all highlighting the fragility of our food systems.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the health and livelihoods of people across the

world, we must come together to ensure that nutritious food, including fruits and vegetables, reaches the most vulnerable.

Let us use this International Year to rethink our relationship with how we produce and consume food. Let us re-examine our food systems and commit to a healthier, more resilient and sustainable world where everyone can access and afford the diverse nutrition they need. ■



Scientist advises on volcano glow in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

The National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has been issuing regular alerts over the past month on the status of the active volcano, La Soufriere, which has been registering seismic activity since late December. Indeed, residents of North Leeward have reported seeing “fire” at the volcano. This fact notwithstanding, so far there has been no explosive eruption of La Soufriere. Activity thus far has been described as an “effusive eruption”.

“The magma continues to flow out of the crater, so that is a normal part of an effusive eruption,” Director of NEMO Michelle Forbes said during a radio broadcast. She indicated that no evacuation orders had

yet been issued for any of the communities in the vicinity of the volcano.

Addressing the witnessing of a glow at the site, Forbes assured “That is a normal part of an effusive eruption”. She recalled that this was confirmed weeks ago by Professor Richard Robertson, a geologist from the Seismic Research Centre in Trinidad and Tobago who has been monitoring the volcano.

Robertson urged the public to remain calm, explaining that the glow at the volcano is to be expected. As a result of the effusive eruption, a second dome is growing inside the volcano alongside the one that resulted from the explosive eruption of 1979.

Robertson said: “As the dome gets bigger — and it has gotten bigger — people on the western flanks, especially in Chateaubelair, will begin to see what we call in volcanology, ‘incandescence’ or glowing of the dome. And this is natural because the volcano has been erupting hot material, creating a mountain of very hot materials. The materials have temperatures of 500 or 600 degrees Celsius. These materials naturally give off a glow.”

He said it is difficult to see the glow during the day because of the brightness of the sun, but it is visible at night. He stated that residents of the country should continue with their lives, as they have been doing since the effusive eruption was made public. ■



ECLAC meeting addresses non-communicable diseases in the Caribbean

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for the Caribbean to refocus attention on addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs), to ensure that their social costs do not reverse the gains made towards overall sustainable development.

The pandemic has increased the risk of unhealthy behaviours, such as a rise in the prevalence of alcohol consumption and unhealthy diets, as well as restrictions to physical activity because of lockdown measures. While these unhealthy behaviours may not have immediate implications, there may be an actual increase in the prevalence of NCDs associated with these risk factors in some years to come.

ECLAC Caribbean's study "Addressing the adverse impacts of non-communicable diseases on the sustainable development of Caribbean countries" is an effort to stimulate debate on the need for renewed focus on NCDs as a health challenge. An expert group meeting to discuss the findings of this study was convened virtually in November 2020.

The study notes that NCDs in the Caribbean prevail in the context of a rapidly ageing population and a rising prevalence of childhood obesity. These factors have direct impacts on healthcare delivery and cost, as well as implications for the economic productivity of current and future populations.

While COVID-19 is unquestionably the public health priority of the day, the pervasiveness of NCDs remains a critical health concern since these lifestyle diseases have been shown to exacerbate the morbidity of the coronavirus. It is therefore important to keep the issue of NCDs on the health agenda. Meeting participants agreed with the position that Caribbean countries should develop strategies to better protect those populations at a greater risk of hospitalization and death from the virus due to their NCD conditions. This should include policies for equitable allocation of future vaccines and protocols to manage interruptions in normal medical product supply.

The study found that access to continuing health services and essential medicines for persons with NCDs during the COVID-19 pandemic or any other health emergency is crucial. The pandemic has created an additional burden on the health system, as human and financial resources have been reallocated to treating sick persons with the virus. There has also been a decrease or halt in economic activity, as countries implemented lockdown and stay-at-home measures to prevent the spread of the virus, which would have affected the ability of some persons to buy necessary medications. Government programmes that provide citizens with free access to medication and health services, have proved to be quite beneficial for NCD patients as they have helped to ease the burden caused by the pandemic.

Caribbean countries are also urged to start exploring new strategies for maintaining health care through digital health or telemedicine initiatives, in order to adapt and build forward better from the COVID-19 pandemic. Stronger regional collaboration should also be encouraged to position member States to better track their progress in achieving the Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases 2013–2020 and SDG targets.

The EGM was attended by several Caribbean policymakers and health practitioners from Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Guyana, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. International and regional development partners and experts from the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), The University of the West Indies (UWI) were also represented, as well as representatives from the non-governmental organizations - Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) and The Trinidad and Tobago Non-Communicable Diseases Alliance (TTNCDA). ■



Puerto Rico declares state of emergency over gender violence

Puerto Rico has declared a state of emergency over its deep-rooted problem of violence against women, creating new measures demanded by activists for years, to battle a deadly trend.

The decision came on 31 January 2021 in the US territory, which has seen sustained levels of violence that on average result in one woman's death per week, measured in a 2019 report and exceeded in last year's estimates, echoing the problem in other Caribbean and Latin American countries.

The declaration, which also offers protection to gay and transgender persons, includes measures like creating a mobile app for victims to ask for help and report attacks.

Authorities will create a new programme to check in with women who have taken out restraining orders against abusers, and a new committee will be responsible for enforcing policies and proposing other measures.

Puerto Rico Governor, Pedro Pierluisi, said the order aims to combat "an evil that has caused too much damage for too long". "Victims have suffered the consequences of systematic machismo, inequity, discrimination, lack of education, lack of guidance and above all lack of action," he added in a statement.

The declaration defines sex or gender-based violence as conduct that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm to another person motivated by stereotypes.

According to a 2019 report from non-profit advocacy groups Proyecto Matria and Kilometro Cero, one woman is killed every seven days in Puerto Rico. Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the most dangerous regions for women. Rights groups have drawn attention to the issue in recent years, staging protests and securing key demands, such as the legalization of abortion in Argentina. ■



Dominican Republic signs agreement to offer extensive aid to Haiti

The governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic have signed nine agreements in which they have undertaken to address irregular migration flows, issues regarding trade, maritime borders, sovereignty, health, as well as other matters of concern common to both nations that share the island of Hispaniola.

In January 2021, the presidents of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, Luis Abinader and Jovenel Moïse, respectively, signed the agreements following a meeting held at the southern border.

Abinader and Moïse indicated that they would both take action to implement cutting-edge technology that should facilitate the reduction of illegal activities between their borders; be it irregular migration flows, human trafficking, drug and arms trafficking and even theft of cattle.

“We are working to obtain the necessary financing for the adoption of a training and support plan, that will facilitate the work of both countries to reinforce security and border surveillance. Each country will therefore collaborate with the other if physical or technological controls are built

along the entire border,” said a statement issued following the meeting.

The leaders also agreed to start the process of identification and registration of all Haitian citizens who are in Dominican Republic territory. The two countries will also begin the negotiation process to delimit their maritime borders. This process should start as soon as possible.

In area of health, both leaders agreed to cooperate in the construction of general hospitals in Haitian territory, with the support of the international community that has signaled its readiness to finance hospitals in Haiti. These hospitals, to be built on sites identified by the Haitian government, should reduce the heavy demand of Haitian nationals on Dominican Republic hospitals.

The two Heads of State reaffirmed their willingness to continue collaboration in priority areas of their respective countries, exchange experiences, especially in these times of pandemic, and strengthen cooperation and potential development opportunities.

The joint declaration proposes continuing negotiations in a sustained manner, until a general trade agreement is reached to establish transparent, stable, fair, and predictable rules for both parties and stop the smuggling that erodes both countries’ tax bases.

The declaration added that both countries will work closely to plan an energy interconnection matrix and prioritize renewable energies (wind, solar, biomass, hydroelectric), which allows the exchange of surplus energy from one country to another. It also promotes the production of biodegradable products instead of those that harm the environment, especially those made with polystyrene. It also specified that Haiti is immersed in the process of constitutional reform aimed at consolidating democratic governance.

“Within the framework of respect for the sovereignty of States, the Dominican Republic encourages the Haitian authorities to work to ensure that this process complies with the aspirations of the Haitian people,” the declaration added. ■



"2021 a year to recover," says Prime Minister of Aruba

During the year's first press conference held on 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister of Aruba, Evelyn Wever-Croes, announced that the government had decreed 2021 as the year to recover.

The COVID-19 pandemic turned 2020 into a year full of challenges, not only for Aruba but for the entire world. The year 2021 began with the commemoration of the 35th anniversary of Aruba's Status Aparte.

"Because of our determination and cordiality, we achieved great things during the 35 years of Status Aparte. We gained the respect and admiration of many countries in the region and inspired other countries to fight for their autonomy. Although

things did not always go the way we wanted, we had the courage and ability to correct the wrong, making us a respected country," Wever-Croes stated. She added that 2021 is also an important year for Aruba; during September the country will have the opportunity and privilege to elect the new legislators.

The Recovery Year logo presented by the Prime Minister featured a plane representing the recovery of the tourism sector, a cornfield representing agriculture and the economic recovery anticipated.

"The year 2021 is the recovery year in all senses. Economic and tourism recovery will improve, and we can focus on other industries. It will lead to the financial recovery of Aruba. This

year we will also see a recovery in education for last year's loss. We will tackle the social crisis with determination."

"Our workforce will recover with more jobs and improved working conditions. Our healthcare system will also recover. The vaccination of our community is imminent. It gives hope that we will soon see the light at the end of the tunnel. However, we all need to work together and focus on one goal, Aruba. We need to remain cautious and protect ourselves and our loved ones. Aruba counts on you for its recovery, now more than ever. Let's focus on the positive and work with optimism to overcome all the challenges ahead for the swift recovery of our island", the Prime Minister emphasized. ■

Trinidad and Tobago Homestyle Sponge Cake

What you will need:

- 6 oz butter
- 6 oz sugar
- 6 oz flour
- 3 eggs
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp each lemon zest and juice, orange zest
- A few drops of vanilla essence
- 1 tsp mixed spices

How to Make it:

Step 1: Grease and flour 1 large cake pan or 2 small ones.

Step 2: Cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy.

Step 3: Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition.

Step 4: Sift flour and baking powder together 4 times.

Step 5: Add in flavourings, then flour in three batches, mixing lightly after each addition.

Step 6: Pour into cake pan and bake for 30 to 35 minutes at 350 degrees.

Step 7: The cake is done when a toothpick inserted in the centre comes out clean.

Step 8: Cool in pan for 5 minutes before taking it out.



CONTACT US

ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean,
1 Chancery Lane, P.O. Box 1113,
Port of Spain,
Trinidad and Tobago.

MEDIA CONTACT

Tel.: 1 868 224 8075

E-mail: eclac-media-pos@eclac.org

SOCIAL MEDIA



<https://www.cepal.org/en/headquarters-and-offices/eclac-caribbean>

