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THE CARIBBEAN OUTLOOK. SUMMARY

RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE – REPOSITIONING THE CARIBBEAN POST COVID-19

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Introduction

This edition of the Caribbean Outlook chronicles the circumstances of member States as they continue to experience residual effects of the varied impact that COVID-19 has had on the subregion. Yet, by dint of resolve and fortitude —of both governments and peoples— the subregion continues efforts to adjust to the new normal. These adjustments concentrate on building resilience in the face of increasing economic, social and environmental shocks.

The theme —recovery and repositioning— is altogether fitting. Recovery is essential for continued development. Reopening flailing economies however, particularly those dependent on tourism, also requires keeping the population safe from future pandemics which may inevitably emerge.

The last two years have taught the region that continued ‘business as usual’ is no longer an option for advancing sustainable development. As such, repositioning must take place at all levels, encompassing all sectors, if the region is to thrive. COVID-19 exposed many areas requiring thoughtful consideration. These include fragile health systems, a pressing need for national and regional interconnection, the need to diversify the economic base and to invest in capital services that promote self-reliance and decent work. Promoting decent work is crucial for persons earning their livelihoods in low wage low productivity sectors, particularly those in the informal sector. Additionally, policymakers will need to pay much more attention to incentivizing youth, women, coastal and indigenous communities —indeed among all vulnerable groups— for whom unemployment rates are unacceptably high. This is an unequivocal prerequisite for their engagement in the new economy. This new economy we know, is today characterized by three enabling factors —innovation, digitization and interconnection.

Despite currently prevailing efforts, significant and substantial issues remain. The subregion faces converging multidimensional vulnerabilities that create a perfect storm of cumulative challenges. This convergence has occurred precisely as debt accumulation and servicing costs have narrowed the fiscal space, exacerbated by COVID-19 and unavoidable climate event-related expenditures to support the economy. Heavy rainfall during May and July of 2021 and 2022 for example had significant impact, particularly in Guyana and Suriname. The 2021 volcanic eruption of the La Soufrière volcano was another major natural event, causing major population dislocation, significant damage and losses in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia and Barbados. Similar catastrophic multi-dimensional events were experienced in Haiti in 2021, which suffered a 7.2 magnitude earthquake and the passage of a storm in quick succession. The important point to keep in mind is that additional resources had to be allocated to address these unforeseen events.

Underscoring the unique vulnerability of the subregion, its recent history of damage and losses due to extreme hydroclimatic events is worth retelling. The category five hurricane Maria left Dominica facing the equivalent of 226 per cent of its GDP in 2017. In 2019 Hurricane Dorian caused over US \$3.4 billion in damage in The Bahamas. The subregion is also annually inundated with massive sargassum blooms, resulting in significant negative impacts to coastal communities, public health, domestic sea transportation, tourism and fisheries. Moreover, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicted an above-normal Atlantic hurricane season in 2022 with an estimated 14-20 named storms, 6-10 hurricanes and 3-5 major hurricanes.

Despite these challenges positive signs on other fronts demonstrate the subregion’s potential for resilience to these multidimensional vulnerabilities. Although economic performance has not yet returned to 2019 growth levels, the economies are beginning to open and grow. The Ukraine conflict however, has retarded prospects for rapid and robust recovery as inflationary pressures related to supply side effects of the war emerge. Such effects include energy and food cost increases, eroding the purchasing power of fixed income earners. A worsening of this situation would bring further pressure to bear on the public finances, as governments are forced to provide income support to the poor. On the positive side, the conflict has created an environment supportive of new incentives for adaptation and increased investment in renewable energy.

The limited access of the countries of the subregion to concessional finance, due largely to their so-called “middle income status”, remains a significant barrier to the governments’ efforts at investment in recovery and resilience. ECLAC therefore has been pursuing the establishment of a Caribbean Resilience Fund to leverage affordable finance for long term resilience building. Success here would mitigate the high debt service burden through the application of Liability Management Operations (LMO’s) aimed at debt reprofiling. These initiatives seek to provide a buffer, increasing fiscal space. Of note, too, is work ongoing towards the development of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) that hopefully, will return to the agenda, the challenges that small island developing States (SIDS) and other groups experience in attempting to access concessional funding.¹ This issue continues to be relevant. It should also be linked to the pressing global debate on climate justice, which requires the advanced industrialized economies, major contributors to global warming, to support those countries that have contributed negligibly to while suffering inordinately from the ongoing climate crisis. In this regard, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities must be made to work for SIDS.

The ‘Outlook’ contains four chapters. Chapter I open. It also considers the challenge of access to finance, sources of existing finance, and strategies to bridge the financing gap through initiation of the Caribbean Resilience Fund. The final section examines the subregion’s economic structure, stagnation in trade performance and strategies for diversification and structural transformation.

Chapter II explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on two key sectors —fisheries which play a pivotal role in the rural economy, livelihoods and the food security of the subregion, as well as tourism; the principal tradeable sector for most. Both sectors depend on healthy environmental systems and are negatively impacted when management systems are environmentally unsound. This chapter also seeks to assess the negative externalities that both sectors generate. Because of the considerable importance of the tourism sector to growth and development, the chapter also examines the more general impact of tourism on the environment. The chapter closes by outlining policy recommendations aimed at conserving and enhancing the resilience of the natural resource base —a major source for sustained economic and social welfare of Caribbean SIDS.

¹ Motivated by the dire economic and debt situation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Belize, the then Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), wrote to the UN Secretary-General reiterating the need to advance a MVI. Subsequently, the General Assembly in paragraph 8(a) of resolution 75/215, requested specific recommendations from the Secretary-General on, inter alia, the possible development and use of such an index. The interim report provides a summary of the deliberations undertaken to date by the UN High-level Panel and their initial recommendations for the development of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI). Member States, International Financial Institutions (IFI), multilateral development banks (MDB) and other relevant stakeholders are being invited to review and provide their views and comments on the interim report to help further develop and refine the Panel’s final report.

Chapter III examines key socioeconomic challenges to an inclusive recovery and identifies policy measures that would promote resilient economies as countries of the subregion transition from COVID-19 health emergency measures to greater focus on socioeconomic recovery and repositioning. In addition, it analyses various socioeconomic deficits that could hamper an inclusive post-pandemic economic recovery. It makes the case for an inclusive economic recovery, propelled by the emerging digitized knowledge economy, particularly by advocating for investment in functional skill acquisition, including technical vocational education and training (TVET). The analysis illustrates the need to transition from emergency to recovery, focusing on measures that can close skills, gender and age gaps in employment thereby fostering sustainable economic recovery.

Chapter IV recognizes that launching the Decade of Action behooves governments, the people and all sectors to redouble efforts to address the SDGs. The COVID-19 pandemic has created greater challenges for member states to meet their obligation. This chapter identifies ways to redouble efforts to make the decade of Action count for the people of the subregion. It explores the various deficits in addressing the SDGs and considers strategies for implementation in an inclusive process.

Chapter I

Economic recovery and repositioning in the era of COVID-19

Introduction

The economies of the subregion were hard hit by the global pandemic, particularly those dependent on travel and tourism. This chapter points out that a sustained uptick in economic performance beyond pre-pandemic levels is unlikely, notwithstanding strong growth estimates for 2021 and 2022. This outcome derives from inflation and pandemic supply chain disruption, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. While average economic growth has been positive in the last two years, incomes still lag below 2019 values. For this reason, economic policies must focus on recovery as well as repositioning.

The chapter therefore begins with a review of economic growth performance since 2020, before considering sources of finance for sustainable development and strategies to bridge the financing gap. It also examines trade performance, one of the major sources of foreign exchange and explores areas for economic diversification and structural transformation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the mechanism for economic recovery and recommendations on sources of finance and trade.

A. Growth performance

COVID-19 restrictions stalled normal economic activity in the subregion, especially those driven by tourism services. Indeed, the decline in economic activity in 2020 excluding Guyana was -13.1% (see Table 1). Many individual countries saw declines at levels never before experienced in modern times.

During 2021, most of the subregion's economies expanded, with average growth rising to 5.1% (3.5%, if Guyana is excluded).² For 2022 growth with and without Guyana is projected at 10.4% and 4.6% respectively. These growth rates, the highest achieved in more than a decade, are actually due to the normalization of economic activity and a low comparison base rather than true growth dynamics. Most of the individual economies are still smaller than they were pre-pandemic and are not expected to surpass 2019 levels until 2023 or 2024 —assuming the global situation becomes more favourable (see Figure I.1).

Table I.1
Real GDP growth rates, 2020-2022
(Percentage)

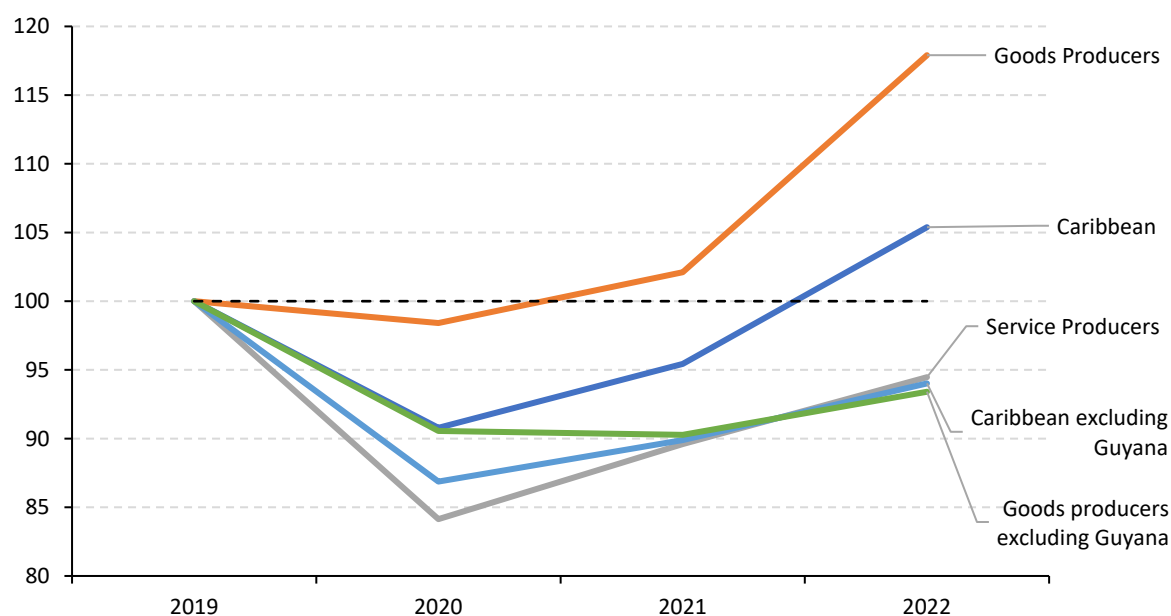
	2020	2021	2022
Anguilla	-29.9	11.1	13.7
Antigua and Barbuda	-20.2	5.3	7.5
Bahamas	-23.8	13.7	8.5
Barbados	-14.0	0.7	5.9
Belize	-16.7	9.8	5.8
Dominica	-16.6	6.5	5.7
Grenada	-13.8	5.7	3.7
Guyana	43.5	18.5	52.0
Jamaica	-9.9	4.6	2.8
Monserrat	-5.3	8.0	4.4
Saint Kitts and Nevis	-14.2	-3.9	5.0
Saint Lucia	-20.4	7.0	8.0
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	-5.3	0.7	2.7
Suriname	-15.9	-2.8	1.5

² Guyana is unique among Caribbean countries as it experienced major economic transformation in 2020 with the introduction of oil production and export. As a result of this new industry the Guyana economy has entered a period of explosive expansion, with growth rates of 43.5% in 2020, 18.5% in 2021 and a forecast of 52% in 2022.

	2020	2021	2022
Trinidad and Tobago	-7.4	-0.5	3.7
Caribbean	-9.2	5.1	10.4
Goods Producers	-1.6	3.8	15.5
Service Producers	-15.9	6.5	5.4
Caribbean excluding Guyana	-13.1	3.5	4.6
Goods producers excluding Guyana	-9.4	-0.3	3.5
Latin America and the Caribbean	-6.9	6.5	2.7

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean on the basis of official figures.

Figure I.1
Caribbean real GDP index
(2019=100)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean on the basis of official figures.

Several of the economies remain heavily dependent on tourism. Direct contribution of the travel and tourism sector to GDP exceeds 10% in 10 countries of the subregion economies. In the remaining 5, the contribution exceeds 15%. Indirect contribution is even greater; so too is the contribution to employment. Unsurprisingly, the 73% decline in stayover tourist arrivals resulting from pandemic-related travel restrictions had severe impacts on tourism-dependent economies. The service-centred economies contracted by 16% in 2020, compared to -9.4% for the goods producing³ economies (excluding Guyana).

³ The goods producing economies (Belize, Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago) are more dependent on goods exports while the service producing economies (Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) are more dependent on service exports.

In 2021, visitors began returning in greater numbers. Stayover arrivals grew by 57%. The service producing economies grew by 6.5% while goods producers (excluding Guyana) contracted by 0.3%. The best performing economies were Anguilla, The Bahamas, Belize and Saint Lucia. These three economies had experienced some of the deepest contractions in 2020, brought on by the pandemic lockdowns. Their strong growth in 2021 established a bounce back from these substantial contractions. Other service producing economies such as Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, which did not experience deep contractions still did not have the highest growth rates in 2021. The countries that contracted in 2021 were Saint Kitts and Nevis (-3.9%), Suriname (-2.8%) and Trinidad and Tobago (-0.5%). Saint Kitts and Nevis and Trinidad and Tobago both maintained stringent restrictions well into 2021, and Suriname has been challenged by a balance of payments crisis degrading economic performance.

Compared to the wider Latin America and Caribbean, the subregion has had a deeper contraction in 2020 and a slower rebound in 2021. In 2022 however, its growth (excluding Guyana) of 4.6% will surpass the 2.7% growth projected for Latin America and the Caribbean. Other service producing economies that lagged behind in 2021 will rebound in 2022 as travel requirements were relaxed—less stringent COVID-19 testing and vaccination requirements. In addition, the subregion’s largest economy, Trinidad and Tobago, will benefit from higher energy prices. Downside risks to the subregion include high inflation caused by pandemic supply chain issues, made worse by increased energy and food costs resulting from the Russia-Ukraine war, higher borrowing costs as the US Federal Reserve increases interest rates, reduced tourism demand, as well as the potential for the return of restrictions if a more virulent variant of the disease emerges to become dominant. Inescapably, absent repositioning and diversification, there is likely to be a return to the pre-pandemic trend of low growth rates. Economic restructuring is necessary to create an environment conducive to dynamic economic expansion in the near and medium term. Restructuring however, will require access to affordable finance, explored next.

B. Access to finance for economic restructuring

Economic restructuring in the subregion can revitalize economic activity, bringing it closer to the path of sustainable long-term growth. Central to this thrust however, is sourcing adequate affordable development financing. In this respect the subregion faces a two-pronged challenge. First, access to finance is inadequate to the challenge of creating a dynamic, competitive and sustainable economy. Second, the quality of finance, measured by cost, term structure, scale and efficiency of use is inadequate. Consequently, as the region develops post-COVID-19 financing strategy, both factors—quantity and quality—must be tackled simultaneously, ensuring that financial arrangements work for development.

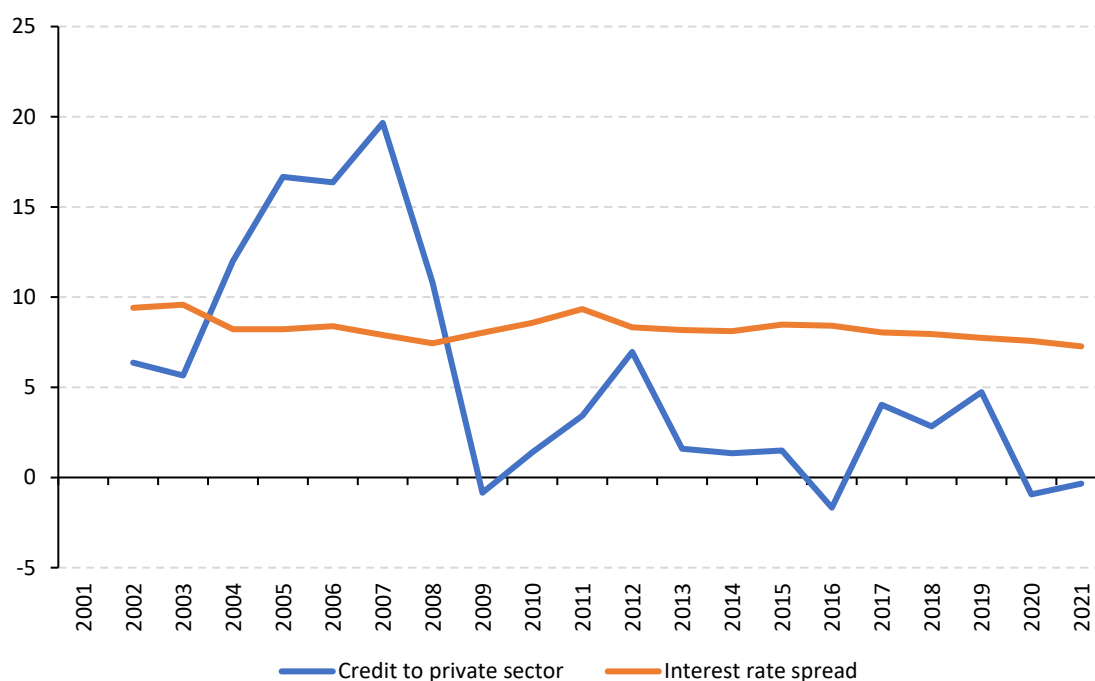
Even before the pandemic, the region confronted a deficit of long-term, affordable, sustainable financing for high-impact economic, social and environmental projects. This included insufficient finance for restructuring the key segments of tourism, agriculture and light manufacturing. The banking sector’s portfolio indicates a significant percentage of credit to the private sector being allocated to personal and other consumption activities. In addition, continuing large interest rate spreads suggest banking system inefficiency. These latter conditions render productive efforts—especially the critical export sector—starved of finance for successful enterprise upscale.

The next section analyses the subregion’s main sources and access to financing for development. It examines domestic and international sources, including banking sector credit, FDI and the impact of graduation from concessional funding. It also examines more recent innovative initiatives, such as the Caribbean Resilience Fund, Recovery Adjustor and the use of state contingent instruments, including hurricane clauses to deal with climate change risks.

C. The main sources of finance

Domestic finance is an important vehicle for funding development, particularly the SDGs in member countries. The subregion’s commercial banking system has the largest pool of funds. Banking sector credit to the private sector grew at an average of 12.5% annually between 2001 and 2008 (see figure I.2 below). Not unexpectedly, after the global financial crisis, annual credit growth slowed considerably to 1.8% from 2009 to 2021. A number of countries experienced significant slowdowns in credit growth. These included Suriname (55.6 percentage points), the ECCU countries (12.3 percentage points), Trinidad and Tobago (11.9 percentage points) and The Bahamas and Barbados (both at 8.9 percentage points). Only Guyana registered an improvement in credit growth between the two periods, an increase of 4.0 percentage points. This slowdown in credit growth as the region embarks on achieving the SDGs is of major concern, given that the private sector remains the engine of growth. Further, the bulk of banking sector credit goes to personal and consumption activities rather than to productive sectors—tourism, manufacturing and agriculture. Moreover, the cost of credit is rather high, especially to productive activities that might entail higher risk profiles than consumer credit.

Figure I.2
Growth in credit to the private sector and interest rate spreads in Caribbean, 2001-2021
(Percentage)



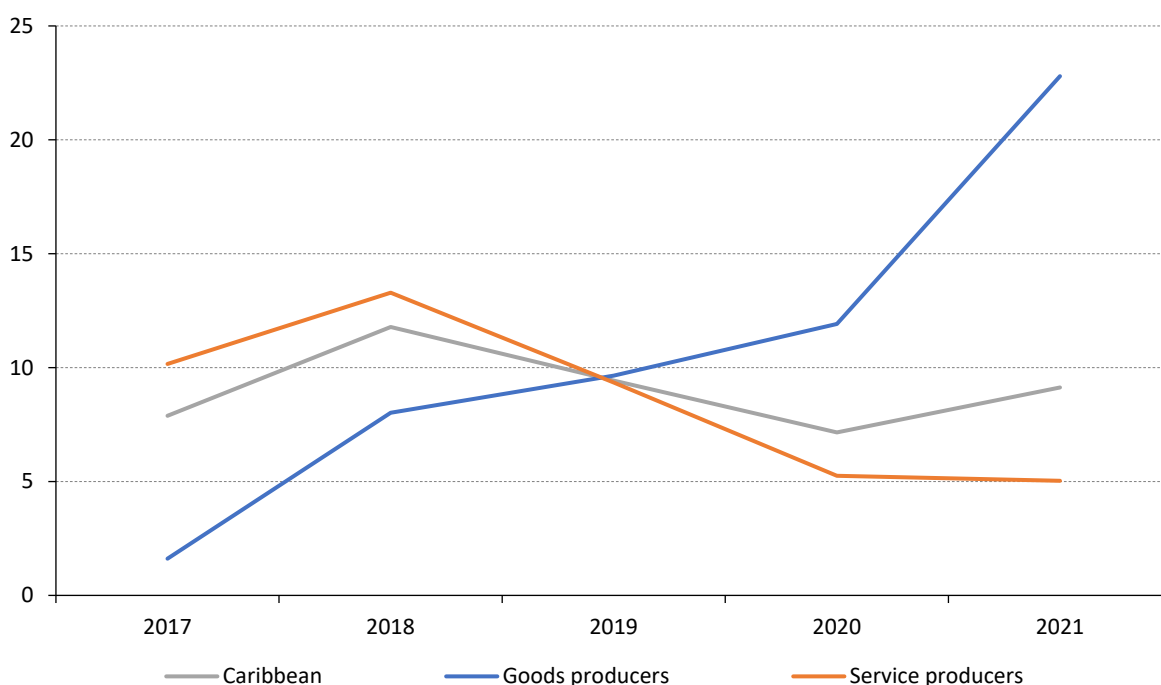
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean on the basis of official figures.

D. Evolution of FDI and remittances as sources of financing

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is a vital source of development finance in the subregion. FDI not only provides funding, often for long-term projects in key sectors such as tourism, mining, agriculture, telecommunications and power generation, but is also a critical source of technology transfer, management, organizational know how, and marketing that enables access to foreign markets. The varied benefits of FDI have led to countries competing for inflows with a range of fiscal and non-fiscal incentives. In the last five

years, FDI to CARICOM states averaged only US\$263.7 million per year (see figure I.3). Moreover, excluding Guyana, a major recent recipient due to the exploration for and production of oil, FDI inflows averaged a mere US\$129.8 million. Indeed, without Guyana, inflows of FDI actually declined by 13.7% in the last five years. Also, FDI accounts for only 9.1% of GDP. This suggests the region may be losing its attractiveness to direct investors in tourism, industry and other sectors as other regions become more attractive destinations.

Figure I.3
FDI inflows for the Caribbean
(Percentage of GDP)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean on the basis of official figures.
Note: Data excludes Barbados and Suriname in 2021.

Remittances are also an important source of financing for consumption and some small business activities. During the last five years, remittance inflows to the subregion averaged only 5.1% of GDP, indicating the need for measures to boost flows, including reduction of remittance transfer costs. The service-based economies at 5.8% of GDP received a higher share than the goods-based economies at 3.7% of GDP. Remittances were relatively important sources of financing in Jamaica (16.8% of GDP), Guyana (7.7% of GDP), St. Vincent and the Grenadines (5.7% of GDP) and Belize (5.2% of GDP).

E. ODA and graduation versus gradation

Official Development Assistance to the subregion has long been trending downwards. Most countries have been deemed ineligible for concessional financing from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD - World Bank) and other multilateral funding agencies. Net ODA flows to CARICOM averaged US\$373.5 million from 2016 to 2020. This represented on average, a mere US\$187 per person and would be even lower at US\$102 per person if the last two years — reflecting

higher inflows due to the pandemic — are omitted. Further, net flows declined from an average of US\$386.0 million before the global crisis to US\$356.7 million after the crisis, when they were most needed. These flows averaged a mere 2.4% of gross national income (GNI) for the subregion for the previous five years to 2020. From 2002 to the global crisis of 2009, ODA averaged 2.4% of GNI, actually declining to 2.2% of GNI after the crisis.

To increase the subregion’s access to ODA and other concessional resources, ECLAC has proposed that instead of graduation based on per capita gross national income (GNI), a measure of vulnerability should be used. It has been persuasively contended that per capita GNI is an incomplete and inadequate measure for determining eligibility for access to concessional resources. More recently, in 2020, the General Assembly in paragraph 8(a) of resolution 75/215, requested specific recommendations from the Secretary-General on, *inter alia*, the possible development of a multivariate vulnerability index (MVI). Active consideration is therefore being given to the construction of such an index that takes account of both economic and environmental vulnerability. This points to the need for a shift from outright graduation of countries based on per capita GNI thresholds to gradations based on wider vulnerability —country risk, specific economic and environmental shocks (ECLAC, 2021). The gradation approach allows for the use of structural funds at the international level to resolve structural problems such as pandemics and climate change impacts, while maintaining improved contingency financing to deal with cyclical shocks such as Balance of Payments (BOP) and major global economic shocks.

F. Role of innovative financing mechanisms and vulnerability measures

With most of the subregion unable to access concessional financing, and with poor credit ratings increasing private funding cost, innovative financing mechanisms are necessary for advancing the region’s development initiatives. ECLAC has made progress advancing a Caribbean Resilience Fund to provide long-term, affordable financing for climate and economic resilience building, debt relief and liquidity enhancement to achieve sustainable debt levels in the subregion. The resilience building pillar aims to raise substantial funding to finance high impact climate adaptation and mitigation projects, including resilient infrastructure, green energy and transportation. The debt restructuring and liquidity enhancement facility will assist countries with debt restructuring and reprofiling, as well as liquidity management operations (LMOs). The aim is to extend maturity structures and reduce servicing costs by 50% in selected countries while providing for new debt to be guaranteed by the DFIs as a means of crowding in private creditors to scale up development finance to the subregion.⁴

A complementary mechanism to cope with economic shocks is the state contingent debt instruments (SCDIs). These instruments, particularly the natural disaster clause or hurricane clause includes in the contractual terms of a sovereign’s debt, the ability of the creditor to defer payments of interest and principal in the event of a disaster that meets minimum levels of intensity, and impact on the socio-economy of the affected debtor country (Cleary Gottlieb, 2021). Both Grenada and Barbados have already introduced natural disaster clauses, providing an example for others in the subregion to follow. In addition, blended financing arrangements that combine concessional with commercial loans may be used to de-risk key projects of higher economic and social benefit, such as in renewable energy and improved waste management.

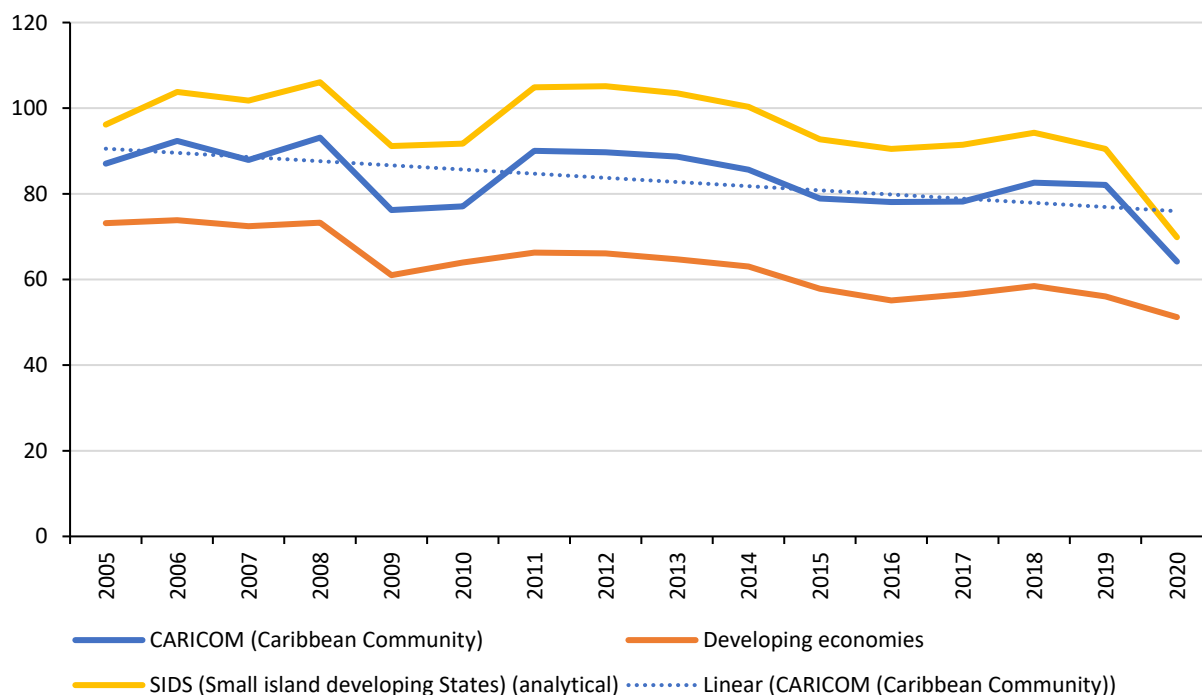
⁴ Vulnerability measures play an important role in ensuring that highly vulnerable economies have access to the appropriate levels of support and resources for recovery. The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) has proposed the “Recovery Duration Adjustor (RDA)” (CDB, 2022) as a vulnerability measure that goes beyond the susceptibility of countries to economic and environmental shocks to also factoring in their resilience capacity. Therefore, the RDA will act as a resilience-adjusted per capita income measure that will be used to provide a more adequate and comprehensive means for classifying SIDS according to their real vulnerability and thereby helping them to mobilize finance for building resilience.

G. Fostering export diversification and industrialization in the Subregion

As part of repositioning the economies of the subregion, economic diversification and structural change are vital to achieve sustainable development. Caribbean economies exhibit a relatively high degree of trade openness, as evidenced by average trade to GDP ratios exceeding 90%. Although the trade openness index has been on a declining path over the past 15 years, it remains still significantly higher than the developing country average. Additionally, member states of the Caribbean Community are also signatory to several bilateral trade agreements (Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), Partial Scope Agreements (PSAs) and Preferential Trade Arrangements (PTAs)),⁵ which provide market access, as they typically include provisions for reductions in tariff and quota barriers to trade.

Unfortunately, increased market access has not automatically translated to broad-based and effective market penetration. Moreover, apart from the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) (8%), individual use of these bilateral trade agreements is marginal (less than 2%). Market access is significant only in the United States of America (24%) and Canada (6%), which offer unilateral non-reciprocal preferential market access. These are also significant export markets for the entire Caribbean.

Figure I.4
Trade Openness by region, 2005 - 2020
(Percentage of GDP)



Source: United Nations conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The failure to take advantage of increased market access opportunities with extra-regional partners, particularly those with bilateral trade agreements in place, has been attributed to several factors. These include inadequate export readiness among producers, weak production systems, low levels of trade

⁵ For example, Canada, Cuba, Columbia, Costa Rica, European Union, United States and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

competitiveness and trade-related economic infrastructure, as well as high energy, shipping and connectivity costs. Taken together, all negatively impact productivity and competitiveness. Other factors may be identified as limited technology creation, transplant and diffusion. These impediments derive from, or may be attributable to, lack of investment in the domestic capital producing sector, as well as limited access to trade finance, adverse logistics issues and challenges with sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures. Non-tariff barriers to trade and vulnerability to climate-related weather events continue to constrain the subregion's businesses' export potential.

There is therefore a need for increased cooperation among key facilitating agencies, such as the Caribbean Export Development Agency, National Export Promotion Agencies, Coalitions of Services Industries, other business support organizations (BSOs) and business to business (B2B) partners in major markets, to improve the competitiveness and export readiness of the private sector. There also continues to be considerable room for subregional governments to improve the business environment by reducing bureaucracy and inefficiency in public sector and state-owned enterprises, by modernizing port operations and logistics chains. Additionally, there is need for more private-public-partnerships to engage in meaningful market research to discover specific costs that constitute a market failure. All these issues must be systemically tackled if the subregion is to reposition export business in dynamic export markets.

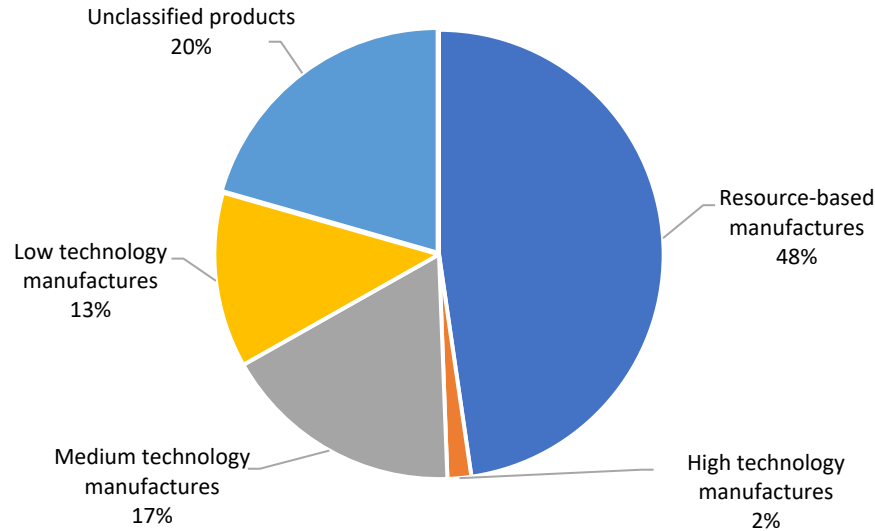
These policy prescriptions while necessary, are not sufficient to deliver the structural transformation that the subregion requires to facilitate trade. They also do not go far enough to Fastrack building the requisite economic and climate resilience. They should be buttressed by feasible regional integration and other forms of cooperation. The next section explores these issues more closely.

H. Regional Integration, Structural Change and Export Diversification

After six decades of regional integration, the subregion continues to specialize in relatively low value-added segments of global value chains, including various forms of tourism and natural resource exploitation—especially mining. During this period as well, trade competitiveness and productivity have been declining. These factors contribute to high levels of unemployment and insufficient creation of decent jobs. The subregion's share of global exports displays secular decline. Furthermore, benefits of the CARICOM Single Market (and Economy), have been distributed asymmetrically. The stronger manufacturing economies tend to dominate intra-regional trade. Prior to the pandemic (2019) Trinidad and Tobago accounted for 62% of intra-regional exports, followed by Barbados (14%), Guyana (8%) and Jamaica (7%) (2019). Moreover, the subregion's food and merchandize imports remain high, with potential areas of comparative advantage such as indigenous healthy starches, fruits and vegetables remaining underexplored. In fact, intraregional exports account for merely 10% of total exports.

The data reveal Caribbean Community merchandise exports to be highly concentrated. The top 10 products account for 74% of exports (value) over the period 2010-2020, and 91% of global exports for the year 2020. Furthermore, the subregion's range of manufactured products is extremely narrow with natural resource-based manufactures dominating exports, accounting for 48% of CARICOM's exports. Medium-low technology manufactures in turn account for 30%. While high technology manufactures account for only 2% of the subregion. These results establish CARICOM exports dominated by natural resource endowments and exhibiting Hecker-Ohlin-type trade. Figure I.5 displays the technological intensity (index) for the Caribbean in 2019. Technological intensity measures the extent to which scientific research contributes to the rise in productivity or revenue of an industry.

Figure I.5
Technological Intensity of CARICOM's Exports, 2019
(Percentage of total exports)



Source: United Nations conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Additionally, CARICOM total exports represent only 0.09% of world exports, which means that it is an extremely small player in world trade. Even the exports of various product groups such as food and live animals, beverages and tobacco and crude materials are all less than 1% of the world's exports (Table I.2).

Table I.2
CARICOM Export Share to the World (SITC Single Digit)
(Percentage of world exports)

Product	2006	2010	2015	2020	2021
Total all products	0.17	0.12	0.11	0.08	0.09
All allocated products (SITC 0 to 8 + 961 + 971)	0.17	0.12	0.11	0.08	0.09
Food and live animals	0.20	0.14	0.14	0.10	0.12
Beverages and tobacco	0.39	0.27	0.29	0.27	0.28
Crude materials, inedible, except fuels	0.48	0.21	0.24	0.16	0.15
Mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials	0.60	0.32	0.32	0.28	0.27
Animal and vegetable oils, fats and waxes	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00
Chemicals and related products, n.e.s.	0.23	0.18	0.19	0.07	0.07
Manufactured goods	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.04
Machinery and transport equipment	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02
Miscellaneous manufactured articles	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.04
Commodities and transactions, n.e.s.	0.16	0.28	0.24	0.27	0.23

Source: United Nations conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The implication is that substantial technical, development, and financial support may be necessary to push the region up the value chain. There has been little structural change as export diversification has not progressed as intended. If regional integration and trade relations are to have any chance of delivering substantial development gains, the bottlenecks identified must be removed.

I. Building Competitive Export Structures

The subregion's industrial development has largely been dominated by capital-import intensive manufactures and natural resource-based manufacturing, as evidenced by the earlier reference to the technological intensity of the subregion's exports. Moreover, primary products and manufactures were largely exported to low end preferential markets. This alone has established disincentives to capital production, research and development, technology creation as drivers of production and competitiveness.

The subregion has not succeeded in production integration based on cross-border specialization, facilitation of unrestricted movement of labour, capital and technology, as well as creating *de facto*, a fully integrated and liberalized internal market—the objective articulated in the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.⁶

It is important, therefore, to unearth credible comparative-advantage-based avenues for export diversification. These would have to be supported by fostering backward and forward linkages, allowing subregional goods and services production to move up the value-chain, while shifting away from an overreliance on imported inputs.⁷

Table I.3 displays CARICOM services exports as a share of world services exports. The data indicate for each services category, a share less than 1% of world services exports. Demonstrably, CARICOM is a relatively small services exporter. Although CARICOM is likely to remain a small services exporter, there does exist scope for the region to expand and as well, diversify its services offerings.

Table I.3
CARICOM Services Exports
(Percentage of world service exports)

Category	2005	2010	2015	2019
Services	0.34	0.25	0.27	0.26
Manufacturing services on physical inputs owned by others	0.01	0.00	0.00	...
Maintenance and repair services n.i.e.	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00
Transport	0.17	0.11	0.11	0.08
Travel	0.93	0.78	0.85	0.92
Construction	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00
Insurance and pension services	0.32	0.23	0.11	0.13
Financial services	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01
Charges for the use of intellectual property n.i.e.	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01
Telecommunications, computer, and information services	0.21	0.11	0.05	0.04
Other business services	0.16	0.09	0.10	0.08
Personal, cultural, and recreational services	0.08	0.07	0.15	0.15
Government goods and services n.i.e.	0.42	0.39	0.45	0.49

Source: United Nations conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

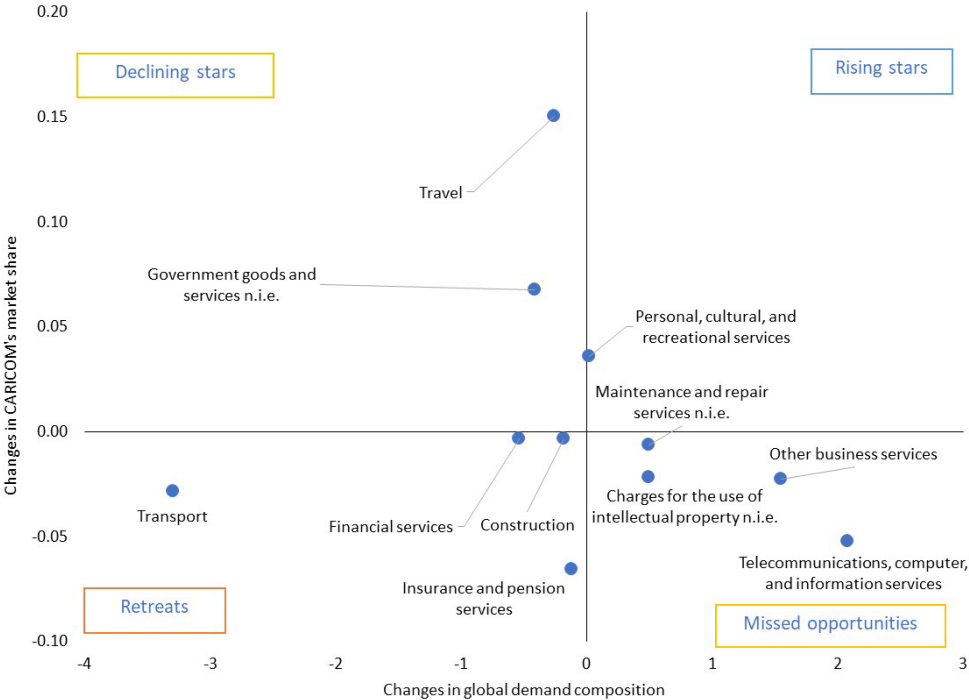
⁶ This has in no small way underpinned its declining trade complementarity with its major trading partners (except for Asia) and countries with which it has trade agreements. This was demonstrated through ECLAC's analysis using the Trade Complementarity Index (TCI). Further, examination of the Grubel-Lloyd Index has also revealed that the Caribbean's manufactures exports are largely inter-industry in nature, with insignificant levels of intra-industry intra-regional or extra-regional commerce.

⁷ This is particularly important for the tourism-based economies which saw their economies contract by as much as 25% (in the case of Saint Lucia) in 2020 as global economies instituted measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, which essentially shut down the tourism sector during the second quarter.

This notwithstanding, Caribbean global services trade has steadily trended upwards since 2005. The subregion’s services exports grew from just under US\$ 10 billion in 2005 to over US\$ 16 billion in 2019 (UNCTAD). However, using the ECLAC TradeCAN methodology⁸ to assess trade competitiveness, it was revealed that few service categories are truly competitive. Over the decade 2009 to 2019, only one service category, cultural and recreational services, was revealed to be a “rising star”. This is the sector gaining share in a dynamic market. The subregion’s largest service sector—travel services—is categorized as a declining star, put differently, a sector gaining share in a declining market. Several significant tertiary service sector activities are considered “missed opportunities”, or sectors losing share in a growing market. These include telecommunications, intellectual property, maintenance and repair services and other business services (see Figure I.6).

Services sectors which can be key poles of industrialization and diversification drivers in the subregion include the creative industries; education, sports, health and medical tourism; community-based and eco-tourism; business process and other tertiary services; renewable energy services. In this group may also be placed ICT, intellectual property and knowledge-based services. These represent areas for development cooperation, investment and focus on improving the macroeconomic landscape. They constitute part of the domestic capital making creating sector (James and Hamilton 2022). This should be geared not only towards optimizing the service export trade but towards also, providing a new platform of production integration and economic diversification.

Figure I.6
Trade Competitiveness Matrix for Services Export of CARICOM (from 2007-2009 to 2017-2019)
(Percentage points)

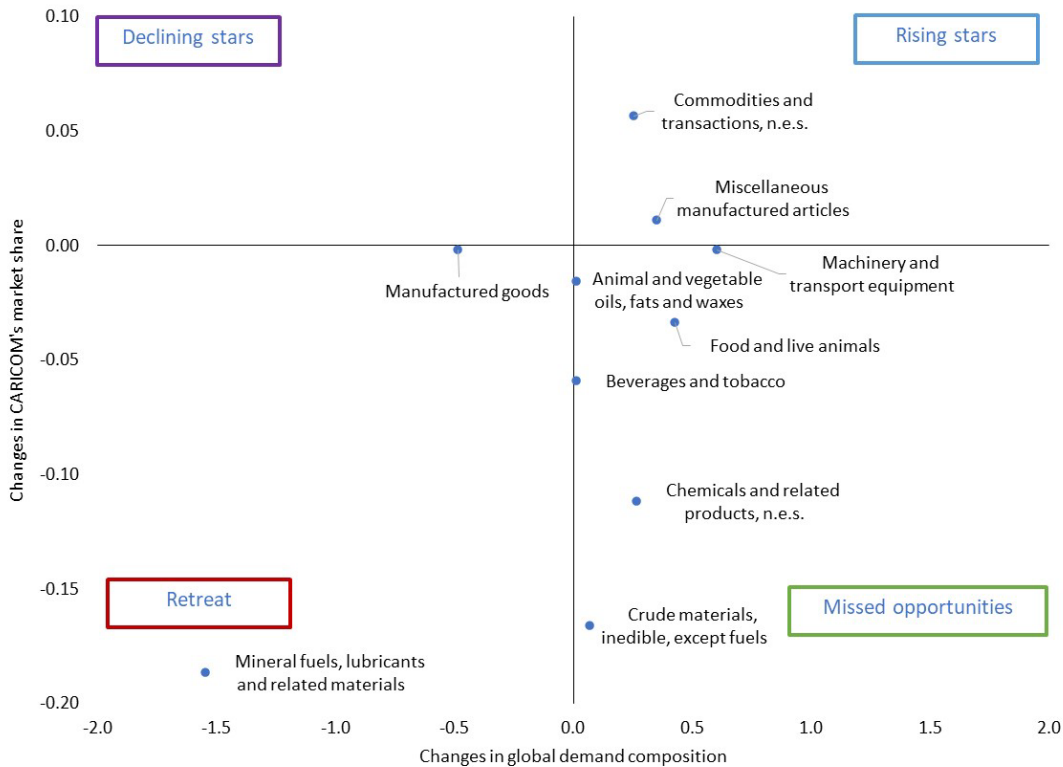


Source: United Nations conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

⁸ TradeCan is designed to analyse national and regional competitiveness in commodities and manufactured exports. It allows users to calculate market shares for each three- or four-digit Standard international trade classification (SITC) export between 1985 and 1996 and to plot changes in market share and market structure.

Figure I.7, the goods competitiveness matrix, illustrates that there are rising stars in machinery and transport, miscellaneous manufactures, and primary commodities. There are missed opportunities in food and live animals, animal and vegetable oils, beverages and tobacco, chemicals and related products, and crude materials expect fuel. There are no declining stars. There is retreat in manufactured goods, and mineral fuels.

Figure I.7
Trade Competitiveness Matrix for Goods Export of CARICOM (from 2007-2009 to 2017-2019)
(Percentage points)



Source: United Nations conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The COVID-19 lockdowns demonstrated to the subregion the importance of information communication technology (ICT) and the digital economy to international trade. In this regard, e-commerce and online transactions have proven that they can be used as enabling tools for SMEs to participate in international trade. ICT (including telecommunications) has also been shown to reduce transaction cost and increase output in a cross-section of sectors. Moreover, digital connectivity is also key to reducing trade bottlenecks. Further, air, shipping and cost of sea transport (all traditionally high in the Caribbean), which spiraled with pandemic supply-chain disruptions, have adversely affected the Caribbean's competitiveness.

There is no panacea for the subregion's trade-related challenges. What is required, however, is the adoption of a regional approach, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities to international supply-chain bottlenecks and the urgent need for resilience building. Improving trade facilitation by simplifying border procedures, will help reduce trade-related friction at ports of entry. These include long container clearance times, *ad hoc* restrictions and non-tariff barriers that drive high trade costs. This notwithstanding, the subregion's structural gaps which have constrained its industrialization and resilience building efforts are far too wide to be bridged by such limited policy undertakings.

J. Mechanism for economic recovery

Normalization of economic activity will likely see the subregion's economies rebound from the COVID-19 shock. Economic production however, is concentrated in a narrow range of activities. This pattern of export production creates greater vulnerability to terms of trade shocks. Success improving long-term growth trends requires industrial restructuring. The latter entails a shift in the economy's production structure, increasing the share of domestic value in existing products and activities, while increasing the range of activities contributing to total output. Such change simultaneously develops and strengthens intersectoral linkages, expands production of customized high value-added products and services that command higher returns in export markets.

For successful economic restructuring, an industrial policy designed to increase international competitiveness through increased productivity, usually requires use of improved technology, knowledge and workforce skills, greater intersectoral linkages and attendant improved access to decent jobs. There must be a system of innovation, with input from both private and public sector, that is linked to the productive system. Modern industrial policy should focus on those activities that have positive spill overs to additional sectors and activities (Stiglitz 1999). This should cover a range of areas including competitiveness policies, trade and inward FDI policies, policies to foster innovation, human resource training, upgrading the tourism sector and SME development. In addition, industrial policy should aim to reduce constraints facing business expansion through a number of strategies, including trade facilitation and logistics improvement.

Continuous emergence of regional and international value chains has changed modern systems of production and allowed small developing economies to engage in the global economy. The importance of knowledge, information and innovation has been elevated in all processes. To capitalize on these trends there must be a shift toward becoming knowledge economies while increasing export capacity (Alleyne 2019). This involves investment in the domestic capital making sector and use of capital services for exports. The "domestic capital" cluster includes sectors such as education, healthcare, ICT, finance, engineering, architecture, design and the creative industries, as well as industries such as tourism, travel services, wholesale and retail (James, August 2018). The quality of the labour force must be enhanced through the development of real skills *via* the formal and informal education system. In addition, to the traditional academic school system there must be development in the vocational school system providing students a menu of high-quality offerings. Much can be done to improve opportunities for youth. This would in turn, reduce unemployment and concomitant high levels of emigration.

K. Recommendations

- Public private partnerships are an endorsement that would attract long term financing supporting green energy, blue industry projects, disaster risk reduction and the restructuring of tourism and other sectors.
- Caribbean governments with the backing of international financing institutions should be encouraged to support the establishment of the Caribbean Resilience Fund (CRF) aimed at securing long-term affordable finance for sustainable development.
- The IFIs should support using state contingent debt instruments to help cushion the negative impact of economic shocks faced by Caribbean SIDS.
- Strong emphasis should be placed on increasing financial literacy in the business sector complemented by monitoring and evaluation strategies to improve efficiency in the use of available financial resources.

- Modernization of the subregion's ICT infrastructure is central to: 1) narrowing the digital divide; 2) improving competitiveness; 3) eliminating trade-related bottlenecks.
- The subregion should redouble efforts to enhance regional e-governance and e-commerce development efforts.
- Investment in promoting technical capacity in human capital development will help support economic diversification, allowing countries to ascend the value chain.
- Reducing high transportation costs (air and sea) is vital to improving trade competitiveness. This will further encourage trade with Latin America.

Chapter II

A. COVID 19 and the Natural Environment – Opportunities for Recovery

COVID-19 has had adverse impacts on the productive sectors of Caribbean economies. Attention is given in this chapter to two key sectors—fisheries and tourism—impacted by the fallout from the pandemic. Fisheries play a pivotal role in the rural economy, livelihoods and food security of the subregion and, like tourism, depends on healthy environmental systems for viability and productivity. If managed unsustainably however, these sectors negatively impact the very enabling systems upon which they depend. This chapter assesses economic externalities generated by both sectors. Given the importance of tourism to regional economic growth and development the chapter also examines the more general environmental impact of tourism. The assessment is intended to inform policy for preserving and enhancing resilience of the natural resource base as the ultimate source of sustained economic and social welfare.

B. Overview of Caribbean SIDS environmental vulnerabilities

Caribbean SIDS are essentially, natural resource based and dependent on ecosystem goods and services. They are characterized by fragile natural environments (threatened biodiversity, over exploited fish stocks); fresh-water scarcity, natural disasters (earthquakes and volcanic eruptions); and threats associated with the effects of climate change (higher intensity of category 4 and 5 hurricanes, floods, landslides, and droughts). The region is also annually inundated by massive influxes of Sargassum blooms on coastal and near coastal zones. Together, these threats exacerbate environmental vulnerabilities. In April 2021, the La Soufriere volcano on the island of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines erupted, resulting in much of the island and neighbouring Barbados and Saint Lucia being blanketed by volcanic ash. The volcanic ash precipitated degeneration of agriculture in the northern part of Saint Vincent as it made it impossible to use surface water. In July 2021, Hurricane Elsa passed over Barbados and Saint Lucia. Elsa was the first hurricane in 65 years to hit Barbados directly, resulting in widespread power outages and property damage. Meanwhile Haiti was also severely affected by earthquakes, landslides and flooding in 2021. Heavy rainfall in May and June of 2022 resulted in widespread flooding in Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana, impacting agriculture and diverse communities.

Continued threats and stresses to the region, a result of climate change impacts and natural disasters, are further exacerbated by external shocks linked to the extant geopolitical environment. Unforeseen threats and risks create harmful impacts on the region’s ability to advance its development agenda. Resources must constantly be diverted from development programmes to recovery and rehabilitation initiatives (Climate Studies Group Mona (Eds.), 2020).

C. COVID-19 pandemic Impact on natural resources and the environment

1. Overview of environmental services and its importance to the region

The natural environment, functions as an ecological regulator, providing ecosystem maintenance. Ecosystems, including their biodiversity maintain both environmental integrity and heterogeneity, through specific ecological structures and functioning. Effective functioning of these natural systems are interconnected and inter-dependent.

It is estimated that reef associated tourism in the Caribbean generates US 7.9 billion in expenditure annually, whilst coral reefs provide on average US 310 million annually to fishers by supporting their livelihoods (Escovar-Fadul, et al, 2022). These economic benefits however, can neither be achieved nor sustained if the coral reef ecosystems and services are not sustainably managed.

2. COVID-19 Impact on the natural environment

As the world emerges from COVID-19, unanticipated ‘gains’ from its impact include reduced global greenhouse gas emissions, reduced industrial potable water demand, tempering of solid waste generation, improved coastal water quality and anthropogenic noise abatement. These gains arose as public health

mitigation measures were implemented to limit the spread of infection and minimize mortality. Lessening anthropogenic pressures allowed the natural environment to resuscitate itself.

COVID-19 pandemic public health control measures however, also caused negative impacts on the natural environment. This is seen for example in generation and disposal of municipal waste. While lockdowns and curtailment of retail activities reduced the volume of municipal solid waste however, preliminary research suggests an increase in biomedical and plastic waste. The increased demand for single-use personal protection equipment (PPE) alongside mandates for wearing of facemasks caused proliferation in production and consumption of PPEs.,

There were several other impacts on municipal waste management systems attributable to the pandemic: waste composition changes included an increase in discarded food delivery containers and reduction in recycling processes as employees adhered to lockdown procedures. Another negative impact derived from the fundamental requirement of safe handling, storage, and disposal of biomedical waste. Increased washing and sanitation practices, particularly at health care and other public-service facilities resulted in increased demand for potable water and concomitant waste-water generation. Existing waste-water management and treatment systems were not designed to receive, separate, treat, and monitor the greater volume of bio-medical waste before safe release into the environment. It is notable that uncontrolled disposal of pharmaceuticals and other drugs are considered an emerging problem of environmental pollutants (Espejo, 2020).

Assessment of the COVID-19 impact on the natural environment remains preliminary — a result of limited data availability. The Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), very early in the pandemic, highlighted waste management as a significant issue, highlighting the need to increase waste collection rates and improve existing waste disposal systems. In both these areas of concern, CARPHA expressed apprehension that if left unabated, improper management of waste could contribute to uncontrolled dumping and open burning (CARPHA 2020). Moonsammy *et al* 2021 noted that in Guyana, households that experienced a change in their municipal waste collection schedule due to COVID-19, were 12.9% more likely to engage in self-dumping. If they lived close to a landfill, the probability of self-dumping increased to 25.7%. Much of the waste disposed of illegally during the pandemic is expected to enter the waterways of the countries of the subregion and eventually reach the Caribbean Sea. Even before the pandemic, the Wider Caribbean Sea had one of the highest concentrations of plastics in the world. In 2015, it was estimated that over 1 million tonnes of plastics had been introduced into the Caribbean Sea, primarily from land-based sources (UNEP 2019).

Although empirical data is not readily available, many of the COVID-19 pandemic impacts experienced in other regions of the world, also hold true for the Caribbean subregion (Walcott J., 2021a). Lockdown measures for example, also meant that regulatory requirements governing environmental monitoring, compliance and enforcement programmes were curtailed (Santora et al 2021). The reduced coastal monitoring and environmental controls in the Northern Belize Coastal Complex (NBCC)⁹ during COVID-19 resulted in increased pressure being placed on this protected area (Walcott J., 2021b). In the case of fisheries, reduced monitoring also led to an upswing in illegal fishing.

While economic contraction, in the range of 2% -16%¹⁰ during the pandemic is thought to have contributed to reduction in emissions and reduced pressure on the subregion's ecosystems, that assessment has so far not been confirmed.

D. Status of COVID-19 impact control measures on natural capital and livelihoods

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the interdependencies of human health, livelihoods and the environment. This is of particular importance to economies reliant on their natural resources for economic

⁹ The Northern Belize Coastal Complex (NBCC) is a river-to-reef seascape of connected protected areas in northern Belize, more details on the NBCC can be found at: https://rris.biopama.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Northern%20Belize%20Coastal%20Complex_2015.pdf.

¹⁰ According to Walcott 2020, the 2-16% economic contraction was experienced or Caribbean SIDS in 2020.

and social development (Espejo et al 2020). In this context, the impact of the pandemic on the fisheries and tourism sectors in the Caribbean is further explored below.

1. Impacts on Livelihoods: The case of Fisheries

Fisheries is an important economic sector in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) noted in 2018, that the total estimated value of marine capture fisheries and exported fisheries products in the CRFM Region were USD 502,738,320 and USD 293,800,000 respectively (CRFM, 2020). The issue of concern is that many fisheries resources are either fully, or over-exploited. Many habitats supporting these fisheries are also threatened by increased pollution, habitat degradation and destructive fishing practices.

Furthermore, the fisheries sector like others, was not spared the fallout from COVID-19. This resulted from containment measures, lockdowns and curfews preventing many fishers from going out to sea; the cessation of fish processing due to sanitary concerns; the initial lockdown of airports, ports, markets and borders; and curtailing of shipping (UNCTAD, 2021 and Walcott, 2021). Furthermore, initial widespread uncertainty regarding the likely economic impact of the pandemic during the first few months, resulted in reduced spending by households and the stocking of canned fish in lieu of fresh seafood in the region (UNCTAD, 2021, CRFM 2020).

A survey conducted by CRFM with its Member States in May 2020 confirms this impact, with respondents noting the most common impacts of the pandemic on the sector being reduced trade, reduced production, and decreased access to fish by consumers. When interviewed, fifteen fishers¹¹ representing seventeen fisherfolk organizations in CRFM countries¹² noted a decrease in fish caught during the period February to April 2020 when compared to the same period the previous year. They indicated that this was due to a decrease in the amount of time spent at sea, citing curfews, limited number of fishing days, reduced market operations and restricted fishing times (CRFM, 2020).

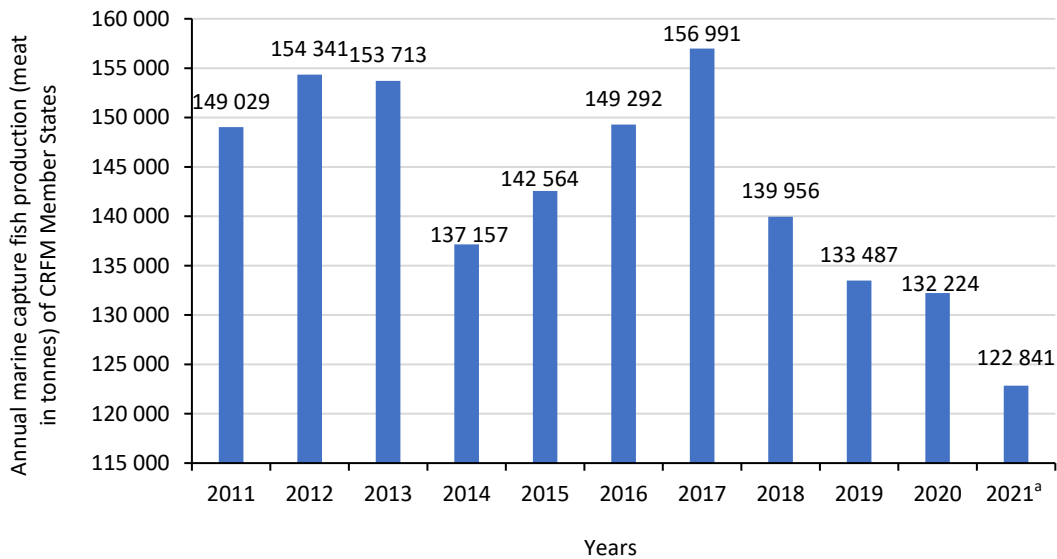
In Belize, both marine fisheries and aquaculture suffered because of the pandemic and measures implemented to contain it. Lockdowns completely halted fishing and post-harvest activities. Many fishers expressed anxiety about the risks of COVID-19 to their health and the welfare of their families (UNCTAD, 2021). When fishing finally resumed, fishers had first to adapt to sanitary measures implemented onboard fishing vessels. Limited cash flow, inadequate availability and high costs of fishing supplies, spare parts and repair services also negatively impacted fishers' ability to earn a livelihood (UNCTAD 2021). Reduced demand for seafood products both nationally and internationally also resulted in a large reduction in seafood prices. In Belize for example, spiny lobsters were sold for BZ\$30 per pound in 2019. In 2020 as demand fell, the price went down to BZ\$15 per pound (UNCTAD, 2021). Closure of fish markets, restaurants, hotels and shifting consumer demand to preserved fish also negatively impacted Finfish production and prices, (UNCTAD, 2021).

This decreasing trend in annual marine capture fish production is corroborated in the 2020 and 2021 CRFM Statistics and Information Reports (CRFM 2022) which show preliminary estimates for 2021 at 9,383 tonnes below 2020 figures. Notwithstanding the information provided in the reports, it is not possible to confirm that the observed decrease in annual marine capture over 2020 and 2021 was mainly due to fallout from the pandemic. This is because a declining trend in the annual marine capture fish production had been observed from 2018 (Figure II.1) (CRFM 2021).

¹¹ Fishers is a term used for persons working in this sector.

¹² Seventeen Fisherfolk organisations in the following CRFM 9 countries responded to the questionnaire: Belize (1), Dominica (1), Grenada (4), Guyana (1), Jamaica (3), St Kitts and Nevis (2), Saint Lucia (3), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (1), and Trinidad and Tobago (1).

Figure II.1
Annual total capture of fish production of CRFM States (in tonnes), 2011–2021



Source: CRFM Statistics and Information Reports, 2020 and 2021.

^a Projections.

On the positive ledger, the effect of reduced fishing activity observed during the pandemic, a result of less time at sea, lower demand for seafood products, closure of trade markets, along with the benefit of reduced pollution of coastal waters from processing plants and other land-based activities could have a beneficial impact on fish stocks, allowing for conditions that promote more resilient stock recovery. (Nathan *et al* 2020, Walcott 2021).

Evidence of similar impact was observed during the 2008-2009 financial crisis which resulted in reduced bottom trawling, with increased fuel prices causing slower moving fishing vessels, decreased noise and air pollution. Such changes indirectly caused improvements to some benthic habitats and air quality (March *et al*, 2021). Other relevant studies suggest that 10-15 years of reduced fishing pressure is required for overfished stocks to recover (FAO,2021; UNCTAD, 2021).

Hotel, restaurant and marine park closures resulted in loss of income and livelihoods for many people in coastal communities forcing some to enter the fishing sector for supplementary income. Preliminary data from the CRFM Statistics and Information Report 2021 shows an increase in the number of persons employed in the marine commercial capture fishery in 2021 when compared to the 2019/2020 period (CRFM, 2022).

It should be noted further that the closure of marine parks, due to a decrease in tourism activity, focus of governments on unemployment relief and business recovery, resulted in less resources for monitoring control and surveillance of fishing areas. Consequently, there were increased incidence of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing as more people resorted to subsistence fishing to satisfy food and livelihood needs (Nathan, et al 2020, UNCTAD, 2021). In one Caribbean country infractions and illegal fishing activities increased 21 percent, as tour guides turned to subsistence fishing for their livelihoods (Walcott, 2021). In that same country, a local newspaper reported that camera surveillance enabled police and rangers to apprehend and prosecute individuals for harvesting queen conch from a marine reserve and for catching undersized lobster (UNCTAD, 2021).

2. Impacts on the tourism sector

In the Caribbean the main products offered by the tourism sector are dependent on the environment and natural resources, in the offerings of ‘sea-sun-sand’ and cruise tourism. Increasingly popular are eco-tourism, cultural tourism and health tourism (ECDPM, 2005). These facilities and services are often located in coastal, marine and other fragile ecosystems. The physical location of most tourism facilities and attractions along coastlines further heightens the vulnerability of the industry to the impact of extreme weather events, with resulting loss and damage. In the case of The Bahamas for example, following the 2019 passage of Hurricane Dorian, loss and damage to the tourism sector was estimated at \$854.8 (IADB, 2020). Specific to environmental and natural resources management, the Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy and Development Framework (2020) listed the following as values and guiding principles towards supporting sustainable tourism: mainstreaming climate change actions, multi-hazard risk management and resilience and optimal use of natural resources (CTO 2020a).

As observed in chapter I the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated sharp falls in visitor arrivals across the subregion (ECLAC, 2020). This fall in demand for tourism services resulted in reduced environmental pressures in such areas as fresh water requirements, pollutant emissions, coastal, marine and land use. The generation of solid and liquid waste from the sector also would have been reduced by lower consumption demand (OECD, 2021). Reopening of the sector provides opportunities for diversification and strengthening to achieve a more climate resilient, environmentally sustainable, low-carbon tourism economy.

Towards supporting environmental responsibility, increased transparency and competitiveness in the tourism sector, governments and the private sector are investing in crafting legislation, national standards and certification schemes. Legislative frameworks designed towards driving economic growth in the tourism sector often include regulation and licensing requirements to comply with environmental sustainability, climate responsiveness and disaster resiliency (CTO, 2020b).

Tourism certification schemes are built by consensus, achieving agreed ‘minimum standard requirements’ for environmental sustainability. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), for example, has developed several global standards for sustainable travel and tourism. These standards cover areas such as (i) effective sustainable management, (ii) maximizing benefits and minimizing negative impacts on local communities and (iii) preserving cultural heritage and the environment. GSTC membership includes governments, private sector entities, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders supporting sustainable tourism best practices.¹³ Examples of other schemes used in the subregion are the Green Globe Sustainable Tourism Certification¹⁴ and the Blue Flag which promotes environmental issues and awareness of beaches, marines and boating operators.¹⁵ Maintaining currency of certification often requires external auditing to ensure compliance with agreed standards.

Notwithstanding these efforts, environmental resilience requires knowledge and understanding of tourism sector impact for GHG emissions. The CTO (2020c) assesses the tourism sector as a major contributor to global CO₂¹⁶ emissions. The principal emitters in this sector were identified as air transport (40%), car transport (32%), accommodation (21%), recreational activities (4%), and other forms of transportation (3%).

Given that tourism is the main economic sector for most countries of the subregion, trends in CO₂ emissions would reflect the impact of the sector on the environment. Data from Emissions Database for Global Atmospheric Research (EDGAR, 2021) suggest overall emissions for the Caribbean region have been rising over the last three decades, although evidence of a reversal has become apparent over the last five years. For example, per capita CO₂ emissions for Antigua and Barbuda increased from 4.05 tonnes in 1970, to

¹³ Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), see link at: <https://www.gstcouncil.org/about/>, cited August 16, 2022

¹⁴ The Green Globe Sustainable Tourism Certification, see link: <https://www.greenglobe.com/>, cited August 16, 2022.

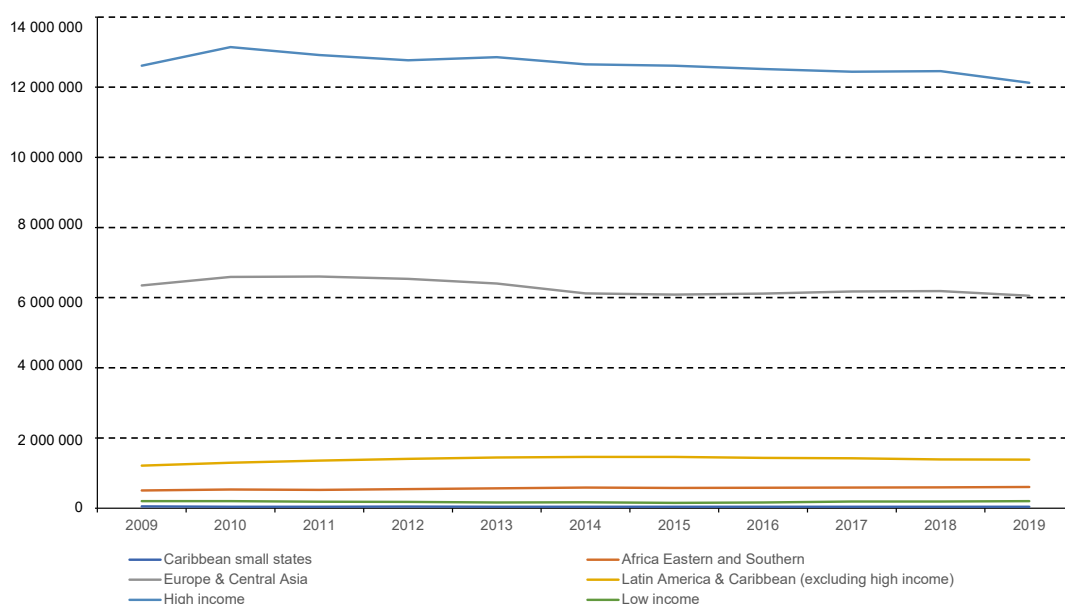
¹⁵ The Blueflag promotes environmental issues and awareness of beaches marines and boating operators, link: <https://www.blueflag.global/mission-and-history>: cited August 16, 2022.

¹⁶ To other GHG’s: methane, ammonia, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride are not examined in this section.

7.23 tonnes in 2015, before falling again to 4.34 tonnes by 2020. In the case of the Dominican Republic, this measure increased from 0.85 in 1970 to 2.62 in 2020, while for Jamaica, estimates ranged from 3.16 tonnes in 1970 to 2.71 tonnes in 2020.

In the context of these measures, it is important to note that per capita estimates do not convey a realistic assessment of CO₂ emissions of small Caribbean states relative to global measures. In terms of total emissions for instance, the 2019 estimates for Antigua and Barbuda, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica were 520; 27,229 and 8,390 kilo tonnes respectively. At the same time estimates of emissions for Europe and Central Asia were 6,055,907 kilo tonnes, while the average for High Income Economies[1] was 12,125,558 in 2019. Based on these metrics, emission measures for the Caribbean states would be judged relatively miniscule, in the global context.

Figure II.2
Total CO₂ Emissions (Kilotonnes) - Selected Countries and Regions: 2009 - 2019



Source: IBRD

Overall, the temporary suspension of global tourism activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided an excellent opportunity for evaluating the impact of the tourism sector on the natural environment including on ecosystem goods and services of the subregion. As observed by the UNWTO and Asia Development Bank (2022), low tourism volumes should enable local destination managers to prepare destinations for future growth through investment in sustainable tourism infrastructure including implementation of physical carrying capacity limits and improved visitor education. Building a more resilient tourism sector will require strategies to minimize the negative impacts of the sector on the natural environment, particularly in the context of the sub-region’s high vulnerability to natural hazards.

E. Recommendations

Considering the foregoing analysis, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Promote sustainable management of natural resources by strengthening institutional mechanisms, human resource capacities, data systems and use of environmentally sound technologies.

- Promote and adopt sustainable ocean and coastal resources management opening opportunities to diversify economic activity including mariculture, pharmaceuticals, marine renewable energy and maritime transportation.
- Use economic, social and environmental impact and valuation techniques for making informed decisions on natural resource use. Science-based valuation approaches are useful for monitoring, assessment, decision-making, reporting and remediation of environmental degradation.
- Encourage Public-private partnerships at all stages —planning, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery— including disaster risk management.

Chapter III

Making Post-COVID-19 Socioeconomic Recovery Inclusive

For almost three years now, the Caribbean and the rest of the world have faced challenges occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. From emergency response measures to economic stabilization and socioeconomic recovery, the consideration for social inclusion has been paramount in strategies and policies considered or implemented by governments. However, in the face of economic, social and cultural impediments, there are challenges to the successful implementation of policies aimed at propelling socioeconomic post-COVID-19 recovery.

This chapter begins by addressing socioeconomic deficits such as vaccine hesitancy, unemployment — including its gender differences — and lags in digitization that constitute challenges to sustainable post-pandemic recovery. It continues to make the case for building a knowledge-based economy that is inclusive, as a viable strategy for socioeconomic recovery. The chapter concludes with indicated policy recommendations.

A. Addressing the socioeconomic deficits

1. COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy

In the early days of the pandemic, the race to find an effective vaccine against the virus was deemed a necessity. Successful development of COVID-19 vaccines by Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Johnson and Johnson, Moderna, Sinopharm and others ensued. The next challenge was how to effectively and equitably make them available globally. This prompted the COVAX initiative, a partnership of the World Health Organization (WHO), Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi¹⁷ and UNICEF which aimed to accelerate “the development and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines and guarantee fair and equitable access for every country.”¹⁸ In May of 2022, WHO reported merely 57 countries, all high-income, had achieved 70 per cent a vaccination rate of their population — a threshold considered minimum to achieve herd immunity to the COVID-19 virus.

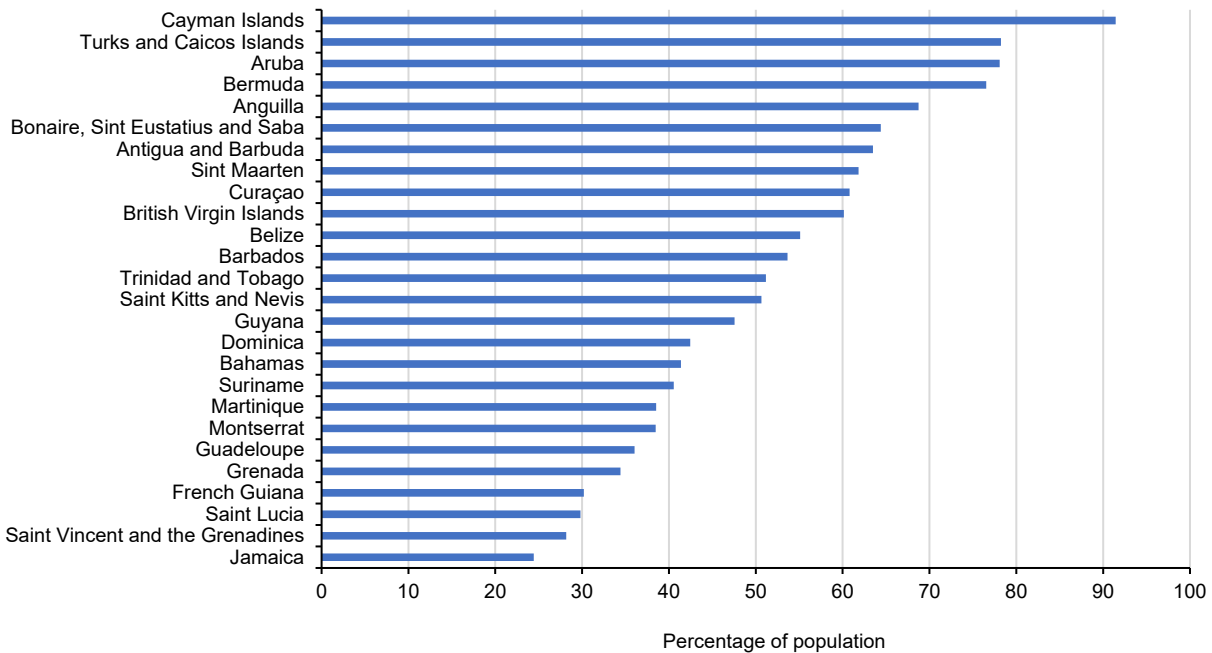
In the Caribbean, as of August 2022, only four countries¹⁹ had vaccination rates of 70% or more. As figure III.1 shows, twelve of the 26 Caribbean countries and territories represented had a vaccination rate of below 50%. On average, only 40% of the subregion’s population is fully vaccinated compared to a global average of 63% and regional average of 70% for Latin America and the Caribbean. When compared with other small island developing States (SIDS) regions, the average rate of full vaccination against COVID-19 in the Caribbean trailed the rate for Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) SIDS at 58%, and that of the Pacific SIDS at 66%.

¹⁷ Formerly the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization

¹⁸ See <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/covid-19-vaccines>.

¹⁹ The four countries are Aruba, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, and Turks and Caicos Islands. These countries are all foreign territories of The Netherlands and Great Britain.

Figure III.1
Percentage of the population fully-vaccinated for COVID-19 (August 2022)



Source: ECLAC based on data from WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard.

In a recent survey of Caribbean residents conducted by ECLAC and UN Women between September 2021 and January 2022,²⁰ persons younger than 36 years old were noted as more likely to report not being vaccinated. Reasons mostly provided for being unvaccinated include medical exemption due to a pre-existing health condition, including for women, pregnancy or nursing. Others include concerns arising from confusing or contradictory information received regarding the safety of the vaccines. There were persons who admitted to being either complacent or afraid to receive the vaccine. Irrespective of the reasons for not being vaccinated, there is notable COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in the Caribbean. With the different mutations of the virus already seen and the concern that COVID could become a seasonal disease, vaccine hesitancy poses a challenge to the efforts of the government as well as regional and global health authorities to control infection. For tourism dependent economies anticipating the return of heavy international visitor traffic, this also has implications for the sustainability of economic recovery in the Caribbean, in the unfortunate event of a re-emergence through variants.

2. Unemployment and its gender differences

Through existing and newly created social support programmes, Caribbean governments implemented stimulus packages to ameliorate the hardship citizens experienced at the pandemic's peak. These policy measures, targeted mainly the most vulnerable subpopulations. They included temporary cash transfers for small businesses and those working in the tourism sector.²¹ Publicly funded, the programmes were

²⁰ The survey covered Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands.

²¹ Example of these are cash and food transfers implemented in Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname. Other measures aimed to guarantee access the provision of basic services, such as water and electricity, implemented in Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Belize, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (see ECLAC, 2020).

implemented at a peak period when most jurisdictions experienced COVID-19 induced economic decline.²² Unemployment was however, already at high levels, both individual and household, particularly in vulnerable subpopulations such as women and youth. Before the pandemic, about a quarter of the Caribbean youth²³ was unemployed, a rate three times higher than that of adults.²⁴ Moreover, many of these youth have been unemployed for six months or more. Pandemic impacts simply intensified this debilitating socioeconomic condition. (OECS Commission and UNICEF, 2020).

Although participation rates of Caribbean women in the labour force varies significantly across countries (Schimanski, Chagalj and Ruprah, 2018), unemployment rates for women are generally higher despite their higher levels of participation in and performance at the secondary and tertiary levels of education (Abdulkadri and others, 2022). Such gender gaps in unemployment rates, while existing prior to COVID-19, have been aggravated by the pandemic and further contribute to the social deficits that post-pandemic recovery measures must address.

Furthermore, the burden of unpaid care work increased for women and girls mainly due to cultural norms that place women as the default caregivers in the household. Women's provision of care for family members has made it more challenging for them to re-join the labour market, particularly following extended periods of unemployment. The health restrictions imposed to control COVID-19 aggravated such burdens, as evidenced by the fact that women's unemployment rates in the Caribbean have tended to be higher than men's, except for Barbados. Moreover, women are overrepresented²⁵ in the subregion's tourism sector, which is highly vulnerable to shocks such as the pandemic. A recent study by ECLAC and the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2022) shows that domestic work—which leaves many women in situations of unpaid work or underemployment—was the main driver of employment upticks from 2020 to 2021 in Latin America and the Caribbean. Such a trend evidences the structural difficulties that women must overcome to regain stable and formal employment.

Figure III.2 shows the unemployment rates for men and women in eight Caribbean countries from 2015 to 2020.²⁶ Before the COVID-19 pandemic The Bahamas,²⁷ Cuba,

²² ECLAC (2020) estimated that these programmes amounted to a cost of US\$1.3 billion in 2020.

²³ People between 15 to 24 years old.

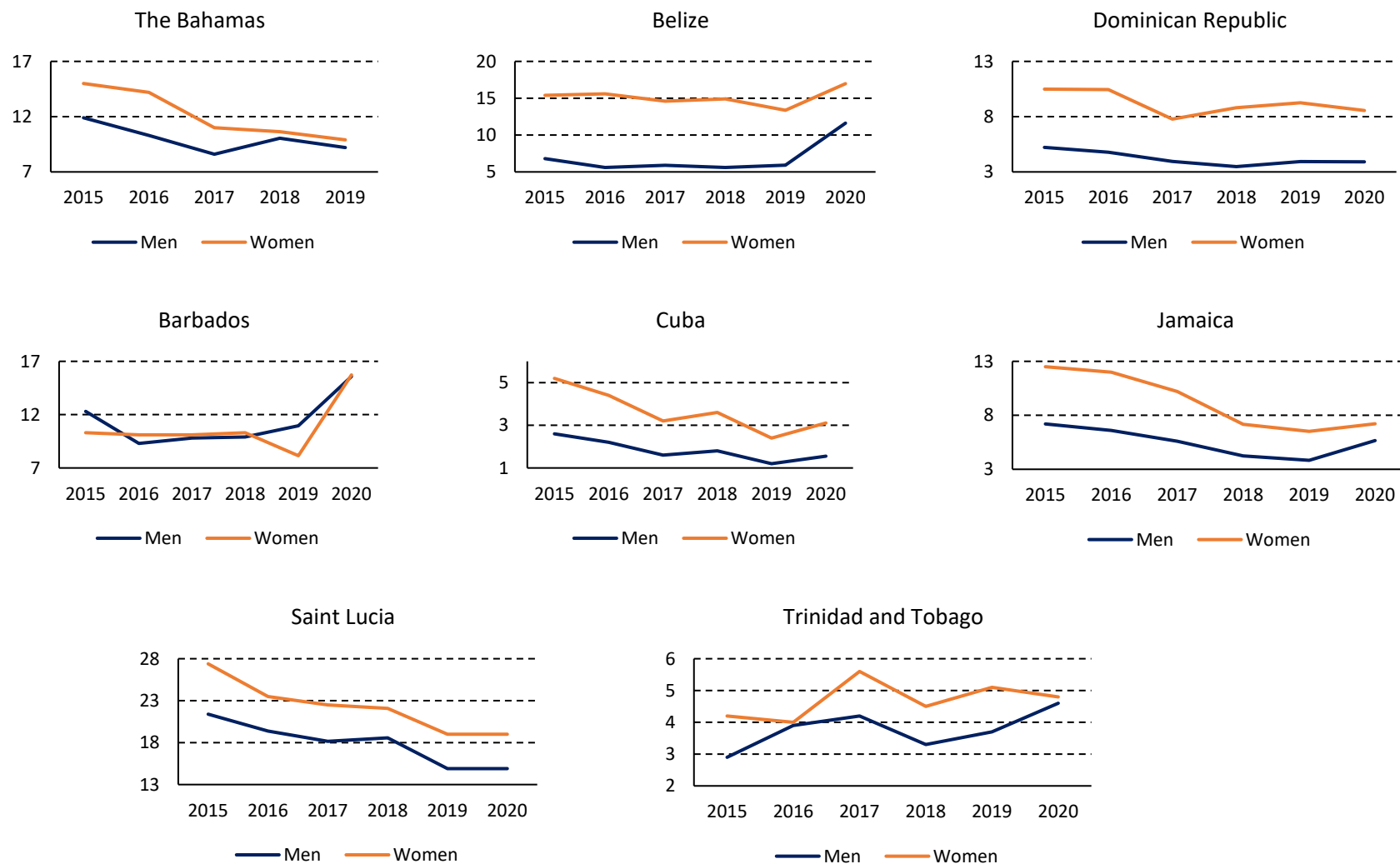
²⁴ Defined as persons 25 years and older.

²⁵ Women account for between 50 and 60 per cent of employment in the Caribbean tourism sector (ILO 2020).

²⁶ Disaggregated unemployment data are only available for The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago. This chapter's comparative analysis does not include 2021, as the member States have not reported disaggregated unemployment rates for that year.

²⁷ Unemployment data for The Bahamas did not include the year 2020.

Figure III.2
Annual Unemployment Rates among Men and Women from 2015 to 2020
(Percentages)



Source: ECLAC statistical database.

Jamaica, and Saint Lucia recorded declining trends in the unemployment rate for men and women. In the Dominican Republic, the unemployment rate declined sharply for women between 2016 and 2017 but was on a modestly increasing trend before COVID-19. For Belize and Barbados, the unemployment rate held steady for the most part before the pandemic but rose sharply between 2019 and 2020. In contrast, the unemployment rate for Trinidad and Tobago oscillated during the period 2015-2020, peaking in 2017 for men and women. The changes in the national unemployment rate from 2019 to 2020 suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased unemployment, with the exceptions of the Dominican Republic and Saint Lucia, which had no appreciable change over this period. Jamaica and Cuba experienced moderate unemployment increase. At the same time, the impact of the pandemic on unemployment rates in Trinidad and Tobago showed a gender-differentiated effect, with men's unemployment rate rising sharply while the women's declined modestly.

Figure III.2 further shows the pre-existing gender gap in employment in the Caribbean. Only Barbados did not display a systemic gender gap in its unemployment rate. The Bahamas, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago showed a reduction in such gaps over time. On the other hand, Belize, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Saint Lucia showed relatively large gender gaps in their unemployment rates that are either stagnant, widening or not reducing significantly. Across the seven countries with a gender gap in the unemployment rate, that for women was always higher than for men.

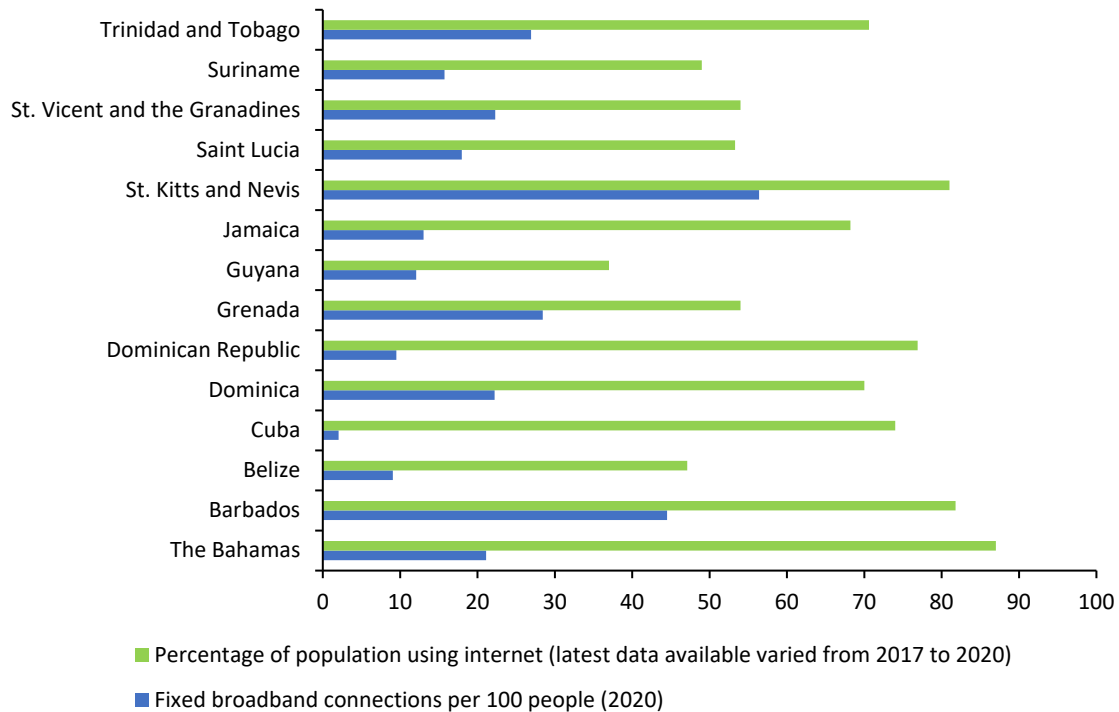
The pandemic may have had an unintended equalizing effect on the gender gap in employment. Figure III.1 shows a significant closing of the gap between the unemployment rate of men and women in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago over the period 2019-2020. Barbados experienced a notable improvement in women's unemployment rate between 2018 and 2019, putting women's rate 3% lower than men. However, the pandemic reversed gains in the gender gap, as women's unemployment rate almost doubled from 8.1% to 15.6% between 2019 and 2020, while men's rose by 4.7 percentage points from 11% in 2019 to 15.7% during the same period. In Jamaica, the pandemic caused men's unemployment rate to increase by about 2% between 2019 and 2020, while women's rate increased by less than 1%. Similarly, Trinidad and Tobago experienced a closing of the unemployment gender gap due to an increase in the men's unemployment rate because of the pandemic. Such changes in unemployment rates experienced by Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago point to relatively more men than women losing jobs due to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19.

3. Lags in digitization

Investing in digital solutions has become a centrepiece of the global economic recovery. Social distancing restrictions implemented at the pandemic's peak accelerated ICT investments and innovation around the globe. Digital solutions allowed economic actors to maintain productivity in face of the public health restrictions. Tellingly, 73% of over 600 executives of mostly high-earning Caribbean businesses surveyed in late 2020, reported that switching to, or increasing the use of digital solutions, either maintained or increased productivity. Moreover, these business executives expect that such solutions will moderately or substantially increase their companies' revenues (PwC, 2021).

Figure III.3 shows the latest data on two key digitization indicators, the share of fixed broadband subscriptions and the population's share of internet users, in fourteen Caribbean countries. The share of fixed broadband subscriptions was less than 10% in Belize, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. On the other hand, Saint Kitts and Nevis had a fixed broadband subscription rate of 56.4% in 2020, the highest rate among these Caribbean countries, followed by Barbados with a 44.5% fixed broadband subscription rate in the same year. Overall internet use however, is more encouraging than fixed broadband subscription data. Only Belize and Guyana reported that less than half their population used the internet (47% and 37% respectively). By contrast, The Bahamas recorded the highest rate of internet use at 87% of the population, followed by Barbados and Saint Kitts and Nevis, with 82% and 81% of the population respectively using the internet.

Figure III.3
Digitization indicators



Source: World Bank World Development Indicators.

Public and private investment in ICT will boost economic productivity and address low growth rates of the last three decades. ICT investments will also contribute to increasing productivity particularly in the services sector (Samuel, 2022). A recent Inter-American Development Bank (2021) study argues that reducing digitization deficits can increase GDP by approximately 10% in many Caribbean countries. This benefit requires the subregion to invest around 2% of GDP in ICT. Realizing the economic benefits of further digitization requires improving human capital availability.

B. Building an Inclusive, Knowledge-Based Economy

The multiple external shocks faced in the Caribbean create significant challenges to the subregion's economic recovery, directly affecting the social sector. Added to these challenges is the risk of an unequal recovery following the pandemic, which would adversely impact vulnerable groups. Although the subregion is well-positioned to address its socioeconomic deficits, leveraging its advantages requires addressing workforce skills gaps.

As the global economy becomes more digitized, the importance of a skilled labour force has assumed greater significance. Indeed, it has become crucial. Nevertheless, the subregion punches below its weight in human capital creation and retention. Moreover, the mismatch in the skills predominant in the labour force and those that industry demands undermine the ability of companies to increase productivity and stymies the potential of the subregion's economies to be globally competitive. Post-COVID-19 economic recovery therefore presents a prime opportunity for the Caribbean to harness investments in ICT to build inclusive economies, and to leverage the high participation and achievement of women in tertiary education for careers in sectors that transcend traditional gender stereotypes in employment.

Box III.1

Barbados Employment and Sustainable Transformation (BEST) Plan

The BEST plan is a fiscal stimulus package of approximately US\$ 148 million to provide balance of payment support and protect jobs in the country's vital tourism sector until the resumption of normal international travel. A crucial component of the BEST plan is the provision of funds for workforce upskilling through the National Training Initiative of Barbados and its related agencies. Moreover, the BEST plan considers a Green and Digital Investment Fund for businesses that have reemployed or retained their workers in an effort to reduce unemployment. The plan also creates worker-retention incentives beyond the tourism sector by financing training for small businesses and manufacturing and agricultural enterprises that have retained a significant portion of their workforce.

Source: ECLAC COVID-19 Observatory, <https://statistics.cepal.org/forms/covid-countrysheet/index.html?country=BRB> [accessed on July 28, 2022].

Table III.1 provides the World Bank's Human Capital Index (HCI)²⁸ for 11 Caribbean countries in 2020. The Caribbean average of 0.55, which is just below the global average of 0.56, is comparable to the regional averages of Latin America and the Caribbean and East Asia and the Pacific, another region with many small island developing States (SIDS). However, the average HCI of 0.60 for the Caribbean high-income countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad & Tobago) is much lower than the global average of 0.71 for high-income countries. This suggests that Caribbean high-income countries are under-achieving in human capital formation when compared to countries of similar income level.

Table III.1
World Bank's Human Capital Index (HCI) 2020 and selected indicators for the Caribbean

Country Name	Income Group	Expected Years of School	Harmonized Test Scores	HCI 2020
Antigua and Barbuda	High income	13.0	407	0.60
Dominica	Upper middle income	12.4	404	0.54
Dominican Republic	Upper middle income	11.9	345	0.50
Grenada	Upper middle income	13.1	395	0.57
Guyana	Upper middle income	12.2	346	0.50
Haiti	Low income	11.4	338	0.45
Jamaica	Upper middle income	11.4	387	0.53
Saint Kitts & Nevis	High income	13.0	409	0.59
Saint Lucia	Upper middle income	12.7	418	0.60
Saint Vincent & the Grenadines	Upper middle income	12.3	391	0.53
Trinidad & Tobago	High income	12.4	458	0.60
Caribbean Average		12.3	391	0.55
Latin America & Caribbean		12.1	405	0.56
East Asia & Pacific		11.9	432	0.58
Upper middle income		11.8	411	0.56
High income		13.2	487	0.71
Global Average		11.3	423	0.56

Source: Human Capital Project of the World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital#Index> [accessed on July 28, 2022].

²⁸ The World Bank's Human Capital Index is a parameter comprising a diverse range of data on years of schooling, harmonized test scores of schoolchildren, plus demographic and socioeconomic indicators to compare human capital formation among countries.

A deeper examination of selected components of the HCI reveals that the human capital deficits are not as a result of insufficient years of schooling. On the contrary, the Caribbean’s average expected years of schooling in 2020 were about 12.3 years, one year more than the global average, and on par with or higher than that of other country groupings, except for high income countries. The Caribbean has also made substantial progress in reducing gender disparities in education, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels. Since 2017, twice as many women as men have enrolled in the regional university, The University of West Indies (Abdulkadri and others, 2022). Nevertheless, the human capital that generates a skilled workforce involves more than just school attendance. It requires learning and transforming the knowledge acquired through education into functional skills —put differently, as described in technology studies: “learning by doing”. One admittedly imperfect metric for measuring knowledge acquisition is performance on standardized tests. The Caribbean with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago performed below the global average on harmonized test scores in 2020 (see table III.1).

Further examination of the HCI suggests human capital deficits do not derive from insufficient years of schooling. On the contrary, the Caribbean’s average expected years of schooling in 2020 were about 12.3 years. This represents one year above the global average. Perhaps more importantly 12.3 years is either on par with, or ahead of other world regions including the upper-middle-income group of countries. The Caribbean has also made substantial progress in reducing gender disparities in education, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels. Since 2017, twice as many women as men have enrolled in the regional university, The University of West Indies (Abdulkadri and others, 2022). Nevertheless, the human capital embodying the core of a skilled workforce involves more than just school attendance. It requires both learning and transforming the knowledge acquired through education into functional skills —put differently, as described in technology studies: “learning by doing”.

Table III.1 shows that the subregional average for the harmonized test scores of 391 was lower than the global average of 423. Only Trinidad and Tobago (a score of 458) showed harmonized test scores higher than the global average. All Caribbean countries except Haiti, are high-middle-income or high-income countries, evidencing the subregion underperforming in human capital formation. These skill deficits constitute a retardant to achieving the potential productivity embodied in digitization and ICT investments.

Furthermore, Caribbean business executives have reported deficiencies in the subregion’s human capital formation. Some 40% of the subregion’s business executives reported that their enterprises have fallen behind in attracting or training workers with an adequate set of ICT skills for the digital era, which also speaks to the skills mismatch between the workforce and industry (PwC, 2021).

Skill and digitization deficits hamper productivity and dampen the prospects for economic recovery. Moreover, advancing the knowledge economy, central to digitization efforts, can promote an inclusive post-pandemic recovery. However, digitization efforts will promote sustainable economic recovery only if policy measures are inclusive and account for vulnerable groups like unskilled or low-skilled labourers, women and youth, who disproportionately, tend to be unemployed. To this extent, Caribbean governments can take advantage of the productivity gains that ICT investments can bring while upskilling their workforce, including dedicated financing for TVET institutions and measures. ICT investments are altogether critical to fostering required digitization.

TVET is a relatively cost-effective measure for workforce upskilling. Such efficiency promoting measures can prove vital to ensuring women and youth are not left behind in post-pandemic recovery. Workers can acquire skill sets critical for the knowledge economy from training and education centred on ICT subject areas. Economic integration mechanisms, such as the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), allow mobility of the workforce. Furthering the implementation of Caribbean Vocational Qualifications that progressively replace national vocational qualifications will promote the benefits of investments in TVET as a timely mechanism of workforce upskilling, as it allows Caribbean industries to tap into the larger talent pool available in the subregion (Fletcher, 2020).

Therefore, TVET serves as a mechanism to close existing skill gaps in the workforce or facilitate the transition of experienced workers from one field to another (Hanni, 2019).

C. Policy recommendations for an inclusive knowledge economy

- Implement government monitoring, quality evaluation and assessment of market orientation of educational institutions and allow public subsidies and/or financing to be made conditional on positive evaluations.
- Enhance digitization and the knowledge economy by prioritizing quality education and training to produce human capital able to innovate and adapt to different challenges of a fast-changing global economy, effectively tapping into the wider creative potential of the population.
- Prioritize implementation of measures capable of eradicating institutional bottlenecks and coordination failures in an attempt to attain what development practitioners in Latin America and the Caribbean have termed the ‘orange economy’ (Benavente and Grazzi, 2017) providing both adaptability and resilience (Ferreiro-Seoane and others, 2022).
- Provide grants or scholarships for both young people and experienced workers to access upskilling opportunities to enhance creation of a critical mass in the labour force.
- Provide grants and scholarships specifically targeting women and girls to address gender under representation in jobs requiring ICT skills. (Vaca Trigo and Valenzuela, 2022).

Chapter IV

Identifying Strategy, Policy, Plans and Support to Advance SDG Decade of Action

Introduction

Resilience and repositioning represent the thread that must connect all economic and social policies, considering the challenges and opportunities exposed by COVID-19 impacts. This response is compatible with the Decade of Action²⁹ conceived as a crosscutting lever for motivating action at three levels: global action to secure better leadership, more resources and smarter solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals; local action by embedding effective transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of national governments, cities and local authorities; and people action to push for the required transformations with active participation of the youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, and academia. The Decade of Action requires that everyone, everywhere be mobilized, with the urgency that the 2030 Agenda demands and with such an ambition that will make a meaningful difference. Ultimately, all actions should be to transform ideas to solutions and for these solutions to result in sustainable outcomes for development. This chapter focuses on what can and should be done, to give real meaning to the decade of action in the Caribbean as part of its repositioning.

A. Policies, Programmes, and Strategies for a Caribbean Decade of Action

1. Integrating the SDGs into National Policy and Budgets

A strong mechanism for engaging the entire country in the SDG process requires incorporation of the SDGs into national development and medium-term plans and, crafting a national, cross-sectoral Sustainability Development Index (SDI). SDGs would thus be mainstreamed into national policy planning and implementation. The SDI would serve as a benchmarking and monitoring mechanism for goal achievement. This approach serves to improve data collection, create targeted and strategic decision making and a development-based approach to national policy. By their very nature these initiatives require the participation of all sectors. For example, Belize's Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS), is a strategic approach to attainment of the SDG goals. Built along the framework of the Horizon 2030³⁰ it will seamlessly merge within the goals of the SDG having been mainstreamed as part of both medium and long-term Belizean goals. (Belize Voluntary National Review, 2017) This approach is certainly worthy of consideration for adoption by other CARICOM states, provided appropriate benchmarks and metrics are designed to measure and assess effectiveness. Across the Caribbean, there have already been some attempts to adopt this approach. For instance, in Antigua and Barbuda the *Leave No One Behind* programme aims to consult with the most vulnerable stakeholders.³¹ The programme specifically targets such SDGs as poverty eradication, good health and well-being, high quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth. Antigua and Barbuda also seeks to align its development policy with the SDGs and implement a monitoring mechanism tracking their achievement. Governments must pursue effective integration of all stakeholders in the development process. Achieving the latter shall, as an added benefit foster commitment that enhances perceptions of 'national ownership'.

2. Ensuring Dignity Through Decent Work Empowering Marginalized Groups

While a great deal of emphasis is placed on the number of persons who are employed, large numbers of people in the Caribbean work in low wage, low productivity jobs, including those workers in the informal

²⁹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/>.

³⁰ The objective of the Horizon 2030 Framework is to clearly establish a set of long-term development goals, targets, and indicators that will guide concerted action by all stakeholders involved in the development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of both long term and intermediate sector programs and Government's long and medium-term development strategies.

³¹ The list includes those living in extreme poverty, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, marginalised children and youth, older persons, persons in prisons, deviant young males, females who are institutionalised and migrants.

sector. The number and quality of jobs available in a society, access to opportunity and decent work enhances workers' dignity, the quality of life of their families and their sense of optimism. Deliberate policies to support this approach is necessary if workers are to have decent jobs.

For example, Barbados introduced a Social Partnership of government, trades unions and the private sector in the 1990s that has won much international acclaim for its role in building social harmony, addressing workers' rights and wages and acting as mechanism of conflict resolution. It continues to function effectively. The Social Partnership³² has been expanded since its original establishment. Such initiatives, bringing the marginalized into the development discourse is critical to fulfilling aspects of the SDGs. Creating policy or legislation which protects marginalized groups such as migrants, the poor and in many cases women, is an effective means of creating broad based support for national policy.

In 2016, Trinidad and Tobago introduced the National Tripartite Advisory Council (NTAC) aimed at fostering dialogue between the government, employers and worker organizations. (Trinidad and Tobago Voluntary National Report, 2020). During the period 2015-2020, the country undertook a series of initiatives focusing on decent work. These included a review of labour legislation; strengthening of the labour inspection function for effective enforcement of labour laws; development of policies on HIV/AIDS in the world of work; sexual harassment in the workplace; and raising public awareness of rights and responsibilities in the workplace.

Antigua's Medical Benefits Scheme supports women who stay home and perform domestic work and care for children, the elderly or the disabled without formal employment, as well as unemployed women by providing financial assistance and pharmaceutical supplies to its beneficiaries after 6 months contribution. This service provides refunds for procedures such as x-rays, laboratory tests, surgery, ultrasound and other similar procedures. (Antigua and Barbuda Voluntary National Report 2021).

In St Kitts and Nevis, The Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan (GEPAP) is a UNESCO backed programme that will provide an institutional framework to assist the Government in facilitating gender equality and empowerment through gender sensitive initiatives that incorporate a rights-based approach to human development.³³ (St Kitts Department of Gender Affairs). Regarding the COVID-19 impact on women and girls, initiatives such as this are pivotal to the development effort and achievement of the SDGs. While legislation and policies are necessary, monitoring and evaluation of such policies overtime is necessary to determine effectiveness and gaps in implementation that need to be tweaked over time.

3. Striving for Gender Equity and Youth Protection and Creating Social Protection Floors

Given the high level of youth unemployment and gender disparities, interconnected policies are necessary to address multiple challenges. St Kitts for example, offers protection for young boys and girls. The Boys Mentorship Programme, launched as a pilot at the Charles E. Mills Secondary School in July 2016, provides high risk adolescent males with viable alternatives to a life of anti-social behaviour that could easily and quickly deteriorate into a life of criminality. It provides life training as well as social and technical skills

³² The current composition of the Social Partnership is Government representatives (Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Attorney General, the Minister responsible for the Social Partnership, and other Ministers as needed, along with related public officers). From the private sector (BPSA and its subsidiary organisations – Barbados Agricultural Society, Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association, national bankers organisations, Barbados Manufacturers Association, Barbados International Business Association, Small Business Association, Barbados Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Barbados Employers' Confederation, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Barbados, Barbados Coalition of Service Industries, and workers' organisations, Barbados Workers Union, Congress of Trades Unions and Staff Association of Barbados and its member organisations, Barbados Secondary Teachers Union, National Union of Public Workers and representatives of the national credit union movement.

³³ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/65/MS%20Inputs%20Review%20Theme/St%20Kitts%20and%20Nevis.pdf>.

using a collaborative approach with parents, schoolteachers and guidance counsellors. (St Kitts Department of Gender Affairs).

Project Viola Teen Mothers Programme provides teen mothers with the opportunity to complete secondary education after disruption of their studies by unplanned pregnancy. It equips them with the necessary skills, including personal and career development skills, job attachment, skills training and a scholarship programme. Project Viola is recognised by UNICEF as a best practice model. (St Kitts Department of Gender Affairs). The policy satisfies the SDGs in the protection and empowerment of girls and women, gender equality and quality education. Teen pregnancy is identified as a social problem in the Caribbean, erecting barriers to young women's advancement. Ribas (2021) notes that adolescents 15-19 years old account for 16% of pregnancies in the Latin American and Caribbean region.³⁴

More broadly, mechanisms to protect the most vulnerable in the society is necessary to prevent them from falling through the “cracks”. To achieve goal number 10 —reducing inequalities within and among countries— a comprehensive, cost-effective social protection system is required. Often the breadth of existing social protection policy is either inadequate or unresponsive. It is even more urgent in the wake of the ravages of COVID-19 to the economy. There are however, countries with appropriate policies. Barbados, for example, provides free education and health care to all citizens and has a National Insurance Scheme for payment of unemployment benefits, sickness, maternity leave and other benefits. Those in the informal sector can enjoy many of the same benefits if they contribute to the scheme.

Another example is that of Trinidad and Tobago which has identified seven key action areas to which programmes and services could be targeted for achieving an effective social protection system. These cover Unemployment Relief/Basic Needs Provision (SDG8), Health and Wellness (SDG 3), Education, Skills Training and Re-tooling (SDG 4), Employment and Productivity, and Innovation and Enterprise Development (SDG 8), Safety and Security (SDG 16), Poverty Prevention through Financial Security Awareness (SDG 1), Community and Civil Society Action (SDG 17). As noted earlier however, monitoring and evaluation of these programmes is important to determine their effectiveness. Considering the fiscal challenges facing many Caribbean governments, social protection systems are generally not comprehensive although they are an important mechanism for resilience building in the face to future pandemics.

4. Engaging the Whole of Government, Whole of Society for the SDGs: Building Trust and communication for the SDGs

For a decade of action to be impactful, it is necessary to foster and achieve stakeholder buy-in to an ‘all of government’ and ‘all of society’ approach. This is done by reaching out to all stakeholders. These include building trust, communicating the SDGs to the public, creating a sense of inclusion by government and non-government stakeholders and addressing message delivery.

Trust must be built both at the level of the global community and in national life. It is at the heart of fostering the respect, inclusion and equity people crave worldwide. Policy makers, corporate and other national leaders must pursue leadership which builds confidence and trust, as part of the new imperative of institution building. To achieve the SDGs, the public must believe that the other stakeholders, particularly governments, truly have a vested interest in their wellbeing.

In addition to trust, the type and quality of government communication influences the nature of citizen response, including their response to accessing care and vaccines for COVID-19.³⁵ For building trust and confidence it is essential for governments to communicate openly and often, using both traditional and modern media and communications platforms. Many citizens today do not get their information from traditional news sources. Nor can governments rely solely on the historic tool—the press release. Social

³⁴ Carolyn Rodrigues Ribas National Library of Medicine <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8678105/>.

³⁵ <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.783374/full>; <https://research-repository.uwa.edu.au/en/publications/toward-effective-government-communication-strategies-in-the-era-o>; <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01900692.2021.1956950?journalCode=lpad20>; <https://www.northeastern.edu/rise/presentations/impact-of-government-communication-strategies-during-covid-19/>.

media particularly Facebook, Instagram and Twitter may be used to inform individuals of policy changes, new initiatives, events, programmes and strategies. Such communication provides linkages to SDG goals and most importantly, their relevance to the citizenry.

An effective communications strategy from government which captures both the attention and imagination of the public would of necessity, be creative messaging across multiple platforms, targeted at various demographics based upon analysis to determine “market”/public perception, thereby allowing appropriate and effective message tailoring.

5. Creating A Sense of Inclusion - Government and non-government Stakeholders

Resistance to government policies and programmes does not emerge solely from external stakeholders, but can exist within government itself. It is important to communicate among government agencies, ministries, parastatals and those implementing policy, engaging with and delivering to the public. They should be made to feel valued and appreciated. Moreover, the SDGs should be embraced through a whole of government approach. Governments need to establish mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, accountability and transparency. Local Government initiatives that include towns and cities are critical to SDG adoption and implementation. At the national level, Cabinet Oversight Committees or Roundtables charged with the responsibility of ensuring the SDGs are implemented would also be a useful tool.

6. Creating A Sense of Inclusion: Non-government Stakeholders and the Architecture of Delivery

Communication stressing the importance of achieving the SDGs must target all stakeholders, including government itself, the corporate sector, civil society groups, communities and citizens. All communication with stakeholders must be built on explaining what the SDGs are, what they are intended to achieve, the value proposition for stakeholders and how they will benefit, explaining what stakeholders need to do, what is expected of them, and seeking both feedback and input from the public. Townhall meetings, community conversations, national consultations and online surveys are all useful tools that can be employed to reach the wider public.

To foster inclusion and responsiveness in the Caribbean context, the society must be mobilised using community leaders, service clubs, social and religious groups, communities, youth and women, formal agencies such as Chambers of Commerce, Business Associations, Hotel and Tourism Organisations, Service and Social Organisations, Industry and Manufacturing Organisations. Women are an important stakeholder group as the main caregivers in families, the choosers and purchasers of the goods and services which families use and the persons who pass values and ideas on to the next generation. At the same time citizens must be empowered to make suggestions and see the changes arising from their interventions. In some cases, new avenues and channels of communication would need to be opened for effective and meaningful participation.

The existence of appropriate delivery architecture is pivotal to the Government’s success. At the multilateral level the UN has established the tool —the Voluntary National Review (VNR). This enables an annual review by countries and an accounting to the international community at the UN’s annual High Level Political Forum, of how far member-states have reached in their national implementation of the SDGs. “Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), are an important innovation as a United Nations process for follow up to the adoption of development agendas.”³⁶

It is considered that, “The **Voluntary National Reviews** (VNRs) aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.”³⁷ Some countries have also adopted domestic or local national reviews (LNR) to help track their SDG implementation and to ensure full engagement of government and

³⁶ <https://sdgtoolkit.org/tool/voluntary-national-review-reports-what-do-they-report/>.

³⁷ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>.

multistakeholder involvement in the SDG process. At the national level Ministerial Roundtables and Cabinet Committees with oversight responsibility for the SDGs have also been established.

This raises the question: what architecture governments should employ to determine and deliver on their performance of the SDGs. Some countries have found it useful to establish a sustainable development committees or commission.³⁸ Although these are not now as popular as they were when the UN's Commission on Sustainable Development existed, they can provide useful lessons for crafting present day tools and approaches. Some countries have located responsibility for the SDGs within the Office of the President or Prime Minister,³⁹ or the Ministry of Finance in order to ensure the provision of adequate resources for implementation and to convey to stakeholders the importance being attached to the achievement of the SDGs. There is no single formula or mechanism.⁴⁰ Each country must adopt the model best suited to its national circumstances.

7. South-South Cooperation for securing the SDGs

South-South Cooperation has become an important mechanism for cooperation in the pursuit of sustainability and the SDGs in the Caribbean. Many countries and regional groups in the global South grapple with the same or similar problems —unemployment, access to capital, a deep digital divide, debt, disease, climate change, environmental degradation, the need to improve education, health care and housing. Some have developed highly successful innovative tools at scale, for addressing the challenges of development and can offer effective, replicable, and scalable models to other developing countries. This subsection examines several ongoing initiatives and examples of South-South cooperation. These examples are of best practice, impactful initiatives and models that can be replicated.

8. Partnerships In Education for SDG support

The role of higher education in developing the domestic capital sector, through knowledge creation and dissemination is very important for resilience building. For this reason, partnership among local regional and international Universities is important. To give one example, The University of the West Indies, a public university partially funded by the governments of the Caribbean, has established an Office of Global Partnership and Sustainable Futures which aims to strengthen the university's standing and ability to meet the goals set by the 2030 Agenda. Global partnerships allow for widening the scope of opportunities available to both students and faculty.

UNILAG-UWI Institute of African and Diaspora Studies a collaboration of UWI Mona with the University of Lagos, Nigeria established in May 2017 offers a Master's degree in African and Global Studies. The Institute for Global African Affairs is another collaboration with an African university, in this case the University of Johannesburg and offers a Master's degree in Global African Studies. The Strategic Alliance for Hemispheric Development was formalised in April 2019 and sees The University of the West Indies working in conjunction with Universidad de Los Andes (UNIANDES) for the award of postgraduate degrees, certificates and other training programmes, and joint research in areas of mutual interest. Additionally, following some 30 years of collaboration The UWI and the University of Havana (UH) signed an agreement to establish a new and innovative, Joint Centre for the Sustainable Development of the Caribbean in December 2019 called UWI-University of Havana Centre for Sustainable Development.

In addition, the University Consortium of Small Island States (UCSIS) consisting of University of Malta; University of Mauritius; University of the South Pacific; University of the Virgin Islands; The University of the West Indies and partly sponsored by the government of Spain intends to enhance graduate level institutions of Small Island States by facilitating the development capacity required to implement the

³⁸ https://www.iisd.org/system/files/publications/sdplannet_lessons_from_the_past.pdf; <https://www.ncsds.org/index.php/homepage/background.html>.

³⁹ For example, Malaysia, Bahamas, Uganda, Finland.

⁴⁰ <https://www.local2030.org/library/126/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-are-coming-to-Life-Stories-of-country-implementation-and-UN-support.pdf>; <https://www.oecd.org/gov/SDGs-Summary-Report-WEB.pdf>.

Barbados Programme of Action. Several other local and regional Universities have established interrelationships that offer significant synergies in pursuit of the SDGs.

9. Cooperating Through Caribbean Regional Institutions and with Latin America and triangular cooperation

The importance and reliance attached to the Treaty of Chaguaramas establishing the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and the regional institutions it has established suggests confidence in South-South Cooperation. Demonstration of such confidence and cooperation may be seen in creation of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC); The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) in education; The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) in economic cooperation. Cooperation also obtains in public health with CARPHA, the Caribbean Public Health Agency headquartered in Trinidad and Tobago and in security by establishment of The Regional Security System (RSS), being just a few examples. Despite the limited economic integration and stagnant trade flows alluded to in chapter I, functional and other forms of cooperation remain strong in the subregion.

The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)⁴¹ is a multinational grouping of 33 member states. Its purpose is to “bring together all of Latin America and the Caribbean countries” in support of regional integration programs. It was created with a commitment to advance the gradual process of regional integration, unity and carefully balancing political, economic, social and cultural diversity of Latin America and the Caribbean.” The strong and emerging economies present in the grouping, such as Brazil,⁴² Argentina⁴³ and Mexico,⁴⁴ create great potential for trade, business and technical cooperation.

CELAC is also widening its sphere of influence and global relationships. In December 2021, CELAC hosted a virtual conference⁴⁵ with China to broaden the relationship between the grouping. The Conference agreed on cooperation in a broad number of areas—political, security, finance, agriculture and food, science and technology, industry and technology, energy and renewable resources, tourism, infrastructure, arts, sports and culture, higher education, sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Latin America and the Caribbean agreed a regional plan encompassing ten steps to aid the recovery of terrestrial, marine, and coastal ecosystems during the next decade on February 2, 2020. This became the Action Plan for the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.⁴⁶ The government of El Salvador initiated the cooperation initiatives, directed by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The Action Plan focuses on cooperative mechanisms and outlines ten actions that follow three paths.⁴⁷ By 2030, the Action Plan envisions considerable progress in creating policies, programs and projects to restore marine, terrestrial, and inland water ecosystems. (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021)

In addition, triangular cooperation continues to be important to the countries in the global South and in the Caribbean, for both governments and NGOs. Several examples are available. One such is the initiative is the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) partnership with the Munich Climate Insurance Initiative (MCII) which launched the Caribbean component of a project called, the “Multi Actor Partnership on Climate and Disaster Risk Financing and Preparedness in the context of the InsuResilience Global Partnership”⁴⁸(MAPs). “The hub was developed to provide Civil Society Organisations, Academia, Government and Private sector with online learning materials and resources pertaining to Climate Disaster

⁴¹ <https://celacinternational.org>.

⁴² US\$ 1.44 trillion 2020.

⁴³ US\$ 383 billion 2020.

⁴⁴ US\$1.07 trillion 2020.

⁴⁵ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/202112/t20211207_10463459.html.

⁴⁶ Ecosystem restoration includes: enhancing organic carbon in agricultural soils, increasing fish stocks in overfished zones remediating polluted sites, restoring ecological processes, restoring biodiverse.

⁴⁷ Regional movement; Political engagement; Technical capacity.

⁴⁸ <https://cpdcngo.org>.

Risk and Finance Insurance. Additionally, the hub also contains information on the project implementing partners and the Caribbean stakeholders who are signatories to the MAPs.”

These examples of cooperation across the pillars of sustainable development and in broad pursuit of the achievement of the sustainable development goals are typical of initiatives that can be replicated, scaled or advanced, to ensure the SDGs are met and the people of the region live with dignity.

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