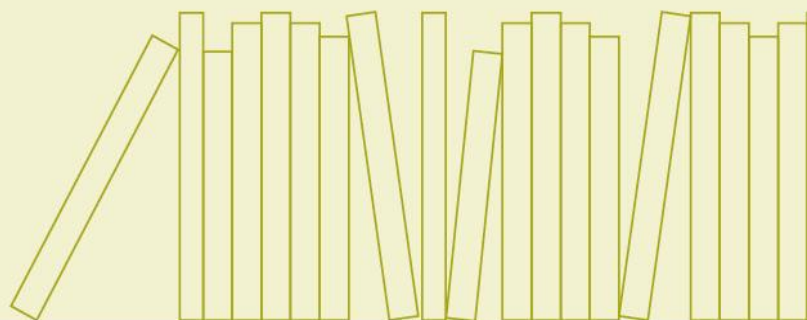


Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

ECLAC SUBREGIONAL HEADQUARTERS FOR THE CARIBBEAN



Report of the expert group meeting on challenges and opportunities in financing Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 9 in three Caribbean countries



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and sustainable future



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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean

Expert group meeting on challenges
and opportunities in financing
Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 9
in three Caribbean countries

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LC/CAR/2023/13
9 November 2023
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Virtual meeting, 22 March 2023

**REPORT OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING
ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN FINANCING
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 4 AND 9
IN THREE CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES**

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A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. Place and date of the meeting

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) subregional headquarters for the Caribbean convened an expert group meeting to discuss the findings of “A study on challenges and opportunities in financing Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 9 in three Caribbean countries”. The meeting was held virtually on 22 March 2023.

2. Attendance

2. Representatives from the following institutions participated in the expert group meeting: the Antigua and Barbuda Ministry of Education and Sports, the Antigua and Barbuda Public Utilities Authority, the Barbados Light and Power Company Limited, the Barbados Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training, the Barbados Statistical Service, the Barbados Water Authority (BWA), the Saint Lucia Electricity Services Limited and the Saint Lucia Water and Sewage Company Inc. (WASCO).

3. The meeting was chaired by the Coordinator of the Statistics and Social Development Unit of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean.

3. Agenda

1. Welcome remarks and introduction
Abdullahi Abdulkadri, Coordinator, Statistics and Social Development Unit, ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean
2. Overview and presentation of the study
Michael Hendrickson, Economic Affairs Officer, Economic Development Unit, ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean
3. Plenary discussion on presentation and study
Michael Hendrickson, Economic Affairs Officer, Economic Development Unit, ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean
4. Closure of the meeting
Abdullahi Abdulkadri, Coordinator, Statistics and Social Development Unit, ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean

B. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening of the meeting

4. The Coordinator of the Statistics and Social Development Unit of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean opened the meeting by welcoming the guests. He went on to highlight the importance of the paper and expressed the hope that the study was preliminary to a more extensive research agenda in the area being discussed.

2. Overview and presentation of the study

5. The Economic Affairs Officer then delivered a presentation on the study, which is an exploratory analysis of the challenges and opportunities Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados and Saint Lucia face in financing two of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 4 (quality education for all) and SDG 9 (resilient electricity and water infrastructure). As these three countries recover from the pandemic, they will need to bridge the financing gap to continue achieving these goals. These three Caribbean countries face myriad challenges in generating the financing needed to achieve the SDGs. The common challenges include high public debt and debt service which constrains fiscal budgets, slow economic growth and high unemployment.

6. With respect to education, the three countries are comparable to member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in several key indicators, including spending on education as a per cent of GDP. These indicators, however, do not translate to comparable education outcomes, as these Caribbean students often underperform in key subjects – especially mathematics, reading and science subjects. This underperformance is often correlated to income level as students' socioeconomic background impact their performance.

7. In the infrastructural sector countries have been seeking to expand access and improve reliability of the electricity and water utilities. The challenge now is to strengthen the resilience of these sectors to natural hazards, climate change and economic shocks. To this end, the three countries of focus have been making steps to shift to renewable energy sources and increase the efficiency of delivery.

8. The presentation concluded that Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados and Saint Lucia would require a major change in their financing to achieve quality education for all and resilient infrastructure systems. This change would require substantial mobilization of domestic resources alongside the raising of traditional and innovative international funding along with a substantial improvement in the efficiency with which resources are used.

9. The presentation then listed six main recommendations for increasing financing for quality education and resilient infrastructure: (i) in the short term, funding should be allocated to build out a robust hybrid education system; (ii) governments should allocate increased funding and other resources to early childhood education, which would serve to improve quality education overall; (iii) over the medium to longer-term governments should invest in revamping the education curriculum and teaching and learning approaches to transition to a more student-centred learning environment; (iv) for infrastructure resilience, legislation should be enacted to require credit ratings for infrastructure utilities to incentivize private financiers to invest in them; (v) focus on the continued development of the nascent regional capital and bond market, blended finance and public-private partnerships to leverage additional finance for the green energy transition and for resilience upgrades in electricity, water and other infrastructure; (vi) and the use of public expenditure reviews, incentives and assessments should be encouraged to promote greater efficiency of spending.

3. Discussion

10. During the discussion component of the expert group meeting, several critical issues regarding data, statistical education, and infrastructure resilience came to the forefront. One of the foremost concerns was the availability and quality of data necessary for assessing progress toward SDGs 4 and 9. Participants unanimously recognized that the lack of comprehensive and reliable data presents a significant challenge to informed policy and decision-making processes in the Caribbean region. This concern extended to the limitations and gaps within existing datasets, which raised doubts about the region's true status regarding these SDGs.

11. To address these data-related challenges, participants delved into discussions on improving data collection mechanisms and systems in Caribbean countries. Capacity building emerged as a key strategy to bolster these efforts, alongside the proposal of purposeful mechanisms to enhance data collection. Collaboration with international organizations and leveraging their technical expertise, such as Statistics Canada and the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom, were considered vital in this regard.

12. Sustainability concerns also emerged, particularly regarding projects aimed at enhancing statistical capacity. The need to sustain skills and capacity, particularly post-project completion was highlighted as an important issue to be addressed. Ensuring the routine sharing of data and statistical literacy were also identified as critical components of addressing these challenges. There was a shared recognition that statistical literacy, or the understanding of data value, needed to be promoted in the Caribbean region, with an emphasis on educational efforts.

13. Furthermore, the importance of utilizing available data more effectively was raised. It was suggested that the creation of more practical use cases for data held by national statistical offices (NSOs) should be encouraged. The importance of NSOs improving their websites and making data more accessible online was also highlighted. The overall consensus was that enhancing data collection, utilization, and statistical literacy were crucial steps towards achieving the SDGs in the Caribbean region, particularly, SDGs 4 and 9. The discussion also acknowledged the exploratory nature of the analysis and the need for a preliminary phase to gather insights given the existing data limitations.

14. Additionally, a representative from the Water and Sewage Company Inc. (WASCO) in Saint Lucia shared their infrastructure challenges, emphasizing the pressing concern of aging infrastructure relating to water and sanitation systems that had not kept pace with the country's development, creating difficulties in maintaining their functionality. Problems in water infrastructure, such as leaks and a lack of recent studies on non-revenue water percentage, were highlighted. The need for ongoing maintenance and upgrades to address these challenges was stressed. Although efforts had been made, such as dredging to remove silt and enhance water body capacity, the effectiveness of these measures remained uncertain, particularly in anticipation of the upcoming rainy and hurricane seasons.

15. A major challenge in conducting a more comprehensive study was the difficulties in gathering information and responses from some regional utilities agencies, particularly in the power sector. Notwithstanding these challenges, the importance of promptly collecting feedback and comments after the expert group meeting was underscored, as this input would be critical in informing future research, actions and resilience measures. Some participants such as the Barbados Water Authority (BWA) promised to share comments after the meeting.

4. Closing remarks

16. The Coordinator of the Statistics and Social Development Unit of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean ended the meeting by commending the presenter on an informative presentation. Before concluding, he thanked participants for their interventions and encouraged sharing of comments via email. He assured them that their concerns and advice would be incorporated into the final study.

Annex I**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

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