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Planning for resilience: an integrated approach to tackle climate change in the Caribbean

Introduction

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

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

Key recommendations to promote integrated approaches for resilience building:

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

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

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

Background

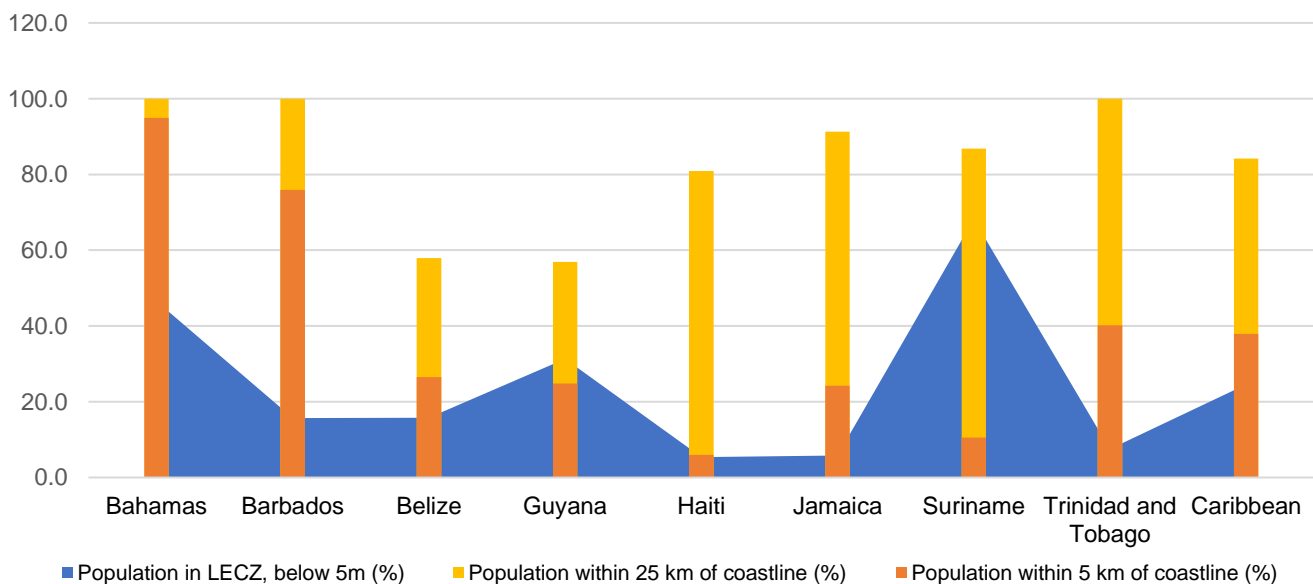
Due to their small land size, the majority of Caribbean countries’ population, infrastructure, and activities, are situated within 25 km of coastline and in several countries over 20 per cent of the population lives in low elevation coastal zones (LECZ), as represented in figure 1. Both factors – coastal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

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ provides a unique opportunity to address the

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

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

Figure 1: Caribbean coastal vulnerability



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

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

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

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

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

Threats and Opportunities

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

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

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

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

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

ownership of the global Agenda and have identified priority goals and indicators for measuring progress in achieving the SDGs. Several countries benefitted from mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support (MAPS) missions to help advance national level SDGs implementation². Previous experience of mainstreaming other cross-sectoral issues such as gender, youth and environmental concerns, together with sustainable development planning practice, knowledge and access to data on climate change, present an opportunity for Caribbean countries to extract lessons and to integrate country resilience building experiences into development planning.

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

At the global level, climate programmes are promoting the strategic integration of climate resilience into development planning through mechanisms for climate financing³ clearly establishing the link between evidence-based planning and implementation. This approach has emphasized strategic coherence among development policy objectives in order to activate funding by a variety of financial instruments, thereby effectively mainstreaming climate resilience into short-, medium- and long-term budgetary instruments (Pervin et al, 2013).

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

capacity-building, financial and technical assistance and technology transfer, in accordance with international commitments⁴. Existing mechanisms such as the CDCC-RCM may require strengthening in order to provide effective support and achieve better implementation (ECLAC, 2019b).

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

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

While integrated planning and policy coherence are relatively new concepts, Caribbean countries have made significant strides in establishing interministerial working groups and coordination mechanisms, mandated to pull all actors together, and are addressing budgeting for cross-disciplinary action, skills and incentives for collaboration, and specific legislative frameworks for sustainable development⁵.

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

³ For example, mechanisms under the UNFCCC Adaptation Fund.

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

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

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

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

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

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

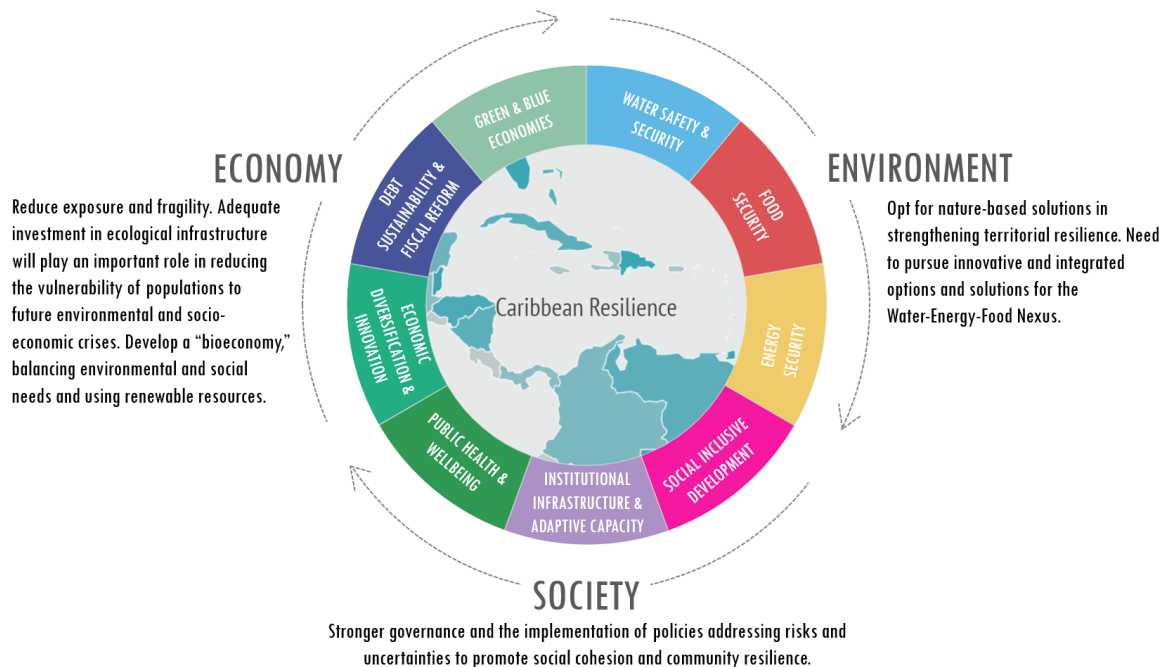
Policy Recommendations

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

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

Figure 2: An integrated approach to Caribbean resilience planning

INTEGRATED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLANNING TO ADDRESS EXPOSURE AND VULNERABILITY



Source: Authors' compilation.

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

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

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

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

It is important to promote appraisal approaches – including reliable and complete *community-based vulnerability and capacity assessments (CBVAs) pre and post disaster*, with particular focus on economic sectors such as tourism, fisheries, and agriculture – as a basis to identify priority areas of action to support each gender, enhance access to benefits and address the needs of specific groups such as indigenous communities, at risk youth, or persons with disability. CBVAs and disaster assessment tools must be mainstreamed into land-use policy

development and implementation, urban planning, informal and non-permanent housing programming, with guidelines and follow-up tools informed by anticipated demographic and environmental changes, including foreseen migration and displacement patterns⁶.

Continuous effort is required to strengthen data collection systems and capacities, in both the public and private sectors, to reflect multidimensional vulnerabilities in measurements of growth, poverty and natural resources. Efforts must be made to improve data availability and sharing arrangements. This will include increasing the collaboration between the National Statistics Offices and other government bodies to ensure that data collection systems are better coordinated, transparent, and feed more directly into the policy process⁷.

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

Promoting bottom-up collaborative approaches to resilience building: New democratic participatory planning methodologies entail creating the conditions for inclusive policy design, implementation and follow-up, by ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, youth with diverse backgrounds, and particularly vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities or persons with disabilities, in disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation at all levels. Planning must be community-driven and an

⁶ In this regard see ECLAC, 2019c, chapter IV on environmental-related migration in the Caribbean subregion.

⁷ This may include strengthening legislative frameworks and enabling electronic data provision and dissemination, as well as information-

sharing agreements, and microdata access. For further information see ECLAC, 2019d.

important first step is to develop CBVAs⁸. This will institutionalize local knowledge and capacity in resilience building from the early stages of the planning process, triggering the establishment of *community-based disaster risk management systems*.

Mainstreaming gender and youth: Several Caribbean countries are pioneering new methodologies for gender and youth mainstreaming. A new generation of policy frameworks is moving towards more action-oriented disaster and climate policy, ensuring the equal and meaningful participation of women and men, boys and girls, and their active involvement as agents of change. High-level political commitment and championship coupled with a well-articulated coordination system for gender and youth mainstreaming, the required capacity building for youth development and the institutionalization of youth work, are key building blocks for *youth and gender perspectives* to be brought into resilience planning.

Concrete measures in support to youth social entrepreneurship may offer an additional gateway for youth-led innovation and government should emphasize the investment in areas that are crucial for resilience such as youth engagement in the blue economies.

Improving knowledge management, communication and outreach: Stakeholder mobilization requires coordination mechanisms that are not always in place and may need to be enhanced. While better data management is essential to support policymaking, mechanisms are also needed to ensure all stakeholders remain involved in the process, especially the most vulnerable and hard to reach. *Managing effective communication, knowledge exchange, and providing access to information* is therefore an important pillar of mainstreaming climate resilience into development planning. This entails improving the communication between researchers, policymakers and stakeholders and increasing stakeholder awareness of the benefits and

opportunities of integrated planning and collaborative approaches. Involving the civil society may require capacity building for effective communication in planning and implementation processes, in particular for marginalized groups. It should also require awareness raising campaigns in order to sensitize the communities.

Reinforcing capacity building for resilience: Multi-stakeholder collaboration requires raising the capacity of different partners, at national and subnational levels, towards a common understanding of the concepts of resilience and integrated planning in the context of sustainable development, including for more effective coordination, analysis, funding, implementation, and M&E of multi-sector policies. Other critical capacity building areas are public finance and administration, social and gender responsive budgeting, mortgage finance, financial regulation and supervision, agriculture productivity, fisheries, debt management, climate services, including planning and management for both adaptation and mitigation, and water and sanitation-related activities and programmes (AAAA, 2015).

Notwithstanding pre-identified critical capacity building areas, *capacity needs assessments* must be conducted at national and subnational level, to determine the needs of the communities pre and post disaster, and the conditions of different stakeholders – including the private sector – in order to target national level resilience building priorities.

Developing sustainable financing mechanisms: Sustainable financing mechanisms are vital to redirect investment towards resilience within national development priorities. ECLAC's debt-for-climate adaptation swap is an overarching mechanism to address the issue of high debt while also focusing on areas that will enhance resilience. Such efforts should be directed within a broad ecosystem-based approach, providing adequate investment in ecological infrastructure, which will in

⁸ See, for example, those conducted through the Community Disaster Risk Reduction Fund (CDRRF) [<https://www.caribank.org/our-work/programmes/community-disaster-risk-reduction-fund>].

its turn play an important role in reducing the vulnerability of communities to environmental and socioeconomic shocks (ECLAC, 2019).

Public expenditure reviews⁹ are another useful tool to prioritize expenditure and improve public financial management. Further measures include the design and implementation of policies for financial protection to mitigate the risk of disasters; annual estimates of resources needed to cover the response, rehabilitation and reconstruction processes; budgetary allocations for DRM activities; and the establishment of a structure for the retention and transfer of disaster risk in the country¹⁰. Moreover, fiscal reforms - addressing poorly designed tax systems, tax evasion and tax avoidance - could and should be a mechanism to tackle poverty and inequality through adequate public social spending. In fact, investing in social protection systems¹¹ should play a central role in long-term community resilience, alongside economic and environmental policies.

A comprehensive and strategic financing approach is critical to aligning strategies for public and private investment through *Integrated National Financing Frameworks* (INFFs)¹².

Exploring international cooperation: It is recommended to explore options for bilateral and regional cooperation, including technical assistance and exchange of information in specialized fora.

In alignment with the 2030 Agenda, the AAAA and the Secretary-General's Strategy and Roadmap for Financing the 2030 Agenda, the UN system is supporting enabling conditions and building capacities for addressing policy-implementation gaps. This includes increased support for sustainable financing modalities, establishing stronger foundations for long-term commitment to the SDGs and goals of the Paris Agreement, both public and private. The UN system collaborates with

international financial institutions, development finance institutions and other financing institutions in the subregion and at country level, to accelerate actions towards financing resilience and sustainable development in the Caribbean.

Conclusion

With one of the highest incidences of disaster in the world, the Caribbean subregion must reinforce coherent and integrated resilience policies capable of addressing the multiple vulnerabilities faced by its communities. Concrete measures to promote resilience include mainstreaming DRR into each stage of the planning process, making use of existing knowledge and local capacity, while investing in vital sectors, notably reinforcing the Water-Energy-Food nexus.

Stronger governance is required in the implementation of integrated measures, addressing Caribbean multidimensional vulnerabilities in different sectors:

1. The gradual and progressive realisation of universal social protection policies, mindful of risks and uncertainties hindering social cohesion and community resilience.
2. The economic sector, which remains pivotal for Caribbean countries ability to face climate change and reduce exposure and fragility.
3. Adequate investment in ecological infrastructure, opting for nature-based solutions strengthening territorial resilience, which will play an important role in reducing the vulnerability of populations to future environmental and socio-economic crises.

As such, the shift to a “bioeconomy”, investing in blue growth, adjusting to a more sustainable and efficient use of natural resources, balancing

⁹ PERs analyse the quality and quantity of a country's public expenditure and assess how that expenditure relates to resilience efforts. Several Caribbean countries have conducted such reviews, with the technical assistance of ECLAC (ECLAC, 2019b).

¹⁰ On this matter, see ECLAC, 2019.

¹¹ Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, 2019.

¹² UNSG's Roadmap for Financing the 2030 Agenda, 2019.

environmental and social needs, is paramount for resilience building in the Caribbean.

A new generation of Caribbean resilience planning policies will require strong institutional capacities, adjusted with effective communication and knowledge management platforms to manage information and coordination efforts. Therefore, integrated development planning methodologies

must ensure availability and access to information and data for better decision-making, attracting the innovation and creative collaboration of all sectors of government and society, and enhancing innovation between technological and indigenous knowledge. Finally, it will be vital to attract investment and benefit from international exchange and best practice in climate resilient development suitable and adaptable for Caribbean SIDS.

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