



INVESTIGATING THE IMPACTS OF SOVEREIGN DEBT AND CLIMATE-RELATED EVENTS ON VULNERABLE GROUPS IN THE CARIBBEAN



SUMMARY REPORT

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ACRONYMS

CPDC	Caribbean Policy Development Centre
CPI	Consumer Price Index
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NODS	National Office of Disaster Services
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODM	Office of Disaster Management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
USD	United States Dollar

BACKGROUND

SOVEREIGN DEBT AND CLIMATE-RELATED EVENTS



Caribbean islands are confronted with elevated levels of public debt, much of which were either directly or indirectly induced by the onset of natural hazard events during the last decade. Oxfam International (2023) defines climate related events as climate hazards that are natural disaster events in the weather cycle. The most common natural disaster events are hurricanes, droughts, wildfires, flooding and high winds. Changes in the global climate exacerbate climate hazards and amplify the risk of extreme weather disasters. Due to the increased frequency and intensity of climate-related hazards and the additional cost of adaptation, this debt overhang has resulted in increased resources needed to service debt. The immediate effect of elevated debt levels and the attendant increase in debt service costs is the crowding out of investments in critical social programmes and infrastructure needed to support vulnerable and marginalised groups.

The impact of natural disasters represents a key link between environmental and public debt vulnerabilities in the Caribbean. The extreme weather events of 2017 caused US\$320 billion in losses around the world (Munevar 2018). Dominica experienced damage and losses valued at US\$1.1 billion, equivalent to 250% of GDP, after being hit by Hurricane Maria in September 2017. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 92% of the population of Dominica was left in need as the hurricane destroyed 15% of the houses and heavily damaged an additional 65% of the housing stock of the country. Hurricane Irma had a devastating impact on the island of Barbuda. It is estimated that 95% of all properties (public and private) in the island were destroyed, causing damage and losses for a total of US\$155 million (11% of GDP). According to the Inter-American Development Bank (2019), damages and other impacts on the Bahamas by Hurricane Dorian were estimated at US\$3.4 billion. Losses for the social sector were estimated at B\$93.2 million: B\$65 million in housing, B\$21.4 million in health and B\$6.7 million in education.

Climate related events also compound the existing challenges experienced in the health sector. Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are linked to more than 70% of deaths in the region, which mirrors the current global average. Consequently, those who live in poverty, are disproportionately affected by NCDs as they usually possess limited capacity to avoid the impacts of climate-related hazards such as hurricanes, storms, and floods, which further compounds their vulnerability and weakens household and personal coping strategies.

Additionally, the shocks and crises caused by climate extremes such as drought, floods and hurricanes destroy crops, livestock and fish resources, as well as agriculture, livestock and fishing/aquaculture infrastructure and productive assets such as irrigation systems, livestock shelters, docks, and landing and post-harvest facilities. This reduces overall food production capacity, increases food prices, shrinks economic opportunities and livelihoods, particularly in rural areas, and decreases investments in the sector.

International Agreements on Climate Change Supporting Vulnerable Populations

There are several key international and regional frameworks that address the disastrous effects from climate related events on vulnerable groups such as women, children, persons with disabilities and farmers, as well as workers in the agro-processing sector.



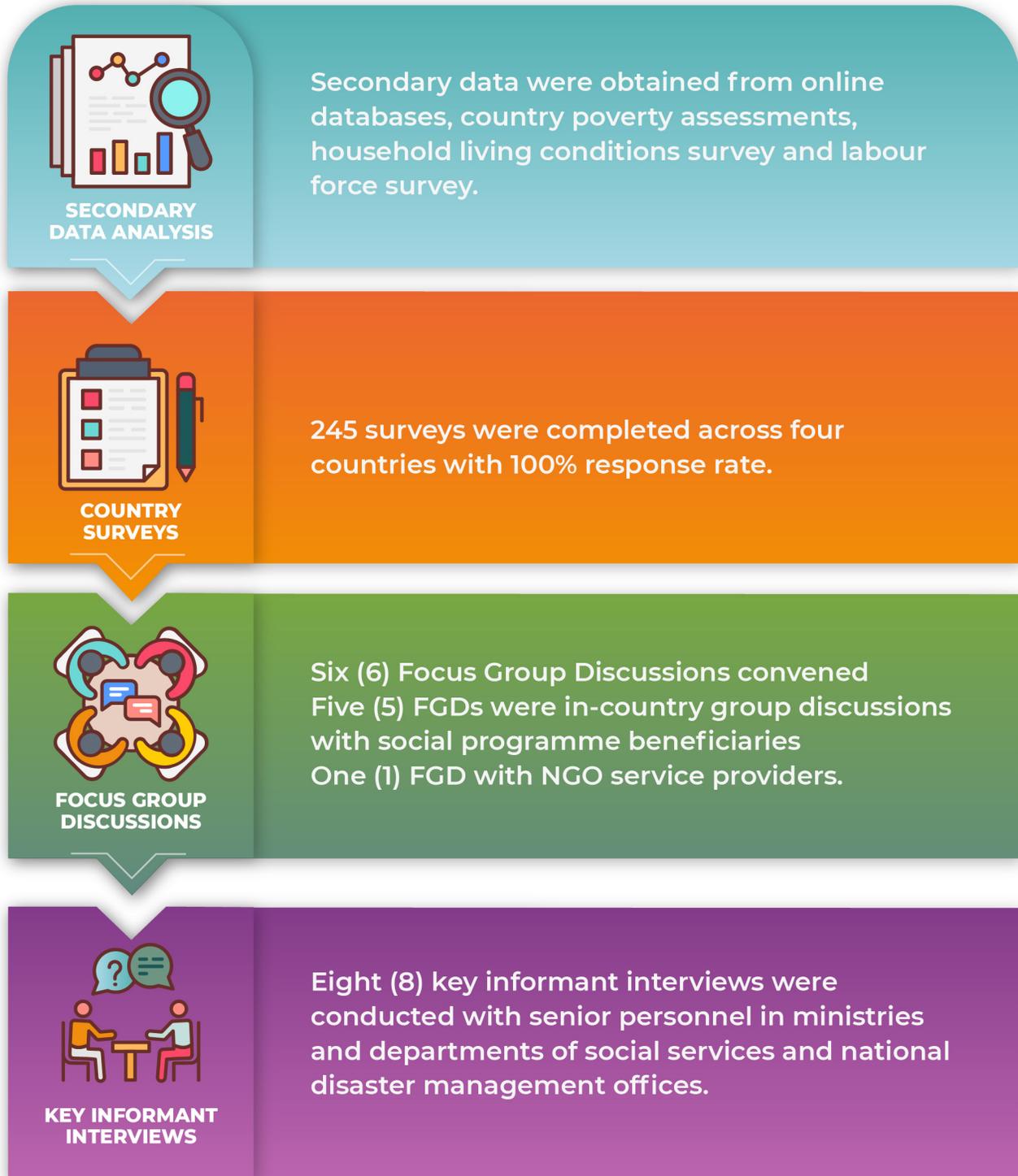
Scope of the Study

The Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC), through its programmes and advocacy campaigns, is aiming to build a case for Caribbean debt relief and restructuring based on the region's inherent climate and economic vulnerabilities. An investigation into the impacts of sovereign debt and climate-related events on vulnerable groups in the Caribbean was conducted in four CARICOM countries, namely Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Dominica and Jamaica.

Scope of the Summary Report

This report succinctly presents information and charts intended to help Caribbean NGO leaders, donors, policymakers, and beneficiaries understand the impact of sovereign debt and climate related events on vulnerable groups in the Caribbean.

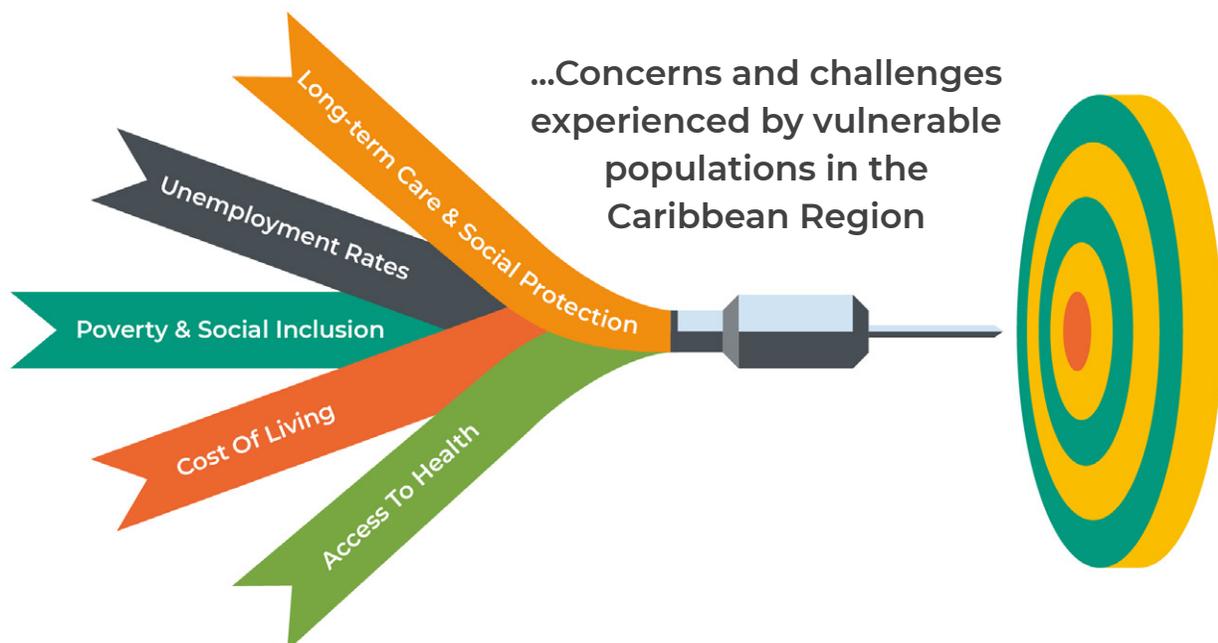
Figure 1: Research Methodology



Research Objectives

The Summary Report highlights the main findings of the study, *Investigating the Impacts of Sovereign Debt and Climate-Related Events on Vulnerable Groups in the Caribbean* and is aligned to the following objectives:

- a. Contextualise the current development concerns and challenges experienced by vulnerable populations in the Caribbean Region using, but not limited to, the following indicators: i) poverty and social inclusion; ii) unemployment rates; iii) cost of living; and iv) access to health, long-term care and social protection.
- b. Identify the vulnerabilities of marginalised social groups in Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Dominica and Jamaica, and examine the impacts of national debt and climate-related events on their livelihoods and standard of living for the period 2010-2020. These include the following:
 - Analyse the effects of sovereign debt on the provision of social programmes and social safety nets for vulnerable groups, highlighting the implications on their lives.
 - Identify the main social and economic impacts that natural disasters have had on the livelihoods of vulnerable populations.
 - Identify the primary social service and other developmental needs of vulnerable groups as it relates to mitigating and responding to the effects of natural disasters.
- c. Analyse the key development challenges raised by vulnerable groups and develop policy responses for sovereign governments and civil society organisations to mitigate and remedy the aforementioned issues.



FINDINGS

SUMMARY OF COUNTRY MACRO-ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDICATORS



During the period 2010-2020, poverty and unemployment rates fluctuated. Country Poverty Assessments¹, Household Living Conditions Survey and Labour Force Surveys reveal the following:

¹ Jamaica is the only country among the four with a Household Living Conditions Survey conducted at regular intervals. All others rely on Country Poverty Assessments for poverty data, which date back as far as 2005.

Poverty

● **Women account for the greater portion of the poor:** 51.8% in The Bahamas, 52.8% in Antigua and Barbuda, 28.9% in Dominica, and 10.4% in Jamaica. **The Kalinago population is one of the most vulnerable groups, with a poverty rate of 49.8%.**

● Poverty rates are likely to have increased. This increase would have resulted from external shocks, namely the **global financial recession in 2008** and the passage of **catastrophic hurricanes, flooding and drought**, as well as the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

Total Unemployment Rates

Except for Dominica, national unemployment rates in Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas and Jamaica have been **less than 10%**. However, there is a perennial challenge with youth unemployment rates, which are on average three times higher than national unemployment rates. Modernization of the economy, supported by revisions in national education policies and apprenticeship programmes, may address this challenge in the medium to long term.



Antigua & Barbuda (national unemployment rate **8.7%**;
youth unemployment rate **25.7%**)²



Bahamas (national unemployment rate **9.5%**;
youth unemployment rate **20.0%**)³



Dominica (national unemployment rate **11.1%**;
youth unemployment rate **27.0%**)⁴



Jamaica (national unemployment rate **6.6%**;
youth unemployment rate **16.7%**)⁵

2 2015 Labour Force Survey

3 Labour Force and Household Income Survey 2019

4 National Census 2011

5 Labour Force Survey 2022

Inflation

- **Inflation in Antigua and Barbuda (see Figure 2)** averaged a rate of 1.78% over the review period (2010-2020). There were marked increases in prices, resulting in average inflation rates of about 3.4% during the period 2010-2012, owing to increases in international oil and food prices. The inflation rate was 7.5% in 2022, driven by increases in the prices of transportation (23.5%), clothing and footwear (13%), food and beverages (11.6%), and household furnishings and supplies (11.5%).

- **The Bahamas** has experienced relatively low inflation, averaging a rate of 1.4% over the review period (2010-2020). While inflation remained at about 0% in 2020, prices spiked thereafter, raising inflation to 6.7% in 2022. The increase in prices was driven by supply shortages and increases in transportation costs caused by the pandemic.

- **In Dominica** the inflation rate, as measured by the changes in the CPI, has been relatively low, averaging 0.69% over the review period (2010-2020). Prices have since spiked to 7.9% at the end of 2022, with supply shortages and increases in transportation costs in the wake of the pandemic (see Figure 3).

- **The inflation rate in Jamaica** has been relatively high, averaging 6.3% during the period 2010-2019. Inflation was higher during the period 2010-2014, averaging 8.9% compared to an average of 3.6% for the period 2015-2019. Inflation was at its highest in 2010, at 12.6%. Since then, inflation has been trending downwards, reaching the lowest rate of 2.3% in 2016. Notwithstanding, the inflation rate as of 2019 was 3.9% (see Figure 4). The inflation rate is projected to rise in the near-term due to the global spike in prices after the pandemic.

Fig. 2: Inflation in Antigua and Barbuda

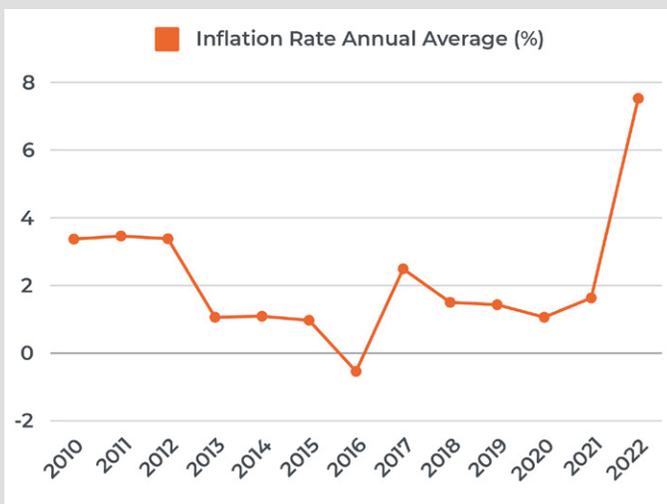


Fig. 3: Inflation in The Bahamas

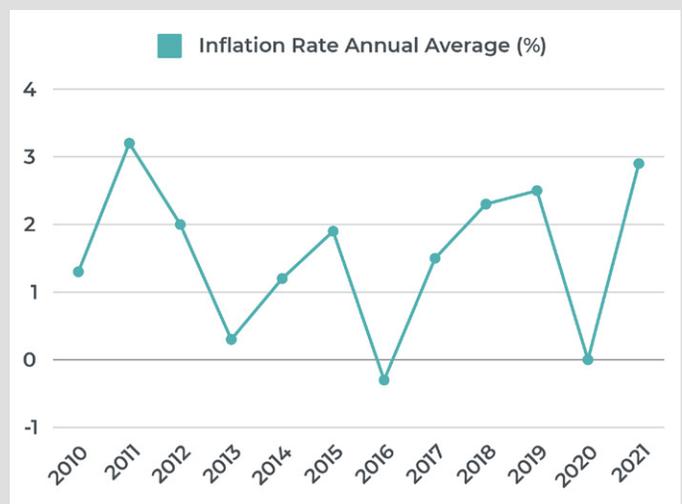


Fig. 4: Inflation in Dominica

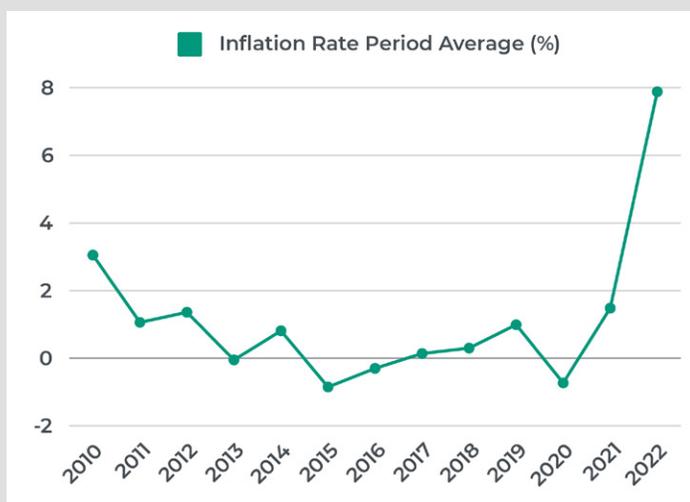
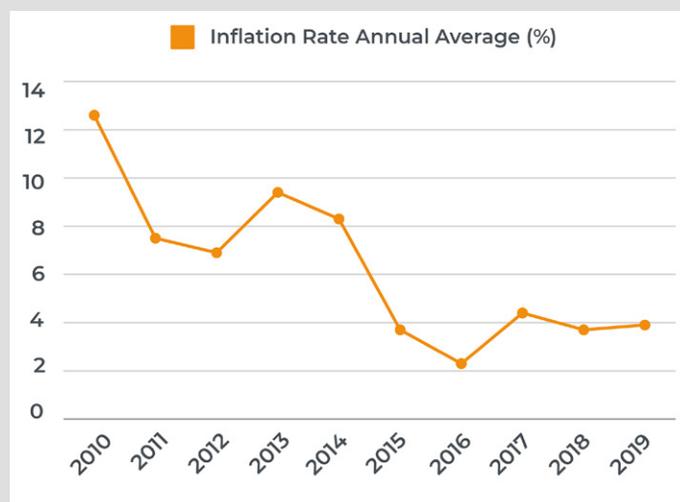


Fig. 5: Inflation in Jamaica



Public Debt

- **Public debt in Antigua and Barbuda** rose from EC\$2,613 million, the equivalent of 84.3% of GDP in 2010, to EC\$3,657 million or 98.9% of GDP in 2020. The high level of public debt in Antigua and Barbuda reflects cumulative borrowing and accumulation of arrears over time to meet the financing requirement of sustained overall fiscal deficits.
- **The Bahamas' public debt** has been trending upward from B\$3,401 million, the equivalent of 33.9% of GDP in 2010, to B\$8,484 million or 75.1% of GDP in 2020. Like the case of Antigua and Barbuda, total expenditure has been consistently higher than total revenue, leading to persistent fiscal deficits and resultant increases in public debt. Over the review period, total revenue and total expenditure averaged 15.2% and 18.8%, respectively.
- **Public debt in Dominica** rose from EC\$921 million or 69% of GDP in 2010 to EC\$1,485 million or 109.10% of GDP in 2020. During the period 2010-2014 the country ran average fiscal deficits of about 4.3%, however, revenue rose from 27.2% of GDP in 2014 to 43.8% in 2015, reflecting large inflow of funds from the revamped Citizenship by Investment Programme. The passage of Hurricane Maria in September 2017 brought a halt to this positive outturn as the sharp contraction in economic activity led to reductions in revenue and increases in reconstruction and rehabilitation expenditure in 2017 and 2018.
- **Nominal public debt in Jamaica** rose from JM\$1,657 billion in 2010 to JM\$2,137.6 billion in 2020, however, the public debt to GDP ratio improved from 141.4% in 2010 to 108.1% of GDP in 2020, attributable to sustained growth in GDP during the period 2013-2019. Measures were undertaken to narrow the fiscal and financing gap and achieve growth in GDP during the period 2013-2019, despite the effects of the

2014 drought, Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and Tropical Storm Arlene in 2017. As at 2019, there was a surplus of 0.9% on the fiscal accounts and the debt/GDP ratio fell to 94.3% of GDP. However, these gains were eroded due to the pandemic as the fiscal deficit grew to 3.1% of GDP and the debt/GDP climbed to 108.1% of GDP.

The four countries are highly vulnerable to external economic shocks and the increasing rate of climate related hazards. These climate related hazards cause major infrastructural damage, disruptions in economic activity and increase the spending requirements for recovery and rehabilitation and counter-cyclical policies. All vulnerable groups were negatively impacted by interest expenditure, with the social protection expenditures for the elderly being the most impacted.

Fig. 6: Public Debt Antigua and Barbuda Fig. 7: Public Debt in The Bahamas

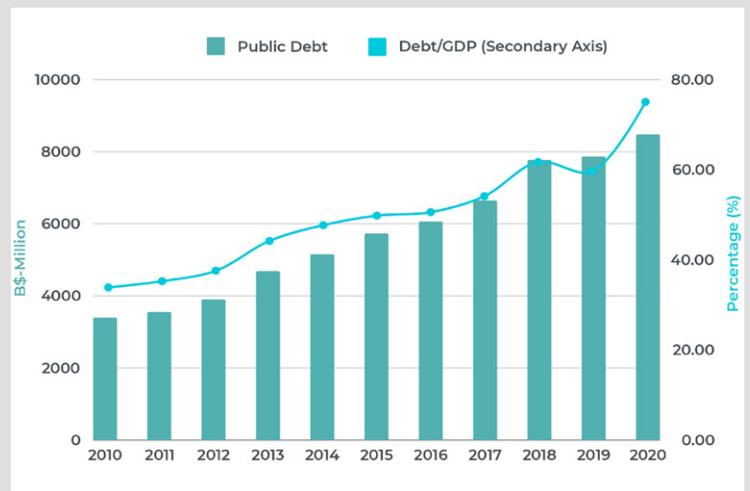
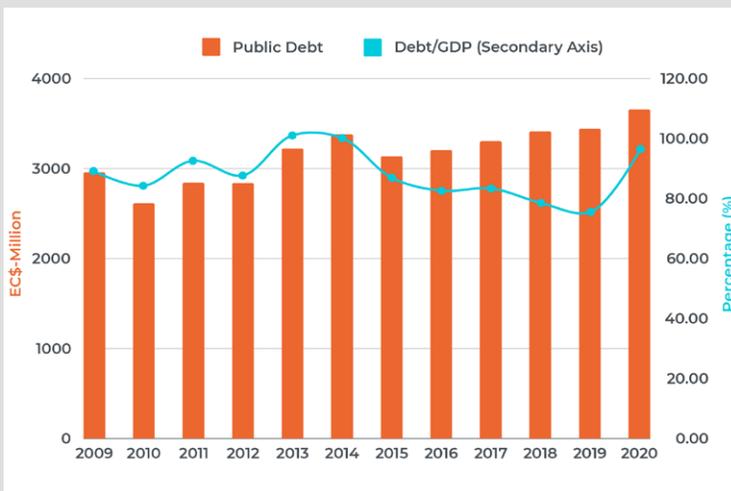


Fig. 8: Public Debt in Dominica

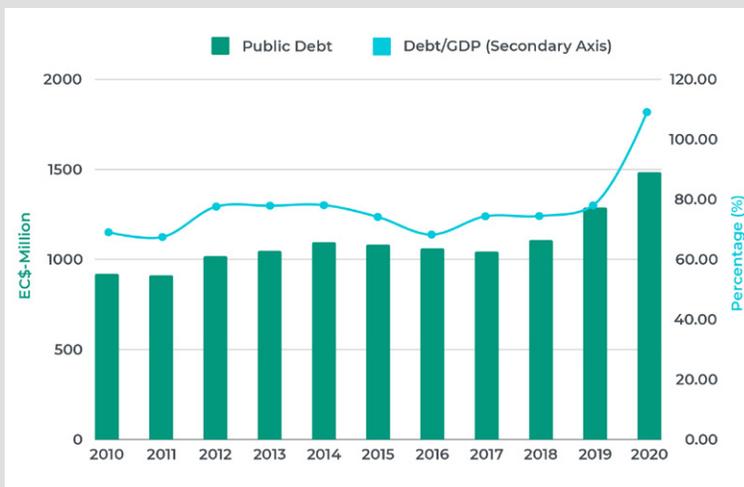
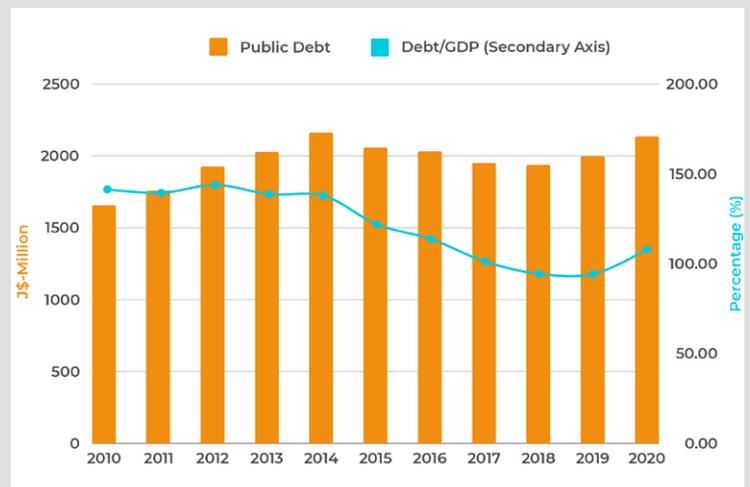


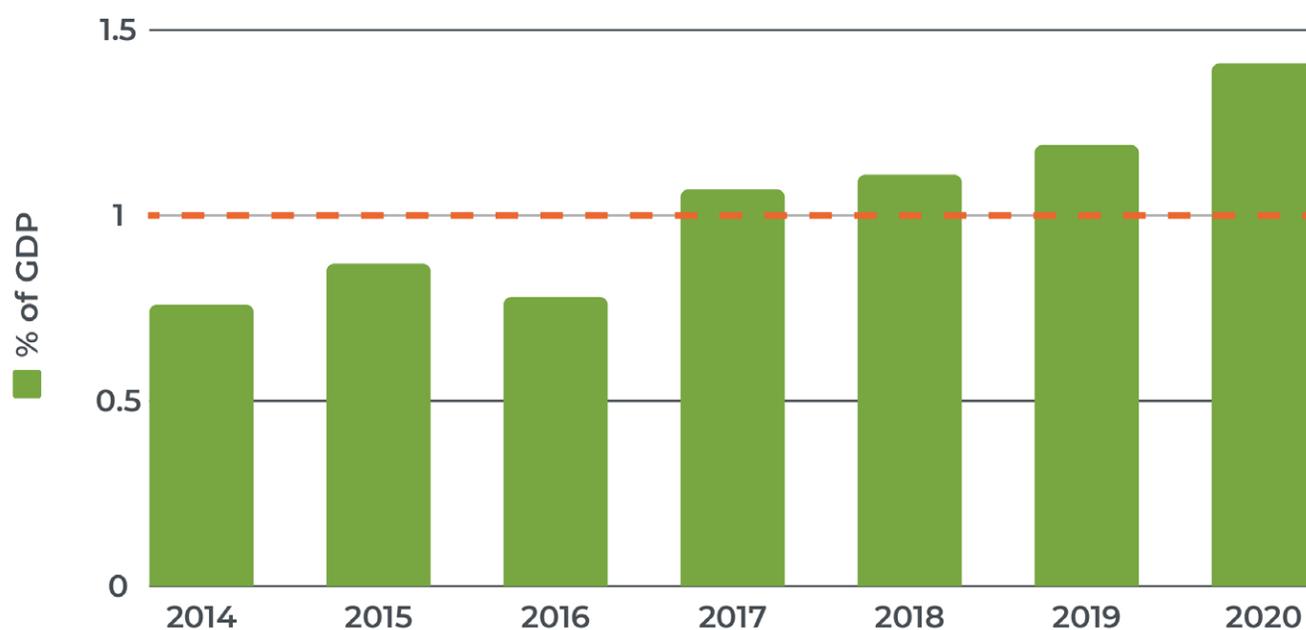
Fig. 9: Public Debt in Jamaica



Social Protection Programmes and Budgetary Allocation

- Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Dominica and Jamaica have a total of 135 social protection programmes.** Forty-eight percent (48%) or 65 programmes are social assistance in nature, reflecting governments' thrust to alleviating the socio-economic plight of the poor and vulnerable. Social care services for children in need of care and protection, the elderly and women and girls account for 26% of total social protection programmes, followed by labour market programmes, which stood at 22% or 29 programmes, and 4% relate to social insurance.
- Budgetary allocation towards social protection is generally low.** Between 2014-2020 the average budget allocations to social protection across Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Dominica and Jamaica was 1% of Gross Domestic Product. The governments' allocation increased from 0.76% in 2014 to 1.41% in 2020. It must be noted that 2020 registered the largest increase in social protection expenditure, rising by 0.22 percentage points on account of increased social protection outlay to respond to the social, public health and economic consequences of COVID-19 pandemic.

Fig. 10: Social protection expenditure as % of GDP



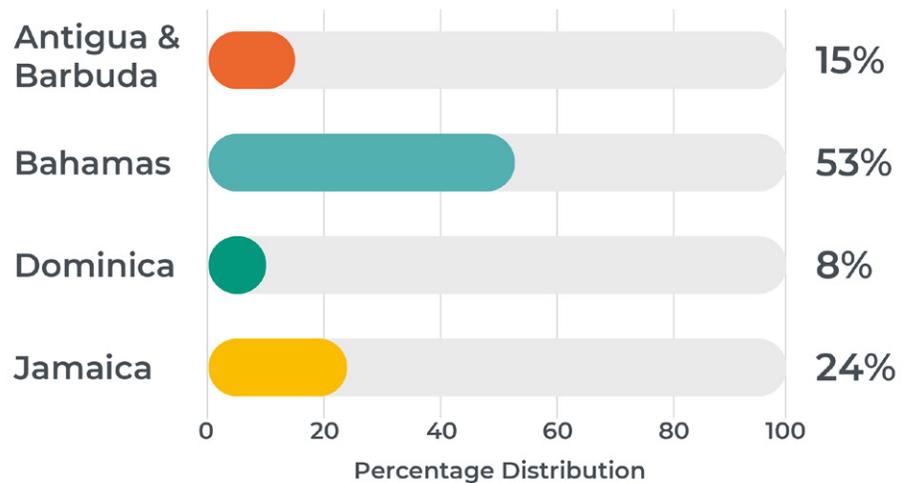
The average social assistance budget allocation for all four countries declined from 51% in 2015 to 39% in 2020. The average social care budget allocation was reduced from 24% to 21% and labour market allocations increased from 25% to 40%. Reduced allocations towards social assistance programmes have adverse implications for the changing population dynamics in the region, evidenced by an increase in life expectancy as well as the increase in female participation in the labour force.

Government Public Assistance Programmes and NGO Services: Profile of Beneficiaries (Selected Variables)

RESPONSE BY COUNTRY

There were 245 survey respondents across the four study countries. **Figure 11** provides the percentage distribution for each country:

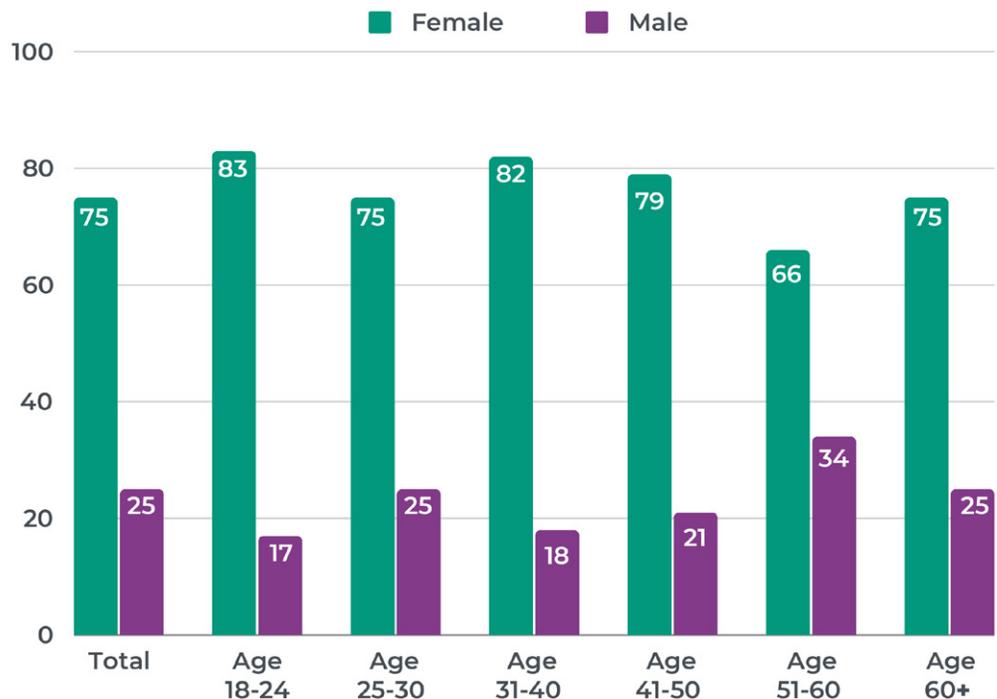
Fig. 11:
Percentage distribution of survey respondents



AGE-SEX DISTRIBUTION

The overwhelming majority of respondents across all age-groups were female. The age cohort with the highest proportion of females was 18-24 years (83%) (**Figure 12**).

Fig. 12:
Age/Sex distribution (n=245)



EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Figure 13 indicates that 48% of all survey respondents were unemployed, while 28% were employed (paid) and 17% were self-employed. Gender comparisons show that males were more likely than females to be unemployed (57% versus 45%) or self-employed (20% versus 16%).

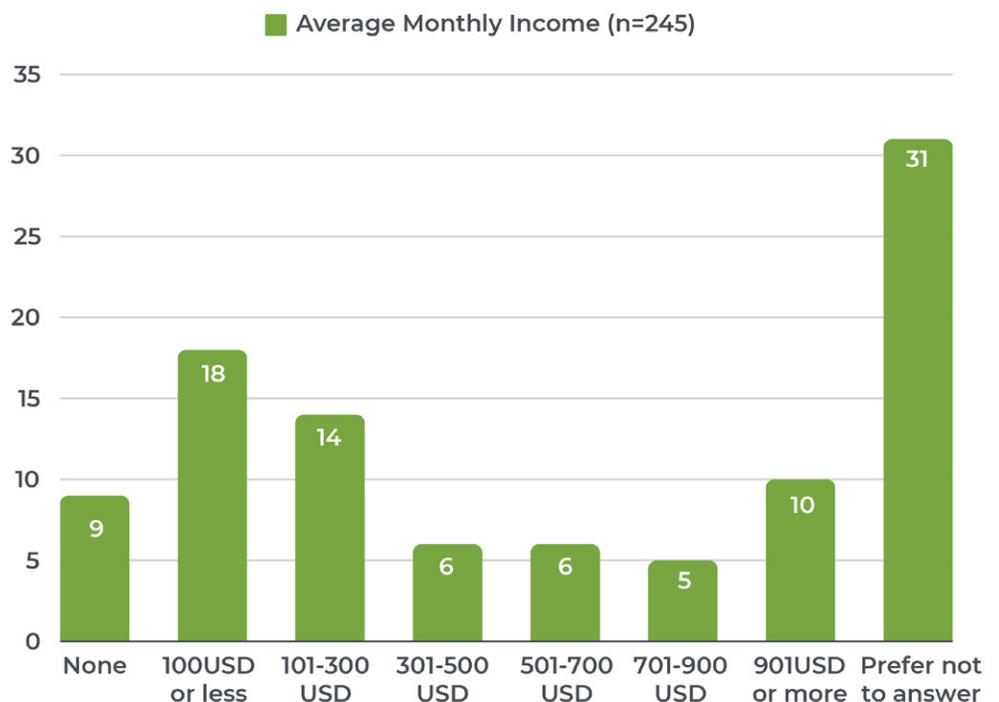
Fig. 13:
Employment
status by gender
(n=245)



AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME

Respondents represented individuals from the lower income brackets. More than one-fourth (27%) of survey respondents reported a monthly income of US\$100 or less and included those who did not have any income at all (see Figure 14).

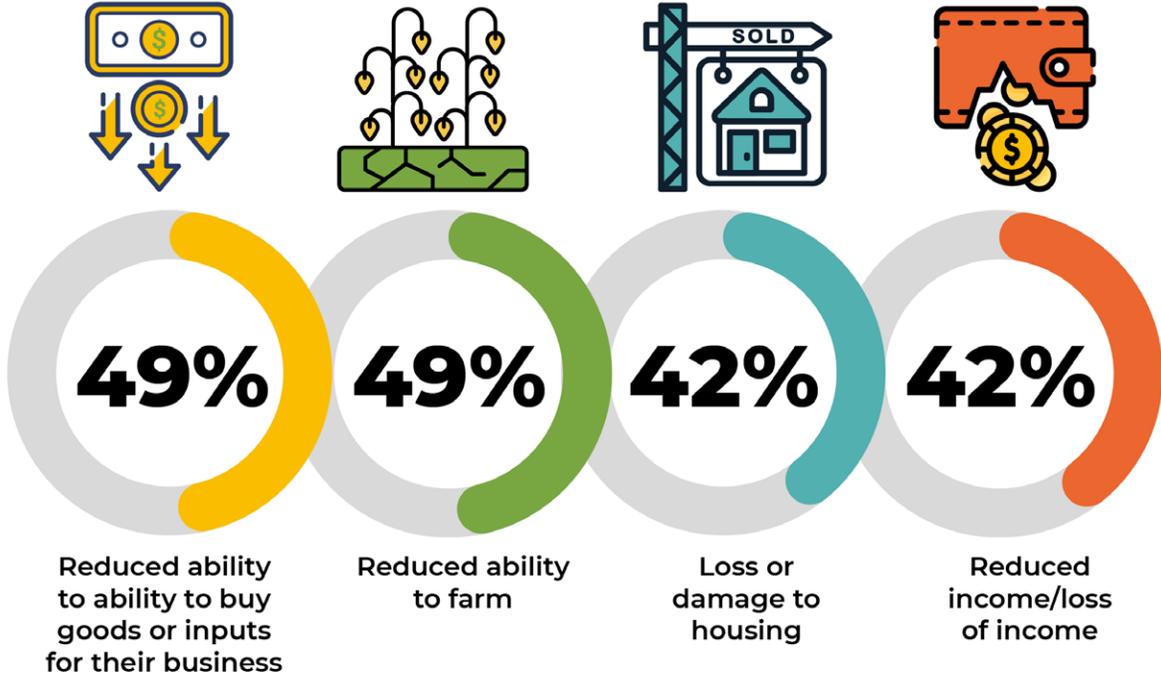
Fig. 14:
Average monthly
income (n=245)



Economic and Social Impacts of Natural Disasters on the Livelihoods of Vulnerable Populations

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The most severe economic impacts from climate related events were:



Responses from focus group discussions provided further understanding of the severity of the economic impacts.

The most cited include the loss of livelihoods and price increases.

**FEMALE RURAL FARMER
Jamaica**

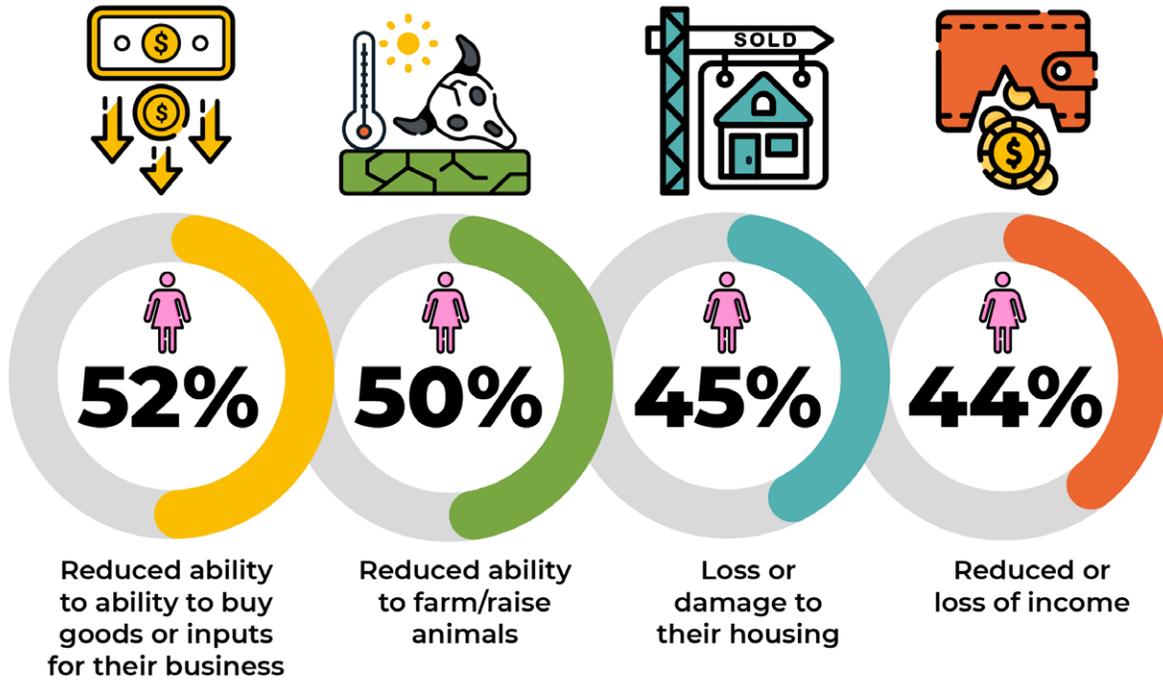
"Mi thank poor relief fi give me a little food and money so my child can go to school. It rough. Mi have nutten fi guh a market – plantain dry out, banana dry out, everything dead out. Mi have few likkle goat, dem start dead inna di drought same way."

**MALE ENTREPRENEUR
Antigua**

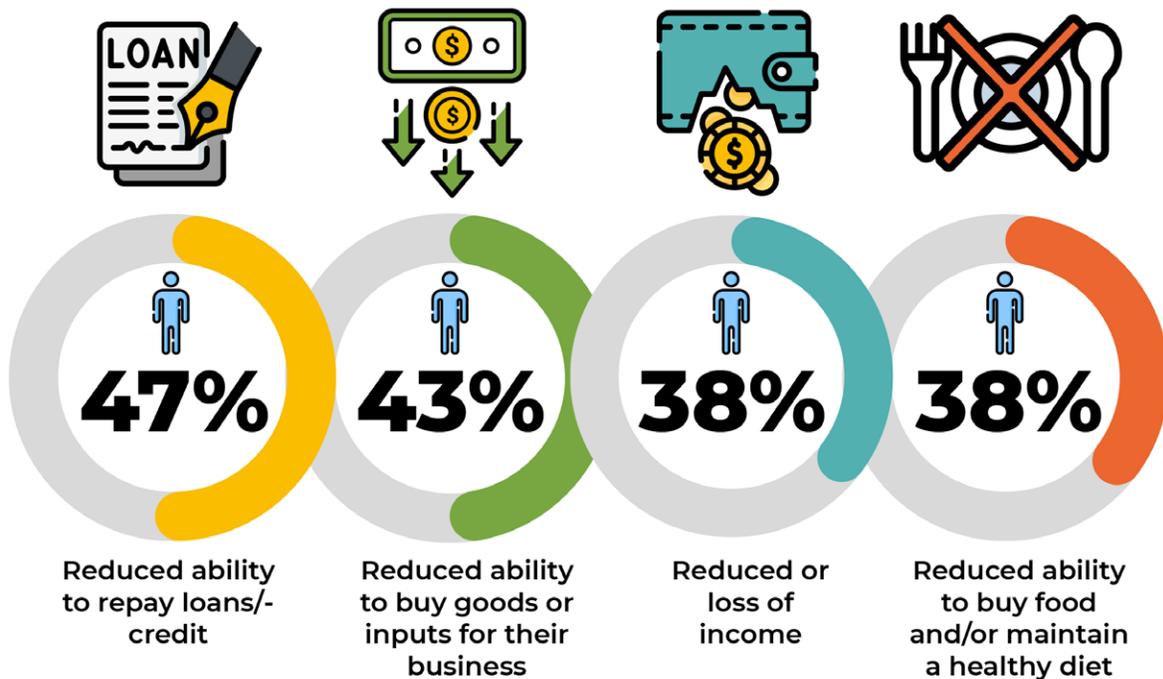
"... somebody benefiting, but it's not really the citizens, it's really people that own businesses, or electric companies...Prices go up because of whatever disaster is happening at the time. Because if you're stuck in your village, yeah, for you to buy whatever in the village and the shops and the business owners they can be opportunists out of that circumstance."

There are differences in the effects of climate-related events for females and males.

The most critical economic challenges among females were:

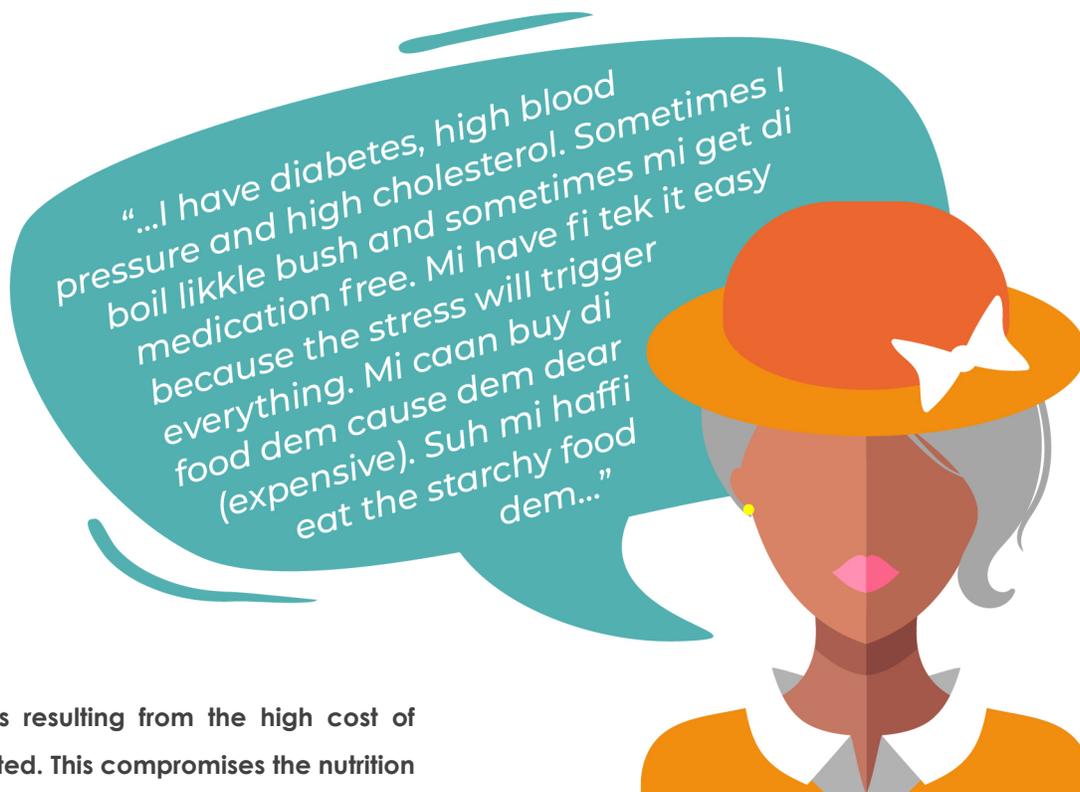
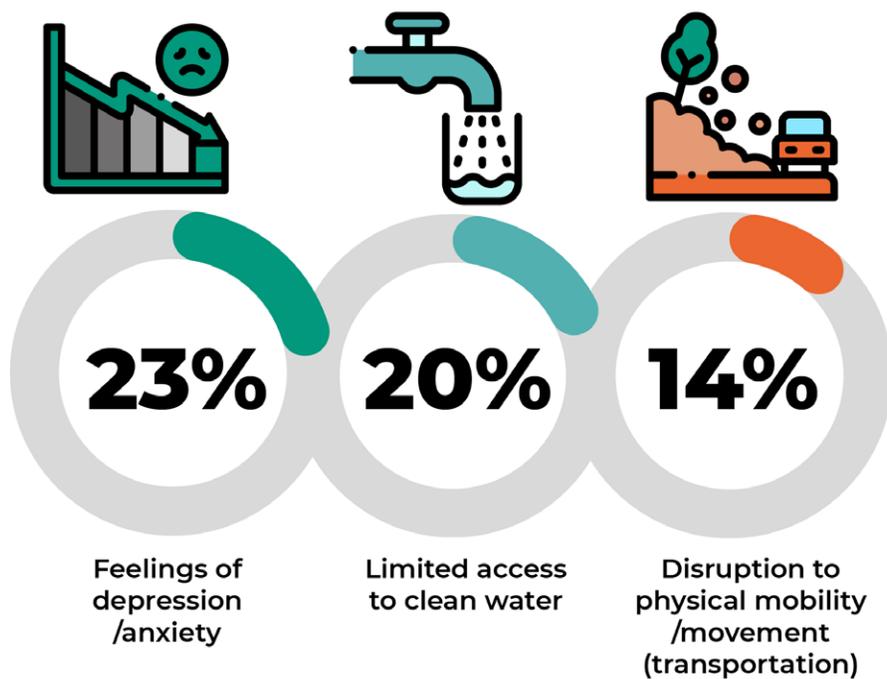


The most critical economic challenges cited among males were:



SOCIAL IMPACTS

Some of the most common social impacts include:

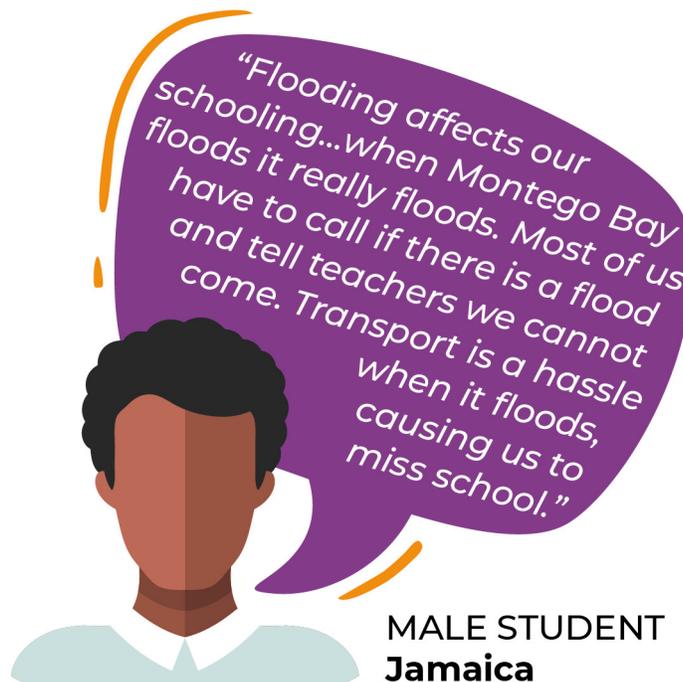


Health complications resulting from the high cost of food were also reported. This compromises the nutrition requirements for persons living with lifestyle diseases, resulting in other comorbidities or even death.

ELDERLY FEMALE
Jamaica

Another impact of natural disasters was that of flooding which affected the availability of transportation for commuting students. The inability to access transportation during periods of prolonged flooding results in absenteeism. One male youth reported:

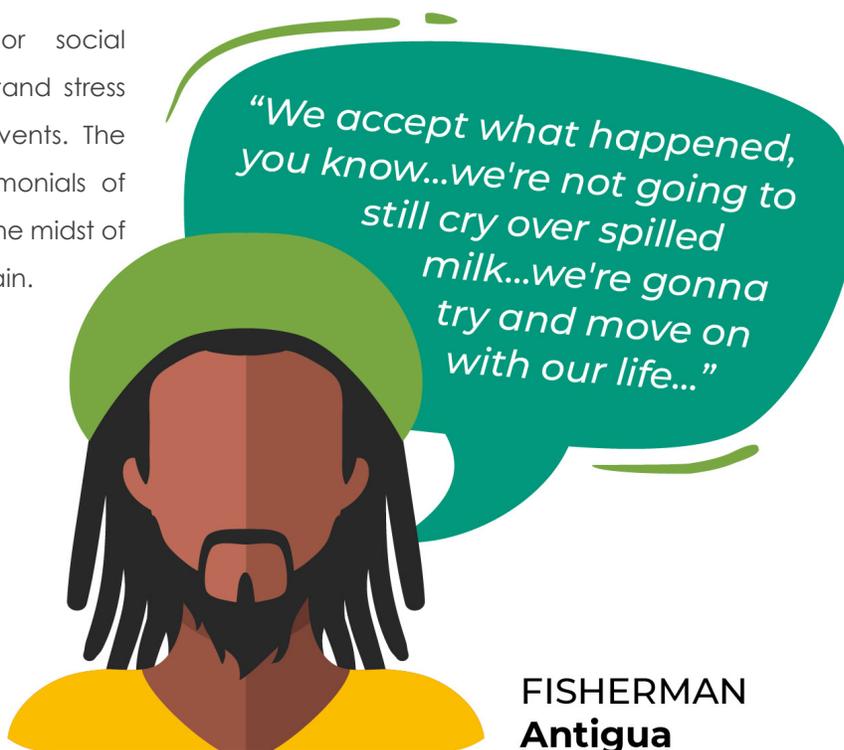
There are policy implications on the most vulnerable when their standard of living is further reduced because of climate-related events. Sustainable agricultural practices, food security, health and wellness and investment in resilient infrastructure should be maintained as areas of priority on the development agenda of SIDS.



POST-DISASTER COPING STRATEGIES

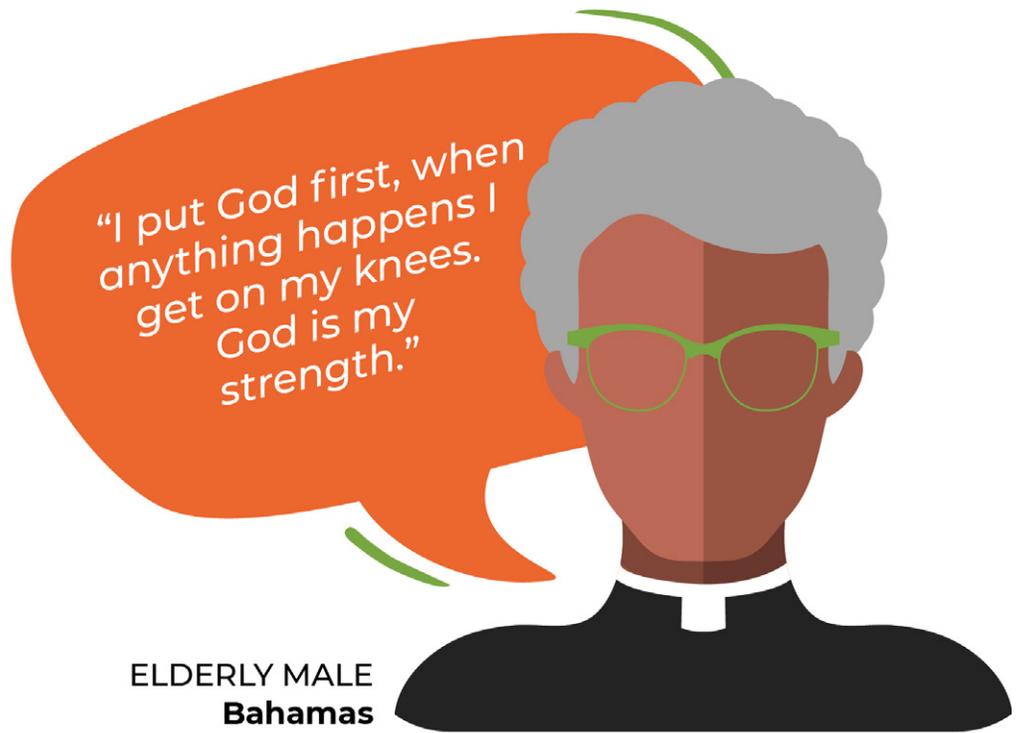
Coping strategies are cognitive or social mechanisms developed to help withstand stress that usually emerges from external events. The coping strategies presented are testimonials of the resilience of Caribbean people. In the midst of adversity, we hurt but we rise to live again.

As noted by one fisherman in Antigua,



A:

RELIANCE ON DIVINE SUPPORT



"I put God first, when anything happens I get on my knees. God is my strength."

ELDERLY MALE
Bahamas

B:

RESIDENTS CAME TOGETHER TO REBUILD COMMUNITIES AND LIVELIHOODS

The importance of social capital at the community level is an important factor in bringing people together to accomplish tasks:



"Maybe two, or three days after Maria, the road in Camel was already cleared and I expected it to clear maybe, in a few months...but everybody, they work together as a team. They didn't wait on the government. They didn't wait on anybody to tell them this has to be done, everybody was just on work mode."

FEMALE PARTICIPANT
Dominica

C:

PRIORITISING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS DESPITE PERSONAL CHALLENGES



ELDERLY FEMALE
Bahamas

"Maybe two, or three days after Maria, the road in Camel was already cleared and I expected it to clear maybe, in a few months...but everybody, they work together as a team. They didn't wait on the government. They didn't wait on anybody to tell them this has to be done, everybody was just on work mode."

Listening to the painful experiences of others is a therapeutic mechanism both for the victim and individuals offering support:

D:

GATHERING SUPPORT FROM FAMILY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Families and guardians offer emotional and financial support, especially in times of need. This is an important component of psycho-social recovery:

"As a family, we pull together, we come together. I can remember Hurricane Louis (1995) and my mother's house was a shelter. Almost everybody from the family came over because their house got destroyed. Who didn't sleep on the floor...honestly, this was the time to come together."

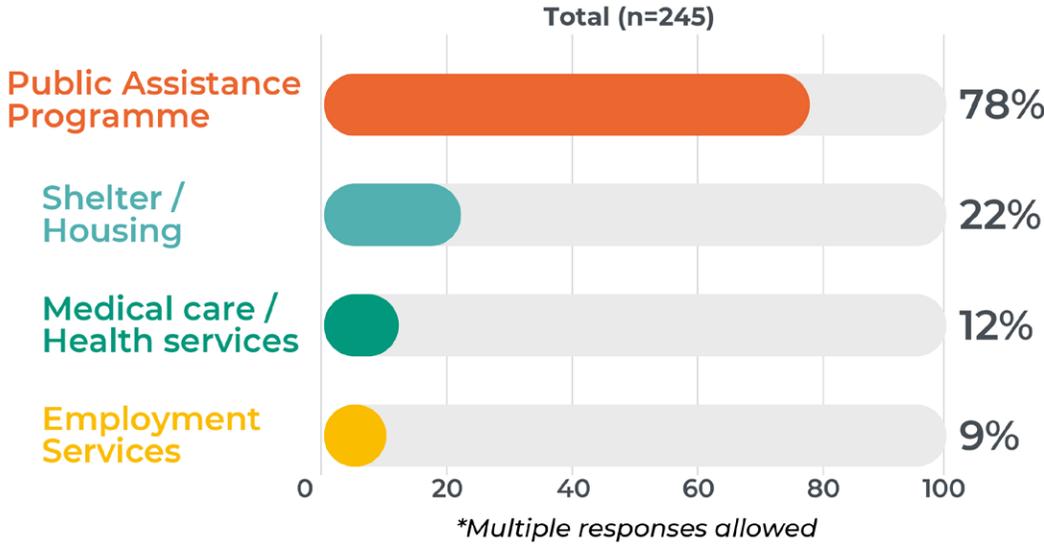
MALE
Antigua



Social Services that Beneficiaries Tried to Access in the Aftermath of Climate Disasters

Vulnerable populations depend on social services that are ordinarily needed for survival and more so to deal with the effects of climate related disasters. Fifty percent (50%) of respondents depended on social services to deal with the effects of climate related disasters. **Figure 15** provides details of which services were accessed during such times.

Fig. 15:
Popular social services accessed



- Females were 5.4 times more likely than males to seek shelter/housing services (27% versus 5%) and twice as likely as males to seek employment services (10% versus 5%).

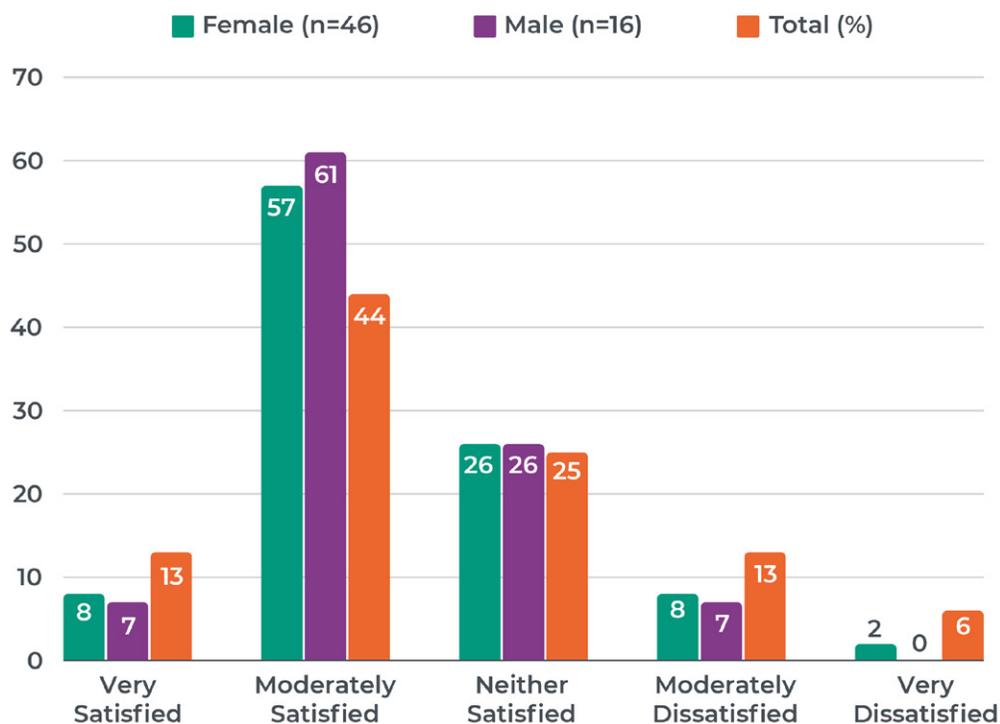
50% of respondents depended on social services to deal with the effects of climate related disasters.



Level of Satisfaction with Support Services

Sixty-five (65%) of beneficiaries were overall satisfied with the social support services they received.

Fig. 16:
Level of satisfaction with social support services



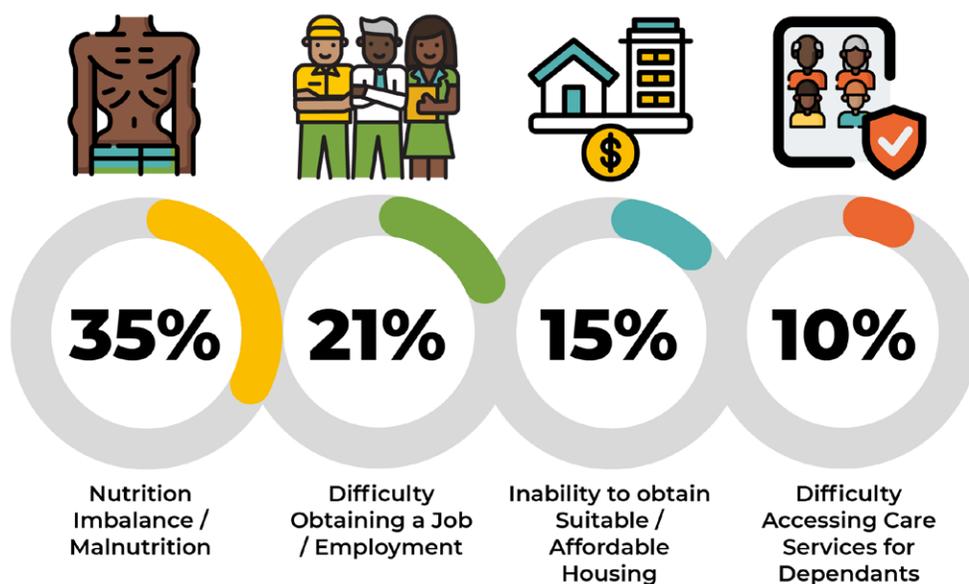
65% of beneficiaries were overall satisfied with the social support services they received.



Development Challenges of Vulnerable Populations Following Climate-Related Disasters

The four most pressing developmental challenges identified by beneficiaries were nutrition imbalance/malnutrition (35%), difficulty obtaining a job/employment (21%), inability to obtain suitable/affordable housing (15%) and difficulty accessing home/day care services for dependents (10%). Access to healthy diets at reasonable prices, particularly after climate related events, is supportive of having good health and well-being for the entire population (SDG 3). Additionally, accessing home/day care services is an important consideration for women during recovery from natural disasters because it impacts on the timeframe in which they will re-enter the labour market. This is an important factor in keeping with attaining gender equality (SDG 5).

Fig. 17:
Top four development challenges experienced after climate related disasters



**Multiple Responses Allowed*

Inclusive Response and Recovery Approaches in Disaster Risk Reduction

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 emphasizes that a greater people-centred approach is required for disaster risk reduction. This framework calls for increased inclusivity of vulnerable groups such as women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners and older persons in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards. The overall aim is to ensure that the response and recovery strategies are inclusive, sustainable and resilient. Findings from the country surveys revealed that the three most important areas that government and civil society organisations should advocate for are disaster risk reduction, that is, approaches to reduce the risk of persons suffering from a disaster (32%), investment in early warning systems/infrastructure at the national level (20%) and disability inclusion in disaster preparation and recovery (13%).

Table 1: Three most important issues that government and civil society organisations need to advocate for to reduce the impact of climate disasters by country



Country:	Priority #1:	Priority #2:	Priority #3:
Antigua & Barbuda 	Disaster risk reduction (approaches to reduce the risk of persons suffering from disaster) 24%	Disability inclusion in disaster preparation and recovery 24%	Investment in early warning systems/ infrastructure at the national level 21%
Bahamas 	Disaster risk reduction (approaches to reduce the risk of persons suffering from disaster) 32%	Investment in early warning systems/ infrastructure at the national level 17%	Disability inclusion in disaster preparation and recovery 11%
Dominica 	Mainstreaming inclusion for all vulnerable groups in disaster risk reduction plans/policies at the national level 30%	Disaster risk reduction (approaches to reduce the risk of persons suffering from disaster) 25%	Investment in early warning systems/ infrastructure at the national level 25%
Jamaica 	Disaster risk reduction, (approaches to reduce the risk of persons suffering from disaster) 39%	Investment in early warning systems/ infrastructure at the national level 24%	Disability inclusion in disaster preparation and recovery 11%

Partnerships Supporting Resilience, Sustainability and Inclusivity in Climate Related Events

Partnerships with national, regional and international organisations is an important aspect of responding to and recovering from climate-related events. Knowledge of these partnerships are important for the CPDC to potentially collaborate with these organisations in improving the human and technical capacity of civil society networks in addressing disaster risk reduction among its beneficiaries.



SCOPE	ANTIGUA & BARBUDA	BAHAMAS	DOMINICA	JAMAICA
NATIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disaster Management Act secures partnership in the management and recovery from disasters from all sectors. There are operational partnerships forged by the NODS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disaster Risk Management Act, 2022 mandates all government ministries and departments to assist in times of natural disasters. Membership from ministries, departments and NGOs is represented across 14-sub-committees, and includes animal care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The constitution makes provision for personnel from public and private sector entities and NGOs to serve on the National Emergency Planning Organization. The ODM is the Secretariat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Disaster Council (NDC) is chaired by the Prime Minister. There are 7 sub-committees that allow for partnership based on legislation and operational function.
REGIONAL	<p>Membership with CDEMA, part of CARICOM, gives accessibility to regional resources (see Section 5.3.4).</p> <p>All four countries are members of CCRIF, a regional catastrophe fund for Caribbean governments to limit the financial impact of hurricanes and earthquakes to Caribbean governments by quickly providing short term liquidity when a policy is triggered.</p>			

SCOPE	ANTIGUA & BARBUDA	BAHAMAS	DOMINICA	JAMAICA
INTERNATIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAO is supporting the development of disaster risk management plans for the sectors. • USAID enabling the safe school and safe hospital initiative. • UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women collaborated with the government of Antigua and Barbuda to provide psycho-social support and school reintegration programme post hurricanes Irma and Maria. • UNICEF supported the national water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programme during the pandemic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United States Military and Coast Guard have assisted with medical expertise, project equipment and rescue boats. • USAID has supported capacity building in shelter management and damage assessment as well as granted access to their warehouse in Florida and provides supplies during emergencies. • Pacific Disaster Center based in Hawaii undertakes annual disaster management exercises. • MOU between University of Hawaii with and University of the Bahamas to build expertise in disaster management. • The Japanese Embassy has given a grant to purchase new heavy-duty equipment and radio systems to support their communication system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Japanese Government has provided trucks. • UNESCO delivered the school safety programme. • IOM has assisted with: renovating shelters; providing alternate power supply to shelters; building capacity in disaster management services • Developed shelter manual for disaster workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government of Argentina has partnered with the Government of Jamaica to develop the National Volunteers programme and a national volunteer database for disaster risk management. • The Government of Japan is funding the master communication platform for national response during disasters. • United States Southern Command, through USAID, conducts training in disaster risk management. • The Government of Chile through the Chile Espana programme provides technical capacity support for the country's seismic response capabilities.

Conclusion

Poverty and vulnerability in the four countries is best characterised as structural in nature. The geographical location of the region and size of the islands increase the risk of experiencing negative effects of climate change on the physical infrastructure and vulnerable groups.

Recommendations

Several recommendations have been identified to support debt restructuring and improving the resilience of the physical infrastructure and human resources in a context of sovereign debt and the adverse effects from climate change.

The recommendations are:

1. Advocate for updating poverty and vulnerability diagnostics and monitoring data. Except for Jamaica, poverty data in the region is outdated with most Household Budget Surveys and Survey of Living Conditions (SLC-HBS) and UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) implemented over a decade ago.
2. Prioritise improving governance and creating fiscal space for resilient social protection systems.
3. Improve targeting and allocation of social protection resources. Social protection systems in the four study countries are inadequate in reach and depth. They do not cover the entire population requiring support and the quantum of resources and support services falls short of what is required to lift the poor and vulnerable out of poverty.
4. Strengthen institutional mechanisms in the national disaster authorities and social sectors as well as NGO services in supporting inclusive disaster risk reduction. This requires advocating for inclusivity in the review and amendments to national legislation and system procedures (e.g., standard operating procedures, manuals), alongside the review, preparation, response, recovery and relief regarding climate-related and other events, which should ensure the participation of women, youth, elderly, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI and various ethnicities.
5. Integrate Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in the accessibility and delivery of human and social services. Ministries and Departments of social services need to continue investing in structures and supporting information technology systems to facilitate ease of access to social services, specifically, digitising list of beneficiaries of government public assistance programmes to facilitate accessibility to multiple services for recovery, decentralising services, particularly where vulnerable groups inhabit, and developing user friendly application forms to access services, including braille and audio formats.
6. Improve opportunities for livelihood and psychosocial recovery in the aftermath of natural disasters and pandemics.
7. Promote greater knowledge about free movement treaties and efficiency in climate-related migration within CARICOM among skilled professionals supporting response and recovery efforts. Collaboration with the CARICOM Secretariat and OECS Commission in expanding public education programmes

associated with the Treaty of Chaguaramas and Treaty of Basseterre. It is important that NGO service providers are engaged in these discussions. The groups which they serve are least aware of these treaties and their benefits.

8. Support inclusive communication and advocacy requirements by disseminating the findings of this report with a broad cross-section of stakeholders, namely NGO service providers, policy makers in the financial, education, social protection and social services and environmental/disaster management sectors. The findings and recommendations could be incorporated in existing country sector strategies. Additionally, there should be consideration in making the findings of this report more inclusive and accessible to various populations, that is, the report becomes available in print, braille and audio, including both the official (or "standard") language and the creolized/vernacular languages of the region (English, Dutch, French, Spanish and their variants).
9. Strengthen the infrastructure to withstand the damage that comes with more frequent and intense hurricanes, floods and other disasters. It is important to explore with regional finance and development institutions and national governments, procedures for getting disaster financing earmarked for the region, as one of the commitments coming out of COP27 in November 2022. This disaster financing could be instrumental in supporting investments in upgrading the physical infrastructure, including housing, public shelters and road networks across countries.
10. Maintaining food security through the provision of more resilient inputs and storage mechanisms.





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