



# Equity Transparency & Resilience

The Guiding Principles for Sustainability in CARIFORUM States

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# **Equity Transparency & Resilience**

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# About CPDC

The Caribbean Policy Development Centre is a legally registered non-profit headquartered in Barbados and established in 1991. CPDC serves as a regional umbrella NGO for organisations comprising of small farmers, women, youth, Indigenous People, rural populations, and faith-based organisations located across CARICOM. CPDC also has strong networking partnerships with organisations of persons with disabilities, artisans, micro-entrepreneurs, human rights, and workers. Altogether it serves some thirty-five (35) regional, sub-regional and national NGOs working at the grassroots level in economic, social, and cultural areas in the Caribbean. The Centre also has working relationships with many other NGOs and development partners across the region.

The organisation was mandated to work with NGOs and civil society to understand how policies affecting Caribbean people are made; to share information about policies and decision-making processes; to work to influence and bring change to the developmental process, and to support and to lobby for policies which improve the lives of Caribbean people. In fulfilling its mandate, the CPDC seeks to build the confidence and the ability of the Caribbean people to influence public policy. Our main work modalities are research, training, advocacy, publications, public education, and institutional strengthening. CPDC is officially recognised, both regionally and internationally, as the principal representative of Caribbean NGOs working with such organisations as CARICOM/CARIFORUM, Commonwealth Foundation, UN System Agencies, among others.



# To Our Readers

This publication seeks to highlight key issues facing the Caribbean region and its civil society populations. The commentaries and research pieces were sourced from practitioners in their subject areas.

We hope that the publications shed some light on and bring awareness to pertinent areas of concern for the region.

*From The CPDC Team*



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# The Role of Good Governance in Sovereign Debt Management

**Authors: Delia Cox and Nadia Spencer-Henry**

This study examines the extent to which CARIFORUM member countries<sup>1</sup> meet the minimum best practice requirements for good sovereign debt governance. The model for the analysis is taken from the governance and strategy development pillar of the World Bank's Debt Management Performance Assessment (DeMPA) to assess five debt performance indicators, namely: Legal Framework, Managerial Structure, Debt Management Strategy, Debt Reporting and Audit of Public Debt. The researchers also assessed the level of transparency in sovereign debt operations using the World Bank's Debt Transparency heatmap. The study found that despite some progress over the last decade, good governance of sovereign debt continues to be a challenge for CARIFORUM member countries in all areas. The study provides concrete insights into the key gaps and challenges in debt governance and presents practical policy recommendations for strengthening debt governance, improving debt sustainability, enhancing accountability and debt transparency, and generating financing for the SDGs.

*Key terms:*

good governance; legal frameworks; public debt management; debt transparency; debt justice.

1 Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname.

## Overview of Public Debt in the CARIFORUM

A government's public debt portfolio is typically the largest and, arguably, the most important financial portfolio in a country (Cox 2023). An International Monetary Fund (IMF) staff blog estimated that at approximately 40% of total global debt, public debt has accounted for the largest proportion of global debt since the mid-1960s.<sup>2</sup> According to Debt Justice UK (formerly Jubilee Debt Campaign), the external debt in developing countries increased by 60% between 2009–2019 (Jubilee Debt Campaign 2018). Economic crises, the global budgetary crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, have been the main drivers of public debt since 2007 (Gaspar 2021). In terms of national output, the weighted average of global public debt to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was estimated at 96% in 2021, dominated by advanced economies, followed by emerging markets and developing countries (Perrelli 2022). At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries in all income groups registered substantial increases in public debt both in nominal terms and as a proportion of GDP, as governments borrowed heavily to manage the crisis.



## History of Public Debt in CARIFORUM Countries

As Mooney et al. (2021) state, “the history of public debt in Caribbean countries is striking. Several countries in the region have been among the most indebted in the world (measured in terms of the public-debt-to-GDP ratio) since gaining independence beginning in the 1960s.” The Caribbean is characterized by low economic growth and rising debt levels which manifest into high debt-to-GDP ratios. Chowdhury et al. (2012), Piemonte (2021), Greenidge et al. (2012), and the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (2021) referenced different debt-to-GDP thresholds for emerging market developing economies. These academics and practitioners consider a public debt-to-GDP ratio between 30–60% of GDP to be a prudent limit. Considering this,

# 11 of 14

Cariforum countries recorded government gross debt to GDP ratios above 60% for 2022.

This includes nine countries above 80%, three of which recorded ratios above 100% (see Figures 1a and 1b).

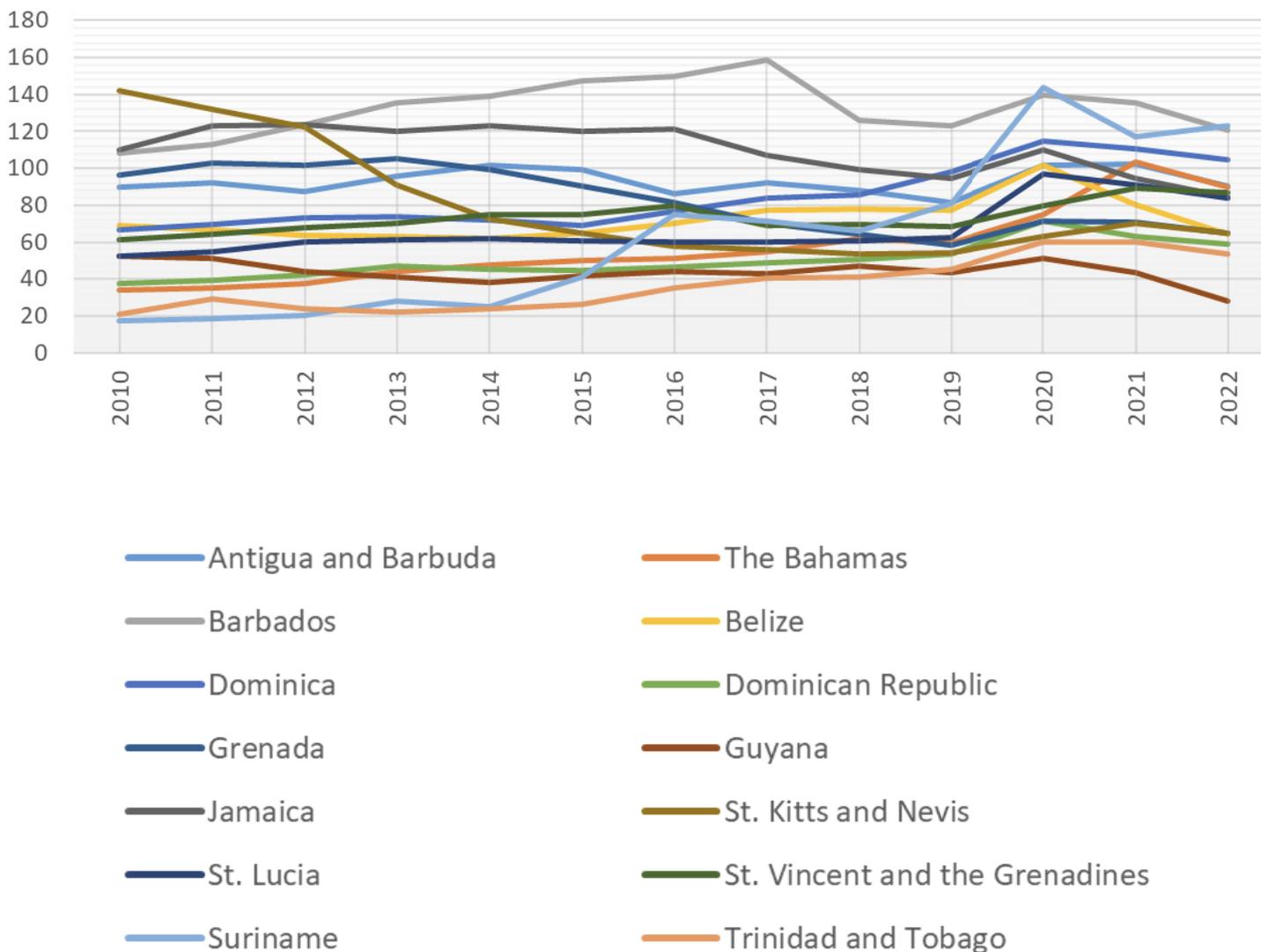
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2021/12/15/blog-global-debt-reaches-a-record-226-trillion>

Figure 1a: General Government Gross Debt to GDP

Country	General Government Gross Debt to GDP		
	2021	2022	2023 (Projected)
Antigua and Barbuda	102.4	90.6	84.9
The Bahamas	103.3	89.4	83.9
Barbados	135.4	120.8	113.5
Belize	80.1	64.1	60.4
Dominica	110.2	104.8	96.5
Dominican Republic	63.2	58.9	58.3
Grenada	71.0	64.5	62.4
Guyana	43.2	27.8	29.8
Jamaica	94.2	84.1	77.9
St. Kitts and Nevis	70.0	64.8	63.0
Saint Lucia	90.8	83.5	82.7
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	89.3	86.8	86.3
Suriname	117.0	123.2	112.2
Trinidad and Tobago	59.9	53.8	53.9
TOTAL CARIFORUM	97.79	96.68	96.30

Source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2023

Figure 1b: General Government Gross Debt to GDP (2010 - 2022)



Source: IMF World Economic Government Gross Debt to GDP

## Colonialism and Public Debt

Although this is not a paper on colonialism, it is important to acknowledge “the horror of the colonial conquests” (Cash 2023). The human or social impact of colonialism is well-documented; however, the full effect of the transatlantic slavery (and subsequent years of oppression) on the economic development of the region is not well-known. However, there is enough research to conclude that the history, impact, and contributions of transatlantic slavery to the economic development of the empires of colonial powers came at the expense of enslaved Africans and Indigenous Caribbean populations in the former Caribbean colonies (Williams 1994). The “horror of the colonial conquests” usually focuses on the treatment of enslaved Africans and Indigenous Caribbean populations. However, transatlantic slavery played a critical role in impeding the natural process of development (as Rodney 1973 well describes) of Caribbean nations.

During colonization, profits were dispatched to colonial powers, leaving little or no money to finance economic development in the Caribbean (Caribbean Policy Development Centre, n.d).<sup>3</sup> Several academics have written on how these colonies were left underdeveloped, uncompensated, ill-equipped and unprepared to adequately finance their development (Beckles 2013, Beckles 2021, Rodney 1973, and Williams 1994). Thus, following independence countries

were left with limited financing options (and inadequate institutions) to even begin to achieve the level of development that colonial powers had achieved as a result of unpaid, enslaved labour and these ill-gotten profits. In order to advance on the path of economic development and empower citizens in the international economy, these young nations were forced to borrow from these same colonial powers, their institutions and other creditors. Development, therefore, came at a price, including high-interest costs, other fees and currency parity changes.

In light of this history, Caribbean governments have moved to include debt relief as part of the reparatory justice discourse as a regional development project to right the historical wrongs committed against the Caribbean Indigenous populations, African enslaved people and their descendants. In March 2014, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Heads of Government endorsed a Ten Point Action Plan for Reparatory Justice to be used as a foundation for discussions on the transatlantic slavery legacy and the case for reparations. Point ten (10) of the Plan speaks to “Debt Cancellation to address the ‘fiscal entrapment’ that faces Caribbean governments that emerged from slavery and colonialism” (CARICOM Caribbean Reparations Commission 2015). The CARICOM Reparations Commission<sup>4</sup> (CRC), chaired by The University of the West

3 Caribbean Policy Development Centre. n.d. “Caribbean Debt Monitoring and Advocacy Hub.” Accessed online at: <https://debthub.cpdngo.org/> Accessed on: May 30, 2023.

4 “The CARICOM Reparations Commission is a regional body created to establish the moral, ethical and legal case for the payment of Reparations by the Governments of all the former colonial powers and the relevant institutions of those countries, to the nations and people of the Caribbean Community for the Crimes against Humanity of Native Genocide, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and a racialized system of chattel Slavery.” Caribbean Reparations Commission. n.d. “About us.” Accessed online at: <https://caricomreparations.org/about-us/> Accessed on: June 16, 2023.



Indies Vice Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, was established to operationalise the case for reparations (The Caribbean Community 2014).

## **Other Emerging Issues Impacting Financing Needs and Public Debt: The Climate Crisis**

The Caribbean's inherent vulnerabilities to natural disasters of increasing frequency and intensity due to climate change has compounded the public debt burdens. The Caribbean Policy Development Centre (2022)<sup>5</sup> estimates that there has been US\$30 billion in damages caused by 854 storms that impacted the Caribbean between 1950 and 2021. Despite being low emitters, small island developing states (SIDS), including Caribbean countries, are forced to incur debt for disaster response, recovery and reconstruction as well as climate mitigation and adaptation.

## **Why is Good Governance Important?**

Given the importance of the size and impact of public debt on a country's macroeconomic outcomes and by extension, the quality of life of citizens, it is no surprise that conversations about

good governance of public debt have gained the renewed attention of the public and are featuring more prominently in the public domain. The advent of social media and other types of public forums has given citizens and civil service organizations in the Caribbean a platform for intensifying calls for increased accountability, transparency, and good governance from the governments that they have elected to make decisions on their behalf. The rising indebtedness of Caribbean nation-states and its resultant negative effects on some groups in the community have triggered questions on the use of resources and management thereof. Despite some progress over the last decade, good governance of sovereign debt continues to be a challenge for CARIFORUM member countries.<sup>6</sup>

Weak governance of sovereign debt has implications for debt sustainability, debt transparency and the effective financing of the sustainable development goals, including issues related to gender, youth, and climate action.

Further amplifying the need for good governance is the loud call for improved debt transparency from global public leaders, key multilateral institutions, the private sector and civil society. Therefore, effective governance frameworks not only lay a solid foundation for effective public debt management and debt sustainability, but also promote accountability and transparency.

5 Caribbean Policy Development Centre. 2022. "Caribbean Emancipation 2030: A Sovereign Debt and Climate Justice Initiative for Caribbean SIDS". Accessed online at: <https://cpdcngo.org/download/caribbean-emancipation-2030-a-sovereign-debt-and-climate-justice-initiative-for-caribbean-sids/>. Accessed on: June 27, 2023.

6 Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname.

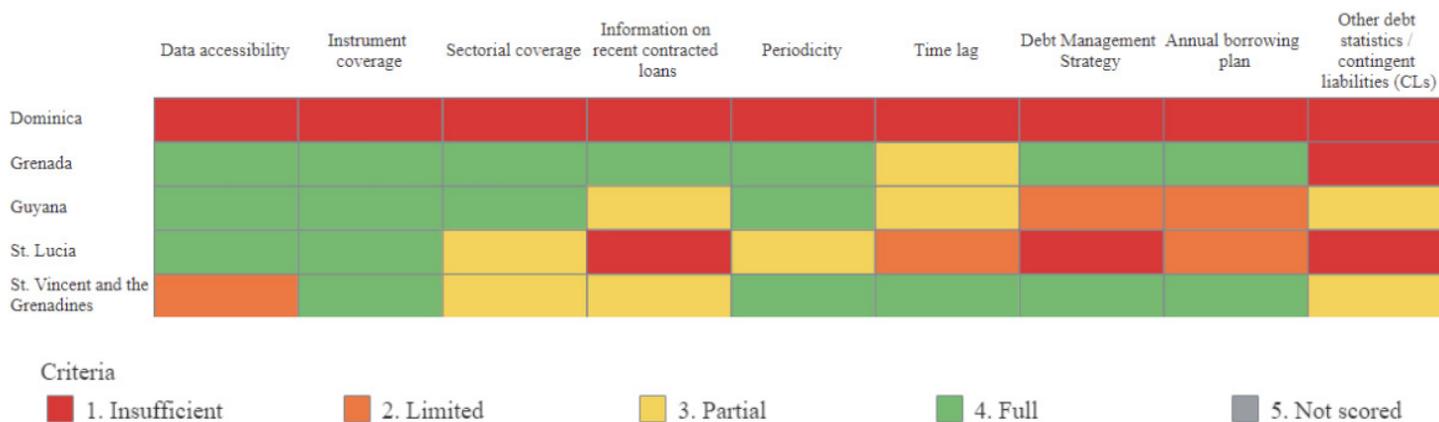
# Good Governance and Debt Transparency

As previously highlighted, good governance of public debt is key to promoting debt transparency and accountability. Rivetti et al. (2021) state that “Debt transparency covers the availability of debt data and borrowing processes that are legitimate, rule-based, and traceable” and emphasise the need for transparency in both debt reporting and borrowing operations. Public debt transparency through readily available debt data and information supports effective decision-making of government, investors and creditors and also promotes accountability to citizens on the level of borrowing and the use of borrowed funds (Estevão, Essl & Tsiropoulos 2022).

A first attempt at gauging the level of transparency in debt reporting practices in World Bank International Development Association (IDA) countries is the annually updated World Bank’s debt transparency heatmap. The heatmap not only considers whether published public debt

statistics and documents are accessible but also whether this information is timely and complete. Considering the information available on official government websites, Rivetti et al. (2022) detail and group the methodology behind the heatmap in three primary areas, namely, “(i) dissemination of public debt statistics; (ii) publication of key debt management reports; and (iii) publication of other debt data, including identification and quantification of contingent liabilities”. The 2022 Debt Reporting Heatmap further supports some of the findings about the IDA-eligible CARIFORUM countries outlined later in this paper. The heatmap shows how the absence of key governance cornerstones can have implications for debt transparency (Figure 2). The publication and timeliness of up-to-date debt statistics and documents continue to be a challenge for the identified countries. Worth noting is the apparent lack of disclosure of contingent liabilities, including government guarantees and other debt statistics such as account payables.

Figure 2: Debt Reporting Heatmap as of October 1, 2022



Source: World Bank

Relatedly, Rivetti et al. (2021), in a World Bank report on “Debt Transparency in Developing Economies” highlighted some high-priority policy reforms needed to support public debt transparency, including the development of sound public debt legal frameworks, the publication of public and publicly guaranteed debt statistics and related details and limiting the use of confidentiality clauses in borrowing.

## Defining Good Governance of Public Debt

The Revised Guidelines for Public Debt Management prepared by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) in 2014 define public debt management as:

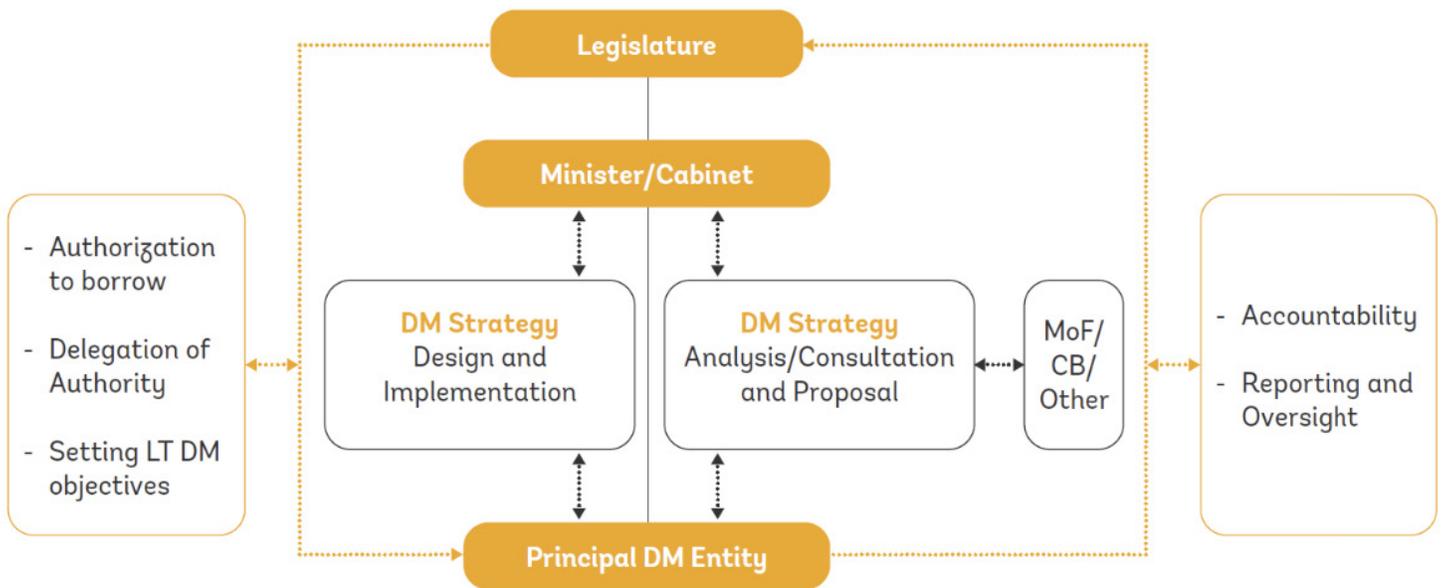
**“... the process of establishing and executing a strategy for managing the government’s debt in order to raise the required amount of funding at the lowest possible cost over the medium to long run, consistent with a prudent degree of risk.”**

It should also be noted that the goal of public debt management should be aligned with fomenting and advancing a domestic capital market and appropriate cash flow management. Debt managers may also be required to manage contingent liabilities.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, debt management functions include: (1) financial market development and support, (2) debt management strategy design and implementation and (3) processing and recording of debt transactions and government guarantees and contingent liabilities. However, debt governance is linked to the legal arrangements that support transparency and accountability for these procedures and practices.

The World Bank’s governance framework is provided in Figure 3 below. It lays out the structure adapted for analysis in the Debt Management Performance Assessment Tool (DeMPA). This tool covers the legal structure that “shapes and directs” countries’ debt management processes. The appropriate legal structure should include coordination between a country’s legislative and executive branches for the purpose of authorizing, borrowing and delegating debt management responsibilities. The structure also outlines the need for regular public disclosure of debt-related information to promote transparency and accountability.

7 The IMF Public Debt Statistics Guide for Compilers and Users defines contingent liabilities as “obligations that do not arise unless a particular, discrete event(s) occurs in the future. A key difference between contingent liabilities and liabilities (and public sector debt) is that one or more conditions must be fulfilled before a financial transaction is recorded.” The guide also describes the difference between explicit and implicit contingent liabilities: “Explicit contingent liabilities are defined as legal or contractual financial arrangements that give rise to conditional requirements to make payments of economic value. The requirements become effective if one or more stipulated conditions arise. Implicit contingent liabilities do not arise from a legal or contractual source but are recognized after a condition or event is realized.” International Monetary Fund. 2011. Public sector debt statistics: Guide for compilers and users. Statistical Manual, Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund. Elibrary.imf.org. May. Accessed June 16, 2023. <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9781484349762/9781484349762.xml>

Figure 3: Simplified Governance Structure



Source: World Bank, 2021

Mooney et al. (2021) opine that governance and decision-making structures are “one of the most important subsets of sound debt management institutions.” In order to define what good governance of public debt is, it is important to describe what constitutes weak governance of public debt. Wheeler (2004) asserts that,

**“... weak governance practices over public debt include a lack of core features of the identified elements of good governance, leading to unclear debt management objectives, inadequate frameworks and practices related to accounting, disclosure, reporting, oversight and internal control of public debt.”**

Given the aforementioned, it would be logical to explore the core features of good governance of public debt in more detail.

For Wheeler (2004), the governance of public debt refers to the legal and managerial arrangements that fashion and direct how government debt managers operate. It includes the statutory legislation, ministerial decrees, and other parliamentary mandates that clarify goals, designate authorities, and refine lines of accountability. It also outlines the management arrangements, the articulation and implementation of strategy, functional procedures, assurance of quality assurance, and lines of reporting (Wheeler 2004).

# Essential Requirements for Good Governance of Public Debt

Sound practices in public debt management (including governance) differ among CARIFORUM countries, given the different political landscapes and public administration practices. Notwithstanding, the literature reviewed from the WB, IMF, the Commonwealth Secretariat and other authors, identifies some key elements of good governance practices for public debt management, which are used by the researchers to identify where these countries stand relative to these standards. One of the most popular and widely applied frameworks is the World Bank’s DeMPA Methodology (World Bank 2021). The DeMPA outlines five key institutional pillars for effective public debt management, including: (1) Governance and Strategy Development, (2) Coordination with Macroeconomic Policies, (3) Borrowing and Related Financing Activities, (4) Cash Flow Forecasting and Cash Balance Management, (5) Debt Recording, Payments and Operational Risk Management (Figure 4). The DeMPA’s five pillars are further disaggregated into a total of 15 debt management performance indicators (DPIs). The DPIs are further broken down into 33 dimensions which further detail the requirements for sound public debt management practices.

As previously stated, governance is the “cornerstone” of public debt management. This section focuses on the five debt performance

indicators which form the Governance and Strategy pillar.

Figure 4: Sound Practices in Public Debt Management

Debt Management Performance Indicators	
<b>Governance and Strategy Development</b>	
DPI-1	Legal Framework – Existence, Coverage, and Content of the Legal Framework
DPI-2	Managerial Structure
DPI-3	Debt Management Strategy
DPI-4	Public Debt Reporting
DPI-5	Audit
<b>Coordination with Macroeconomic Policies</b>	
DPI-6	Coordination with Fiscal Policy
DPI-7	Coordination with Monetary Policy
<b>Borrowing and Related Financing Activities</b>	
DPI-8	Domestic Borrowing
DPI-9	External Borrowing
DPI-10	Loan Guarantees, On-Lending, and Derivatives
<b>Cash Flow Forecasting and Cash Balance Management</b>	
DPI-11	Cash Flow Forecasting and Cash Balance Management
<b>Debt Recording, Payments, and Operational Risk Management</b>	
DPI-12	Debt Recording, Monitoring, and Payments
DPI-13	Data Security and Business Continuity
DPI-14	Debt Related Records
DPI-15	Debt Management Information Systems (DMIS)

Source: World Bank Debt Management Performance Assessment 2021

## Legal Framework

A robust legal framework is the foundation of sound public debt governance, policies and practices. Roy et al. (2010) note that legislation is a critical component of the governance

8 Some good examples of consolidated public debt legislation in the Caribbean include: The Bahamas Public Debt Management Act, 2021; Grenada Public Debt Management Act, 2015 and 2016 amendment; and the Jamaica Public Debt Management Act 2012.

## Managerial Structure

framework for sovereign debt management. It can be considered good<sup>9</sup> when it provides a platform that gives strategic direction, refines the power structure and builds professionalism for overall sound debt management. Moreover, it is vital that the legislative framework restricts the abuse of power and advances accountability in the management of public debt. Awadzi (2015) also purports that law is central to the effective management of public debt even though political and economic factors may influence debt policies and the quality of debt management practices. For Awadzi (2015), a good legal structure augments discipline, transparency, and accountability. For this reason, countries that have experienced debt challenges move to reform and strengthen the legal frameworks for public debt management to avoid default. Reforms to the public debt management framework are also precipitated by sovereign bond market debuts. As political and economic factors continue to change there will be a continued need to improve and strengthen the Public Debt Management (PDM) legal framework. The literature reviewed by Roy et al. (2010) and Awadzi (2015) shows that countries have been improving the legal frameworks, but they call for further strengthening.

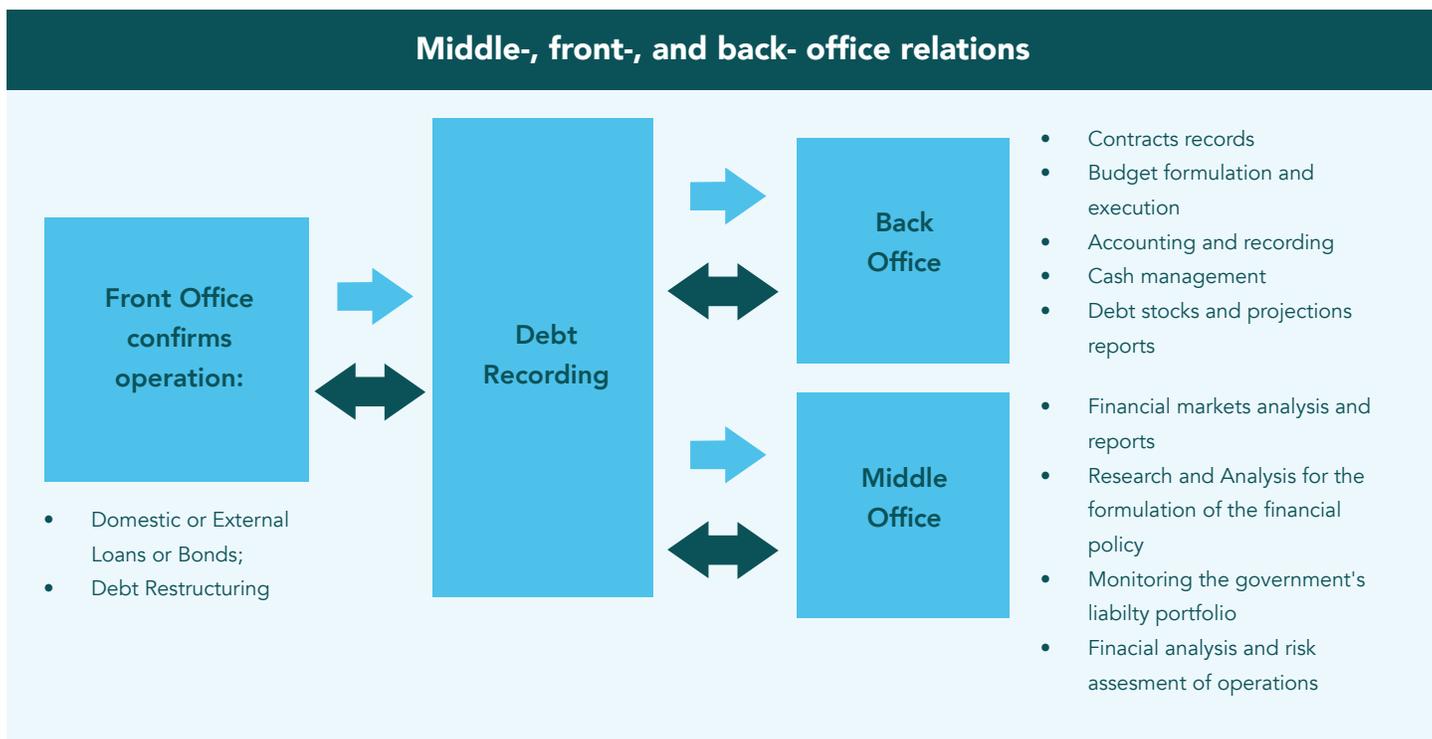
The second building block in the public debt governance foundation is an effective managerial structure. The most effective debt management managerial structure is through the establishment of a single Debt Management entity or Debt Management Office (DMO) with the assigned legislative mandate of achieving the government's debt management objectives and managing central government borrowing, including publicly guaranteed debt<sup>9</sup>, on-lending<sup>10</sup> and debt-related transactions. Although debt management can be undertaken by several entities, it requires a well-coordinated approach that encompasses information sharing and formal channels for communication and decision-making, such as committees and other institutional arrangements. The DMO should be adequately staffed, resourced and arranged along functional lines to promote the segregation of duties. This includes establishing a back office, middle office, and front office. The function of each office is summarised in Figure 5.

<sup>9</sup> The IMF Public Debt Statistics guide for Compilers and Users defines publicly guaranteed debt as "debt liabilities of public and private sector units, the servicing of which is contractually guaranteed by public sector units. These guarantees consist of loan and other debt instrument guarantees, comprising a specific type of one-off guarantees. Although this is debt of the private sector or other parts of the public sector, it represents a potential liability - an explicit contingency in this case - for the public sector unit providing the guarantee." International Monetary Fund. 2011. Public sector debt statistics: Guide for compilers and users. Statistical Manual, Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund. Elibrary.imf.org. May. Accessed June 16, 2023. <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9781484349762/9781484349762.xml>

<sup>10</sup> The IMF Public Debt Statistics Guide for compilers and users describes on-lending as "a resident institutional unit, A (usually central government), borrowing from another institutional unit(s), B (usually a nonresident unit), and then on-lending the proceeds from this borrowing to a third institutional unit(s), C (usually state or local governments, or a public corporation[s]), where it is understood that unit A obtains an effective financial claim on unit C." International Monetary Fund. 2011. Public sector debt statistics: Guide for compilers and users. Statistical Manual, Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund. Elibrary.imf.org. May. Accessed June 16, 2023. <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9781484349762/9781484349762.xml>



Figure 5: Units and Functions of a Debt Management Office



Source: WINTOSAI, n.d.

The DeMPA highlights that an effective managerial structure should account for clear distinctions between the political level and the execution level. The political level includes the role of parliament or congress, the president or prime minister, the cabinet or the council of ministers and the minister with responsibility for finance. The Minister of Finance is responsible for outlining debt management objectives and deciding on the government's risk appetite and risk tolerance as outlined in the medium-term debt strategy (MTDS). The political level also makes decisions on the level or quantity of government indebtedness. It is at this level that debt targets are decided.

The execution level implements the policies set at the political level as part of the government machinery. The technicians who function at this level work within the limits set at the political level to ensure that both fiscal and debt objectives are met in the most prudential manner. The execution level carries out the debt management functions previously identified and produces robust data dissemination for transparency. The execution level monitors debt sustainability levels and measures potential effects from shocks, including climate-related shocks, and provides critical information to policymakers when deciding between borrowing options and maintaining prudential debt levels as prescribed by legislation.

## Debt Management Strategy (DMS)

The third building block of good public debt governance is the development, approval, publication and implementation of a sound debt management strategy<sup>11</sup> which outlines how the previously described debt management objectives are to be achieved within the macroeconomic environment, market conditions and budget constraints. In this regard, the debt management office (DMO) established in the managerial structure will be assigned this responsibility, including the execution of the debt management strategy through borrowing, and other debt-related transactions, such as publicly guaranteed debt, on-lending and derivatives.<sup>12</sup> In doing so, “the DMO is typically responsible for undertaking analysis and providing advice to decision-makers on potential DM strategies and the cost-risk trade-offs” (World Bank 2021). To implement the DMS, the DMO should develop and publish an annual borrowing plan and a securities issuance calendar to outline how the government’s financing requirement, as determined by the budget, will be met with various debt instruments. Designing a debt management strategy is outside the scope of this paper however, the MTDS Guidance Note<sup>13</sup> outlines the content of the debt management strategy.

## Debt Reporting

The fourth cornerstone of governance is a comprehensive, timely and intelligible public debt reporting framework that promotes transparency and accountability to the legislature and the wider civil society. This cornerstone of governance is supported by the DeMPA guidelines and the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) (International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board 2015). Reporting of public debt includes public sector debt levels, portfolio structure, composition, ratios, cost-risk indicators, and contingent liabilities as well as providing an account of debt management operations and progress towards achieving debt management objectives as outlined in the legislation and the debt management strategy (World Bank 2021). Debt reporting can take the form of regularly published debt reports such as debt portfolio reviews, debt bulletins on official websites and a report on debt management operations to the legislature. IPSAS 29 outlines the requirements for recognizing and measuring of financial instruments including loans and securities for the purposes of the public accounts. The guide also indicates how debt restructurings should be valued (International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board 2015).

11 The DMS is a medium-term plan to be used by the government to achieve the desired composition of its debt portfolio. (World Bank 2021).

12 The IMF Public Debt Statistics Guide for Compilers and Users describes financial derivatives as a non-debt financial instrument “of which the underlying contracts involve risk transfer. Thus, rather than supplying funds or other resources, a derivative contract shifts the exposure to the effect of a change in the value of an item between the parties, without a change in ownership of that item.” The guide recommends that countries “compile and disseminate data on financial derivatives positions as a memorandum to public sector debt statistics. Such information is useful because these contracts can add to a public sector unit’s liabilities and, if used inappropriately, cause significant losses.” International Monetary Fund. 2011. Public sector debt statistics: Guide for compilers and users. Statistical Manual, Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund. Elibrary.imf.org. May. Accessed June 16, 2023. <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9781484349762/9781484349762.xml>

13 The Medium-Term Debt Management Strategy Guidance Note is published by the IMF and can be accessed online at: <https://www.imf.org/external/np/pp/eng/2009/030309a.pdf>

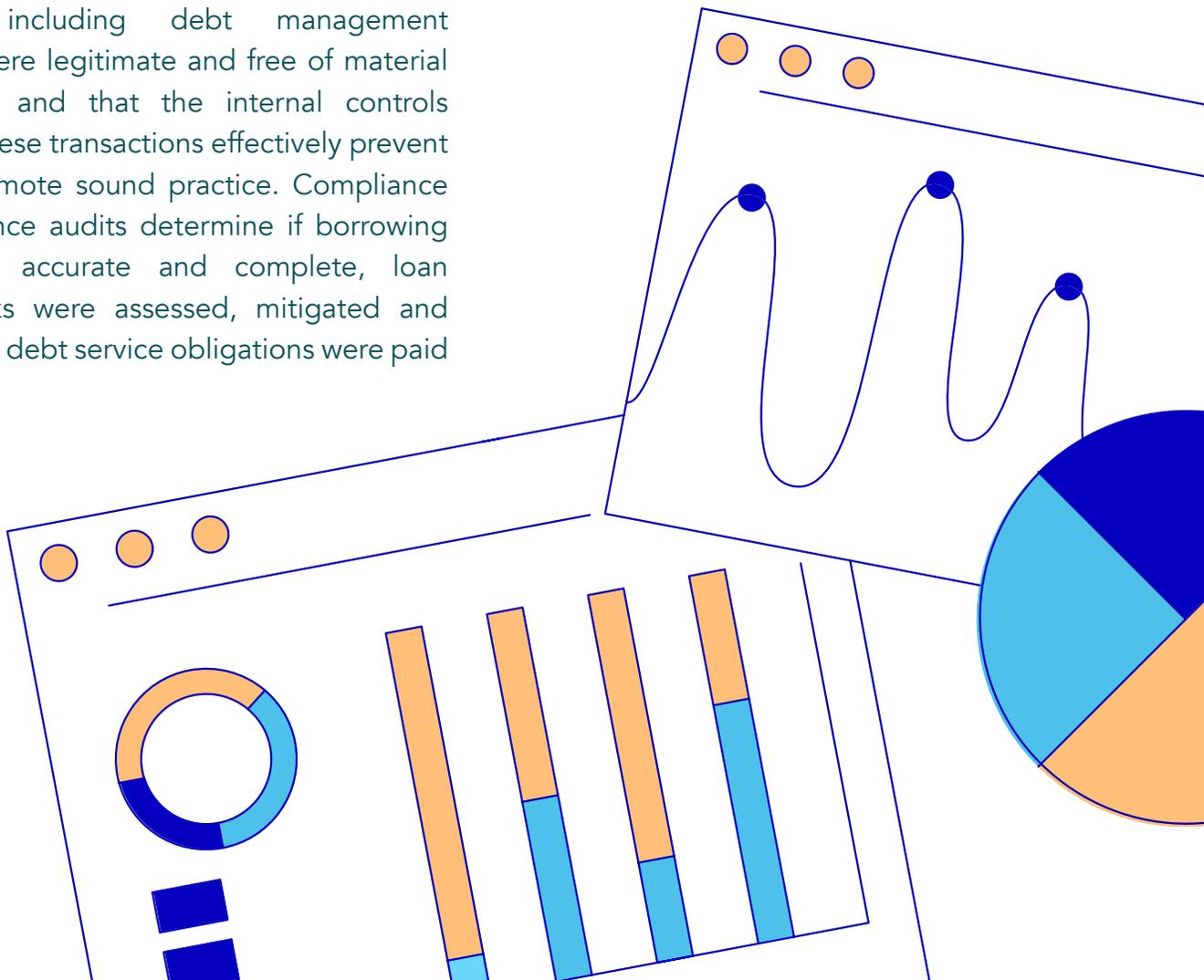


## Audit of Public Debt

The fifth cornerstone of a sound debt governance foundation is the auditing of public debt management operations and transactions. Several types of debt management audits need to be conducted by a competent audit authority or supreme audit institutions including the Auditor General and internal auditors. According to INTOSAI's Audit of Public Debt Management Handbook for Supreme Audit Institutions (2021), supreme audit institutions (SAIs) play a vital role for independent external oversight of the financial, performance and compliance of PDM relative to existing debt objectives as outlined in legislation. The results of any audit activity should be reported to the public (INTOSAI 2021).

Financial audits provide assurance that financial transactions including debt management transactions were legitimate and free of material misstatements and that the internal controls surrounding these transactions effectively prevent fraud and promote sound practice. Compliance and performance audits determine if borrowing records were accurate and complete, loan guarantee risks were assessed, mitigated and monitored and debt service obligations were paid

accurately, completely and on time in accordance with debt arrangements. It also assesses whether debt service obligations are accurate, and the information is published as outlined in the relevant legislation, regulations and policies. Performance audits also determine the effectiveness of debt management operations in meeting its objective as well as how efficiently resources were utilized in the execution of the debt management function. It is critical that these audit reports are publicly available for examination by oversight bodies including public accounts committees and the wider citizenry to promote transparency and accountability.



## Methodology

For the purposes of this study, the paper adopts and expands on the approach used by Mooney et al. (2021). In the study published by the Inter-American Development Bank, Mooney et al. (2021) partially utilized the 2015 version of the DeMPA methodology to inform a questionnaire distributed to the six borrowing member countries of the Bank. For this study, the researchers have chosen to pursue a qualitative study that relies on publicly available literature identifying various themes of governance from the DeMPA tool as evidenced in the practices of CARIFORUM countries to answer specific research questions (Figure 6). The revised World Bank's DeMPA Methodology of 2021 is used as a baseline for establishing sound debt governance practice. The study utilizes select dimensions of the five DPIs under the DeMPA's governance and strategy development pillar as a benchmark against which the current state of sovereign debt governance in the various CARIFORUM countries can be evaluated. In doing so, the study applies a partial DeMPA evaluation, to assess the public existence of key reforms, documents and practices related to the legal framework, managerial structure, debt management strategy, debt reporting and the audit of public debt. Additionally, the level of transparency of sovereign debt operations is assessed using the World Bank's Debt Transparency heatmap where the data are readily available.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Some countries are not IDA-eligible. The IDA-eligible CARIFORUM countries include Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Lucia. The ineligible CARIFORUM countries include Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname.

This methodology applies only a partial DeMPA analysis and only uses publicly available data and therefore this limits the application to other governance practices or reforms that the countries may be undertaking at the time of writing this study. Therefore, a more detailed evaluation of some areas of governance is beyond the scope of the study. It should be noted also that the World Bank acknowledges that the DeMPA tool should be used for indicating performance relative to the standard and not as a tool that provides recommendations for reform. The tool helps countries to identify the minimum standard of performance that could then serve as a trigger for reform.

Figure 6: Questions Considered in the Analysis

Debt Performance Indicator	Research Question
Legal Framework	Is there a consolidated public debt law published on the official website?
Managerial Structure	Is there a dedicated single debt management office?
Debt Management Strategy	Is a current debt management strategy published?
Debt Reporting	Are there annually published public debt reports?
Audit	Are financial audits of DM transactions published? What fiscal year is covered by the most recently published financial audit?

Source: World Bank, Authors

## Findings

The preliminary findings suggest that, overall, most CARIFORUM member countries examined do not meet the minimum best practice requirements for good sovereign debt governance in at least three areas. Grenada (2008) suggests that high debt in the CARICOM nation states is a result of poor governance generally across these countries. However, based on a review done by the IMF and others between 2013 and 2014<sup>15</sup>, several countries received technical assistance to strengthen their debt management framework; however, weaknesses remained.

## Legal Framework

Based on the study of twelve Caribbean states<sup>16</sup> by Robinson (2021), two (Grenada and Jamaica) out of twelve had a single consolidated debt management legislation and only two (Grenada and Jamaica) had a legal mandate to publish their MTDS. Since the publication of her findings, the authors of this paper found that one additional country (The Bahamas) has published a single consolidated public debt management act. One additional country (St. Lucia) has published a public debt management bill.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, publicly available data show that the legal framework governing public debt management is still fragmented in the CARIFORUM grouping,

with some countries having more than one piece of legislation guiding public debt management. There would need to be further analysis to assess if the public debt laws for the published countries cover all the requirements for a comprehensive piece of legislation that articulates debt management objectives.

## Managerial Structure

A review of the websites of the ministries of finance in the 14 CARIFORUM countries reveals that 12 of these nation states have acknowledged the importance of an institutional framework that supports debt management by setting up debt management units with the appropriate managerial structure. The findings reveal that the twelve countries which have established debt management units include Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname. The assessment of the researchers did not look at whether the units were adequately staffed or resourced or whether the mandate for the units was properly laid out in appropriate legislation. The assessment also does not assess the effectiveness of the debt management units in carrying out the

15 Yartey, Charles, and Therese Turner-Jones. 2014. "Caribbean Renewal: Tackling Fiscal and Debt Challenges." International Monetary Fund. Accessed online at: <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9781484369142/9781484369142.xml?BookTabs=bookabstract>. Accessed on: May 30, 2023.

16 Caribbean countries examined during the desk review included, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago.

17 The Public Debt Management Bill is not yet an Act, however, it worth mentioning as it is a step in the right direction. It can be accessed here: <https://www.govt.lc/publications/public-debt-management-bill>

debt management function. Notwithstanding, the existence of these debt management units might signify that it is possible that some of the documents which are not publicly available are being prepared for internal consumption. However, this was outside the specific scope of this preliminary study.

## Debt Management Strategy

On the debt management strategy, the authors found a current published debt management strategy for the year 2023 (the year of writing) on the Ministry of Finance webpages of three of the fourteen countries analysed. These include The Bahamas, Grenada, and Jamaica. Guyana publishes a public debt policy<sup>18</sup> which “provides a broad framework to guide decisions” in the country. It is worth noting that most of the CARIFORUM countries have published debt strategies in the past, although these are now outdated. To support an earlier point about the legal framework, it is interesting to note that The Bahamas has a published debt management strategy and borrowing plan, despite not having an established or staffed DMO. The publication of the documents is legislated by parliament without specifically outlining the institutional structure for facilitating the publication. The three countries (Bahamas, Grenada, Jamaica) with

public debt management acts have published debt management strategies, while one (Guyana) of the eleven countries without consolidated public debt management acts has a published current debt management policy. This seems to suggest that countries with legal frameworks are more likely to consistently produce and publish a debt management strategy.

## Debt Reporting

With respect to debt reporting, nine of the twelve countries surveyed by Robinson<sup>19</sup> prepare an annual debt report, while only seven submit the annual report to parliament and publish it. Some reasons for the lack of publication, as cited by Robinson, included “a lack of follow-up or approval by higher authorities” and “a reluctance to be challenged about the debt numbers by the legislature or by civil society groups.”

These gaps reveal room for further enhancement. There has been some progress in debt statistics reporting as most countries have implemented debt management systems.<sup>20</sup> A review of the World Bank’s Quarterly External Data Statistics (QEDS) metadata<sup>21</sup> reveals that eight<sup>22</sup> countries are currently providing data on debt stocks and debt service. In the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU), the debt dashboard<sup>23</sup> reveals that

18 The Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. 2021. “The Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana’s Public Debt Policy 2021-2024”. Accessed online at: <https://finance.gov.gy/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Public-Debt-Policy-2021-2024-The-Cooperative-Republic-of-Guyana.pdf>. Accessed on: May 30, 2023.

19 Robinson, Michele. 2021. “Debt Transparency and Data Quality in the Caribbean.” [michelerobinson.net](https://michelerobinson.net). March. Accessed May 30, 2023. [https://michelerobinson.net/assets/docs/ComSec\\_Debt\\_Transparency\\_and\\_Data\\_Quality\\_in\\_the\\_Caribbean\\_-\\_SSM-2021.9162416.pdf](https://michelerobinson.net/assets/docs/ComSec_Debt_Transparency_and_Data_Quality_in_the_Caribbean_-_SSM-2021.9162416.pdf).

20 Commonwealth Meridian is the new public debt management system, developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat. The system, which replaces the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Recording Management System (CSDRMS), incorporates advanced and improved functionalities to address emerging debt management requirements and takes advantage of the latest state-of-the-art technologies.



only three<sup>24</sup> of the eight countries in the union have published quarterly debt bulletins or debt portfolio reviews in the last two years. In addition, the five<sup>25</sup> ECCU countries which actively utilize the Regional Government Securities Market (RGSM) to raise financing, publish some debt information in their security issuance prospectuses as part of the requirements to issue debt securities (bonds, notes and treasury bills) on the RGSM. The assessment did not look at the sectoral coverage, completeness or accuracy of the datasets published.

## Audit of Public Debt

The findings reveal that of the five Debt Performance Indicators, audit of public debt seems to be lagging the most in many countries. Notwithstanding the legal mandate to borrow, and the existence of an audit act and constitutional provisions for auditing, the completion and publication of the general financial audits of the government financial statements are significantly delayed.

Although the legal framework is fragmented in most countries, there is a legal mandate that establishes the authority for borrowing and purpose of borrowing. The findings from an examination of the websites of the various

Ministries of Finance and the Office of the Auditor General suggest that only two (Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica) of the fourteen countries have published audit reports for the fiscal year ended 2022, while two (Barbados and Guyana) have published audit reports for the fiscal year ended 2021. Two countries (The Bahamas and Dominica) had published audit reports for the fiscal year ended 2020. The last published financial audits for some countries date as far back as 2008, 2010 and 2012. Further to this, there were no published audits found on the website or webpage of the auditor general for two of the countries in this study. It is unclear whether the source of the publication delays originate in the conduct of the audit itself by the offices of the auditors general/ supreme audit institutions or whether the source of the delay lies with the production of the financial statements by the offices of the accountants general. This preliminary study did not consider whether countries currently have projects underway to complete outstanding audits. It is important to note that while there is data readily available on financial audits, extraordinarily little is published on performance and compliance audits of public debt.

21 World Bank. (2023). Quarterly External Debt Statistics (QEDS) GDDS data. Accessed online at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/debt-statistics/qeds/gdds#country-metadata>. Accessed on: May 30, 2023.

22 Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago.

23 Eastern Caribbean Central Bank. (2023). Debt Data. Accessed online at: <https://www.eccb-centralbank.org/debt/documents>. Accessed on: May 30, 2023.

24 Dominica, Grenada and Saint Lucia

25 Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

# Policy Recommendations

Although the study is limited in scope, the findings of this short study reveal the need for some key public debt management reforms to promote good governance, accountability and transparency. The writers advocate that there can be robust debt management systems in the CARIFORUM countries reviewed if some key principles, discussed below, are followed.



## Public Debt Management Legislation

Consolidating the various pieces of legislation into one updated public debt management act is a key recommendation. A well-designed public debt management act clearly delineates the levels of authority for public borrowing in terms of strategy formulation, implementation and risk management. It fosters the publishing of comprehensive debt data and debt strategy implementation and outcomes. It also outlines the governance framework that must support good data dissemination standards and ensures that the information shared is timely, relevant and easily accessible. The appropriate minister with responsibility for finance should administer the Public Debt Management Act.



## Institutional Arrangements

Establish institutional arrangements that provide for a clear distinction between the political and executive level of debt management. The writers propose a single Debt Management Office to carry out the debt management functions as outlined in Public Debt Management Act. Where debt management offices have already been established, the authors recommend ensuring that debt management responsibilities are fully assigned to the DMO. Where resources may not be available to establish and staff units in the short term, countries should ensure that deepening of coordination, through debt coordinating committees and memorandums of understanding among and including entities involved in debt management to ensure effectiveness in achieving the debt management objectives, takes place.



## Debt Management Strategy

Develop and publish a debt management strategy to guide borrowing and support the achievement of debt management objectives and to steer borrowing towards the desired cost-risk combinations. This is critical for good governance of public debt and for improving debt transparency and accountability in many countries. To operationalise the debt management strategies, governments should also consider the development and publication of annual borrowing plans and security issuance calendars to help the market participants prepare for issuances.



### **Debt Reporting and Publication**

Publish comprehensive, timely debt data, statistics, ratios, risk measures and reports on debt management operations, including progress toward strategy implementation, is crucial for transparency and accountability. These reports should be comprehensive, accurate, intelligible and be submitted to parliament and published on official websites in a timely manner.



### **Financial Reporting and Auditing**

Financial accounts need to be prepared and financial, compliance and performance audits need to be conducted in a timely manner to allow for enhanced accountability to the public. These reports should be submitted to the parliament for publication by the timelines outlined in the legislation and accepted best practice. Active public accounts committees and civil service organisations are crucial to this process.



### **Publication of Key Debt Documents**

While this point can be integrated into the fourth policy recommendation, the authors believe it is important to separate this as a final recommendation. Governments can consider updating and reorganising websites<sup>26</sup> to facilitate easier access of published documents to promote good governance, accountability, and transparency. In examining various official country and ministerial websites, the authors found that many websites were not well organised or updated, making information difficult to access. The authors acknowledge that in some cases countries which have been identified as not having some documents publicly available, may be producing some of these documents – debt management strategies, audits, borrowing plans, debt portfolio reviews and debt bulletins – for internal consumption. However, the authors reemphasize that a critical part of good governance, accountability, transparency and DeMPA requirements is the publication of these documents and other key pieces of information.

<sup>26</sup> A good example is the ECCB's debt webpage, which provided useful information in one place.

**Indeed, this paper was not intended to criticize countries or their governments, but rather serve to start (or recommence) a conversation on the current state of good governance over sovereign debt management in the region, by examining just one aspect of each of the five generally accepted areas of good governance.**

The authors hope that countries can be encouraged by this paper to take steps towards implementing the outlined policy recommendations as appropriate. If implemented, these proposed governance reforms can support debt sustainability, debt transparency and financing of the SDGs, including the advancement of gender and youth. It is important for CARIFORUM countries seeking to access limited sources of financing to publish data, legislation and audits because these types of information support investor relations for entities seeking to invest in government securities on the domestic and international markets. Further, public lenders including multilateral development banks (MDBs), Governments and international financial institutions (IFIs), private lenders and credit rating agencies use this information to assess government's creditworthiness and payment capacity. Debt transparency allows for resolution among creditors and improves trust. Critically, access to information allows for smoother debt resolutions that form part of the international financial architecture and it helps creditors to understand burden-sharing in a debt resolution exercise. Last but by no means least,

transparency through the publication of this information promotes accountability to citizens (to whom governments are accountable) who inevitably have to service the debt through tax revenue.

## **Conclusion and Scope for Further Study**

This study took a deeper look into the role of good governance in sovereign debt management in the Caribbean. As discussed, high public debt has origins both pre- and post-independence and continues to be a challenge for many CARIFORUM countries, with many countries being among the most heavily indebted and highly vulnerable in the world. This qualitative analysis was conducted under the premise that good governance of public debt is the foundation of effective debt management. As such, the analysis sought to survey (via desk research) the state of good public debt governance in the 14 CARIFORUM countries. The analysis presented some important gaps in various governance cornerstones in the target countries. The findings reveal that while there has been some progress, there is significant scope for greater, decisive reform in all areas to strengthen and, in some cases, introduce public debt governance frameworks. The study further revealed the need for consolidation of fragmented public debt legal frameworks and arrangements to institutionalize debt management best practices



such as the establishment of debt management units, publication of debt management strategies, improvement of debt reporting and the production of timely audits of public debt.

Further empirical research is required in a number of the governance cornerstones within the Caribbean context. The assessment revealed the need for further in-depth research and analysis of the individual governance cornerstones highlighted in this study with a view to identifying the key areas for improvement and the associated implementation challenges with a view to providing more detailed recommendations on these areas. Another area of further research could be a study on how high public debt crowds out the implementation of the SDGs in the Caribbean.

In addition to the recommendations already highlighted in the paper, this additional research will provide a basis for more effective and targeted technical assistance, capacity building and advisory services, tailored to the Caribbean context, to help advance public debt reforms in the Caribbean with a view to promote good governance, transparency and accountability as well as supporting the advancement of the SDGs in the region.



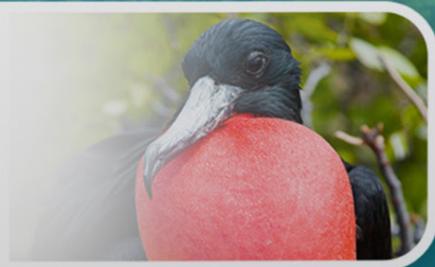


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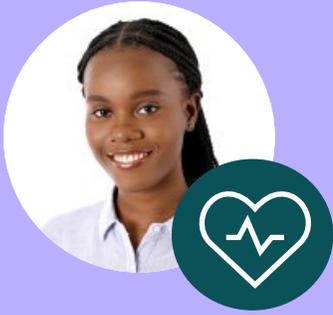
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# An Assessment of the Impact of Trade Liberalization on Non-Communicable Disease Prevalence within the Caribbean Region

**Author: Adiella Lewis**

Characterized by the United Nations as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – as a result of their small geographic and population sizes, limited natural resource endowments, and susceptibility to external shocks (United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States n.d.) – countries within the Caribbean are among the most food insecure globally (United Nations World Food Programme 2022) as a result of the unique developmental challenges they face.

In an effort to promote and facilitate the sustainable economic growth and development of countries within the Caribbean region, there has been an increased focus in the region on the issue of food security given its perpetuation and exacerbation of existing social and economic inequalities.

While some of the implemented policies and initiatives have been relatively successful, many have failed, given the tendency to focus solely on reducing hunger while neglecting the quality and utility pillars (Committee on World Food Security 2014) of food security.

The failure of governmental and non-governmental organizations to take into consideration these vital pillars when implementing policies and initiatives designed to address the issue of food insecurity is evidenced by the current Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) epidemic currently being faced by

countries within the Caribbean region (Caribbean Public Health Agency 2021).

Furthermore, the exclusion of SIDS from literature studying the potentially adverse relationship between international trade, upon which Caribbean countries are heavily dependent, and the prevalence of chronic diseases has resulted in the inability of governmental and non-governmental institutions to effectively implement policies and design initiatives to combat the epidemic, resulting in the misuse of scarce resources and efforts that are, at best inefficient, and at worse, progress reversing.

Consequently, without the relevant data and analysis, the current NCD epidemic will continue to be one of the lesser discussed side effects of international trade, and more specifically, the promotion of trade liberalization as a catalyst for economic growth and development.

*The purpose of this research paper, therefore, is to assist governments, non-governmental organizations, and other relevant authorities within the Caribbean region with the data and analysis needed to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the policies and initiatives designed and implemented to address the current NCD epidemic.*

To accomplish this, this study reviews existing literature and utilizes regression analysis to investigate whether a statistically significant relationship exists between the liberalization of trade and NCD prevalence given the impact

that the increased importation of less nutritious, heavily processed foods, and sugar-sweetened beverages has on regional consumption habits (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2002).

The qualitative component of this study, which largely takes the form of a literature review, concluded the following.

**40%**

**of the population of the English-speaking Caribbean qualifies as food insecure (World Food Programme 2022).**

The Caribbean is one of the most vulnerable regions globally (United States Department of Agriculture 2019). This stems from a number of developmental challenges including the region's over-dependence on foreign exchange which is required to fund the importation of approximately eighty to ninety percent of the food consumed within the Caribbean (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture 2021). This is illustrated by the results of the 2021 Global Food Security Index which ranked the Dominican Republic as the most food secure Caribbean country at forty-seventh, and Haiti as the least food secure Caribbean country at one hundred and sixth (Economist Impact 2021).

The inability of Caribbean countries to produce sufficient food to satisfy regional demand – coupled with adverse events such as the coronavirus pandemic, given its unprecedented impact on global economies and supply chains, and more recently, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – has resulted in extraordinarily prohibitive food prices. The severity of this problem is reflected in the results of a survey which found that twenty-five percent of respondents were eating less preferred foods, thirty percent had reduced food intake, and five percent had recently forgone an entire day of eating (Relief Web 2022).

Secondly, NCDs – as a result of their devastating impact on the healthcare systems, labour force productivity, and government expenditure of affected countries – have the tendency to exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities therefore creating a vicious cycle. With approximately seventy-seven percent of the total deaths, and eighty-five percent of premature

deaths attributable to NCDs occurring in low- and middle-income countries, this is especially true for SIDS within the Caribbean region (World Health Organization 2021) which bear an inordinate proportion of the global NCD burden.

This burden was worsened by the advent of the coronavirus pandemic which – given its severely negative impact on global healthcare systems, supply chains, and therefore economies – further emphasized the risks associated with populations within which comorbidities such as diabetes and other NCDs are extremely prevalent (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean 2021).

As such, the sustainable growth and development of SIDS within the Caribbean region is contingent on the timeliness and effectiveness of the actions taken by the relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations to combat this issue.

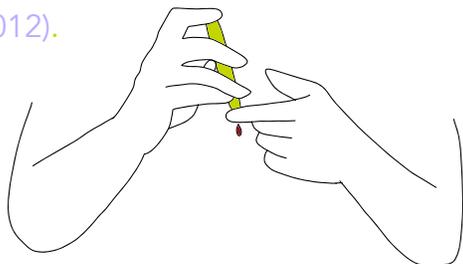
Lastly, studies conducted on the prevalence of NCDs within the Caribbean region have identified the nutrition transition (Unwin, et al. 2017) – defined as the drastic change in consumption from primarily healthier, locally produced foods to less nutritious, heavily processed foods, and sugar sweetened beverages (Foster, et al. 2016-2017) – as one of the main contributing factors to the current epidemic (Healthy Caribbean Coalition 2020).

Given that the majority of these foods are imported, the shift in consumption observed in many Caribbean countries highlights the impact

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## **“Non-Communicable Diseases and their risk factors worsen poverty while poverty results in rising rates of Non-Communicable Diseases”**

(Anderson 2012).



of the region's trade policy – a liberal approach to which has been promoted as a catalyst for economic growth and development – on consumption (Guell, et al. 2021), and therefore NCD prevalence.

This has been demonstrated in a number of countries for example, in Samoa – a Small Island Developing State (UNESCO 2021) which reports some of the highest rates of NCDs globally – where the importation of turkey tails was identified as contributing factor to the increased consumption of fatty meats and therefore NCD prevalence (Thow, et al. 2017).

Therefore, while SIDS are dependent on, and have benefited greatly from (Inter-American Development Bank 2019), the liberalization of trade – as evidenced by the significant contribution of trade in services to the growth of Gross Domestic Product and the increased access to vital commodities such as pharmaceutical products – it is imperative that the relationship between trade and NCD prevalence is thoroughly researched to prevent further harm being done to the region's developmental progress.

The quantitative component of this study, which took the form of a regression analysis, sought to reinforce the findings of the literature review by determining whether a statistically significant relationship exists between trade liberalization and NCD prevalence within the Caribbean region.

However, contrary to the existing literature, the results of the regression analysis indicate that

no statistically significant relationship exists between the percentage of Disability Adjusted Life Years attributable to Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus and Merchandise Trade as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product which were used as proxies for the prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases and the liberalization of trade respectively.

This discrepancy may have occurred for several reasons, most likely, the incorrect specification of the model due to the unavailability of data for countries within the Caribbean region. Therefore, in order to ensure the correct specification of the model, it is imperative that additional studies are done to address the lack of region-specific data.

*Consequently, this study concludes by recommending the following:*

Firstly, it is imperative that increased research be conducted in this area to fill the gaps in the knowledge and facilitate the completion of studies which yield reliable results that can be used to inform the design and implementation of actionable solutions by the relevant authorities. Secondly, governments and non-governmental organizations should seek to increase awareness about the causes and impact of NCDs. This may be done in a variety of ways including through the inclusion of nutrition education in school curriculums, mass media campaigns, and the dissemination of educational materials in workplaces, hospitals, clinics, and other institutions.

Thirdly, governments of Caribbean countries

should require adherence to the international standards for nutrition labelling, and the inclusion of easily visible health warnings on undesirable products such as cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. This measure should be accompanied by policies restricting access to and disincentivizing the purchase and subsequent consumption of commodities which have been identified as significantly contributing to the prevalence of NCDs.

More importantly, Caribbean governments – whether through the reduction or removal of taxes applied to healthier alternatives, or the introduction of welfare programmes – should simultaneously implement policies designed to improve the accessibility of more desirable foods and beverages.

Lastly, a system which records the data related to the prevalence of NCDs and associated risk factors must be put in place to monitor the success of these recommendations and facilitate further research in this area.







# **A Sustainable Food Systems and Policy Framework for Small and Medium Scale Food Producers in Selected Cariforum Countries**

**Author: Dr. Tigerjeet Ballayram and Professor Fitzroy Henry/ Caribbean Policy Development Centre**

## **Introduction**

This policy brief is based on a recent study<sup>1</sup> that the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) conducted on the state of food and nutrition security and sovereignty in five CARICOM member states, viz., Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The study also conducted a needs assessment of small and medium scale (SMS) food producers in these five countries. One of the key findings of the study is that these countries' food systems require significant re-orientation to effectively address the existential food and nutrition security (FNS) challenges these countries face. Against this background, this Brief proposes a new conceptual framework for addressing these critical FNS problems, and to guide policy and programmatic actions in food and nutrition security and sovereignty. The Brief also identifies key features of sustainable food systems and develops a policy framework focusing specifically on policy areas for enhancing the livelihoods of small and medium scale food producers in the five countries under study, and in other CARICOM countries.

1CPDC (2023). A Sustainable Food Systems and Policy Framework for Small and Medium Scale Food Producers in Selected CARIFORUM Countries. Caribbean Policy Development Centre, Barbados).



# Food and Nutrition Security Situation

Indicators representing the four dimensions of FNS, viz., food availability, access, utilization, and stability, were analysed over the 2010–2022 period to assess the FNS situation in the five countries under study. The following summarizes the main findings of that analysis:

- All five countries have food energy, fats/oils, and sugars/sweeteners available in the countries to meet their Recommended Population Food Goals<sup>2</sup> (RPFGs). Barbados, Guyana, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines also have protein available to meet their RPFGs. However, in Jamaica and Grenada protein availability, respectively, is 13% and 6% below RPFGs. The availability of Fats/Oils and Sugars/Sweeteners is significantly in excess of RPFGs in all five countries, and this has serious health implications.
- In all five countries, the main public health problem is the increasing prevalence of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs), also known as nutrition-related diseases. While preventable, these diseases are driven mainly by unhealthy diets, based on foods that are readily available mainly from imports, that are calorie-dense, high in fats, sweeteners, and sodium (salt). These diets are then linked to overweight and obesity, major risk factors for the NCDs.
- With the exception of Guyana, food production in the other countries appears to be normalized around a base level equilibrium, with food imports accounting for the major proportion of foods consumed in the countries. The most recent estimates indicate that Barbados produces 13% of the food it consumes, Grenada 19%, Jamaica 37%, St. Vincent and the Grenadines 32%, and Guyana 59% (FAO, 2015a).
- Based on the latest available data, poverty, unemployment and highly unequal distribution of incomes, and more than two decades of slow economic growth, are existential factors that constrain access to food, and thereby contribute to the vulnerability of households to food and nutrition insecurity. Exogenous factors (e.g., pandemics, crises on the world economy, natural disasters, etc.) also adversely impact food and nutrition security.
- Over the 2010–2021 period, the average annual food import bill for Barbados was US\$303 million, Grenada US\$77 million, Guyana US\$239 million, Jamaica US\$846 million, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines US\$81 million. On average, the Caribbean spends more than 30 percent of the value of total merchandise exports on food imports (FAOSTAT, 2023). The ratios for the five countries under study are shown in Table 1 on the following page.

<sup>2</sup>The Recommended Population Food Goals established by the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (2006) are as follows: Food energy (2250 Kcal/capita/day); Protein (70 g/capita/day); Fats/Oils (56.8 g/capita/day); Sugars/Sweetened (125 Kcal/capita/day).

<sup>3</sup>In this Brief, we refer to the “FNS approach” as the conceptual and policy framework, promoted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and other international organizations, and embraced by CARICOMs regional institutions and national governments. The FNS approach, defines food security as existing when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996). This definition is operationalized through four dimensions, viz., food availability, access, utilization, and the stability of these three components.

Figure 1: Food Imports in Total Merchandise Exports (Average over 20120-2021)



- Finally, the indicators of stability presented some sobering observations to which policy makers must pay attention. First, there is rapid transmission of international food price increases to these countries whenever there is a shock on the world economy. Second, the high ratios of food imports to total merchandise exports are unsustainable. These two observations reinforce the need to incentivize increases in domestic food production, especially through a managed food import policy and targeted productivity-enhancing support to food producers. Third, with the exception of Guyana, the high public debt-to-GDP ratios in the other countries are also unsustainable and can negatively affect economic growth. Finally, these countries

are prone to natural disasters and must seek to build resilience against these exogenous shocks.

## Towards a New Conceptual Framework for Food and Nutrition Security and Sovereignty

Over the past two decades, the FNS approach<sup>3</sup> has dominated the policy space that guided food and nutrition security analyses and programmatic actions in the region. A new conceptual framework is proposed in this Policy Brief. It integrates the FNS and food sovereignty<sup>4</sup> (FSv), approaches with the aim of designing a unifying framework to guide analyses, while advancing CARIFORUM's food and nutrition security and sovereignty agendas<sup>5</sup>. Several reasons motivate this integrative conceptualization:

- First, the conceptual framework will provide the lens for analyses and policy prescriptions on food and nutrition security and sovereignty in any country from a unified perspective of both the FNS and FSv approaches.
- Second, despite making some progress on FNS over the past two decades, countries in the region continue to face several food and

<sup>4</sup> The Declaration at Nyeleni (2007) defined food sovereignty as the right of peoples and nations to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture system. The Declaration also proposed six pillars/dimensions of FSv, viz.: Focuses on people; Values food producers; Localizes food systems; Puts control locally; Builds knowledge and skills; and Works with nature.

<sup>5</sup> The conceptual framework proposed here draws heavily from Ballayram, T., and Henry, F. (2022). Reorienting the Conceptual and Policy Framework of Food and Nutrition Security for more Robust Outcomes in CARICOM Countries. (Unpublished Manuscript).

nutrition security challenges (FAO, 2015a; Ballayram, 2017); CARICOM Secretariat (2020; 2022). These challenges can be attributed, inter alia (Ballayram et al., 2015), to the FNS conceptual framework that guided FNS programmatic actions in the region over the past two decades, which was silent on and/or did not give priority to several critical aspects of Caribbean food systems, such as human empowerment, recognition of rights, aligning food imports with domestic food production, the reinforcement of community capacities to make progress in achieving FNS outcomes, etc.

- Third, even the proponents of the FNS approach have now conceded that there were significant gaps and omissions in their conceptualization of FNS (HLPE<sup>6</sup>, 2020). In response, several critical elements, central to FSv's position about food, empowerment, and the democratization of food systems, have been added recently to the FNS approach. However, the FNS approach has yet to acknowledge the FSv approach, even though the latter's *raison d'être* is to support livelihoods and advance the development agenda of the rural population. Therefore, the proposed changes to the FNS approach bring it closer to the FSv approach and should be a good catalyst for integrating the core aspects of these two approaches.

## Food and Nutrition Security and Sovereignty within Food Systems

The analysis of the state of food and nutrition security and food sovereignty cannot be conducted narrowly in terms of food production trends, income, employment, and other indicators aligned to the two approaches. Instead, it must be situated within the context of the entire food system. Food systems encompass the entire range of activities involved in the production, processing, marketing, consumption, and disposal of goods that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, including the inputs needed and the outputs generated at each of these steps. Food systems interact with and are driven by environmental and socio-economic factors and interactions among them (Ingram et al., 2010). The food system must be sustainable, with attention given to agro-ecological integrity in agriculture and how it contributes to human development, food and nutrition security, and sustainable livelihoods (FAO, 2013).

Figure 1 depicts these and other inter-relationships that are key to food system outcomes. This framework is labelled a "Rights-Based Integrated Food System Framework", because it is underpinned by the Right to Food, and integrates both the FNS and FSv approaches in a single conceptual framework. The Right to Food (RTF) underpins the food system and is a key guiding principle in both the FNS and FSv approaches (HLPE, 2020; Nyeleni, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to global food security and nutrition. Its secretariat is hosted by FAO.

Food system outcomes result from the food system activities, which are determined by action areas or proposals that operationalize the FNS and FSv dimensions, respectively (Sampson et al., 2021). The framework includes agency and sustainability to reflect the evolution of the FNS approach and to acknowledge them as bed-rock principles in the FSv approach (Nyeleni, 2007). Specifically, in addition to asset-based access to food, agency also includes institution-based access, which explicitly seeks to empower individuals and groups with the capacity and independence to take actions that help improve their own wellbeing, and to engage in society to shape food and nutrition security policies. Recent studies in the Caribbean highlight the inequities that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed about FNS at the household level (Henry et al., 2022). Framing food systems through the lens of agency and sustainability expands policy and programmatic actions to address underlying structural inequities that drive food insecurity by placing power in the hands of those most affected (HLPE, 2020).

Chart 1: Rights-Based Integrated Food System Framework



Chart 1 also shows that governance and global and other mandates and commitments constitute two additional sets of influences on food systems and a country's state of food and nutrition security. Within this context, the Right to Food (i.e., the protection of agency) must be elevated as a priority (HLPE, 2020). Food security governance and the Right to Food are sine qua non, i.e., one cannot exist without the other. It is when good governance prevails that the right to food is most likely to be realized (Ballayram and Henry, 2023; FAO, 2015b). Global, hemispheric and regional mandates also exert significant influences on food systems and FNS/FSv outcomes.

## **A Sustainable Food System and Policy Framework for Small and Medium Scale Food Producers**

This section highlights key elements of an enabling environment for Caribbean Small and Medium Sized Food Producers, identifies key features of sustainable food systems and develops a policy framework for advancing the food and nutrition security and sovereignty in the region, focusing specifically on policy needs of Small and Medium-Sized Farmers and Agro-Processors.

### **Key Features of Sustainable Food Systems**

As mentioned earlier, food systems in the region continue to face significant challenges, with wide-reaching consequences for the state of

food and nutrition security and sovereignty and rural livelihoods. To effectively address these challenges and deliver robust food and nutrition security and sovereignty outcomes, these countries must reshape their food systems into sustainable food systems, with priority given to managing food imports, increasing production and productivity, more inclusion of poor and marginalized populations, farming systems that are environmentally sustainable and resilient, and to delivering healthy and nutritious diets to all.

A sustainable food system (SFS) is a food system that achieves food and nutrition security and sovereignty for all and does not compromise the food and nutrition security and sovereignty for future generations. There are three key summary features of a sustainable food system. First, to be sustainable, the food system needs to generate positive values simultaneously along a trifecta of sustainability, viz., economic (it is profitable throughout), social (its benefits are broad-based for society), and environmental (its impact is positive or neutral on the environment) (FAO, 2018; Nyéléni, 2007). Second, a sustainable food system should support and deliver on all dimensions of food and nutrition security and sovereignty, including (HLPE, 2020; Binimelis et al., 2014):

1. Sufficient food is available for all, by managing imports in tandem with targeted productivity-enhancing support to domestic food producers.
2. The Right to Food, so that all people have access to, and utilize/consume, safe, nutritious

and culturally appropriate food for healthy living.

3. Food producers have access to, and control of, resources, and their livelihoods are supported and sustained within that system.
4. Promote empowerment (i.e., agency) for all people, including NGOs, CBOs and producers' organizations, to make choices and exercise voice in policy processes that shape food systems.
5. Build resilience in the system to ensure stability in the face of shocks and crises.
6. Ensure sustainability of all its dimensions, by promoting regenerative food system practices, utilizing local and traditional knowledge, that respect and protect the long-term agro-ecological and socio-economic systems required for providing current and future generations' food and nutrition security and sovereignty (El Bilali et al., 2018).

Finally, a sustainable food system must be underpinned by the Right to Food (RTF), and good governance for food and nutrition security must prevail. The traditional food systems in the region are heavily food-import dependent and have failed to deliver affordable nutritious foods in sufficient quantities to consumers, particularly those in low-income households.

## Policy Framework for Small and Medium Scale Food Producers

The policy framework developed in this section is based on an analysis of the state of food and nutrition security and sovereignty (CPDC, 2023), and findings from a survey of small and medium scale (SMS) food producers in the five countries under study. The framework proposes policy areas and actions for food security and sovereignty to combat agents and systems that impoverish life, resources, and eco-systems. The main principle of the framework is that food systems in countries should be organized to sustain people's livelihoods, their health, and the environment. It emphasizes that the treatment of food merely as a commodity for trade rather than a basic human right diminishes traditional values and cultural heritage. Policy options for local food production should be sustainable; therefore, technologies that undercut this principle should be resisted. Food systems with "modern" development projects that displace people and damage the natural resources and environments are therefore not in keeping with food sovereignty.

Table 1 summarizes evidence from the situational analysis and the needs assessment of SMS food producers to inform the Policy Framework for Small and Medium Scale Food Producers in CARICOM countries. Column 1 in Table 1 shows selected findings from the situational analysis, and responses from the survey that was conducted among small and medium scale food



producers in the five countries under study. These findings and responses inform several policy areas (column 2) which are proposed for advancing food and nutrition security and sovereignty and the livelihoods of SMS food producers.

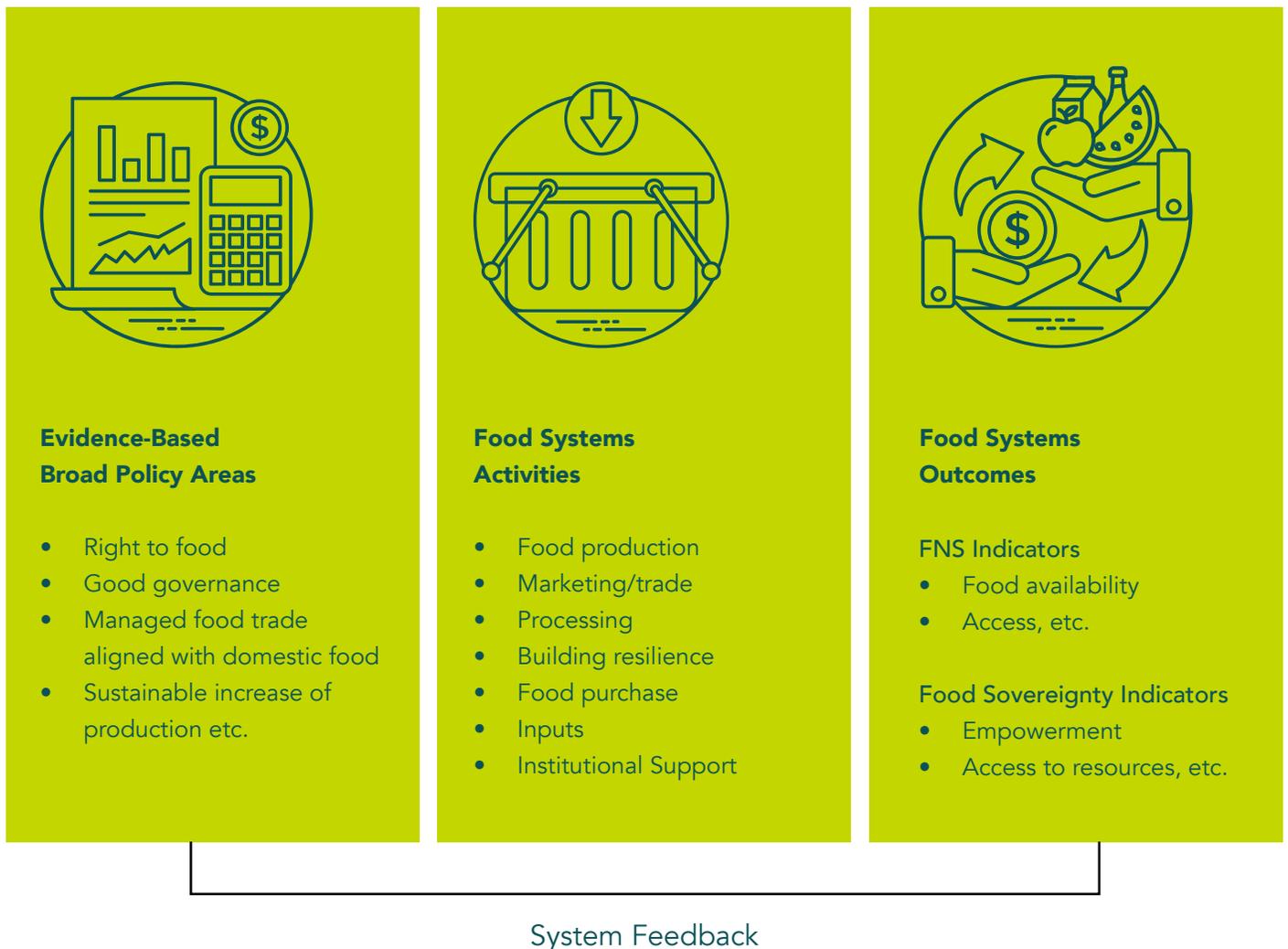
*Table 1: Summary of Evidence/Data to Inform Policy Framework for Small and Medium Scale Food Producers in the Caribbean*

<b>Evidence from Situational Analysis and findings from SMS Farmers' Survey</b>	<b>POLICY AREAS: related to FNS &amp; FSv</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 91% had the desire to expand</li> <li>• 90% need assistance with small equipment</li> <li>• 72% lacked essential tools</li> <li>• 60% lacked access to loans/credit</li> <li>• 37% have problems finding markets</li> <li>• 28% had insufficient processing options/facilities</li> <li>• 28% had problems with praedial larceny</li> <li>• National food production hovering a base-year level</li> <li>• Nutrition-related diseases were the main public health problem in the region</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sustainable increase in agricultural production and productivity with increased access to healthy foods</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 71% need to network with buyers</li> <li>• 76% found a glut in the market</li> <li>• 53% need market link services or platforms</li> <li>• 36% lacked market access</li> <li>• 36% reported that lack of markets is an obstacle to expansion</li> <li>• 35% complained about the low prices for their produce</li> <li>• 31% noted the lack of relevant market information</li> </ul>	<p><b>Bringing food producers and consumers together</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 47% are continuing a family tradition</li> <li>• 29% have off-farm employment to support family</li> <li>• Farmers reported that they benefitted very little from extension services, subsidized inputs, training, etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Food producers are valued, and their livelihoods sustained</b></p>

Evidence from Situational Analysis and findings from SMS Farmers' Survey	POLICY AREAS: related to FNS & FSv
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 69% are members of farmers' organizations, but only 18% are satisfied with these organizations</li> <li>• 86% considered specific vegetable/animal producers' organizations useful</li> <li>• 84% are willing to join a farming cluster</li> <li>• 73% would be committed to a new farming cluster</li> <li>• Only 45% contribute to decisions about their farming enterprise</li> </ul>	<p>Greater empowerment of SMS food producers, via control over resources and farm inputs</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 97% are willing to attend training workshops</li> <li>• More than 80% want management and business training</li> <li>• 88% need training on resilience against shocks</li> <li>• 48-63% want training in technical skills</li> <li>• 75% need practical "how to" skills</li> </ul>	<p>Capacity building in wealth creation, group dynamics and enterprise and risk management</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 69% use irrigation technology and equipment</li> <li>• 41% use crop diversification</li> <li>• 24% practice soil conservation</li> <li>• 28% said there is not enough technical assistance available for climate risk management</li> <li>• Region prone to storms, hurricanes and effects of climate change</li> </ul>	<p>Resilience of food systems against increased climate extremes to preserve environmental and ecological regeneration</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Between 79-90% of SMS food producers felt their living standards can be improved through actions such as a small grant (89%), guidance/advice and assistance with additional income-generating activities (84%), training to manage and sustain farm operations (79%)</li> <li>• Poverty, low income compromise FNS</li> </ul>	<p>Enhance the living standard and overall welfare of SMS food producers</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsustainable food import bills</li> <li>• Food imports account for major source of national food availability</li> <li>• Domestic food production accounts for only 20-40% of national food availability</li> <li>• 90% of SMS food producers would like to expand food production but face several constraints</li> <li>• More than 50% of region's population live in rural areas</li> <li>• Poverty is higher in rural areas</li> <li>• SMS food producers face litany of constraints to expanding farm enterprises</li> </ul>	<p>Strategically manage food imports in line with increasing domestic production capacity</p>

Drawing from the Rights-Based Integrated Food System Framework developed in Chart 1, and the information in Table 1, Chart 2 depicts the pathway that links the policy areas to food systems activities and food system outcomes. The rest of this section elaborates on some of these specific policy areas and related policy actions.

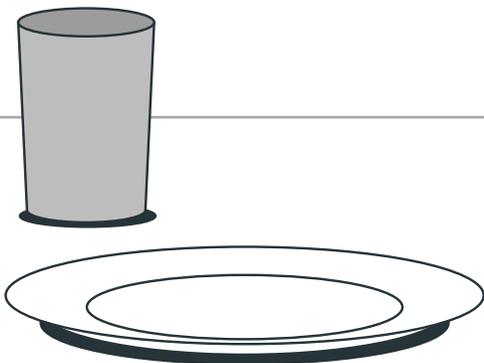
Chart 2: Linking Pathway from Broad Policy Areas to Food System Activities and Food System Outcomes



# 1

## Promote The Right to Food at Regional, National, Country and Community Levels

The Right to Food (RTF) underpins the food system developed in this Policy Brief and is a key guiding principle in both the FNS and FSv approaches (HFPE, 2020; Nyéléni, 2007). All CARICOM countries have ratified several international treaties and conventions (FAO, 2013a; FAO, 2013b), all of which affirm the duty, obligation, and responsibility of governments to, inter alia, protect the RTF for everyone (FAO, 2013b). This means that: (a) citizens can lobby their governments to ensure they have access to food, especially during crises; and, (b) food is a human right, not just a tradable commodity, and can be used as an instrument in negotiations with international organizations (e.g., World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc.), on trade and fiscal issues; and (c) the RTF can be an entry point for proponents of FSv (e.g., NGOs, CBOs, etc.), to lobby on behalf of small and medium scale food producers.



# 2

## Promote Good Governance for Food and Nutrition Security

As depicted in the conceptual framework in Chart 1 and demonstrated elsewhere (Ballayram and Henry, 2023; FAO, 2015b), governance for FNS has a profound influence on a country's food system and the state of food and nutrition security and sovereignty. Governance exists at three distinct levels, namely, the political, institutional, and policy levels. At the political level, good governance for FNS is the efficient delivery of food and nutrition security as a basic public good that the citizenry can reasonably expect from a democratic state. At this level, good governance embraces, inter alia, the human rights-based PANTHER principles (FAO, 2021), which guarantee the Right to Food that underpins the governance for FNS, namely, Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Transparency, Human dignity, Empowerment, Rule-of-law. Food security governance and the Right to Food are sine qua non, i.e., one cannot exist without the other. It is when good governance prevails that the right to food is most likely to be realized (Ballayram and Henry, 2023; FAO, 2015). Within this context, therefore, the Right to Food (i.e., the protection of agency) must be elevated as a priority (HLPE, 2020).

# 3

## **Formulate/support a policy to strategically manage food imports in line with increasing domestic production capacity**

In early 2022, leaders of CARICOM countries announced a regional food import replacement programme to reduce their food imports progressively and selectively by 25% by 2025 (CARICOM, 2022). This programme (“Vision 25% by 2025”) is compelling, commendable, and timely, and should be supported by national governments, regional and international agencies, food producers’ organizations, CBOs, and NGOs. It has the potential to save foreign exchange expenditures, create domestic market opportunities for local farmers, and increase the availability of healthy foods such as fruits, vegetable and indigenous staples that are rich in fibre and complex carbohydrates, in contrast to imported foods that are calorie-dense, high in fats, oils, sugars, sweeteners, and sodium. Caribbean countries can reduce their food import bills through the following policy actions:

1. Provide training, access to markets and to modern farming techniques, and financial assistance such as loans or grants to food producers.
2. Support the development of agribusinesses and value-added industries such as food processing, packaging, and storage.
3. Improve rural infrastructure to facilitate the movement of agricultural goods from rural areas to urban markets.
4. Encourage the adoption of sustainable farming practices, which can reduce input costs, improve soil fertility, conserve water resources, and minimize the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers.
5. Foster regional cooperation on initiatives such as joint purchasing, bulk procurement, and regional trade agreements to leverage economies of scale and reduce the cost of imported food items.
6. Encourage the establishment of local farmers’ markets, cooperatives, and direct sales channels. These initiatives can connect farmers directly with consumers, eliminate intermediaries, and provide fair prices for both producers and consumers.

## 4

### **Take a more proactive approach to Food and Nutrition Security and Sovereignty and Realizing the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030**

All CARICOM countries are signatories to these SDGs, and have, by varying degrees, integrated them into national development objectives and priorities. While all the SDGs are important, SDG 1 (End poverty), and SDG 2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture), are closely related to food and nutrition security and sovereignty, and to the objectives of this study. However, the progress made by the five countries in this study on these two SDGs are at best modest: for SDG 1, Guyana is on track, Barbados and Jamaica are stagnating, and data were unavailable for St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada; for SDG 2, Grenada and Jamaica are stagnating, while the other three countries are moderately improving. In effect, much more must be done by these countries to achieve these two SDGs within the remaining eight-year window before their expiration. In this regard, the recommended policy action is for countries to take a more proactive approach towards the FNS and FSv approaches advanced in this study. These approaches both contribute to achieving SDGs 1 and 2 by focusing on poverty reduction, sustainable agriculture, and improving food availability and access. While the FAO approach emphasizes technical assistance and market-oriented strategies, the food sovereignty

approach emphasizes community empowerment and local control over food systems

## 5

### **Support a sustainable increase in agricultural production and productivity with increased access to healthy foods**

The CPDC (2023) study and analyses done elsewhere (FAO, 2015; Ballayram, 2017; FAO & CDB, 2019), show that, with the exception of Guyana and a few crops in Jamaica, food production in the five countries has stagnated around a base-level equilibrium over the past decade. In these countries the rural population over the 2010–2021 period ranges from 45% (Jamaica), to 73% (Guyana). From the survey conducted among SMS food producers, 91% would like to expand their farming operations. However, several constraints prevent them from doing so (see Table 1). This information can support a wide range of evidence-based policy actions to support small-scale farmers, such as training, access to credit, and technical assistance to enhance their skills, promote sustainable farming practices, and enable them to adopt modern technologies. These policy actions can increase agricultural production, improve productivity, and enhance access to healthy foods, contributing to food security and the overall well-being of the population in the Caribbean.



# 6

## **Bring food producers and consumers together**

Data from the survey conducted among SMS food producers identified several marketing needs and challenges, as seen in Table 1. Policy actions to address these issues would bring food producers and consumers closer together, and help foster transparency, trust, and mutually beneficial relationships. Some policy actions to facilitate this connection include:

Promote direct sales channels, such as farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) programmes, farm stands, or on-farm retail. These platforms allow consumers to meet farmers, learn about their practices, and purchase fresh, locally produced food directly from the source.

Encourage restaurants and food establishments to prioritize local sourcing and establish relationships with nearby farmers. Restaurants can prominently feature information about the farms supplying their ingredients, creating a connection between producers and consumers.

Utilize online platforms, websites, and social media channels to showcase local farms, their products, and farming practices. This digital presence helps bridge the gap between producers and consumers, particularly for those unable to participate in physical interactions.

Create appropriate linkages, such as farmers'

buyers' groups and farmers' markets to empower food producers so that middlemen do not take most of the profits.

# 7

## **Place a premium on the value of SMS food producers to sustain their livelihoods.**

The food sovereignty approach places a premium on policy actions that value food producers and sustain their livelihoods. Policy actions to achieve this outcome include:

- Promote market systems that enable small-scale farmers to access markets and negotiate fair contracts with buyers. This involves addressing power imbalances and reducing the influence of intermediaries.
- Enhance access to essential resources for farmers, including land, water, seeds, and inputs. Improve access to credit and financial services specifically tailored to the needs of food producers, particularly small-scale farmers. This enables them to invest in their operations, adopt sustainable practices, and overcome financial barriers.
- Invest in training, capacity building, and technical assistance programmes for food producers. This equips them with the tools



needed to improve productivity, quality, and market competitiveness.

- Promote the formation and strengthening of farmer organizations, cooperatives, and associations, including in areas such as governance, leadership development, market linkages, and cooperative management.

## 8

### **Bring food producers and consumers together**

The information from the survey conducted among SMS food producers indicated that only 45% of these farmers contribute to policy decisions about their farming enterprise, and while 69% are members of farmers' organizations, only 18% are satisfied with these organizations. Supporting the greater empowerment of small and medium-scale food producers involves implementing various strategies to enhance their capacity, access to resources, market opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes. Some key policy actions include:

- Support the formation and strengthening of farmer organizations, cooperatives, and associations, by assisting in the organizational
- Promote community-level participation for public policy decision-making to reflect their needs and interests.

- Defend farmers' right to have input into formulating national policies that affect SMS farmers' livelihoods.
- Prioritize the needs and rights of small and medium-scale food producers, by creating an enabling environment that incentivizes sustainable agriculture, access to resources, fair markets, and participatory decision-making.
- Strengthen extension services and farmer support systems.

## 9

### **Build capacity in SMS wealth creation, group dynamics, and enterprise and risk management**

The survey data indicated that significant proportions of the SMS food producers were willing to attend training in wealth creation, resilience against shocks, managing their enterprises, etc. Policy actions on each of these training needs can empower small and medium-scale farmers to make informed decisions, improve their financial well-being, build sustainable enterprises, manage risks effectively, enhance collaboration, and access support services.



# 10

## **Build the resilience of food systems against increased climate extremes to preserve environmental and ecological regeneration.**

SMS food producers interviewed for this study indicated that they are favourably disposed to, and practice, climate-smart management practices, but they also reported the lack of technical assistance available to them in this area. Building resilience of food systems against increased climate extremes is crucial for preserving environmental and ecological regeneration and supporting small and medium-scale farmers. This requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving farmers, governments, research institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector to create an enabling environment and support the necessary investments and collaborations. Some policy actions in this area include:

- Provide capacity-building initiatives to enhance the skills and knowledge of SMS food producers in sustainable farming practices, modern techniques, post-harvest management, and value-added processing.
- Provide technical assistance and advisory services to support farmers in adopting efficient and sustainable farming methods.
- Improve SMS food producers' access to climate information, weather forecasts, and early warning systems. Timely information

empowers farmers to take proactive measures in response to climate extremes, reducing potential losses and improving adaptation strategies.

- Implement and, where necessary, strengthen the social protection environment for climate finance through parametric insurance to small scale food producers. This should include bundled products such as micro insurance products coupled with savings accounts.



# 11

## **Enhance the living standard and overall welfare of SMS food producers.**

Between 79%–90% of SMS food producers interviewed for this study felt their living standards can be improved through actions such as a small grant (89%), guidance/advice and assistance with additional income-generating activities (84%), and training to manage and sustain farm operations (79%). Some policy actions along these lines include:

- Provide funding for well-designed and implemented small grants, especially targeted at small scale food producers.
- Provide training in basic entrepreneurship and business approaches to enhance income and wealth creation among SMS food producers.
- Provide periodic training in how to manage and sustain a profitable farming enterprise.

# 12

## **Build Sustainable Livelihoods in Rural Economies.**

In excess of 50% of CARICOM countries' population live in rural economies. Building

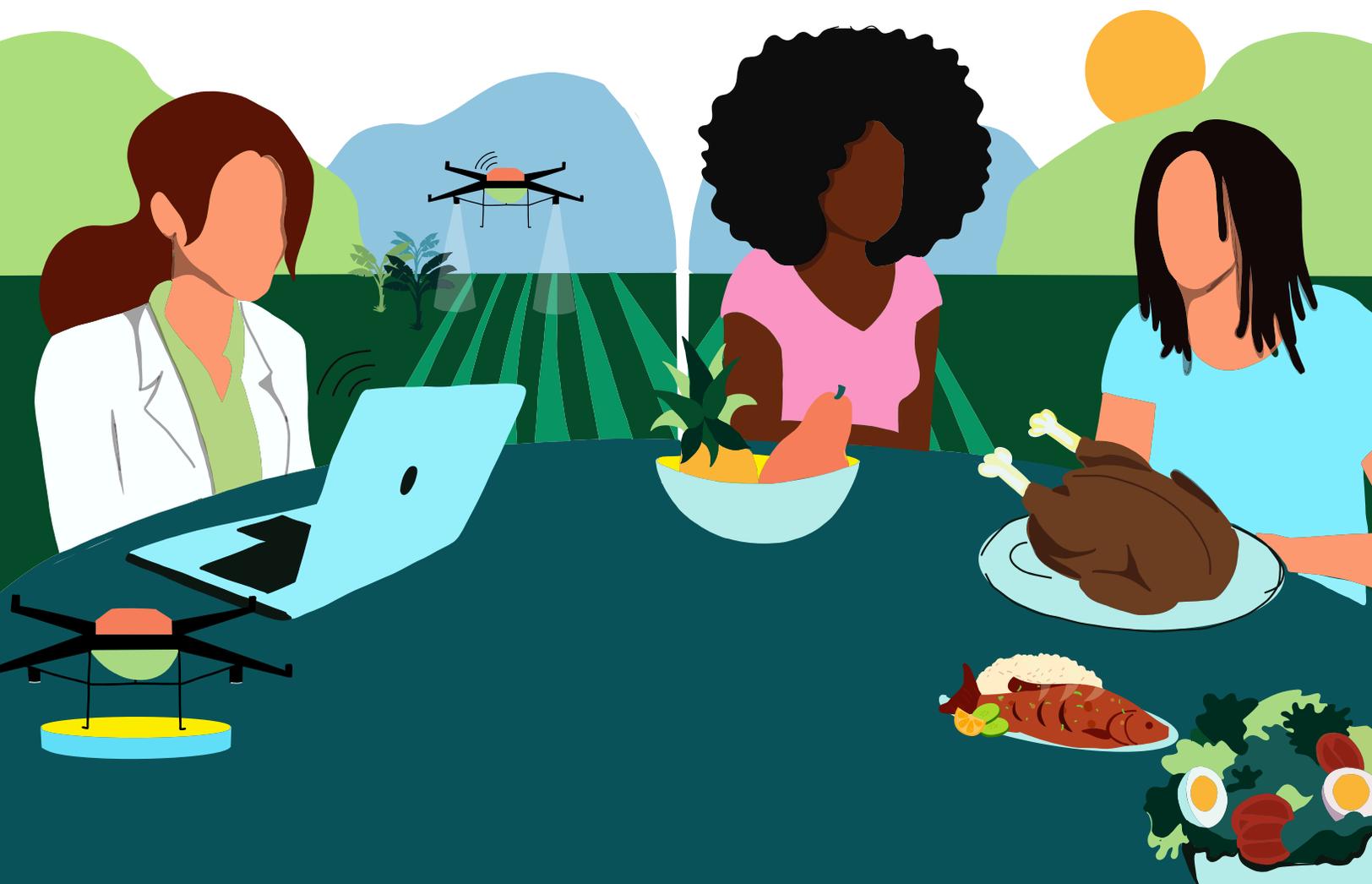
sustainable livelihoods in these rural economies requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses various dimensions of development. Some policy actions include:

- Promote entrepreneurship and the development of small-scale enterprises in sectors such as agro-processing, eco-tourism, renewable energy, crafts, and services. This reduces dependence on a single sector, creates employment opportunities, and enhances income generation.
- Promote value-added processing of agricultural products and facilitate access to markets.
- Facilitate access to finance and business support services for rural entrepreneurs and small-scale enterprises, such as microfinance programmes, financial literacy training, and incubation centres to assist entrepreneurs in developing viable business models.
- Invest in rural infrastructure development to support economic activities and improve digital connectivity.
- Utilize unemployed and immigrant workforce as supplementary labour in the agricultural sector. This can be done by creating synergies across government ministries to determine the labour market needs of the sector while creating employment opportunities.



## Promote the Food Sovereignty approach in the region.

The food sovereignty approach has not gained traction in CARICOM countries. However, there are ongoing efforts by grassroots organizations, farmers' networks, and regional initiatives to promote local food production, agroecology, and sustainable farming practices, which align well with the objectives of the food sovereignty approach. To sustain these efforts and advance the food sovereignty agenda would require strong leadership from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). The Caribbean Policy Development Centre is strategically positioned to take on this role.





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**POLICY BRIEF**

## **TRANSFORMING AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS IN THE CARIBBEAN**

Helping Small and Medium  
Scale (SMS) Food Producers  
to Eradicate Hunger and  
Malnutrition

Caribbean Policy Development Centre

**OCTOBER 2023**



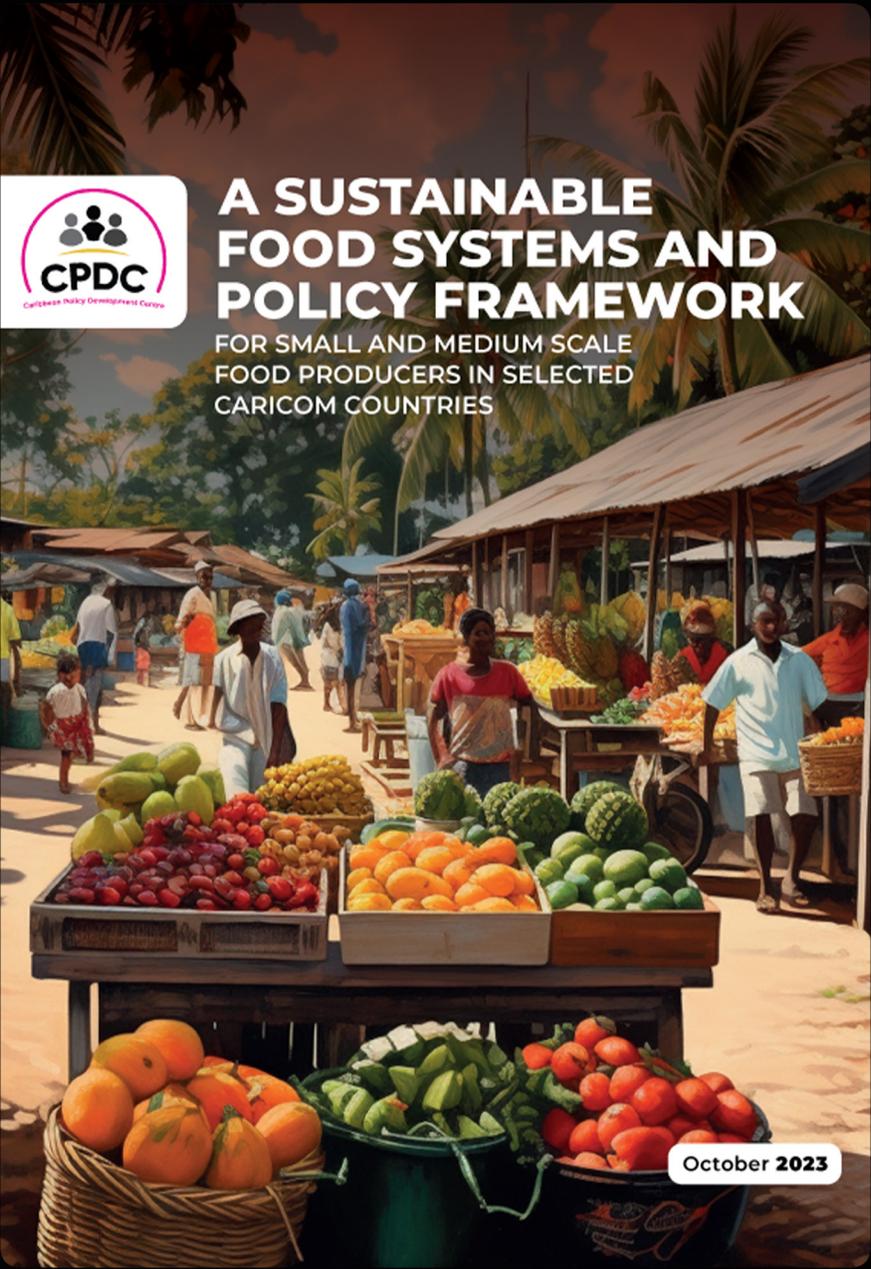


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# A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE  
FOOD PRODUCERS IN SELECTED  
CARICOM COUNTRIES



October 2023



# Female Entrepreneurs. Digital Technology. Economic Growth. Resilience!

**Author: Kathryn Yearwood**

## Introduction

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has acted as a catalyst for the advancement of digital technology which was further developed due to urgent needs brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. The spread of digital technology has greatly impacted international trade, transforming the way business is conducted and making trade more inclusive; with significant opportunities being afforded to women in trade (Sicat et al 2020).

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 5 is the achievement of gender equality and female empowerment. The ability of women to equally participate in trade can improve female economic empowerment as it creates opportunities for women to become financially stable and self-sufficient. This can subsequently improve the standard of living of these women and their families and fuel the economic growth of their country as their participation allows for the most efficient use of a country's resources (Sajid and Ullah 2014). Women's participation in the labour market of their country has the potential to increase the welfare and development of the country through increased productivity and innovation, and fostering economic growth and diversification, which can ultimately contribute to poverty reduction (WTO n.d).

In both developed and developing countries, women advanced in the labour force through the service industry in areas such as hospitality, retail, tourism, personal care services and food and beverages businesses (Kwolek-Folland and Walsh 2007). Digital transformation and technological advances have brought many opportunities for developed and developing countries and more notably for the women who live and work there. The use of digital technologies by women-owned businesses can have a transformative effect on their growth and productivity as they provide flexibility to combat time and mobility constraints (World Bank 2019). By increasing the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) among women-owned MSMEs specifically, there is a potential for increased productivity in existing industries and expansion into new markets (CDB 2016). It also allows for integration into new and higher-level industries as female entrepreneurs become more integrated into global value chains.

The push towards utilizing digital technology must not simply be on the agenda of individual businesses but must rather be a national initiative in order for all to reap the benefits they have to offer and foster sustainable development in Barbados. “A holistic and coordinated approach” combining the input and resources of the government and relevant stakeholders to create and implement policies and strategies while encouraging global assistance for infrastructural development is necessary (UNCTAD 2022).

This study addresses the question “What role can digital technology play in increasing the economic growth of Barbadian women owned MSMEs”? It identifies the various opportunities presented to these women while acknowledging the challenges which women-owned MSMEs face both within and outside the online space. It culminates by providing strategic recommendations for the relevant stakeholders for the efficient and safe use of technology and e-commerce to enhance the economic growth of women-owned MSMEs in Barbados.

**“The future of trade is digital, services & inclusive”**

**the Director General of the World Trade Organization,  
Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (2023)**



## Methodology and Limitations

The research design was qualitative in approach, with primary data being collected through semi-structured interviews and secondary data systematically sourced through desk research of global reports published by credible sources, journals, databases and newspaper articles. Due to time constraints and several data gaps, including a lack of research conducted on digital technology integration in MSMEs in Barbados, case studies were completed of 3 Barbadian female entrepreneurs in attempts to fill the knowledge gaps.

## Key Findings

### Key Findings from Literature

1. In developing countries, such as Barbados, women-owned businesses are generally smaller, less productive and less profitable than those of their male counterparts and mostly concentrated in low growth service sectors which predominantly cater to the needs of other women and children (Kemunto et al 2020).
2. Women-owned businesses in Barbados are predominantly in the service sector in areas such as restaurant and hotel services, health services, education, finance and business services, arts and entertainment, professional services, etc (SBA 2016).
3. The main challenges faced by female entrepreneurs are difficulty accessing finance and sourcing an educated workforce, insufficient training and support for business development, lack of access to business-related information, limited networking opportunities and difficulty accessing technology and other business development resources. Personal challenges include women experiencing low self-confidence, lack of motivation, lack of familial support and difficulty balancing work life with familial obligations.
4. Digitalization can benefit suppliers, business owners and consumers, allowing for an enhanced customer experience, improving the efficiency of business operations which allows for greater levels of productivity and lower production costs, increased product and service diversity and access to new and wider markets.
5. For female entrepreneurs to achieve the maximum benefits from digital technology, policies which foster an environment conducive to the growth and sustainability of their businesses are necessary. These policies must encourage adequate access to ICT infrastructure and the knowledge on how to use digital technology efficiently, the relevant legislation to protect women in the online space as entrepreneurs and consumers and consistent support of women-owned businesses by all relevant stakeholders.

## Research findings

**“A digital presence is vitally important, no business can grow without it”.**



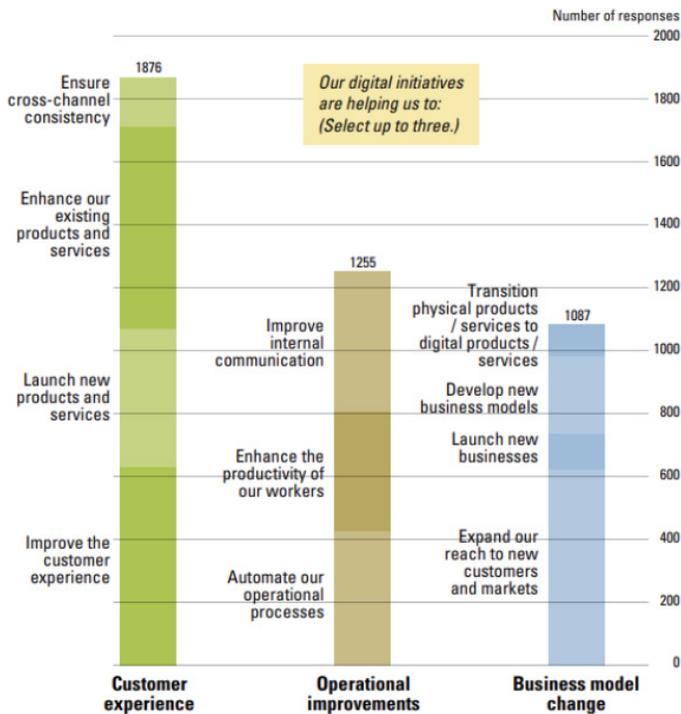
Rachel de Gale (2023)

1. Barbados does not currently collect data on the levels of digital technology or e-commerce use by MSMEs operating within the country. Therefore, no data exists on the number of Barbadian women-owned businesses utilizing digital technology or e-commerce in their operations or details on the level of digitalization they have currently achieved.
2. Due to a rise in unemployment in Barbados caused by downsizing and business closures because of the Covid-19 pandemic, several creative entrepreneurial businesses emerged. Female resourcefulness and innovation emerged as some female entrepreneurs creatively utilized the digital space to gain employment during the pandemic.
3. Digital technology has increased the economic growth of sectors offering traditionally offline goods and services such as food and beverages and education. The findings show the integral role which digital technology, especially the use of social media applications has played in enhancing the customer experience, increasing the consumer base, and facilitating the growth of the businesses interviewed.

Figure 1 showing the major benefits of integrating digital technology into businesses

### WHAT HAS DIGITAL DONE FOR US LATELY?

Companies are using technology to create real, transformative effects across customer experiences, internal operations and new business model.



Source: MITSloan Research Report 2013

**“Investment in women entrepreneurs is an investment in future economic growth.”**

Jane Prokop 2022

## Conclusion

4. The main challenges identified by the interview respondents were the lack of digital literacy of some consumers and personal issues such as low self-confidence and lack of support and motivation. Financing was not a major issue possibly due to the small size of some of the businesses interviewed.
5. While programs, strategies and initiatives do exist to assist female entrepreneurs in Barbados, they lack continuity and are small-scale due to limited funding.
6. Based on an E-readiness assessment for Barbados, significant work still needs to be completed to fill gaps in necessary areas such as expensive telecommunications services, outdated and insufficient legislations and financial sector limitations due to Barbados' appearance on tax haven lists. Also, a lack of consumer readiness due to the absence of trust and awareness of e-commerce platforms and e-payment methods and inadequate skills development of ICT use in the population.

With great efforts being made by countries the world over to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the findings of this research support the fulfillment of Goal 5, target 5B of the SDGs, which aims to “enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women”. Digital technology holds great potential for the economic growth, resilience and increased market share of women-owned businesses in Barbados. The use of social media especially, has become a vital part of the marketing strategy of MSMEs the world over. It increases their competitiveness and market presence, being an initial point of contact for both local and foreign customers. Considering Barbados' position as a service economy, there is great potential for female entrepreneurs to capitalize on the many opportunities afforded to them in the digital economy.

Opportunities in sectors such as tourism, online education, telemedicine and online professional services can be pursued considering that women in the labour market are heavily involved in these sectors when offline. In addition, opportunities in more knowledge-based sectors should also be considered such as website development and Fintech considering the global drive towards digitalization. Entry into these sectors will require the necessary educational support and access to technological tools, resources and systems which facilitate them.



## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, there is need for solutions which address the persistent challenges faced by female entrepreneurs and foster safe and efficient trade facilitation for their businesses, both online and offline. As such the following recommendations have been proposed:

1. Adapt a National Entrepreneurship Strategy to facilitate technology exchange and innovation in MSMEs. Clear policy objectives must be established such as the commitment to fostering an equitable diffusion of ICT among the public and private sectors and identifying indicators to measure the effectiveness of any implemented policies to allow for re-evaluation over time if necessary.
2. The support of Business Support Organizations can improve the regular and productive use of digital technology by women, creating enabling conditions for women-owned businesses to thrive in the digital world.
3. Data Collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data on the MSME sector in Barbados and its use of digital technology is necessary to better inform gender-responsive policies, development support solutions and legislations which boost and protect the female MSME sector.
4. Digital Education and Skills Development is needed for female entrepreneurs and the general public to access the optimal opportunities and benefits which modern technology has to offer. Considering global trends, with digital technology revolutionizing the ways of doing business, knowledge in ICT is necessary to adapt to the global digital transformation and facilitate all aspects of digitalization and e-commerce.
5. E-payment Development is necessary to create ease, efficiency and confidence in business transactions and potentially encourage more domestic and cross-border spending. Data collection through these e-payment systems could be used to inform future policies and assist with the product diversity of the women-owned businesses.
6. Public and Private sector collaboration can encourage the enforcement of policies which promote digitalization and online commerce since national policies and initiatives can play a determining role in the preparation and acceptance of citizens to digital advances. These policies must also consider the safety of female entrepreneurs in the online environment and the challenges which they face such as access to finance.
7. Regularly updated e-commerce related legislation is needed due to the ever-evolving state of the digital world. Legislation in data protection, consumer protection and intellectual property rights are essential.

# Young Economist's Association (YEA) Feature

The Young Economists' Association (Y.E.A.) serves a vital purpose within the academic community at the University of the West Indies (U.W.I.) Cavehill Campus. Established with a clear vision and driven by a passion for economics, the Y.E.A. aims to provide students with professional and personal development opportunities while fostering connections between young aspiring economists and industry professionals.

One of the primary goals of the Y.E.A. is to bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world economic practices. Through partnerships with corporate leaders and economic professionals, the association facilitates meaningful engagements that expose students to advancements in economic research and practices. By providing a platform for discussion on local, regional, and international economic concerns, the Y.E.A. encourages dialogue on common challenges and potential solutions, enriching the academic experience of its members.

Furthermore, the Y.E.A. is committed to fostering networking opportunities within the U.W.I. Cavehill Campus. By creating a supportive and collaborative environment, the association enables students to connect with peers who share similar interests and ambitions in the field of economics. These networking opportunities not only enhance the academic experience but also lay the foundation for future professional collaborations and partnerships.

The Y.E.A. experienced a period of dormancy, but its resurgence during the 2017-2018 period marked a significant turning point. Recognizing a gap in the support and exposure provided to students studying economics, a group of passionate economics majors took it upon themselves to restart the Y.E.A. Driven by their vision for the club and their fellow students, they set ambitious goals for its constitution and future endeavors. Today, we stand on the shoulders of these trailblazers, following in their footsteps and striving to uphold the legacy they created. As a club, we are deeply appreciative of our fellow students, and their support inspires us to continually seek new ways of assisting them in achieving their goals at U.W.I. and beyond.

In conclusion, the Y.E.A. is more than just a student organization—it is a community of dedicated individuals united by a shared passion for economics and a commitment to academic and professional excellence. As we continue to grow and evolve, we remain steadfast in our mission to empower the next generation of economists and make a lasting impact in the field.

# Join us as we embark on this journey of **GROWTH, LEARNING, & COLLABORATION.**



**Together, we can shape a brighter future for economics education and practice.**



# **In d centre is where the action is!: Exploring the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Barbadian Civil Society Sector.**

**Author: Karen Philip**

As the 2023 Barbadian Crop Over Festival rolled over the fields and hills, injecting the country with lively beats, flamboyant colours and jubilation, the Government of Barbados echoed the sentiments of one of the season’s more well-known songs. The government stated their intention to put persons with disabilities at the centre of the action by hosting consultations on the draft 2023-2030 National Policy for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). The National Policy is ambitious and aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



**“ In d centre is where the action is!  
You see, I do not like being on the side no more;  
I want to be jamming right there  
in the centre.”**

**Grateful Co-Centre, Crop Over 2023**

## Why should the Government focus on centring PWDs?

“Persons with disabilities constitute the single largest minority group globally, representing 15% of the world population” Disability (who.int) (UN, 2022). Within the Caribbean region, it is estimated that there are ‘1.3 million persons with a disability of some kind and some 250,000 persons with a significant disability’.<sup>1</sup> Due to an increase in chronic health conditions and longer life expectancies, this number is expected to increase significantly.

Notably, disabilities are not homogenous; instead, they are ‘representative of complex interactions of diverse dimensions, ranging from physical, social, economic, and environmental to cultural factors’ (National Policy 2023, 18). “Disabilities can be acquired or congenital; visible or invisible; temporary or long term; static or episodic, or degenerating; as well as painful or inconsequential (World Report on Disability, 2011). It has been postulated that almost everyone could experience disability at any point, either temporarily or permanently, from accidents, old age, or the increased prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

In recognition of the needs of persons living with disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was adopted in 2007 by the United Nations General Assembly.

The Convention seeks to ‘promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all PWDs, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity’<sup>2</sup>. It was the outcome of decades of activism from civil society across the globe, including Barbados.<sup>3</sup> The Government of Barbados ratified the Convention on February 27, 2013.

Since then, the Government has aimed to create an enabling environment through legislation and regulations. In conjunction with the Barbados Rights of Persons with Disabilities legislation, the government has put forward its first National Policy for Persons with Disabilities. This policy utilises a rights-based approach, and throughout its fourteen (14) priorities, each area has a policy goal, strategic recommendations, and companion actions/activities for execution.

As part of the process, the Government undertook a situational analysis, revealing a challenge in acquiring up-to-date information on PWDs in Barbados. It highlighted that the last national census was taken in 2010 and estimated that 12,000 persons were classified as living with a disability, which is a gross underestimation’.<sup>4</sup> The absence of more up-to-date information could hinder efforts to cater to PWDs properly. With nine out of ten PWDs being unemployed and

1 United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean Policy Brief LC/CAR/2019/12 “Moving Towards equal access to technology for persons with disabilities in the Caribbean.”

2 OHCHR, “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,” n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>.

3 Barbados Council of the Disabled, interview by author, Barbados, August 24, 2023

4 2023-2033 Draft National Policy for Improving the Lives of PWDs in Barbados, p.23

having limited access to the National Insurance Scheme<sup>5</sup>, most live in poverty and are most vulnerable to violations against their person, such as sexual, financial, or physical abuse. The draft National Policy exposed the realities of many PWDs disqualified from receiving social security, as only blind and deaf persons without speech are eligible. This, coupled with high levels of discrimination in the workplace, has effectively marginalised them from productive economic activity.

Policy Goal 5 seeks to ensure that PWDs have access to opportunities to supplement their lifestyles through work freely chosen or through acceptance into a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible to them.<sup>6</sup> It aims to create an enabling environment through:

- Strategy 5.1: Provision of Employment Opportunities
- Strategy 5.2: Provision of Opportunities for Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship
- Strategy 5.3: Offering Decent, Accessible and Inclusive Work Experiences

This Policy signals the change from the charity model of disability to the human rights model,

allowing PWDs to be treated with dignity and autonomy. “Employment has the potential to improve a person’s financial condition, open up opportunities for social interactions, build (new) friendships, and increase people’s self-esteem” (Nurhayati 2010,11). It emphasises that PWDs are valuable members of society, as disability should be viewed as an element of human diversity. This allows PWDs to contribute to the economy while reducing their dependency on the state. Furthermore, it creates an environment that ‘respects, supports, and celebrates human diversity by creating the conditions that allow meaningful participation by a wide range of persons, including PWDs’<sup>7</sup>. This can create a Barbados where people are compassionate to all people and aware and accepting of persons with diverse needs.

The recent pandemic provided a glimpse of what a more supportive environment looks like. Organisations provided flexible remote work options to maintain productivity and stay viable; however, the flexibility waned once the national restrictions were lifted. This situation should be instructive to policymakers on the various options to accommodate PWDs in the workplace. While this may not level the playing field, it certainly can create a more supportive environment and greater opportunities for the meaningful contribution of PWDs in the workplace.

5 2023-2033 Draft National Policy for Improving the Lives of PWDs in Barbados, p.26

6 2023-2033 Draft National Policy for Improving the Lives of PWDs in Barbados, p.63

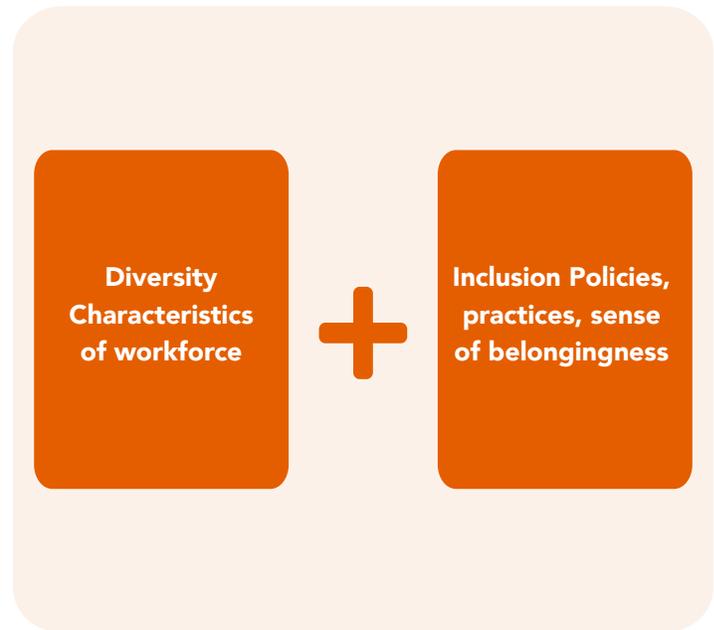
7 “Disability and Human Rights,” Health and Human Rights Resource Guide, May 8, 2014, <https://www.hhrguide.org/2014/03/21/disability-and-human-rights/#:~:text=The%20UN%20Office%20of%20the%20High%20Commissioner%20for,wide%20range%20of%20persons%2C%20including%20persons%20with%20disabilities.>

## How could Diversity and Inclusion help with centring persons with disabilities?

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) have become the watchwords in organisational management that allow individuals and corporations to benefit from each other. Diversity examines the composition of a workgroup, such as race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and education. A heterogeneous composition allows each group represented to share a different approach to thinking, feeling, or behaving (Nair and Vahra 2015, 5). A positive correlation between diversity and organisational effectiveness has been proven (Thomas and Ely 1996, 1) but is only complete with the principle of inclusion.

“Inclusion has been identified as focusing on the psychological experience of feeling accepted and treated as an insider in the workplace while maintaining the organisation’s uniqueness” (Nair and Vahra 2015, 13). Inclusion is best curated in an environment with open communication and transparency about how employees are treated and their contributions are valued. Furthermore, it aims to treat the employees as valuable team members, not chess pieces, as persons should not be treated as pawns or token representatives to achieve a quota or only useful to gain access to a market (Thomas and Ely 1996,6).

Figure 1: Diversity and Inclusion



As such, organisations need to adopt the human rights model of disabilities, which encourages greater tolerance and inclusion of differences. The human rights model provides a theoretical framework emphasising human dignity (Retief and Letsosa 2018, 5). ‘It encompasses human rights, civil and political as well as economic, social, and cultural rights’ (Degener 2017, 44). This requires a shift from the charity model of disabilities that views PWDs as victims of their circumstances and needs to be pitied and incapable of contributing to society.<sup>8</sup>

9 Stabroek News, “T&T AG to Present Girl Born without Arms to the Bar,” Stabroek News, June 8, 2012, <https://www.stabroeknews.com/2011/10/22/news/guyana/tt-ag-to-present-girl-born-without-arms-to-the-bar/>.

8 Marno Retief and Rantoa Letsosa, “Models of Disability: A Brief Overview,” *Theological Studies/Teologiese Studies* 74, no. 1 (March 6, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4738>.

In 2011, born without arms, Veera Bhajan earned her law degree and was offered a position in the Office of the Attorney General.<sup>9</sup> As an infant, she was enrolled at the Princess Elizabeth Special School for the differently abled but quickly surpassed expectations of what a person with a disability could achieve. Unfortunately, these accomplishments did not make Bhajan immune from discrimination. In 2021, despite being appointed a lay assessor, the Equal Opportunity Tribunal and its chairman tried to discredit her ability to do the job due to her disability and the possibility of bias.<sup>10</sup> Instead of welcoming a person who brought a different point of view, the Equal Opportunity Tribunal Chairman made assumptions about her ability to navigate the physical workspace and refused to accept her appointment. This is a prime example of disability discrimination whereby a person is treated less favourably than someone without the disability in the same circumstance<sup>11</sup> and workplace. It also highlights the importance of utilising the human rights-based approach's principles of Diversity & Inclusion. If these principles were applied, the resulting discrimination lawsuit of the Tribunal would have been prevented and the state funds preserved. Additionally, the Tribunal would have been strengthened by Bhajan's knowledge and lived experience from the date of her appointment. This hesitation to include PWDs could be grounded in the charity model, which

does not allow PWDs to be viewed as whole beings capable of substantially contributing to society.

Throughout the region, civil society organisations (CSOs) such as the Down Syndrome Family Network (DSFN) and the National Centre for Persons with Disabilities (Trinidad and Tobago) have campaigned for a more inclusive labour market and workforce. With their support, Rochelle's Sweet Treats, a small family-run business, helps three daughters with Down syndrome access courses in business development, branding and packaging.<sup>12</sup> Also, being spotlighted during their annual celebrations, which saw prominent members of Government in attendance, helped bolster their sales and their ability to make meaningful contributions to society.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the DSFN holds workshops on "Social inclusion requires emotional, behavioural and legislative support for PWDs."

In Jamaica, the Deaf Can! Coffee<sup>14</sup> is a social enterprise providing training and employment opportunities for people who are deaf and hearing impaired in the coffee business. They were introduced to Digicel Foundation through their catering services. The Foundation was so impressed by their vision and provided the funding needed to establish a physical location for their school and shop.

10 Jada Loutoo and Jada Loutoo, "Judge Slams Tribunal, Chairman over Veera Bhajan's Appointment - Trinidad and Tobago Newsday," Trinidad and Tobago Newsday - (blog), November 24, 2021, <https://newsday.co.tt/2021/11/23/judge-slams-tribunal-chairman-over-veera-bhajans-appointment/>.

11 "Know Your Rights about Disability Discrimination and Harassment," Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d., <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/know-your-rights-disability-discrimination>.

12 Radica Mahase and Radica Mahase, "Celebrating People with Down Syndrome - Trinidad and Tobago Newsday," Trinidad and Tobago Newsday - (blog), March 22, 2021, <https://newsday.co.tt/2021/03/22/celebrating-people-with-down-syndrome/>.

13 Radica Mahase and Radica Mahase, "Celebrating People with Down Syndrome - Trinidad and Tobago Newsday,"

14 "Deaf Can Coffee," n.d., <https://deafcancoffee.com/>. Trinidad and Tobago Newsday - (blog), March 22, 2021, <https://newsday.co.tt/2021/03/22/celebrating-people-with-down-syndrome/>.

Given that PWDs are forced to overcome, often, in less than supportive environments, the majority are 'either unemployed or work in the informal sector, earning low wages' (Nurhayati 2020, 2). However, if the principles of D&I and a human rights-based approach are truly embraced, they could join the mainstream workforce or even explore avenues for entrepreneurship.

## **Problem Statement**

It is well known that civil society depends on public funds from internal fundraising or external donors.<sup>15</sup> This limits their ability to allocate funding towards administrative efforts, as money is often pre-directed to project implementation only. However, this is compounded by the demand for good governance and proper leadership in the sector. As a result, there is a call for more organisational capacity building in the civil society sector. This research seeks to determine to what extent the sector is sufficiently equipped to adopt these principles of diversity and inclusion into its operations, especially in relation to PWDs.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative approach was adopted (Keele 2010, 52) and was complimented by the Caribbean feminist approach using reflexive, interactive, and non-hierarchical stance (DeShong 2013, 7). The main method of data collection was semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This permitted the respondents to provide individualised stories based on their organisational management experience. It also created a rapport between the respondents and the researcher, facilitating storytelling without hierarchy. Purposive sampling was employed, whereby the sample consisted of organisations intentionally selected (Mason, 2002). See Table 1: Study Sample.

<sup>15</sup> Kusmanto, F. X. P., and F. XuFeng. "An insight into NGO challenges and the need for organisational capacity building for Malaysian NGOs." Indonesian Student Association in Thailand (2013).

The sample consisted of the following:

*Table 1: Study's Sample*

<b>Name of Organization</b>	<b>Year of Establishment</b>	<b>Main Thematic Focus</b>	<b>Women-Led</b>	<b>Employees</b>
Barbados Association of Endometriosis and PCOS (BAEP)	2016	Sexual and Reproductive Health	Yes	None (Volunteer-based)
Barbados Council for the Disabled (BCD)	1976	Persons with Disabilities	Yes	6
Barbados Family Planning Association (BFPA)	1967	Sexual and Reproductive Health	No	18
Centre for Counselling Addiction Support Alternatives (CASA)	2000	Substance Abuse	Yes	2
Intimate Hotels of Barbados (IHB)	2000	Tourism	Yes	2

# Findings

## Understanding of Diversity and Inclusion

For IHB, diversity meant a 'variety, the staff element being varied in skillset, ethnicity and race'.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, BAEP indicated that diversity meant all members are accepted 'regardless of ethnicity, body ability, gender or race'.<sup>17</sup>

Building on this, BCD stated, 'Diversity is inviting me to the party; inclusion is inviting me to dance'.<sup>18</sup> The BFPA (already demonstrating D & I) adopted new core values: trustworthiness, inclusion, and empathy, which they aim to showcase within their visual identifier (logo) and the composition of their volunteers, staff, and board. The remaining sample echoed that inclusion refers to the capacity to make choices and freely contribute to the organisation.

Although the sample resoundingly touted the importance of diversity and inclusion, organisations still fell short of practising this by having PWDs as key team members or on their Board of Directors. Within the sample, only BCD and BFPA had an inclusive workforce with PWDs. BFPA indicated that one of their team members recently became injured and that they would be accommodating them at the workplace.<sup>19</sup> The sample mainly demonstrated the inclusion of PWDs through their service provisions.

BFPA outlined how the benefits of D & I occur on various levels.<sup>20</sup> On the individual level, their employees are more welcoming to people different to them and, therefore, better people. On the organisational level, D&I places them in better standing with donors and their peers, which aids in mobilising in-kind and financial resources. Overall, there has been a positive shift in the organisational culture. Adopting these principles has allowed BFPA to expand their reach by providing services to new demographics.

On the other hand, BCD found that adopting D&I aided their advocacy work. For example, Kerryann Ifill, their current President, was the first visually impaired student at Combermere School and the University of the West Indies Cave Hill Campus, and admirably the first visually impaired President of the Senate.<sup>21</sup> Her work at the Council and in the public eye paved the way for her and other PWDs to show that they could contribute to society without being viewed as only suitable to receive handouts.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, a participant from BCD stated that by setting the example of diversity and inclusion of PWD, 'it gives us much leverage when we show to the private and public sector by working with them, and they do not know the persons had a disability and got the job done.'<sup>23</sup>

16 Intimate Hotels of Barbados, interview by author, Barbados, August 23, 2023

17 Barbados Association of Endometriosis and P.C.O.S, interview by author, Barbados, August 23, 2023

18 Barbados Council of the Disabled, interview by author, Barbados, August 24, 2023

19 Barbados Family Planning Association, interview by author, Barbados, August 30, 2023

20 Barbados Family Planning Association, interview

21 Bcd, "Kerryann Ifill;" Barbados Council for the Disabled, March 8, 2023, <http://barbadosdisabled.org.bb/kerryann-ifill/>.

22 Barbados Council of the Disabled, interview

23 Barbados Council of the Disabled, interview

## Current Structure of Sampled Organisations

### Governance and Management

The organisations are legally registered and have relevant constitutions governing their operations. Organisations often have written standard operation procedures (SOP) to strengthen their governance and management. An SOP is a policy and procedure document that provides the principles that the company is aligned with, and the procedures outline how they would achieve them.

Within the sample, most organisations still need to have written SOPs or one incorporating D&I. The exceptions are the BCD, which is currently undergoing an institutional review, and the BFPA, which updates its SOP at the beginning of every year.<sup>24</sup> Instead, most of the sampled organisations rely heavily on the constitutions to ensure their values are upheld and are guided by informal SOPs. The absence of written SOPs was frequently attributed to the organisations' busy schedules.

### Physical Structure

Table 2: Physical Structure of Organisations

Name	Physical Building	Owned by Organisation	Accessible to PWDs
Barbados Association of Endometriosis and PCOS (BAEP)	No	-	-
Barbados Council for the Disabled (BCD)	Yes	No	Yes
Barbados Family Planning Association (BFPA)	Yes	Yes	Yes (ground floor only)
Centre for Counselling Addiction Support Alternatives (CASA)	Yes	No	No
Intimate Hotels of Barbados (IHB)	Yes	No	No

24 Barbados Family Planning Association, interview

Most of the sample had office space; however, only BFPA owns the building from which they operate. They have ensured that their ground level is wheelchair accessible, allowing full access to the clinic rooms, conference room and bathroom.<sup>25</sup> This was deliberately incorporated for clients and team members who need this accommodation. The BFPA also indicated that they are willing to accommodate any team member who becomes physically disabled and must be relocated to the ground level. This is coupled with them digitising their files for accessibility purposes. Although they are not entirely accessible to their staff or clients, BFPA should be commended for taking these modest steps to accommodate PWDs.

While BCD does not own their building, they were granted permission to undertake the necessary changes to make it accessible to its staff and members. On the contrary, BAEP operates mainly in an online space, whereby remote work is promoted, and events are mainly held at venues that are accessible.<sup>26</sup> They work closely with organisations that promote D&I, such as BFPA.

### *Staff Composition*

BCD implements the equal employment opportunity principle when posting job openings, acknowledging that some applicants may have

disabilities. BCD provided an example whereby if a blind person applies for a position, documents are sent via email to enable the use of read-aloud technology.<sup>27</sup> They also offer the services of sign language interpreters for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons during job interviews. Furthermore, BCD considers the transportation needs of their team members and may provide stipends or allow additional time to get to a destination based on their needs. BCD laments that 'the community is moving forward with getting training and degrees, but to get work, there is no accommodation'.<sup>28</sup>

CASA and IHB do not have a history of hiring PWDs but are open to doing so as long as the candidates meet their requirements. Previously, BFPA had an agreement to host interns who were disabled; this led to one who was visually impaired doing their internship with them. BFPA also had people on their Board who had disabilities. BAEP indicated they had members of diverse abilities, but it was unclear if this was reflected in the organisation's executive team.

Civil society's struggle to develop strong organisational structures has not been abated. The lack of resources, human and financial, limits its ability to own property, develop SOPs or have a large complement of staff.

25 Barbados Family Planning Association, interview

26 BAEP, interview

27 Barbados Council of the Disabled, interview

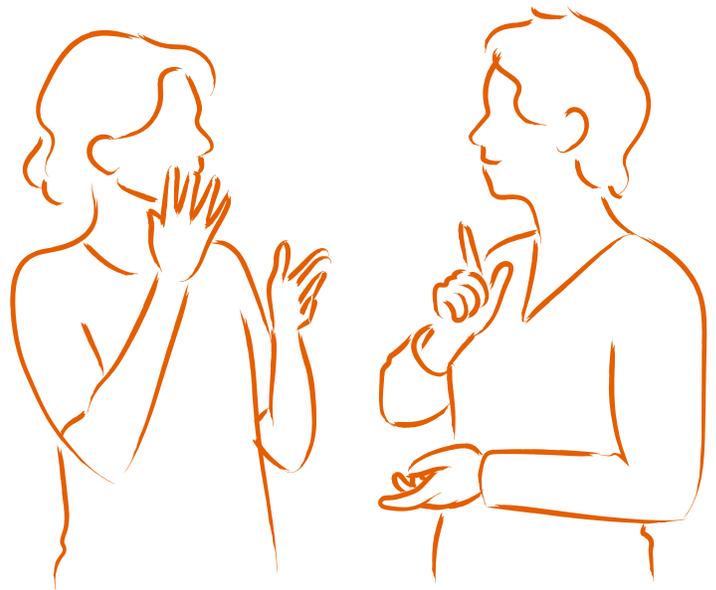
28 Barbados Council of the Disabled, interview

## Awareness of National Policy

Two organisations knew of the policy but needed to be more intimate with the details. BFPA and CASA commend the government for their work in the area, but they believe more is needed for various reasons. CASA is concerned that 'the welfare checks are not covering the needs of the people; [the issue is that] disabled persons are living without assistance.'<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, BFPA is more concerned about the model of disability adopted by government and society. The interviewee stated, "Disability is not an end; anyone could become disabled. We have not empowered disabled persons enough, and they are treated as victims. The policy is a great idea, but more groundwork in the culture is needed, and not just talk about but empower persons with disability.'<sup>30</sup> BCD also deems the policy ambitious and is cautious of its expected implementation.

Concerning Strategy 5.1, Provision of Employment Opportunities, the policy proposes the establishment of regulatory systems and mechanisms (with built-in awareness-building programmes) for guiding employers on making reasonable accommodations in their workplaces and minimum hiring requirements concerning PWDs. As a collective, the sample believes that it is a step in the right direction and welcomes support for including PWDs in their workforce.

The BCD opined that the government should make the necessary changes first, as their buildings are not accessible and have outdated technology. They are currently lobbying the government to incorporate video relay services, a type of telecommunication service that allows people who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or speech impaired to communicate with hearing people in real-time<sup>31</sup> in their outward-facing services. They purported that a UN booklet on hiring PWDs could be shared widely to help include PWDs in civil society. BFPA reemphasised, however, that legislation cannot change the mind of each organisational culture in society. 'There is a need to change the culture for the society to empower people to include PWDs.'<sup>32</sup>



<sup>29</sup> CASA, interview

<sup>30</sup> Barbados Family Planning Association, interview

<sup>31</sup> Jessica M and Jessica M, "Video Relay Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing | Start ASL," Start ASL | Learn American Sign Language With Our Complete 4-Level Course!, September 25, 2021, <https://www.startasl.com/video-relay-services-for-the-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing/#:~:text=Video%20Relay%20Services%20%28VRS%29%20are%20a%20type%20of,call%2C%20Deaf%2Fhard%20of%20hearing%20callers%20can%20see%20>.

<sup>32</sup> Barbados Family Planning Association, interview

## Tools Needed for the Inclusion of PWDs in the Civil Society Sector

According to BAEP, the sector must adopt internal organisational policies and include PWDs on the Board of Directors.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, IHB suggested that a SOP template be developed to aid with the implementation of the much-needed policies and procedures.

CASA proffers that through continuous marketing, PWDs would be interested in volunteering within the sector, thus gaining experience and reference letters that could help them get <sup>34</sup>

BCD would like the civil society sector to reimagine the future and its future, including adopting a business model to ensure its sustainability. Additionally, it was suggested that the sector strengthen its partnership with the government as it needs civil society support to deliver services to the poor and underserved. According to BCD, civil society is an important source of information on what is happening on the ground and can aid the government in shaping legislation and policies. Furthermore, 'they must plan for this growing population facing disabilities, not only from wars or accidents but the amount of non-communicable diseases in Barbados and even the consequences of the pandemic.'<sup>35</sup>

BFPA desires that the sector shift from being subjectively led to being policy-driven. This would require leadership to reflect on their hiring practices to ensure they are equitable and aid in empowering PWDs to move from the margins to the centre.

Furthermore, there needs to be a channel to highlight PWD leaders within society and broaden the discussion on what a disability is. Both BFPA and BCD benefited from the advocacy of Rose Ann Foster Vaughn<sup>36</sup> as a board member and a team member. They spoke of the importance of having someone with lived experience create the changes needed in society. Echoing one another, they mentioned that 'when she spoke, people listened' and that new spokespersons should be listened to today. IHB carried the same sentiment that CSOs should act as allies by being tolerant, accepting, and supporting those with lived experience and knowledge to advocate for societal changes.<sup>37</sup>

## Analysis

In Barbados, the civil society sector has successfully led the charge for numerous social changes, such as decriminalising same-sex relations and removing Section 14 of the Reformatory and

33 Barbados Association of Endometriosis and PCOS, interview

34 CASA, interview

35 Barbados Council for the Disabled, interview

36 "Champion for People with Disabilities Passes On," June 3, 2023, <https://www.nationnews.com/2021/10/08/champion-people-disabilities-passes/>.

37 IHB, interview



## Current Structure of Sampled Organisations

### Governance and Management

Industrial Schools Act, which dealt with wandering. The sector's focus is diverse, as is its workforce, but the one area left behind is the incorporation of PWDs into its workforce.structured, in-

### Understanding of Diversity and Inclusion

It is evident that the participants understand D&I and have benefited from its incorporation. BCD should be congratulated for leading by example, with most of their staff being PWDs. Furthermore, they work with the private sector to help integrate PWDs into their workforce.

Nevertheless, there needs to be more understanding of how to incorporate diverse people in terms of physical ability and neurodiversity in their workforce. The hindrances, such as lack of accessibility to documents or entrance to physical buildings, are not being considered by CSOs; therefore, no accommodation is provided. Those considered accessible are not fully accessible, as seen by BFPA's clinic being wheelchair accessible, but there are no braille or sign language signs in the clinic.

The dearth of SOPs addressing D&I could be addressed by tailoring such policies found online or outsourcing their creation. This could include policies on the accommodation of full-time remote work, the standardisation of technology such as speech recognition and screen reader software, or the inclusion of PWDs on the Board of Directors. These changes would be a step in the right direction towards adopting the human rights model of disability.

### Physical Structure

Understandably, the lack of resources within the sector makes addressing the accessibility of their physical structure seem insurmountable. It is a by-product of the sector's funding cycle, with donors stipulating that funding remain solely for project activities rather than administration. This is coupled with the majority not owning their building and needing funding and relevant permission to convert to a fully accessible building.

### Staff Composition

For the majority, the onus is placed on the PWDs to try to join their team without the barriers in the recruitment process being addressed. Instead, the PWDs were mainly viewed as beneficiaries who deserved accommodation to receive services, such as sign language interpreters for counselling



sessions, but not as team members or on the Board of Directors. This discrimination in the recruitment process and the workforce could be attributed to disparities in the employment of PWDs. Based on this, they appear to uphold the charity model of disability, which views PWDs as objects to be saved and not as equal partners.

It could be alluded that there is a correlation between the size of the staff complement and the incorporation of PWDs. With limited resources available, having a healthy staff complement that includes all marginalised groups internally is difficult. However, there could be space for them on Boards, external committees or as consultants to the organisation.

If the civil society sector is dedicated to 'treating people as people,'<sup>38</sup> there needs to be a shift in their perspective of PWDs. With a human rights-based approach, they can examine their organisational structures that oppress and encourage discrimination against PWDs.

## Awareness of National Policy

While cautiousness around the new National Policy is expected, the sector should remember that one of its key roles is to monitor and hold the government accountable for its policies. This could only be achieved by engaging with the material, constructively critiquing it, and leading by example.

It could be argued that legislation or national policies rarely change culture by themselves, but it sets the stage for developing an enabling environment. If Barbados wishes to live up to its commitment to the UNCRPD, all people, including those with disabilities, must have the same access to employment opportunities.

Civil society is known for lobbying for economic empowerment as it is a main source of gaining economic security and aids in succeeding social inclusion. This Policy could be the right carrier for achieving this for PWDs within civil society. As the representative from CASA indicated, volunteering within the sector could be a springboard for other opportunities, but it should be wider than that. Instead, the sector should seek to become a haven for PWDs, providing them a sense of belonging and economic security.



## Tools Needed for the Inclusion of PWDs in the Civil Society Sector

Even without the legal framework, civil society and BCD should lead the charge by engaging in change management by strengthening its policies concerning D&I and incorporating PWDs into their workforce. As BFPA indicated, “anyone could become disabled at any point, which should not jeopardise their employment.” The sample accurately called for adjustments to be made to SOPs, but other steps could be taken.

The BCD and BFPA organisational approach to including PWDs should be examined as best practice models for other organisations. One feature of their model that can be adopted is a business approach to promoting sustainability versus the traditional non-profit approach, which is prominent amongst Barbadian CSOs. This approach has proven useful as they have increased their network and seen increased funding from donors and individuals.

BFPA uses a social enterprise approach that allows them to hold on to their moral obligation while reinvesting any profit made into the organisation. CK Prahalad postulates that by focusing on the unmet needs of low-income populations, social enterprises can create profitable markets while addressing the most urgent needs of poor beneficiaries.<sup>39</sup> Under social enterprise, an organisation could create three sources of income: donations (individuals and grants), consumers

(selling goods and services on the open market related to their mission or not), and beneficiaries (paying a minimal price for the services and goods provided by organisations). This approach promotes sustainability as profits are not paid to shareholders but re-invested in the organisation.

## Recommendations

There are some key takeaways that CSOs should consider embracing, such as:

- Adopting the human rights-based approach: CSOs must acknowledge PWDs as valuable members of society who deserve equal access to employment in their workplaces. A disability, physical or neurodiverse, provides a unique perspective which organisations could benefit from. PWDs should be empowered to apply for jobs and advocate for themselves.
- Change in operational model to social enterprise: With the continual funding struggles within the sector, there is a need to find a sustainable source of income. One way of doing this is by functioning as a social enterprise, which allows them to have a source of income dedicated to administrative purposes. While donors’ funds attend to project needs, any profit made can be used to address operational challenges, including the

development of SOPs.

- Conduct an audit of Governance documents: As the organisations depend on their constitution, it is important to ensure that it reflects the current work environment. They could be amended to include a quota for PWDs in the workforce or Board of Directors. As a result, they could examine their recruitment processes to see how they could be more accessible to PWDs. Learning from EY's Centre of Excellence, a hiring programme for neurodiverse persons<sup>40</sup>, they could establish programmes to incorporate PWDs into their organisations. It is important to note that there should be synergies in the work done by the PWD programme and the rest of the organisation. The aim is to diversify and foster inclusion, not create a segregated workforce. In our local context, that could mean contacting BCD for recommendations for Board Members or team members.
- Prioritize accessibility and flexibility: Employers should listen to the accommodation needs to provide an optimum work environment for the physical and non-physical organisational infrastructure. For example, this could include installing a wheelchair ramp or purchasing software for screen reading. Additionally, creating opportunities for employees to contribute improved methods of engagement and implementation of tasks would be worthwhile.
- Be representative of society: This means making disabilities a visible, regular part of life. For example, BFPA's logo has people of different colours, representing persons from all walks of life with or without invisible disabilities. However, it is suggested that the organisation further represent those with a physical disability by including a walking stick or a hearing aid. Furthermore, PWDs should be used on all types of content, not just exterior-facing images. By doing this, PWDs would not feel like pawns for the organisation's public relations.
- Embrace storytelling: Rose Ann Vaughn and Kerryann Ifill are ambassadors for the PWDs community, allowing the public to view them as subjects instead of objects needing charity. This helps build compassion and safe spaces; creating these spaces within CSOs could develop an inclusive environment for PWDs. For instance, Bank of America created Creative Conversations, which allows people to learn about one another's viewpoints on social issues in a safe setting and impart knowledge to one another.<sup>41</sup>
- Champion a learning attitude: There is a need for ongoing education regarding the services offered to beneficiaries and the best ways to support your employees who have disabilities.

<sup>41</sup> Clarey, "5 Ways to Improve Inclusivity for People with Disabilities."

An open-door policy, a communication approach in which managers leave their office doors open to encourage openness and transparency<sup>42</sup>, goes a long way in building inclusion in the workplace.

## Conclusion

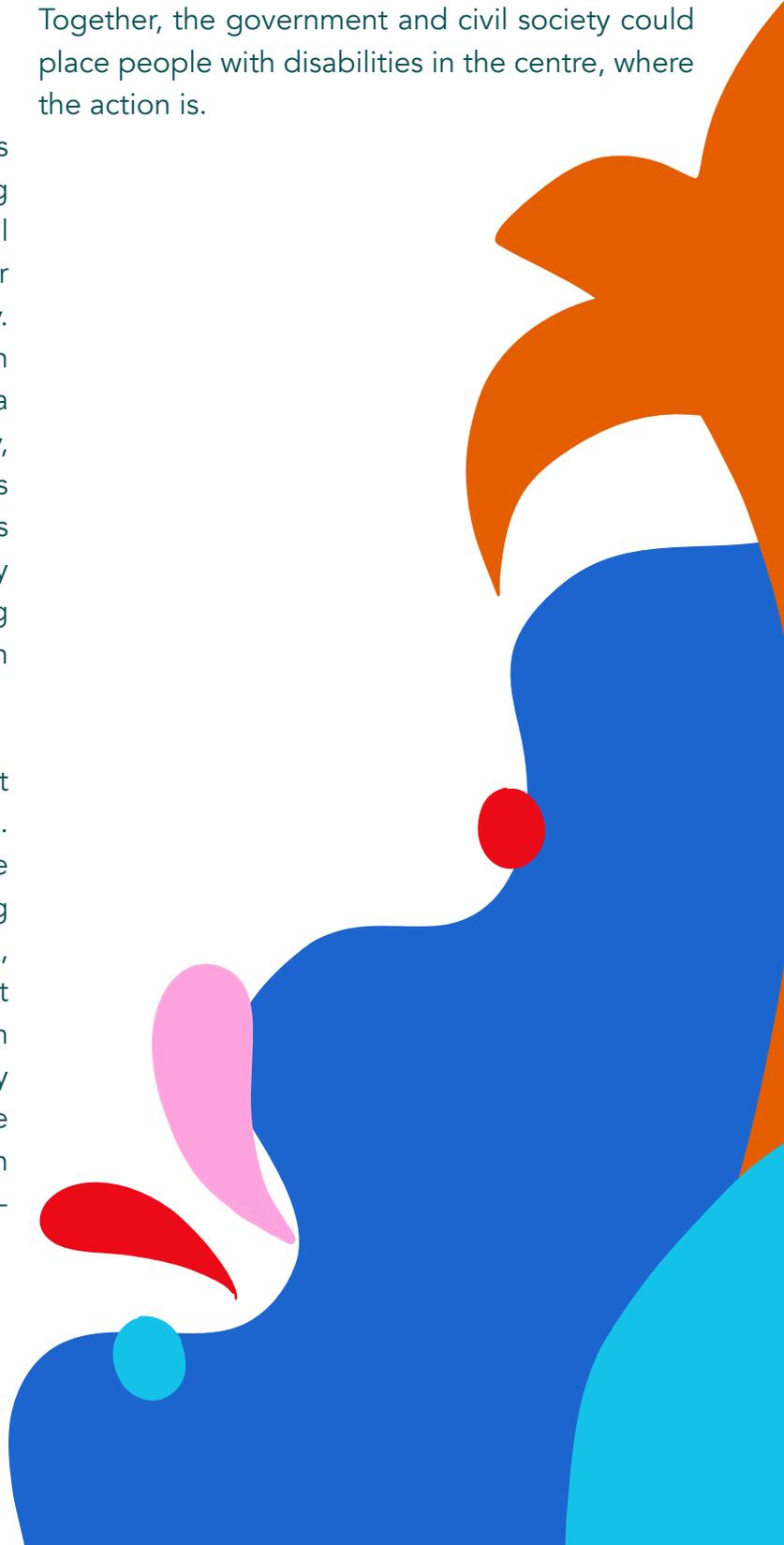
The Government should be applauded for its ambitious draft National Policy for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disability. It is a critical step in developing an enabling environment for PWDs to be seen as valuable members of society. Ensuring that all Barbadians are viewed through the human rights-based lens would promote a country where all persons, regardless of disability, are respected. As a result, PWDs could live full lives with economic stability, a sense of belongingness and increased self-esteem. The civil society sector must continue to fulfil its role of holding the government accountable for how it deals with those on the margins.

Simultaneously, the sector needs to look within it to examine the root of its organisational weakness. This could lead to adopting the social enterprise model and developing and implementing standard organisational procedures. Furthermore, the sector should be open to listening to how best they could be an ally and accommodate them in their operations- ensuring equal opportunity throughout the application process and within the workforce. The benefits of diversity and inclusion show that they enhance creativity in decision-

making, allowing them to exceed performance measurements. Civil society is one of the most innovative and resilient sectors that can effectively implement the recommendations stated.

Together, the government and civil society could place people with disabilities in the centre, where the action is.

<sup>42</sup> "Open-Door Policy," September 6, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/open-door-policy>.



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