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**#YOUTH2030**

**Caribbean Youth Dialogues 2022  
In preparation of the United Nations Economic and Social  
Council Youth Forum  
23 and 24 February 2022**

<b>IDENTIFICATION</b>	
<b>Session focus</b>	Caribbean Youth Dialogues
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<b>CURRENT LANDSCAPE / ISSUES / PRIORITIES</b>	
<p>The Caribbean is home to more than 11 million youth between the ages of 15 and 29, who have a central role to play in achieving sustainable development in the region. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an opportunity to galvanize action aimed at promoting greater inclusion of youth in all spheres. This roadmap recognizes in several of its goals the centrality of the full incorporation of youth as a necessary condition to move towards more egalitarian societies on a path of sustainable development. However, youth in the Caribbean subregion face many challenges that need to be addressed in order to facilitate environments that enables youth to reach their maximum potential to contribute with the achievement of SDGs by 2030, leaving no one behind and a legacy for future youth generations.</p> <p>After almost two years of multidimensional impacts (health, economic and social) of the COVID-19 pandemic, the subregion is slowly reopening and gradually rethinking its trajectory on the road to recovery. Despite the struggles, the subregion's GDP forecast is 6.1% for 2022 (excluding Guyana with a 46% growth, as petroleum exports boost export receipts). This reflects the sustained investments in the slow reopening of the economic activities, coupled with contained inflation rates. There is a certain degree of diversity in numbers of economic growth between countries and territories in the Caribbean, but the recovery is certainly linked to both health and social support measures and resilience building efforts.</p>	

**Key Issue: Quality and Inclusive Education in the Caribbean (SDG 4)**

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the education of Caribbean students with the closure of education facilities from March 2020 onwards impacting nearly 12 million learners in 29 Caribbean countries.
- Limited technological advancement in the education system before the pandemic, made the transition to online learning significantly different to face to face classes which contributed to a widening of the inequality gap. There were significant disparities in the availability of resources to support students such as lack of devices and reliable internet access.
- Online learning and e-learning platforms rarely accommodated for the different learning styles and affected the level of retention of some students. Furthermore, many students were not equipped with the social and emotional skills needed to build their resilience, and as a result they had difficulties coping with the sudden changes and uncertainties that came along with the pandemic. Students were expected to operate as business as usual, even though they were in survival mode. Also, there were many instances where the interest and motivation of parents to get involved in the online schooling process to further provide that support to children was particularly challenging.
- The pandemic highlighted the continued exclusion of differently abled students and other minority groups, as many of them still did not have access to quality education or opportunities to receive up to standard education.

**Key issue: Gender perspectives in the recovery process post-COVID-19 (SDG 5)**

- In times of crisis when resources are strained and institutional capacity is limited, women and girls face disproportionate impacts with far reaching consequences that are only further amplified in contexts of fragility, conflict and emergencies. This statement is especially true when one examines the way that women and girls have been uniquely impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic.
- The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the structural persistence of harmful gender norms- the inequality in relationships between men and women and non-binary persons, which has continued to fuel unequal gender relations between women and men. This has had implications for intimate partner violence, in a subregion that already had prevalence rates of either at or above the global average of one in three women experiencing intimate partner violence.
- Recent data collected from five countries- Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, showed that prior to the pandemic there was some progress in the labour force participation of women, however more women experienced more job losses than men during the pandemic.
- The burden of unpaid care and domestic work that women experienced to a greater degree during the COVID-19 pandemic, increased the inequality gap. Women now had to balance work with taking care of children and the home which had major implications for women's productivity alongside their physical and mental health.
- There has been the continued dissonance in what policies are framed to do and what actually happens in terms of addressing root causes of harmful gender norms. What is described as gender neutrality or gender blindness in policymaking is mainly due to the deficiency in data driven advocacy with the lack of available gender disaggregated statistics.

**Key issue: The role of youth in Caribbean blue futures – targeting SDG 14 (SDG 14)**

- One problem that is often overlooked and is key to a sustainable future, is the lack of stakeholder awareness and educational campaigns surrounding environmental and ocean issues. The lack of equitable education resource distribution, along with limited access to equal opportunities especially for those youth in rural communities and indigenous youth was voiced as a major concern.
- The depletion of fisheries resources has implications for food security, which will ultimately affect young persons and future generations. Additionally, with many young persons being employed in the fisheries sector and other tourism ocean sectors such as fisherfolk and tour guides can experience further implications in the near future. The COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated the effects in these areas.

**Key Issue: Life on Earth and Caribbean Youth Environmental Action (SDG 15)**

- The Caribbean has had to deal with far-reaching issues such as deforestation, flooding, loss of mangroves and forests.
- The bottleneck phenomena of sharing information and the lack of promotion of environmental awareness in the education system in the Caribbean was highlighted as a major issue in this area.

**SOLUTIONS / ACTIONS  
(Approx. 500 words)**

- Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Education, Anguilla embarked on a number of investments in technology integration which included digital and online platforms. During the pandemic, all schools already had an integrated online platform, which meant that the transition from physical classes to e-learning was relatively smooth, as teachers were already trained to use these platforms. The Ministry also used this opportunity to build on exceptional partnerships to mobilize resources for internet access and devices.
- The Youth Ambassador Programme in the Cayman Islands realized the urgent need for the inclusion of many minority groups, especially in the education sector. Prior to the pandemic, the Youth Ambassadors held workshops in 27 schools throughout the island, with the aim of raising awareness for persons with disabilities and the importance of inclusion. The Youth Ambassadors will soon partner with the organizations - Inclusion Cayman, Kids Ability and Lighthouse School to develop a diagnostic survey to assess the needs of students with disabilities. The findings from this assessment would determine the format for further advocacy workshops on how to make schools more inclusive to deliver quality and inclusive education for all, as this was a major challenge during the pandemic.
- The organization- Survival Scholars in Trinidad and Tobago worked towards helping students with their social and emotional wellbeing especially when experiencing situations of trauma and stress. During the pandemic, Survival Scholars empowered students with the social and emotional learning to build their resilience mainly through the arts- specifically puppetry. Puppetry was a key aspect in terms of helping students express themselves and engage in play therapy which helped them to cope. Students were able to move from “the trauma brain or the survival brain into more

of the learning brain”, which is key for students to be able to retain the information they learn from school.

- The lockdown restrictions as part of the COVID-19 measures in many countries in the Caribbean, meant reduced access to sexual and reproductive health care services and pharmaceuticals such as emergency contraception pills, sanitary napkins and other period products. While Governments and many NGOs distributed covid relief care packages of mainly food and cleaning supplies, in most cases period products were usually not included. The organization Feminitt in Trinidad and Tobago therefore launched a safe cycle project that specifically targeted period poverty, where they distributed 120 period kits which provided about three to four months stock of sanitary napkins to young women and girls throughout the island. Feminitt being fully aware of the lack of menstrual education and the normalization of period pain, was able to fund a few young women to see a gynaecologist since these free services were limited during the pandemic.
- Feminitt also conducted a safe cycle study on the rate of period poverty in Trinidad and Tobago, which recommended that the Government should implement a Menstrual Equity Act to mandate public institutions to ensure that there are free period products available, for example in schools. These recommendations were shared with members of parliament; however no action has been taken to date.
- Kalinago Inspirators Youth Group in Dominica have been the frontliners of the effects of climate change and recently launched a project called “Recycle Me” which promoted the recycling of materials such as plastic bottles and turning them into other reusable products. This group has also done a number of other initiatives on food security with the construction of compost bins and soil beds for germinating seedlings, as well youth workshops on tree planting which promotes teamwork and climate action.
- The Guyana Youth and Environment Network has done a lot of impactful work around environmental education and building awareness around the environmental impacts; conservation of mangroves; reduction of pollution; and reduction of carbon emissions. Since environmental education is not formally integrated into the national school curriculum, the Guyana Youth and Environment Network had made efforts to get children to develop an understanding and appreciation for the environment from a young age. Before the pandemic, the organization would do school outreach activities such as learning camps and community awareness raising campaigns on environmental protection and conservation. During the pandemic, when outreach to children became restricted due to lockdown measures, the organization created an online storybook for children that highlighted link between environment and health.

## RECOMMENDATIONS (Approx. 500 words)

- There needs to be more facilitation of the participation of youth as key stakeholders in the decision-making processes and consultations for policy and programmatic priorities. Engaging youth in a meaningful way means also compensating them for their time, their energy, their effort, so that they are respected as valuable experts in the decision-making process.
- Youth-led organizations are consistently at the forefront of engaging with the most vulnerable communities, and they are the ones with the energy, passion, the ideas and the solutions. Youth organizations therefore need to be provided with the grant funding and technical capacity as they are the ones who are embarking on a lot of solid movements and are on the frontlines of some of the most vulnerable communities.
- National youth councils and Caribbean regional youth councils have very important roles to play. More young persons should be encouraged to get involved in youth organizations, non-profits and other projects, that enables youth the opportunity to advocate for their causes. National Youth Council may have more leverage with approaching and engaging with governments as there is a certain level of credibility from a young person's perspective.
- The gap in youth representation must be acknowledged, as there is currently no youth organization that can claim that they fully represent or effectively represent every different intersection of youth. Inclusion of diverse youth such as the marginalized; those who live in rural communities; those who are most vulnerable because of socio-economic reasons; or because of special needs, should be strategically involved and have their voices heard. These diverse groups must be included in the consultations, the decision-making processes and also be held accountable as well, if there is to be acceleration of action towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- “Crises do not affect everyone the same...We are weathering the same storm, but we are not in the same boat”. Women and girls, men and boys, members of the LGBTQIA community and gender non-conforming folks, are all affected differently with this pandemic. Therefore, a practical step in advancing the gender goals in the Caribbean would be to learn from the lens of young girls and other diverse groups in the subregion. These diversified youth groups are experts of their own experiences and must be a part of any and every decision-making process.
- The importance of a transformative approach to capturing data must be underscored. There needs to be an urgent push for sex and gender disaggregated data in research and analysis. Additionally, consultations with communities and organizations on the ground are critical to assess needs in order to design solutions. True transformation comes from consultation and research to determine the root of the issues at hand and devise solutions to remedy.
- Time use surveys and the measurement of unpaid care work should be promoted more in the Caribbean subregion, to be able to craft proper evidence-based policies on affordable childcare, paternity leave, equal pay for equal work, and the burden of care. While some of these issues may not a prominent feature in youth debates, they are ultimately youth issues as one day young people would become parents and more economically active in the labour force.

- Promote a shift in harmful gender norms towards more gender equal relations. Women need to shift their beliefs about their rights as women if they are to reduce the root causes of unequal gender relations such as the man is the natural head of the household and women’s most important roles is to care for their husband and their children. This is also the same with unequal power relations such as intimate partner violence.
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships in education are critical. Synergies between parents, teachers, students, governments, policymakers, private sector and civil society are the only way to solve many of the challenges that plague the education sector in the Caribbean.
- Equipping students with resilience skills will help them better prepare and cope with situations of uncertainty. Providing parents and home support networks with these tools are also important, as the experiences of parents during crises do have implications on children, for example loss of livelihoods affecting children’s nutrition at home.
- Gift incentives and opportunities should be provided to young persons within the blue economy. Governments must be deliberate in creating economic and educational opportunities in the blue economy to promote diversification to the educational curriculum. Internships, fellowships, employment opportunities and also educational courses such as fisheries, ocean and marine resources management should be offered as there is currently a shortage of persons working in these fields.

**OTHER RELEVANT ELEMENTS, IF ANY**

The Caribbean Youth Dialogues presented a platform to showcase that youth are experts of their own experiences. A common theme that resonated during the 2-day session was that young persons need to be engaged in the planning, implementation and development of accountability mechanisms- *“Nothing for us, without us”*. Youth must be the propellers and protectors of the SDGs. Youth is a resource of social innovation and creativity, and they are concerned about their future, and ready to take action. It is time for leaders to step up and support youth and young people need to continue pushing for it.