



DEPARTMENT OF **ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS**



A Caribbean SIDS Side Event

Building Back Better: Reckoning with Size in Pursuit of Resilience

*Organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC),
The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), The Caribbean
Community (CARICOM), the Permanent Mission of Belize to the United Nations*

**New York, 10 July 2019, 1:15to 2.30 p.m.
UN Secretariat, Room S-1527**

Introduction

As the member States of the United Nations prepare to reaffirm commitment to four global development platforms at summit meetings to be convened in September on climate change, SIDS, SDGs and financing for development, this side event is intended to offer the small, highly vulnerable, heavily indebted middle income countries of the Caribbean yet another strategic opportunity to argue persuasively the newly compelling reasons why they are deserving of special consideration where support for their sustainable development process is concerned. The advent of catastrophic category five hurricanes in the Caribbean has made planning for and investing in resilience even more urgent for the countries of this subregion. How these middle-income countries, ineligible for concessional financing, achieve risk reduction and resilience-building in the face of persistently low growth, declining ODA and FDI, high levels of indebtedness and a harsh international environment replete with challenges like de-risking and blacklisting, is the conundrum that they face today.

The side event will consider the renewed imperative of integrating resilience building into sustainable development planning and practice in the Caribbean, in light of the inescapable impact of climate change on the environmental, infrastructural, economic and social wellbeing of Caribbean states. It will be an opportunity to review comprehensively the demands of building resilience, and the myriad challenges, both inherent and acquired, that small size present to the countries of the Caribbean. It will be an opportunity to explore positive responses and remedies through partnership and renewed engagement with the donor community, the private sector and civil society.

Background

Vulnerability to climate change is a multidimensional concept, which is impacted by a combination of factors associated with the location and degree of fragility of human settlements and economic activities in areas prone to natural hazards. The recurrence of natural threats and the growing concentration of populations on the coastal areas contribute to making the Caribbean one of the subregions with highest vulnerability to disasters in the world. Between 1990 and 2017, 408 disasters occurred in the Caribbean, 90 per cent of which were caused by hydro-climatic phenomena including storms, tropical cyclones and floods. A unique characteristic of such events in the Caribbean is their scope; they are typically national in dimension. The entire country is invariably affected, this because of their small size. In the hurricane season of 2017, the category five systems covered the islands completely, and the total cost of damage and loss from Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the British Virgin Islands and Sint Maarten, exceeded 100 per cent of their GDP respectively; for Dominica, this figure was more than 200 percent.

Rapid urban growth not supported by sound planning measures raises the levels of risk to which Caribbean populations are exposed. It is estimated that 84 per cent of the population of the Caribbean lives on the coast, with critical infrastructure situated near the sea. Furthermore, in most Caribbean SIDS, economic activities conducted along the coastline including tourism and fisheries, constitute a significant part of the subregion's GDP. This combination of recurrence of disasters and concentration of population and activities in low elevation coastal zones may increase the potential impacts of climate change if projected sea-level rise scenarios occur.

Caribbean countries also face important structural constraints, directly linked to the small size and narrow, undiversified base of their economies. These include dependence on external financing, limited capacity to mobilize domestic resources, inability to attract FDI in a competitive international climate given the small size of markets, portending minimal return on investment, and high levels of public debt. ECLAC has argued that this debt accumulation in the Caribbean has accrued from the impact of a negative external economic environment, climate change, and natural disasters of increasing frequency and intensity. Inevitably, high public debt and debt servicing, resulting in serious fiscal constraints, have undermined the ability of Governments to sustain social spending and to invest in the resilience of domestic infrastructure.

These structural constraints create conditions wherein environmentally vulnerable developing countries find it challenging to adequately invest in climate change adaptation and mitigation initiatives. Indeed, from both economic and environmental perspectives, size has profound influence on the ability of Caribbean states to bounce back; to pursue resilient development. Vulnerability and size therefore cannot be discounted in any discussion of the economic performance and sustainable development aspirations of the subregion. In this context, the elaboration of national development plans must of necessity include as a central objective the management of risk and integration of resilience.

The Event

This Caribbean SIDS event will be held on **Wednesday 10 July 2019**, 1.15-2.30pm in Room S-1523, in the margins of the 2019 UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development. Panelists will share their knowledge and perspectives on the sustainable development efforts of Caribbean SIDS, particularly the unique challenge presented by their high exposure to hurricanes and the urgent need to address strategies for resilience building. This side event will seek to take into account the environmental, economic and social development challenges posed by small size on the path to resilient building. Presentations will be followed by interactive discussion.

Key Questions to be Addressed

- Acknowledging the impact of vulnerability and size in resilience building effort.

- Renewing the case for consideration of the challenges facing SIDS in spite of their middle-income status.
- Identifying key champions and allies to strengthen SIDS' advocacy in key multilateral forums
- Expanding practical south-south and triangular cooperation to support SIDS' sustainable development effort.
- Exploring emerging partnerships that support SIDS sustainable development. Can these be scaled up? Diversified? Maintained?

Targeted Audience

The Event aims to bring together representatives of SIDS, other UN-member countries, developmental partners and other stakeholders attending the UN 2019 HPLP.

Agenda

Time	
1.15-1.30pm	<p>Opening Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair: H.E Lois Young, Permanent Representative of Belize to the UN and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) • Mr. Sainivalati S. Navoti, Chief of SIDS Unit, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UN - DESA • Ambassador Douglas Slater, Assistant Secretary General, CARICOM
1.30 – 2.00pm	<p>Presentations (7 minutes each):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Diane Quarless, Director, ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean • H.E. H. Elizabeth Thompson, Permanent Representative of Barbados to the United Nations • Ambassador Sharman Yvonne Hyde, Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Economic Development and Petroleum, Belize
2.00 – 2.30pm	<p>Questions & Answers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Moderator:</i> H.E Lois Young, Permanent Representative of Belize to the UN and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)

Contacts

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