

ECOSOC Meeting
PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE IN CLIMATE-AFFECTED SIDS:
A FORWARD-LOOKING RESILIENCE AGENDA
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STATEMENT
By
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Check against delivery

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the President of ECOSOC for convening this event as we mark the one -year anniversary of Hurricanes Maria and Irma that unleashed such devastation on the Caribbean, eroding, as our Secretary General said last year, “a generation of development gains in a matter of mere hours”. The theme of today’s event could not be more timely – it provides an opportunity for stock taking and forward looking on actions needed. Allow me to reflect on the impact of last year’s weather events on the Caribbean.

When hurricanes Irma and Maria, both Category Five, struck the Caribbean in quick succession in September 2017, they left a trail of unprecedented destruction across the region. For example, the Post-Disaster Needs Assessments (PDNAs) conducted in Dominica, evaluated that the losses caused by hurricane Maria were equivalent to two hundred and twenty-six percent of the 2016 gross domestic product (GDP). The recovery needs for reconstruction and resilience interventions amounted to one point thirty-seven billion US dollars.¹

UNDP, and the UN System, responded immediately and were on the ground within days of these disasters. To this day, UNDP is very much engaged in the Caribbean both at the regional and national levels.

I would like to highlight some examples of the recovery progress achieved so far by the Caribbean with UNDP support:

- In Dominica, for instance, UNDP has contributed to the repairs of some five hundred structures, including main government buildings. UNDP is also working with partners to develop an innovative insurance scheme that associates good quality repairs with lower premiums and subsidies for the most vulnerable households. This is an example of recovery linked to building long-term resilience.
- With a view towards building long-term resilience, UNDP assisted in the revision, dissemination and training of building codes and housing standards in Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Sint Maarten.
- We are also working closely with the governments in the affected Islands to augment their implementation capacity. UNDP established four project offices to assist in the implementation of “Build Back Better” recovery projects that resulted in over seven hundred buildings reroofed, and seven hundred and fifty construction professionals trained in “Building Back Better” techniques.

¹ GDP of Dominica in 2016 was 581.5 million US dollars.

These results have only been possible thanks to strong national leadership and vision of key recovery partners, such as:

- **The People's Republic of China** that, one week after the first hurricane, committed five million US Dollars for strategic interventions on housing.
- **The government of India** that promoted an innovative South-South Cooperation modality for early recovery interventions in post disaster contexts.
- The **Caribbean Development Bank**, who is testing -with very positive results so far- the use of UNDP as an implementing partner to accelerate loan implementation.
- The **EU**, who has committed five million Euros for housing repairs in Barbuda in a project that will be key to revitalize the island.
- And many others such as **New Zealand, Kuwait, Denmark, DFID, the World Bank, ECHO and others.**

UNDP is also pleased to advance fruitful partnerships with CARICOM and regional institutions such as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre or the University of West Indies among many others.

Finally, I would like to draw on our experiences in the Caribbean to share three perspectives on how to concretize the pathway for resilience in SIDS:

Strong and durable partnerships to build resilience

First, it is critical to build strong partnerships to support SIDS in building resilience, as was emphasized at the inter-regional preparatory meeting for the SAMOA Pathway mid-term review in Apia two weeks ago. At the CARICOM-UN High Level Pledging Conference, three point two billion US Dollars were pledged for the Caribbean, including one point six billion in grant pledges. This is an excellent start but at the same time an enduring partnership at the global, regional and national levels is needed.

Financing for development in SIDS

Second, I would like to reflect on financing for development. We support the clear call for the vulnerability of SIDS to be recognized as a criterion in country classification, so climate-vulnerable SIDS can access concessional financing. It is also vital that we provide support to improve the ease of doing business where most SIDS are lagging as the 2019 rankings of the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings demonstrate. There is much we can learn from high performing SIDS such as Mauritius which came in at number 20 in 2019 report.

On innovative financing, the diaspora represents an important source of financing for Caribbean and Pacific SIDS. In the case of the Caribbean, remittances account for more financial flows annually than foreign direct investment and ODA combined. However, remittances are largely focused on consumption and it is imperative that SIDS work with development partners to transform the structure of remittances towards more investment-related activities.

Building economic resilience through diversification

Third, building economic resilience through diversification helps build buffers to exogenous shocks. I am pleased to see many SIDS that have embraced the 'blue economy' approach to improve economic diversification. I am delighted that Caribbean SIDS have started looking at ways to tap into the blue economy whilst protecting and preserving the ocean.

Yet, there is no 'quick fix' for building resilience in the Small Island Developing States. Disasters provide a space for reflection, as well as an opportunity for policies and investments to consider future threats. To avoid the reversal of hard-fought development gains, 'building back better' must be more than just a slogan. It requires a broad set of well-coordinated policies and investments that can balance short-term imperatives and long-term resilience.

Thank you!