

UPGRADING CARIBBEAN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE CAPACITIES

Caribbean nations work together for regional resilience

AT A GLANCE

Country: Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Risks: Tropical storms, hurricanes, storm surges, floods, rising sea levels

GFDRR Areas of Engagement: Deepening engagements in resilience to climate change, Enabling resilient recovery

National disaster management agencies in the Caribbean are overcoming challenges to the implementation of effective emergency preparedness and response systems.

INSTITUTIONAL OBSTACLES ARE PREVENTING EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO DISASTER RISK

The Caribbean region is confronted with an increasing number of devastating storms and extreme weather events, as evidenced by the increasing length of the Atlantic hurricane season during which these storms can form, as well as their severity. These events require advanced government and institutional capacities to adequately prepare for an immediate response in their aftermath. Yet many of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the region are confronted with significant obstacles in designing and maintaining such a system. These obstacles derive from insufficient human and financial resources being invested in these countries' respective National Disaster Management Organizations (NDMOs), ranging from deficiencies in their institutional frameworks to a lack of coordination between these agencies.

The common challenges faced by these countries require a regional response which can guide coordination on disaster management mechanisms. To this end, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), a regional inter-governmental agency for disaster management in the Caribbean community, is spearheading an initiative to enhance disaster preparedness in Eastern Caribbean



Understanding Risk Caribbean Conference. Photo: World Bank

countries, namely Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Grenada, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Saint Lucia. These countries are undergoing a comprehensive institutional evaluation of their respective NDMOs to identify weaknesses in their preparedness and response systems, and to build a framework that will support future regional cooperation. This initiative is supported by the Africa Caribbean Pacific – European Union Natural Disaster Risk Reduction (ACP-EU NDRR) Program, an initiative of the ACP Group of States, funded by the EU and managed by the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR).

DESIGNING A REGIONAL STRATEGIC ROADMAP AND INVESTMENT PLAN

In order to guide and coordinate these countries' efforts to improve their disaster management capacities, an institutional roadmap is being developed to help each country's respective NDMO to address its gaps and deficiencies. This roadmap is being informed by the results of an institutional assessment of each NDMO that was conducted by a series of in-person interviews and questionnaires between national disaster experts and program representatives. Based on the evaluation of existing legal and institutional policies, facilities, equipment, and personnel, each assessment will inform the roadmap on the most viable paths for reform. For instance,



ACP-EU Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Program
An initiative of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group, funded by the European Union and managed by GFDRR



Castries, Saint Lucia. Photo: Flavio Vallenari.

in Saint Lucia, the assessment has yielded recommendations for strengthening cooperation with the private sector and deepening knowledge of private sector insurance schemes.

One of the common weaknesses identified by the institutional assessments was the NDMOs' insufficient capacities in collecting and managing actionable data and information. At the request of the countries that underwent the assessment, the project received additional funding to undertake a series of data collection training workshops to address this gap. These capacity-building trainings are being held with the objective of handling both the Covid-19 crisis in the Caribbean and the hurricane season.

Results and Achievements:

Institutional assessment reports were developed for the five participating Caribbean island states, highlighting several policy gaps and recommendations. For example, it was identified that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines would require leadership and co-ordination at the strategic level in order to drive reforms, promote engagement of stakeholders and influence experts, emergency responders and the public. Key institutional bottlenecks and blockages were also identified in Saint Lucia and Dominica, such as outdated legislation and the lack of relevant training and investment in human resources.

The 5 institutional assessment reports were presented and discussed with national stakeholders during 5 country-level situational awareness workshops, leading to the training and awareness-raising of 147 people, including 45 women. Multiple targeted follow up sessions were also organized with national stakeholders in order to finalize the outputs.

LESSONS LEARNED

A participatory approach combining analytical and capacity building outputs ensures better end-products

Country consultations have been essential to develop the five country-level situational awareness reports, through workshops and bilateral follow-up meetings. This approach has produced detailed information on each country's disaster preparedness and response capacities, such as the growing expectations gap between each agency's capacity to meet increasingly diverse disaster management responsibilities and their own human and financial resources, and the development of actionable recommendations.

Institutional reforms require inputs from policy as well as technical levels

It is important to engage not just stakeholders within disaster management agencies through technical assessments and trainings, but also involve policymakers within the government who are likely to determine the long-term success of these institutional reforms. To define priorities for investment, gaining input from the ministries of finance in each country of engagement is crucial to guarantee the sustainability of these reforms.