SESSION SUMMARY

Session Title: Building Back Better & Inclusive Recovery in Small Island Developing States

Session Type: Thematic session

Date and Time: Tuesday, May 14, 11:00 am-12:30 pm, Room 18

Key Speakers and Agencies:

Co-Moderators:
- **Naraya Carrasco,** Senior Disaster Risk Management Specialist GFDRR/World Bank
- **Cindy Patricia Robles**, Disaster Risk Management Specialist GFDRR/World Bank

Speakers:
- **Elizabeth Riley**, Deputy Executive Director, Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (DEMA)
- **Victorina Leger**, Structural Engineer, Ministry of Infrastructure, Tonga
- **Mary Jack**, Provincial Coordinator, Action Aid Vanuatu & Leader of the Women I Tok Tok Tugetha Network
- **Omar Sweeney**, Managing Director, Jamaica Social Investment Fund

The session highlighted how Building Back Better in Small Island States poses specific challenges because small island states are the most vulnerable to natural disasters due to their higher risk relative to their population and economies. They are also at the frontline of climate change, which greatly increases their exposure and vulnerability to natural disasters. The islands in the Caribbean, Africa, and Pacific and Indian oceans are heterogeneous, but they also share specific and unique commonalities such as small size, geographic isolation, narrow expertise-based industries and high

infrastructure costs. They also account for over two-thirds of the countries with an annual disaster loss of between 1–9 % of their GDP.

Elizabeth Riley, Deputy Executive Director, Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), highlighted key challenges in BBB, among which the need to highlight the multi-hazard context in which SIDS operate instead of focusing on the hydro-meteorological hazards alone. She also stressed the importance of identifying the end-goal of Building Back stronger, the need to recognize that the scale of damage to the built environment is not restricted to housing alone but also impacts other sectors such as tourism, public infrastructure, human resources, etc., and that the three dimensions of BBB may require some measure of trade-offs. She emphasized that prior policy articulation and planning, using data to make informed decisions to address the needs of vulnerable sections of the population, inclusiveness, and strengthening horizontal cooperative arrangements of capacity were the way forward to support faster and stronger recovery with emphasis on non-structural recovery.

Victorina Leger, Structural Engineer, Ministry of Infrastructure, Tonga, showed how social resilience and inclusiveness on the ground can be promoted by integrating BBB into national policy that considered immediate response, inclusiveness based on reliable data, and financing for recovery. She reiterated that community self-recovery can be enhanced by raising awareness at the community level, enforcing regulation at the policy level, and a mutual understanding between the two.

Mary Jack, Provincial Coordinator, Action Aid Vanuatu & Leader of the Women I Tok Tok Tugetha Network, emphasized how women's voices were still not heard. If they were made aware of their rights, policy makers could engage them to use their specialized knowledge to take collective decisions on issues affecting them, thereby Building Back Better.

Omar Sweeney, Managing Director, Jamaica Social Investment Fund, contended that the adaptive social protection has been built around targeting and data, with financial resources being channeled to provide access to cash so the most vulnerable can receive the response they need. He emphasized the importance of thinking about BBB before disaster strikes, enhancing preparedness across sectors, and focusing on local leadership to BBB and to drive first response. He stressed the need for strategic investment coupled

with the right information and monitoring programs to evaluate the effectiveness of delivery of social protection. Local leadership and volunteerism, crucial in building community-based organizations with a wide representation, offer the best chance of protection.

The session showed that the three principles on which Building Back Better is operationalized viz. Building Back faster, Building Back stronger, and Building Back more inclusively need to be defined more specifically in the context of Small Island States. The role of data in identifying vulnerable communities, prioritizing actions to help them better prepare and recover from disasters, and identifying the gaps where benefits are not being delivered was highlighted. The panelists agreed that Building Back Better as a phrase sounds good in theory, but there are a lot of challenges on the ground in terms of how it is defined and implemented. There is a need for data to drive policy, which must work hand-in-hand with local communities for effective response and to Build Back Better.