



TECHNICAL SESSION

Building Back Faster, Stronger & more Inclusively in Small Island Developing States

May 14, 11:00 – 12:30 hrs, Room 18

Discussion Paper

Introduction

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are among the world’s most vulnerable countries to natural hazards due to higher levels of risk relative to the size of their populations and economies. Natural disasters disrupt the development in SIDS by exacerbating existing development challenges and reversal of hard-earned development gains. SIDS are also at the frontline of climate change which is expected to greatly increase their exposure and vulnerability to natural hazards including tropical storms, storm surges, flooding, extreme winds, landslides and slow-onset events such as sea level rise, salinization and drought.

Natural disasters are not neutral as they disproportionately affect the poorest, the vulnerable and most marginalized. It has also been widely documented that disasters can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and social inequalities. They further affect women, girls, men and boys differently due to gender inequalities, often exacerbated by marginalization due to age, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation as well as socio-economic status, geographic context, cultural and religious beliefs and migrant status.

For recovery to be truly inclusive and promote equity, it has been argued that three conditions are required: (i) a clear understanding and consideration of the underlying political, social and economic factors in the pre-disaster context that contributes to the vulnerability of the poor and marginalized groups; (ii) a recognition that recovery and reconstruction programs and efforts are not necessarily neutral and can reduce, reinforce or even increase those vulnerabilities; and (iii) investments in targeted actions to ensure that the most vulnerable are effectively reached, protected and empowered. Recovery activities must also include the active participation of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged and acknowledge their potential as agents of change by including these groups in disaster recovery planning and decision-making.

There are several approaches to achieve inclusive recovery, and one of them is to apply the principles of Building Back Better (BBB)¹, operationalized through three dimensions: building back faster, stronger and more inclusively. BBB can lay the foundation for building inclusive and resilient societies and benefit SIDS specifically due to their high vulnerability and small scale. SIDS make up 7 of the top 10 countries

¹ Is defined as “the use of the recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phases after a disaster to increase the resilience of nations and communities through integrating disaster risk reduction measures into restoration of physical infrastructure and societal systems, and into the revitalization of livelihoods, economies, and the environment.” United Nations General Assembly, 2016. Report of the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Indicators and Terminology Relating to Disaster Risk Reduction.



with highest gains from BBB. The Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)/World Bank report *Build Back Better*, shows that a faster, stronger and more inclusive recovery would lead to an average reduction in disaster-related well-being losses² of 59 percent in SIDS and that such resilient and effective recovery can only take place through targeted actions before the disaster hits. However, it is important to understand what BBB means in practice and what the challenges are to its implementation - especially in SIDS where government face many challenges in managing and responding to climate and disaster risks.

The session discuss will discusses the challenges and opportunities SIDS encounter when implementing the BBB approach including the importance of planning ahead of disasters and the role that social vulnerability assessments, adaptive social protection systems, community resilience and gender equality and women’s leadership can play in BBB to build sustainable and resilient societies in SIDS.

SIDS are already taking important steps to prepare and respond better to future hazard events and their growing experience makes them champions of resilience. Bringing in small island states practitioners’ unique experiences can teach us all valuable lessons on how BBB can help us build more inclusive and resilient societies.

Background/Concepts

The SIDS in the Caribbean, Pacific, Africa and Indian Ocean are heterogenous but share unique and specific commonalities such as small size, geographic isolation, high debt, narrow resource and export-based industries and high infrastructure costs. Other common factors are exposure to global environmental challenges and external economic shocks, while coping and managing the impacts of natural hazards and climate change as well. Small island states account for more than two thirds of the countries with the highest relative average annual disaster losses – between 1 to 9% of their GDP, and the costs continue to grow. The recurrence and severity of natural disasters in SIDS makes it hard to fully recover. Donor funding fragmentation, lack of climate financing and thin implementation capacity owing to limited financial and human resources aggravate these challenges.

On average, hurricanes cause US\$ 835 million-worth damage annually in the Caribbean alone³. The 2017 hurricane season in the Caribbean was extraordinary with Hurricanes Maria and Irma impacting numerous Caribbean islands. Hurricane Maria was the first category 5 hurricane to strike Dominica and led to major destructions in a country that was still recovering from Tropical Storm Erika in 2015. The tiny island’s total damage and loss was estimated to nearly US\$ 1.3 billion or 226 percent of its 2016 GDP. There were 31 direct deaths and 37 people went missing - out of a population of less than 80.000. Inhabitants suffered thousands of injuries, and around 80 percent of the population was directly affected

² A resilience metric from the World Bank/GFDRR report *Unbreakable*, to measure how natural disasters affect people’s well-being accounting for the exposure and vulnerability of people; how often they are affected; how much they lose when affected including their socio-economic resilience (defined as an ability to cope with a disaster, receive support, and recover and reconstruct)

³ Building Back Better – A resilient Caribbean after the 2017 hurricanes:
<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12028.pdf>



through disruption of water and power network systems, agriculture losses, damages to houses to name a few. An estimated 80-90 percent of the environmental resources were heavily affected.

In the Pacific, Cyclone Gita that struck Tonga in February 2018, resulted in over 400 injuries and, impacted over 80.000 people representing 80 percent of the total population. The estimated damage and losses were nearly 40 percent of their GDP. In the aftermath of Cyclone Pam - the worst tropical cyclone in Vanuatu's recorded history, their losses and damages amounted to 64 percent of its GDP. Cyclone Winston made landfall in Fiji in 2016 and hit 40 percent of the population (800.000). In consequence, 44 people died, 9,000 homes were destroyed and 17,000 severely damaged. The negative impacts of these cyclones will, therefore, be felt for the years to come.

As the frequency and intensity of weather-related events are expected to increase due to climate change, resilient recovery is not an option for these small islands, but a necessity. The benefits of BBB are greatest among communities and countries that are hit by disasters most intensely and frequently. In the seventeen SIDS that were analyzed in the *Build Back Better* report⁴, *stronger, faster and more inclusive* recovery would lead to an average reduction in disaster-related well-being losses of as much as 59 percent compared to 31 percent globally. Unpacking what stronger, faster and more inclusive means is important before discussing the implications and opportunities:

- **Building Back *faster*** through accelerated recovery lessens the disaster's impact on growth and poverty reduction while ensuring that, through fast-tracked reconstruction, disaster losses can be minimized. It also warrants people restoring their income and assets as early as possible.
- **Building Back *stronger*** ensures that reconstructed infrastructure withstands more frequent and intense hazard events in the future by reducing the risks to assets and the risk to well-being by utilizing more resilient standards such as risk-informed construction standards and risk-based spatial planning.
- **Building Back *more inclusively*** makes sure that post-disaster relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts reach the whole population, encompassing the poorest, the vulnerable and most marginalized who tend to have higher losses relative to income and often resort to "negative coping strategies". Inclusive recovery is key to prevent people from falling into poverty traps. To build back more inclusively, vulnerable and/or marginalized women and men need to be engaged in defining their own recovery needs, identifying solutions, and implementing recovery activities. Their capacities need to be developed to enable their participation in the identification of resilient solutions.

The benefits of building back faster, stronger and more inclusively are maximized if achieved together. However, due to the urgency to respond, post-disaster recovery and reconstruction is often done rapidly, without enough time for planning. For SIDS, repayment of debts, recurrent disasters and related huge economic losses, combined with institutional, operational and technical challenges and insufficient

⁴ "Building Back Better: Achieving resilience through stronger, faster, and more inclusive post-disaster reconstruction"

human and financial resources warrants the question on whether BBB is even realistic in SIDS. But what are the options when resilient recovery is imperative for sustainable development? The focus should be the translation of BBB concept to practical and concrete actions on the ground. This is best done through proper planning ahead of disasters which is essential to inform post-disaster decision-making and to build back stronger, faster and more inclusively. Strengthening recovery systems ahead of disasters will help enhance small islands governments' capacity to respond and recover from disasters in an inclusive way. BBB has the best potential if integrated into a disaster risk management framework. Such a framework should also be linked to the development of policies and investment plans to ensure consistency and alignment with longer-term development plans and strategies. Pre-disaster recovery planning should include targeted actions that promote building back more inclusively in addition to faster and stronger. According to the literature and evidence on DRM, there are several actions that can contribute to this:

- **Collection of sex, age and disability-disaggregated data (SADD):**

An important first step is the collection of baseline data, including data on social vulnerability as this is what influences the ability of people to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. Recovery efforts that are not based on SADD run the risk of implementing interventions that are not well targeted or at worst result in inequitable outcomes for women and men and vulnerable groups. Recovery and reconstruction assistance that are based on a sound collection of SADD and analysis of social vulnerability will, in addition to building back more inclusively, also contribute to faster and stronger recovery as the assistance will be more effective and efficient due to better targeting and understanding of vulnerability and needs.

- **Adaptive Social Protection:**

SIDS can make more effective use of their social protection systems to manage climate and disaster risks as social protection can strengthen the coping capacity of vulnerable populations and can be designed to address longer-term structural poverty. Most SIDS have at least a basic social protection system. To be effective, social protection mechanisms must be shock responsive (adaptive) and should also include the "near poor people" in their database – which means those that are at risk of being pushed into poverty in the event of a disaster. To respond quickly and effectively, social protection measures need to be in place prior to the hazard event. Adaptive social protection contributes to building back more inclusively, but also faster and stronger, as it quickly channels funds to the poorest and most vulnerable, who again can use these funds for stronger self-recovery by rebuilding their houses in a more resilient way and faster through restoration of their income.

- **Engaging and empowering communities, including marginalized groups:**

Evidence has demonstrated the important role that communities play as first responders due to their effective social support networks. Engaging women and men from affected communities through participatory approaches is essential for inclusive recovery. Affected women and men could be engaged beyond consultations through for example community participatory monitoring, which consists of community groups that monitor recovery and reconstruction activities. Selected beneficiaries implement recovery activities through public works, while developing a sense of ownership and impartiality.



Women's grassroots organizations, local civil society organizations and/or NGO networks could be effective partners in implementing recovery activities as they are most likely to be already working with vulnerable and marginalized groups and can quickly reach them. This contributes to faster, but also stronger recovery as increased accountability from citizens leads to better service delivery.

- **Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment:**

Gender norms influence how women and men prepare for, react to, and recover from disasters. Evidence shows that when gender is taken into consideration, the needs of men and women are better met in post-disaster recovery. Disasters can change power relations between women and men for better or for worse. As such, recovery and reconstruction offer a "window of opportunity" for women to step into public roles and get involved in community decision-making and thus initiate long-term social change and resilient development. However, for this to happen disaster risk management agencies need to establish partnerships with women's organizations ahead of disasters. Building the capacity of women to become recovery leaders and by making better use of the knowledge and capacities of gender ministries through integrating them in the work of DRM agencies, contributes to more inclusive recovery. Including women in planning and decision-making will also contribute to faster and stronger recovery through better targeting of beneficiaries, more effective assistance that meets the needs of the whole population and inclusion of affected individuals in recovery activities.

Issues to be discussed in the session

The session will discuss the concept of BBB and its implications in the context of SIDS, what inclusion specifically means in the context of recovery and how it can be translated to practical actions on the ground. It will also discuss the importance of planning ahead of disasters and including BBB in disaster risk management frameworks, and how inclusive recovery can be achieved through dedicated investments in data collection on social vulnerability disaggregated by sex, age and disability; adaptive social protection systems; engagement and empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized communities and individuals; and finally, through the promotion of gender equality and women's leadership in disaster recovery.

More specifically, the members of the panel will be requested to share their experiences based on the following issues/questions:

- The benefits and implications of BBB for SIDS, including a discussion on the particular institutional, operational and technical challenges for SIDS and solutions to overcome them
- The role of BBB to build social resilience, including a discussion on the different approaches available to ensure inclusive recovery (sex, age and disability-disaggregated data, adaptive social protection, community-led partnerships and gender equality and women's empowerment measures)
- How can we better encourage and support community-led approaches and build on best practices for inclusive recovery in SIDS?
- How do we enhance the capacity of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to build resilient communities in the aftermath of disasters?
- Best practices on the development of women's capacity to be recovery leaders



References/Reading Material

- Building Back Better – Achieving Resilience through Stronger, Faster, and more Inclusive Post-Disaster Reconstruction
- Disaster Recovery Guidance Series: Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Disaster Recovery
- Integrating Gender in Disaster Management in Small Island Developing States: A Guide
- Building Back Better – A Resilient Caribbean after the 2017 Hurricanes
- Building Social Resilience: Protecting and Empowering those most at Risk
- Protecting and Empowering Vulnerable Groups in Disaster Recovery
- Women’s Empowerment following a disaster: A Longitudinal Study of Social Change
- Resilient Recovery: An Imperative for Sustainable Development