



Forum of the Countries
of Latin America and
the Caribbean on
**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**
Virtual meeting
15–18 March **2021**

3 March 2021

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America
and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development

Virtual meeting, 15–18 March 2021

GUIDELINES FOR PANELISTS AND MODERATOR

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) is honoured that you have agreed to participate in the Fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, in particular in the panel “**Building forward better in the Caribbean post-COVID-19: critical issues to keep the 2030 Agenda in sight**”, to be held on Tuesday 16 March.

Pursuant to agenda item 4 of the annotated provisional agenda and in accordance with ECLAC “Caribbean first” strategy and with the provisions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognizes that each country has different realities, capacities and levels of development and faces its own specific challenges to achieve sustainable development, and that the situation of the most vulnerable countries, including small island developing States, deserves special attention, this session has been organized to address key issues that should be employed in building forward better in the Caribbean post-COVID-19 pandemic, while advancing in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Moderator:

- Diane Quarless, Chief of the ECLAC Subregional headquarters for the Caribbean

Opening remarks: Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of ECLAC, and Christian Guillermet-Fernández, Deputy Minister for Multilateral Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Costa Rica

Panelists:

- Marsha K. Caddle, Minister of Economic Affairs and Investment of Barbados
- Dean Jonas, Minister of Social Transformation, Human Resource Development and the Blue Economy of Antigua and Barbuda
- Frank Anthony, Minister of Health of Guyana
- Kari Grenade, Macroeconomic Adviser, Ministry of Finance, Planning, Economic Development and Physical Development of Grenada and Chairwoman of the Technical Working Group of the National Sustainable Development Plan 2035
- Andrew Lee, Acting Director-General of e-Learning Jamaica Co. Ltd.

- Birgit Gerstenberg, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Belize and El Salvador
- Civil society representative from a Caribbean organization

Methodology:

This session will run for two hours from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Costa Rica time, GMT-6). The discussion will be guided by the moderator, who will seek the active engagement of the panelists in the debate. The moderator will make a brief presentation (5 minutes) describing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Caribbean. The Executive Secretary of ECLAC and the Government of Costa Rica, in its capacity as Chair of ECLAC, will also deliver opening remarks.

Panelists will then be introduced by the moderator, based on their biographies provided. All panelists are therefore requested to send in advance a brief biography – including a photograph and contact details, in two paragraphs of no more than five lines each. The information should be sent to secretariaforoalc2030@cepal.org before 10 March 2021.

The moderator will endeavour to maintain statements within strict time limits and will invite the panelists to keep their statements concise and to the point, so that each may make full use of the time allowed. Following the statements by the panelists, the moderator will offer the floor to representatives of the member countries of the Forum and the other participants in the session (3 minutes per speaker), for comments and questions. Before concluding the session, the moderator will again pass the floor to the panelists for any final remarks.

The panelists will each make an initial statement of no more than 8 minutes. They will address the topic and the key questions from the perspective of their respective areas of experience and professional background and engage in an active exchange of views with the other panelists and with participants. Panelists' statements should include proposals and recommendations to shape the post-pandemic recovery in the Caribbean and raise awareness of the most urgent areas of need in the subregion, for the consideration of the broader regional and international communities as well as the United Nations system, which stand ready to offer support, including through South-South and triangular cooperation.

Panelists who wish to circulate any support material may convey it to the secretariat to be posted on the Forum's website: <https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2021/en>

Background:

The Fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development is held at a time of considerable economic and social distress especially for the Caribbean. The health pandemic has not only affected the health sector, including the loss of life but also caused a virtual shut down of large parts of their economies. While the response of the subregion to the pandemic has been very swift and somewhat effective, the heavy dependence on tourism has made it difficult for the economies of the subregion to thrive given the ongoing challenges especially in major source markets. For the economies that do not depend on tourism, the decline in commodity prices especially oil prices has seen revenue plummet as well. Governments throughout the Caribbean, with the exception of Guyana, have been strapped for revenues and have had to reorient spending at a time of ongoing debt stress and declining growth in 2020. In fact, the Caribbean growth in 2020 was estimated at -7.9%, while excluding Guyana it was -10.8%. In the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU) it was -17.4%.

Meanwhile debt service as a share of expenditure in 2019 was 29.1%. It is to be noted however that while the COVID-19 pandemic has been the proximate cause of the underperformance in 2020, the region has not achieved average growth levels since the global crisis of 2008-2009.¹

ECLAC has assessed that “COVID-19 presents a clear and present danger to the countries of the Caribbean given that the tourism sector, including such industries as hotels and restaurants, the engine of most of their economies has collapsed, along with other sectors, including construction, some areas of distribution and agriculture linked to tourism. Additionally, weak and falling commodity prices have affected those countries that are oil, gas and other commodity exporters and generally the region will face a decline in its GDP for 2020”.²

Several sectors have been severely impacted, notably the increased pressure on existing health infrastructure, both in terms of personnel and the ability to render care; increased costs in the face of new needs to address the pandemic and additional resources needed to be proactive in the future.

The education sector has been particularly challenged due to the lack of a broadband infrastructure in the countries. Many children are without functional and reliable internet connectivity and the inequality in access has become manifest. The fallout, with respect to households, has not just been physical but also include psychological as many were unprepared for this event. Inevitably, sectors such as tourism have struggled in the wake of heavily imposed travel restrictions in source markets. Furthermore, the tentative re-opening in some countries has seen reversals as COVID-19 numbers steadily increased.

The transportation sector, including cruise shipping has been severely affected by the spread of the disease. And while supply chains in sectors such as agriculture have not been as significantly impacted, renewed emphasis on investing in agriculture in recent budgets for food security reasons is welcome. Creating a robust regional agricultural base with nutritious foods will contribute to curbing the rising tide of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the subregion.

The impact of climate change and natural disasters in this highly vulnerable subregion continues to threaten the very viability of these countries. Natural disasters, especially hurricanes, cause damage in the amount of some US\$3 billion per year; climate change presents a recurrent threat to the tourism and agriculture industries in particular. The subregion’s prospects for recovery are challenging, considering that improvement in the Caribbean situation is heavily dependent on global success in tackling the pandemic, especially in North America and Europe, the major source markets for the tourism sector. Nonetheless, careful planning, monitoring and evaluation of the response is equally vital.

In light of the challenges posed by the global pandemic in the Caribbean, it is important to assess the overall impact on critical sectors, such as tourism, education, and health and on populations, especially vulnerable persons including children, women, and the poor, in order to fashion a recovery strategy that

¹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), The Caribbean Outlook: forging a people-centred approach to sustainable development post-COVID-19 (LC/SES.38/12), Santiago, 2020. Available at: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46192/1/S2000599_en.pdf

² D. Alleyne and others, “The case for financing: Caribbean resilience building in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic”, Studies and Perspectives series-ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, No. 97 (LC/TS.2020/161-LC/CAR/TS.2020/7), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2020. Available at: <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/46629-case-financing-caribbean-resilience-building-face-covid-19-pandemic>

focuses on building forward better. Such a strategy must leverage the 2030 Agenda's promise to leave no one behind and reflect the environmental big push, with the ultimate outcome of setting the subregion on a path to achieving sustainable development with equality. In this context, the post COVID-19 period provides a unique opportunity for policy makers to harness significant structural changes that are occurring at all levels of the society into a vision of the desired future. That vision should include the building of an appropriate ICT infrastructure as a resilience strategy, the restoration of livelihoods where possible and the forging of resilience to combat future pandemics. This must involve upgrading the health and education infrastructure to avoid significant disruption in the future. It is to be noted also that in the face of limited public resources due to high debt and fiscal stress, strategies to reduce the debt burden are essential.

Guiding questions:

The following questions are proposed as a reference to facilitate and guide the discussion. It remains, however, the prerogative of each panelist to determine the content of their presentations in entirety.

- (1) As the fiscal challenges precipitated by the pandemic increase, what are the priority areas for financing that will maintain a focus on SDG implementation?
- (2) What new economic activities have emerged in the wake of the pandemic? Can these be scaled up to promote economic diversification?
- (3) In light of the dramatic fallout in the tourism sector across the Caribbean, what strategies are being introduced to address the economic and employment deficits in the interim? How might the Caribbean build a more resilient tourism sector?
- (4) What priorities are being identified to promote food security?
- (5) Notwithstanding the challenge to individual economies, what aspects of regional integration might be critical to building forward better?
- (6) With the magnitude of social expenditure on COVID-19 support that Caribbean governments experienced in 2020, what innovative ways can be explored to sustain social support for vulnerable populations without creating long-term dependency on public assistance?
- (7) Given the transformative nature of teleworking arrangements on skilled labour mobility, how can the Caribbean educational system be transformed to take advantage of, and respond to, the new global labour market?
- (8) Building forward better will require careful planning. Given limited resources, what strategies have been adopted to advance such planning? Has it involved a cross-section of stakeholders?
- (9) What role for youth in reshaping the hybrid future we want? Can a new generation of National Youth Policies bridge education and labour policies for the future?
- (10) How can we establish greater links between social protection and disaster risk reduction in the Caribbean? Can the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development serve as a pathway towards building forward better, with greater inclusion and equality?
- (11) Has any multi-stakeholder mechanism been put in place for the development and implementation of the COVID-19 recovery plan that bring together government, civil society, youth networks, private sector and academic stakeholders, while advancing towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?