

GOVERNANCE FOR DEVELOPMENT **IN** **THE CARIBBEAN**

The Case of CARICOM

Carol Watson Williams

GOVERNANCE FOR DEVELOPMENT SERIES



Governance for Development in the Caribbean The Case of CARICOM

Governance for Development Series

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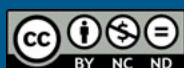
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Good, Creativity for Development

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ABOUT THE SERIES

GOVERNANCE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Development is as essential as it is difficult to achieve. The commitments made by countries under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require not only technical and conceptual clarity around the importance of improving human well-being, but also a recognition of the complex deliberation and decision-making processes involved in mobilizing resources and prioritizing their allocation across competing needs and interests.

This process of discussion and agreement-building constitutes governance for development. It involves several key factors: the legitimacy of the parties to take part in the discussion, the capacity to build consensus, the provision of safety guarantees for participants, and the effectiveness of decision implementation.

Governance for development encompasses both actors and processes operating within specific conditions shaped by history, culture, institutions, and the stakeholders involved. The desire to understand these dynamics and create incentives to improve governance conditions for development led to the alliance between CAF – development bank of Latin America and the Caribbean – and UNDP – the United Nations Development Programme. Since 2023, this partnership has promoted plural, region-wide discussions on these crucial issues.

To support and enrich the dialogue among participants in these discussions, CAF and UNDP commissioned several highly regarded Latin American scholars to prepare a series of essays offering well-informed perspectives on the main issues surrounding governance for development in the region.

The texts that make up this collection are now presented as a series, with the aim of broadening the reach of these ideas geographically and over time. We are confident that the content of these documents will make a valuable contribution to continuing and enriching this complex yet essential debate.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report assesses the governance framework, institutional capacity, and effectiveness of existing mechanisms and structures to support development, primarily in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)¹. Using a theoretical and policy framework for effective governance based on established principles, best practices, and research findings in governance and national development, the report examines the institutional and capacity constraints faced by CARICOM countries in addressing critical development challenges. These limitations are considered within the Caribbean’s social, political, and cultural context, highlighting the key political, economic, and social factors that shape identity, experiences, and institutional responses in the English-speaking Caribbean. The report also explores how this context has facilitated certain aspects of effective governance while undermining or weakening others.

The assessment specifically examines efforts to build and improve state capacities—and the associated challenges—across the English-speaking Caribbean. It focuses on key issues of legitimacy, trust, and acceptance of institutional roles and legal mandates central to the region’s governance frameworks. These frameworks include those that are overarching and form part of the macro-level development framework in arenas such as regional integration, fiscal policy and practice, citizen engagement and participation, democracy, corruption mitigation, human rights, and the protection of civil liberties. They also include the mechanisms operating at the sectoral level, focusing primarily on how they support or hinder the design and effectiveness of policies in specific areas. In the sectoral analysis, the focus is on whether existing institutional frameworks are adequate to respond to the challenges faced in those sectors and whether they can cope with the complex multi-layered social, economic, and cultural dynamics that shape the distinctive character and impact of these issues in the region.

In examining contemporary governance mechanisms and their ability to facilitate and promote the twofold ambition of democracy and development across the region, the report focuses on three development domains: a) human development, b) the environment, and c) digital transformation. Using these three areas to illustrate the importance of governance to economic development, political and social progress, and improvements in the quality of life for citizens, the report examines the institutional endowments in place to sustain development in the region. These issues are particularly pertinent in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. As the UNDP noted, governance is a critical “instrument of recovery” (UNDP, 2021). Governance is crucial to development (and recovery) because good governance is not only the key to promoting human

1. This includes the English-speaking Caribbean, Haiti and Suriname.

rights and protecting civil liberties but also correlates strongly with economic development and the potential to deliver significant improvements in living standards (Mohan, 2023).

Effective national governance frameworks are characterised by their capacity to design and implement relevant policies, build fit-for-purpose institutions, and establish mechanisms that promote the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and inclusive societies. Successful frameworks also recognise the importance of global interdependence and the need for international cooperation and collaboration to achieve common goals. This interdependence acknowledges that countries are affected by the economic stability, prosperity, social cohesion, and security experienced in other countries. Overall, good governance supports progress and prosperity by creating an enabling environment for economic growth and human well-being.

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE CARIBBEAN

CARICOM, or the Caribbean Community, is an organisation of 20 Caribbean nations: 15 Member States and five Associate Members. Established in 1973 under the Treaty of Chaguaramas, it is the oldest regional integration grouping in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. All members are island states with the exception of Guyana and Belize². It has a population of approximately 16 million, 60 per cent of whom are under 30 years old.

Reflecting its history of conquest and colonialism, the population is multi-ethnic, comprising Indigenous Peoples, Africans, Indians, Europeans, Chinese, Portuguese, and Javanese. While some members speak French, Dutch, and indigenous variations, English is the primary language³. CARICOM also includes the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), a sub-regional group of nine Eastern Caribbean countries.

The Caribbean shares a common history of European colonialism and the enslavement of Africans. For centuries, the region served as a source of wealth for European countries, which exploited its resources and, in the process, created plantation societies designed to safeguard the reproduction of wealth for Europe. These societies were premised entirely on Europe's desire to extract commodities, primarily sugar, to finance its development. The plantation societies were characterised by economic dependence on a narrow range of primary commodities, external markets, and capital; racial hierarchy and ridged social stratification; the concentration of wealth (and property) in the hands of an elite minority; and economic, social, and political dispossession of the local population, who were regarded solely as a source of exploited, cheap labour and denied the right to political participation or, in extreme cases, even life.

Caribbean historians (Beckles, 2021) researching the complex and far-reaching dynamics of the plantation system have noted that its 'interlocking institutions and modalities' have touched every facet of life in the English-speaking Caribbean. It shaped the region's social and economic structures; opportunities for economic and social advancement; environmental resilience; and legal, political,

2. Belize is on the northern coast of Central America, and Guyana is in north-east South America.

3. <https://caricom.org/our-community/who-we-are/>

and institutional frameworks. Programmes and policies in education and health, the architecture and scope of government, religion, and the components of the rule of law were all originally designed to serve the plantation economy. Consequently, any assessment of 21st-century governance in the Caribbean must acknowledge the enduring effects of the exploitative slave economy and society model on contemporary socio-cultural, economic, and political issues in the region, as well as the required tools and capacity to address them.

Escalating in the 20th century, nationalist movements emerged across the English-speaking Caribbean, advocating for self-rule and independence from colonial powers⁴. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Guyana gained independence from Britain in the 1960s, followed by other nations in subsequent decades; Saint Kitts and Nevis was the last in 1983. At independence, many Caribbean nations faced challenges in charting strategies for Indigenous nation-building, including economic development and consolidation, and where necessary, the establishment of fit-for-purpose democratic institutions. Like most countries in Latin America, the Caribbean has contended with persistent issues of political corruption, economic inequality, and social exclusion, which have posed ongoing challenges to governance and stability. Politics in the English-speaking Caribbean is characterised by multiparty systems, where various political parties compete for power through democratic elections. In this competitive environment, unsurprisingly, political leaders and parties often articulate competing visions for economic development, social justice, and national identity.

ECONOMIC PROFILE

The Caribbean's economic performance must be understood in the context of persistent structural limitations, including challenges in the labour market. Many CARICOM countries have small, open economies that are highly vulnerable to external shocks, such as changes in global commodity prices, natural disasters, and economic downturns in major trading partners⁵. These structural vulnerabilities can disrupt economic activity, reduce government revenues, increase borrowing, and drive up debt. As a result, some countries face high debt-to-GDP ratios, with Suriname and Barbados currently experiencing the highest ratios in the region⁶.

The labour market also presents significant challenges. Low levels of skills and qualifications, high rates of informal employment—particularly among women—and skills loss due to migration limit prospects for economic growth.

Economic growth in CARICOM countries has been inconsistent, with periods of relatively strong performance followed by notable slowdowns. Between 1980 and 1994, non-commodity-exporting Caribbean countries grew at an average rate of 3.9 per cent per year, slightly outpacing other developing regions, which grew at 3.5 per cent (Henry Blair, 2017). However, this momentum was

4. These nationalist movements existed long before the 20th century. The history of the Caribbean is replete with uprisings and rebellions led by enslaved Africans. These movements strengthened in the post-emancipation period when the emancipated but dispossessed Black majority continued to challenge the existing order. However, a confluence of global and local social and economic factors facilitated their persistence and eventual success in the 1960s.

5. Though by varying degrees, this assessment applies to all the countries of CARICOM, with the possible recent exception Guyana.

6. See Table 2 further in the Report.

not sustained. By 2015, economic growth in the Caribbean had slowed to less than 2 per cent per year, significantly lagging behind the 5.5 per cent annual growth achieved by other developing regions over the preceding two decades (ibid).

The consequences are significant. While some other developing countries halved the time needed to double the living standards of their citizens, this time actually increased for Caribbean nations (ibid)⁷. This low growth rate has persisted. Research further shows that since 2000, the Caribbean has grown 33 per cent more slowly than other non-Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (Chamon, Charap, Chen, and Leigh, 2017).

Nonetheless, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) projects an average growth rate of 8.6 per cent for its 19 Borrowing Member Countries (BMCs) in 2024. However, this figure is strongly influenced by the projected growth rate for Guyana. When controlled for, the average growth rate drops to a more modest 2.3 per cent⁸.

In 2023, growth in the region continued its upward trajectory, following the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, albeit at a lower pace than in 2022. Notwithstanding a slow-down in the rate of recovery-led GDP growth, some countries had relatively high rates in 2023: Anguilla (9.2 per cent), Antigua and Barbuda (6.2 per cent), and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (5.8 per cent) were the top performers. The CBD noted that commodity-exporting countries grew by 13.8 per cent in 2023, a decline from 17 per cent in the previous year. This robust performance was driven by Guyana, with a 35.2 per cent growth in exports from the emerging energy sector. By contrast, service-exporting countries grew at a slower average rate of 2.4 per cent in 2023.

This slowdown in recovery-led growth was consistent with global economic performance in 2023, which decelerated after 2022 with a reduction in economic activity (GDP) and global trade (ECLAC, 2023). Inflation was stable despite high interest rates (ibid). Consequently, the cost of financing economic expansion has been high, leading to a contraction in global economic activity (ECLAC, 2023 IMF, 2024). ECLAC forecasts that this trend will continue in the near term, and will also affect the volume of global trade.

Poverty and human development in the region

Economic precarity and vulnerability of the Caribbean, combined with social exclusion and historically inadequate investments in human development, have resulted in high levels of poverty. Across the region, governments have implemented anti-poverty policies dating back to the pre-independence period⁹, with efforts intensifying after independence. These policies often combine efforts to address

7. This time is estimated to have moved from 30 to 15 years, while the average doubling time in Caribbean nations has actually *increased* from 23 to 69.

8. <https://www.caribank.org/publications-and-resources/resource-library/infographics/2023-caribbean-economic-review-and-2024-outlook>

9. The 1930s was a period of significant social and economic unrest in the Caribbean, marked by labour riots and strikes fueled by poor working conditions, low wages, and rising inequality. In response, the colonial governments initiated an inquest (Moyne Commission), which led to recommendations for alleviating the conditions of the poor throughout the region.

the root causes of poverty—such as education reform and expansion, land redistribution, and increased access to health and housing—with measures aimed at alleviating its effects, including social protection programmes like poor relief, food stamps, price subsidies, housing assistance, and cash transfers, among others. Some initiatives also seek to fundamentally restructure the economic system to promote increased employment through economic diversification, redistribute resources, expand access to capital, and reduce wealth concentration. Despite these interventions, many sustained over time, the Caribbean continues to grapple with high levels of inequality, vulnerability, and poverty (CDB, 2016).

To better respond to the root causes and consequences of poverty, the region has conducted several studies and surveys to explore and more comprehensively understand the prevalence, dynamics, and nature of poverty in the Caribbean. The most consistent and contemporary of these is the Living Standard Monitoring Survey (LSMS), referred to in the region as Surveys of Living Conditions (SLC), which first began in Jamaica in 1988. These studies were initially funded by the World Bank¹⁰, and then by governments¹¹ and the CDB.

The LSMS-SLCs have provided the evidentiary basis for developing poverty reduction strategies, social safety net programmes, and other mechanisms to target social protection interventions more accurately. These studies have shown that the extent and nature of poverty vary across the region. Countries such as Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Turks and Caicos Islands seem to exhibit higher levels of poverty and vulnerability (CDB, 2016). In contrast, poverty levels are lower in the Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Although rates vary, the region has consistently experienced high levels of poverty. At least one in five persons in the region is poor. Though poverty levels remain high, the CDB notes that there has been progress in reducing indigence, defined as being unable to afford the basic food basket (also referred to as ‘food poor’). The depth and severity of poverty, however, have also persisted, showing little progress since poverty measurements began more than three decades ago.

This is not to suggest that there has been no progress in reducing poverty. Jamaica has significantly reduced its poverty rate over the last 30 years, from over one-third of the population to 12.3 per cent in 2023 (PIOJ, 2023). Reductions have also been recorded in Guyana and countries of the OECS sub-region, though poverty levels remain high overall (Downes, 2010, referenced in CDB, 2016).

Inequality is another important indicator of a country’s economic and social inclusivity and cohesion. While some countries—such as Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Dominica—have seen declines in inequality, others have not. Haiti has the highest level of inequality, whereas the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, and Guyana report the lowest (CDB 2016).

Measures of inequality underscore that economic growth, while a sine qua non for poverty reduction, is not sufficient on its own. Effective poverty reduction strategies and programmes must combine

10. In the case of Jamaica.

11. The Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions (JSLC) is funded by the Government of Jamaica.

economic growth and employment with employment protections and broad-based, multi-sectoral and multi-generation social protection programmes.

The 2023–2024 Human Development Index (HDI) highlights the Caribbean’s comparatively high levels of human development, despite persistent structural, social, and economic inefficiencies. With the exception of Haiti, all countries in the region rank in the top 50 per cent of countries monitored by the HDI, achieving ratings of ‘high’ or ‘very high’ by the UNDP (Worrell, 2024).

St Kitts and Nevis leads the region with the highest HDI score, followed by Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados. These countries, along with Grenada and St Vincent and the Grenadines, have HDI scores above the Latin America and the Caribbean average (ibid).

Guyana stands out as the country in the region with the strongest economic performance, which began with oil production and export in 2019. This economic boom has buoyed the country’s HDI, which increased at the highest rate in the region¹².

While Haiti has shown some improvement, progress has come from a very low baseline. Within CARICOM, St. Kitts and Nevis is the only country to outperform the SIDS group in HDI progress, with Trinidad and Tobago matching the group’s gains. However, five CARICOM countries lost ground, recording lower HDI scores in 2022 than in 2010.

Worrell (2024) summarises the HDI findings as follows:

“The picture which emerges from the HDR 2023–2024 is of Caricom countries which enjoy a relatively high level of human development, by world standards, all except Haiti. However, apart from the oil-exporting countries, the region has not kept pace with its peers nor has it advanced at a rate comparable to the Latin American and Caribbean region as a whole, in the years since 2010”.

The Caribbean region possesses significant economic potential and natural resources but continues to face challenges related to human and fiscal capacity, economic diversification, sustainability, and resilience. Governments in CARICOM have begun to address these issues through regional cooperation in some key areas. The CDB has funded poverty assessments in its Borrowing Member Countries to improve data-driven decision-making and has used this data to develop Poverty Reduction Strategies. The CDB has also provided financial support through the Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF) which focuses on poverty alleviation through improved access to basic public services, enhanced community infrastructure, and livelihood opportunities.

CARICOM has developed multifaceted cooperation strategies to support members in their efforts to eliminate poverty. These strategies include initiatives in trade and economic integration, social development, education, health, and environmental protection. Emphasis has been placed on capacity development and training to ensure that technical staff can adapt these regional initiatives to country-specific conditions, making them more effective in-country.

12. The country’s HDI improved at an annual rate, averaging 1.1 per cent for the period 2010 to 2022 (See Worrell).

GOVERNANCE IN THE CARIBBEAN

For small, developing post-colonial countries, effective public governance occurs when governance processes produce outcomes that positively impact the polity, economy, and, perhaps most importantly, society (Grenade, 2010). Conversely, weak governance has far-reaching negative effects, undermining the legitimacy and trust around which citizens cohere, facilitating corruption, obfuscation, and compromising policymaking and policy-implementation processes. In the Caribbean, public governance operates within a multi-level, multi-dimensional architecture shaped by the interplay of national, regional, and global forces.

Given their economic vulnerability, openness, and dependence, small states must also contend with real threats to their sovereignty. Such threats can compromise their autonomy and ability to develop and implement effective governance mechanisms that address corruption and promote social and economic stability and progress. Policy autonomy, particularly in economic decision-making, is central to the government's ability to pass laws, establish institutions, and determine policy outcomes.

In the region, external forces heavily influence the capacity of states to engage in fully autonomous decision-making. As Grenade (2010) notes, there is a direct relationship between the Caribbean's economic dependence, its limited influence in the global economic system, and constrained policy autonomy. This is particularly true in instances where governments are financially constrained by high public debt and the conditions attached to loans and balance of payment support from international financial institutions (Grenade, 2010).

Threats to sovereignty also arise from “problems without passports” (PWP), such as international crime, drug trafficking, and cybersecurity threats. Griffith (2024), in investigating the impact of PWPs on governance and sovereignty in the region, notes that all states are affected, especially by the transnational drug trade and crime, although to varying degrees. He argues that the effect of insecurity is multi-layered, ranging from the more direct manifestations such as generalised crime to more far-reaching materialisations, including corruption that undermines State institutions and governance processes (ibid)¹³.

This section examines the governance arrangements, systems, practices, and culture in the CARICOM region. It identifies the strengths of existing governance arrangements and the gaps and weaknesses that may deter the full realisation of the region's development potential. It discusses the core elements of good governance and its role in creating opportunities (UNDP, 2021); establishing and sustaining democracy and institutional legitimacy; nurturing citizen engagement and trust; and facilitating social and economic development. Although several governance frameworks exist, this assessment does not adopt a single theoretical framework to examine governance systems and practices in the region. Instead, it employs core governance principles that are common across these frameworks.

13. The report returns to this point in more detail in the section on Human Security and Governance.

Governance and development

The UNDP's approach to sustainable human development argues that effective governance is a pre-condition for achieving Agenda 2030. In middle-income countries like those in Latin America and the Caribbean, governance is the most relevant instrument for creating opportunities for people to shape their own futures and foster collaboration. This approach is rooted in the dual premise that SDG 16, which promotes just, peaceful, and inclusive societies, is both an enabler of development and that people's lives are improved when governments are efficient and responsive (UNDP, 2020, p. 15).

While several governance frameworks exist, including those designed to address sector-specific issues, effective governance frameworks share key characteristics. Good governance has four basic elements: predictability, transparency, participation, and accountability (Rajat, 2023). These elements are often reflected in the frameworks of international development agencies. The World Bank's governance indicators¹⁴ are used to assess the quality of governance in countries worldwide. These indicators cover dimensions such as voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has established principles of good governance that guide key elements of effective governance, including transparency, accountability, integrity, and stakeholder participation. These frameworks can serve as a valuable reference for evaluating governance performance and designing governance frameworks and reform initiatives.

Governance holds both instrumental and intrinsic value. Its instrumental value lies in its contribution to economic growth and higher employment and income levels. Its intrinsic value is reflected in its capacity to protect and fulfil fundamental human rights, foster social inclusivity, and build societal cohesion. These values are mutually constitutive, allowing effective governance frameworks to operate in multidimensional and multidisciplinary modalities. The principles of effective governance apply across the board to all aspects of society. Strong institutional frameworks in one area often create positive ripple effects in others. For instance, efforts to combat corruption can drive economic growth, enhance citizen security, and improve environmental outcomes. The Brookings Institute has found that controlling corruption fosters inclusive growth, increases the income of the poor, and reduces poverty¹⁵. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) highlights a growing global consensus that corruption and weak governance significantly hinder economic growth (Mauro, 2004). The institutions of government, often referred to as 'social infrastructure' (Hall and Jones, 1999), have been identified as a primary, fundamental determinant of a country's long-term economic performance (ibid).

One of the critical ways in which governance and economic growth intersect is through the institutionalisation of the rule of law, which safeguards property rights, encourages capital accumulation, and promotes productivity (Sharma, 2007). Additionally, institutions matter because

14. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/worldwide-governance-indicators>. The WGI were developed in 1999 by two World Bank researchers, Daniel Kaufmann and Aart Kraay.

15. The research found that a one-point increase in the control of the corruption and regulatory quality improves the income of the poor by 39 and 42 per cent, respectively. See <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-role-of-good-governance-in-fostering-pro-poor-and-inclusive-growth/>

they form the infrastructure for the determinants of economic performance (North, 2005), as they affect how individuals, organisations, and firms utilise resources in political and economic decision-making. When there are positive incentives, economic activity and growth take place. Conversely, negative incentives lead to unproductive and exploitative behaviours, leading to economic stagnation or reversal (ibid). Governance frameworks and their implementation are, therefore, important prerequisites to sustainable economic development and human advancement.

Governance, democracy, and the rule of law in the Caribbean

Emerging from their colonial experience, today, the countries of the Caribbean—with the exception of Haiti—are established and stable political democracies. Citizens generally enjoy political rights and civil liberties, with state institutions in place to safeguard democratic functions. Across the region, regular constitutional transfers of power occur through multi-party¹⁶ general and local elections (Grenade, 2010).

The democratic and governance arrangements in CARICOM are set out in written post-independence constitutions, mostly modelled off the Westminster system inherited from England. These written constitutions are all supreme law in the respective countries, establishing clear boundaries within which Parliaments must operate¹⁷.

Caribbean constitutions typically establish parliamentary democracies with either a bicameral or unicameral legislature, an independent judiciary, and a constitutional Head of State—either a President in the case of the Republics¹⁸—or the Monarchy for those who retain ties to the British Monarch. The constitutions also establish other important governance structures, such as the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), and embody principles of democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. The principle of Separation of Powers, which underpins all regional constitutions, creates checks and balances to prevent any one branch of government from becoming overly powerful. Each branch serves as a counterbalance to the others, ensuring accountability and limiting the potential for abuse of power. This principle enables the judiciary to invalidate unconstitutional laws or executive administrative actions, allowing citizens to protect themselves against rights violations through judicial review. By safeguarding individual rights and freedoms, the separation of powers ensures that government authority is not exercised arbitrarily. Judicial independence plays a crucial role in this framework, providing scrutiny of laws and executive actions to ensure they align with constitutional protections. The clear delineation of powers and responsibilities among government branches fosters stability and predictability in the political system.

The rule of law is a bedrock of Caribbean governance. Good governance requires fair legal frameworks impartially enforced by an independent judiciary. Judicial decisions and their

16. Although there are usually two dominant political parties in most CARICOM countries, the political systems facilitate multi-party participation, and there have been elections across the region with independent candidates as well as representation from less established political parties.

17. This is a clear divergence from the Westminster model in England. In England, in the absence of a written Constitution, Parliament is sovereign.

18. Barbados, Guyana, Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago are Republics in the English-speaking Caribbean. Haiti and Suriname are also Republics but do not follow the constitutional arrangements described here.

enforcement should also be transparent and adhere to established rules and regulations (Sharma, 2007). A 2020 needs assessment of the Caribbean judicial system highlighted that access to justice is one of the most effective ways for citizens to close ‘development gaps and inequalities’ (UNDP, 2020, p. 14). However, the assessment data showed public perception and confidence in the judiciary’s capacity to manage critical issues such as citizen insecurity remain low, undermining trust in the rule of law as a reliable and competent framework for resolving societal challenges and supporting development.

Recognising the threat to the legitimacy of the rule of law posed by these deficiencies, Caribbean governments have implemented numerous judicial reforms over time. These include legislative updates, capacity-building initiatives for justice institutions, and professional development programs for judicial staff. Specialized courts—handling cases related to drug, family, juvenile, and sexual offences—and tax tribunals—have been introduced (UNDP, 2020). New case management processes, including automated systems, have been successful in reducing backlog and improving efficiency in some jurisdictions.

Efforts to enhance access to justice have focused on reducing barriers such as geographic distance, associated costs, and limited legal aid¹⁹. Improvements to court infrastructure and technology, as well as alternative dispute resolution mechanisms like mediation and arbitration, have also been key initiatives. These mechanisms alleviate pressure on the formal court system and provide faster, affordable, and more flexible means of resolving disputes.

Despite these reforms, the assessment confirmed that the justice sector will need a ‘surge’ in capacities to fulfil its mandate. This will involve improving the capacity of all justice-related institutions—courts, law enforcement agencies, legal aid organisations, and oversight bodies. Training for judges, lawyers, and other justice sector professionals, alongside improved administrative processes and management systems, is essential.

In addition to these technical capacities, justice reform must also address sociocultural norms that affect, *inter alia*, stigma, discrimination, gender equality, and the protection of human rights, particularly for those facing intersecting vulnerabilities (UNDP, 2020).

Democracy and governance

Nevertheless, despite these *de jure* legal and administrative structures, Caribbean countries experience *de facto* shortcomings that undermine effective governance in the region. These include concentrated prime-ministerial powers, an electoral system prone to distortions, clientelism, and an alienated citizenry.

Caribbean prime ministers hold significant powers, including the ability to call elections (within constitutional limits). They often marginalise opposition parties, co-opt or ostracise civil society

19. There are several social barriers to access to justice in the Caribbean. This includes poverty, lack of knowledge of rights, distrust of the justice system, stigma associated with engagement with the system, and language barriers.

organisations, and alienate citizens (Grenade, 2010). The situation is exacerbated by the first-past-the-post (FPTP), winner-takes-all electoral system, which can produce undemocratic outcomes such as no Parliamentary opposition or so little opposition representation²⁰ that the role is rendered ineffective.

Hence, although the Westminster system presupposes a parliamentary opposition, this is not always the case as experience in the Caribbean has shown. In 1983, Jamaica's Parliamentary opposition refused to contest a 'snap election', resulting in no Parliamentary opposition until 1989. Similar election outcomes in other countries have resulted in the ruling party winning all the parliamentary seats, as seen on more than one occasion in Grenada, and at least once in Barbados²¹.

When taken together, those issues can breed corruption and undermine governance (Grenade, 2010). Citizens' participation in the electoral process, which has been largely free of intimidation and coercion for the last three decades, has been consistently dwindling in some nations, raising concern about the potential impact of political apathy on the region's long-term democratic prospects. Understanding the 'why' underlying perceived political apathy is critical to addressing its possible impact on governance and, ultimately, the region's development. This retreat from voter participation may stem from perceptions of political corruption, continued economic challenges that remain unabated despite changes in government, and the perceived disconnect between voting and improvements in individuals' social and economic position.

Voting behaviour and voting patterns in the Caribbean often intersect with socioeconomic status, education, age, race/ethnicity, and geography/location²². In the immediate post-independence period, high levels of interest and loyalty to parties and charismatic leaders (Barrow Giles and Joseph, 2018) buttressed a vigorously contested system that featured 'regular and consistent alternations of two dominant political parties' (Barrow-Giles and Joseph, 2018, p. 285)²³.

Research has found, however, that electoral systems in the Caribbean are evolving. Governments with weak majorities and one-term governments—a fairly new phenomenon in the English-speaking Caribbean—are becoming more common. Historically, governments in the English-speaking Caribbean governed for at least two terms with comfortable majorities following independence (ibid).

Barrow-Giles and Joseph argue that the present 'hegemonic consolidation of neo-liberal globalisation' (p. 585) has eroded the structural framework that once underpinned the legitimacy of parties, leaders, ideologies, and development approaches. They attribute this to a 'collapse of the post-colonial order', which has ushered in new patterns of political behaviour and expectations in the region.

20. In 2020 the opposition in St. Kitts Nevis won 2 of the 11 seats in Parliament.

21. As in the case of Grenada in 2013 when the New National Party won all 15 Parliamentary seats and in Barbados in 2018 when the Barbados Labour Party won all 30 seats.

22. In Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, there is a strong correlation between race and geographic location, with large Indo-Trinidadian and Indo-Guyanese populations concentrated in the rural areas. In Jamaica, location, socio-economic status, and education intersect in the urban areas where the educated middle class is most likely to reside.

23. Or the long-term dominance of a single party, as in the cases of St Lucia, Antigua and Trinidad and Tobago.

One emerging trend is self-interested materialism, which propels voters to make electoral choices based on ‘what’s in it for me’; how they can personally, and perhaps immediately, benefit from the process, rather than adopting a long-term vision of national development or adherence to party loyalty. The implication of this is that long-term development plans and ideations have lost the appeal they had in the immediate post-colonial society in the Caribbean.

This has given way to the pressing demands of daily life and personal advancement as the primary impetus for voting. These demands exert pressure on politicians to devise short-term ‘solutions’ to satisfy the electorate, often bypassing accountability and transparency systems to achieve quick and easy ‘gains’. And, although democracy is often regarded as complementary to good governance, in some instances, it can hinder long-term policy design, institution-building, and sustainability (Hendrix, 2009; Majone, 1996; Dryzek, 2000).

Addressing voter apathy in the Caribbean requires efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, increase transparency and accountability, and promote civic engagement among all segments of society. This can include initiatives such as improving access to information, enhancing civic education programs, fostering dialogue between political leaders and citizens, and implementing electoral reforms to improve representation and inclusivity in the political process.

However, systems of democracy in CARICOM must be understood as extending beyond the participation facilitated by elections, albeit a critical and central characteristic. Democracy is concerned with citizens’ active participation and not just the existence of formal, legally established structures for participation in elections. It must, therefore, also create space for the meaningful engagement of citizens outside of elections. This remains one of the strengths of Caribbean democracies. Even when electoral participation has been low, political interest and engagement, mainly through civil society and civil society organisations (CSO) have been robust (Hinds, Civil Society Organisations, Governance and the Caribbean Community, 2019).

These CSOs often work to promote social justice, human rights, environmental protection, and other issues of public concern through advocacy, activism, and community organisation. But citizens have also actively engaged with the political system outside of formalised organisations (Hinds, 2019; Hinds & Montoute, 2019). Referring to civil society as ‘the people, movements, and organisations that constitute a third sector or sphere of society’ Hinds (2019 p. 24) notes that civil society can facilitate democratic processes in several ways, including keeping the public informed, challenging state actions, and keeping governments accountable. Scholars caution, however, that civil society actors with political agendas, while important to citizen participation, can also subvert democracy, particularly through misinformation (Hinds and Montoute, 2019, p. 5).

Citizens also engage politically through protests, demonstrations, and other forms of collective action to express grievances, demand political reforms, and hold governments accountable. Protest movements have been used to demand action on a wide range of issues, including taxation, corruption, human rights abuses, and environmental degradation. The media is also regularly employed to voice disquiet or opposition to state actions and policies. One enduring feature of Caribbean societies has been the freedom of the press from overt restrictions, although subtle political pressure remains a persistent threat.

Advocacy and activism can enhance democratic practices and outcomes by facilitating a deliberative democracy, capturing a broader range of perspectives and inputs in policy design, and, critically, securing public legitimacy and trust (Hendrik, 2009). Political legitimacy forms the basis of political and institutional authority, both necessary for the successful implementation of any non-authoritarian governance framework. It is the reason people consent and comply with the decisions of leaders, institutions, and regimes of power (ibid)²⁴.

While challenges such as voter apathy, political polarization, and barriers to participation exist, the region's political culture and diverse forms of engagement reflect a clear commitment to democracy. According to the LAPOP Survey 2021, 61 per cent of respondents expressed the view that democracy is the best political system for the region and, despite its gaps, preferred it over any other type of government (LAPOP, 2023). However, citizens also express dissatisfaction with the outcomes and fruits of the democratic system²⁵ and show a weak attachment to elections (LAPOP, 2023). Confirming the understanding that democracy is supported by multilevel institutions, Caribbean citizens valued freedom of expression more highly than elections (ibid).

Corruption and governance are intricately linked, and understanding this relationship is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of governance systems. Corruption remains a significant challenge in the region, with perceptions of corruption varying across countries (Table 1). Notably, perceptions of corruption are highest in Haiti. Haiti is followed by Suriname, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica. Barbados and the Bahamas reported the lowest levels of perceived corruption in the region.

24. Hendrix (2009) explains that according to theories of deliberative democracy, when decisions are reached through a process of collective reasoning more legitimate and publicly oriented outcomes will result. In contrast to the private act of voting, public deliberation involves the political and public act of 'giving, weighing, acceptance or rejection of reasons'.

25. Satisfaction is lowest in Haiti (11 per cent) and highest in Jamaica (45 per cent).

TABLE 1

Perception corruption index Caribbean 2023

Corruption Perception Index 2023	
Country	CPI Score
Anguilla	-
Antigua & Barbuda	-
The Bahamas	64
Barbados	69
Belize	-
The British Virgin Islands	-
Bermuda	-
Cayman Islands	-
Dominica	56
Grenada	53
Guyana	40
Haiti	17
Jamaica	44
St. Kitts & Nevis	-
St. Lucia	55
St. Vincent & The Grenadines	60
Suriname	40
Trinidad & Tobago	42
Turks & Caicos	-

Source: LAPOP.

In some countries, governance mechanisms have been put in place to address integrity, transparency, and accountability in various sectors, including government, public administration, and business. The Integrity Commission Acts in the Bahamas, Guyana, and Jamaica led to Integrity Commissions, while Barbados created the Integrity in Public Life Commission under its Integrity in Public Life Act. Similarly, both St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Antigua and Barbuda have enacted Integrity in Public Life laws, establishing mechanisms such as an Integrity Commission and an Integrity on Public Life Commission, respectively.

These commissions are tasked with ensuring integrity, transparency, and accountability of public officials—including parliamentarians, public servants, and members of statutory boards—through oversight²⁶ to prevent corruption and uphold ethical standards. Their mandates typically include a) investigating allegations of corruption, misconduct, or breaches of ethical standards by public officials, b) receiving declarations of assets from public officials who are required to declare their income, assets, and liabilities to prevent conflicts of interest and illicit enrichment²⁷, and c) making recommendations for prosecution and other sanctions where breaches are identified.

26. Those earning above a specified income threshold. These declarations often also include those of the spouses.

27. In some jurisdictions, public officials have to declare the assets of their spouses/partners.

Other public bodies, such as Auditor General Departments (AuGDs), also form part of anti-corruption mechanisms in the Caribbean. Where they exist²⁸, AuGDs are independent bodies that report directly to Parliament and are not subject to the control or direction of any Cabinet members.

Offices of the Ombudsman serve as independent oversight bodies. They investigate complaints of maladministration, abuse of power, and violations of citizens' rights by government agencies and officials. While not exclusively focused on corruption, ombudsman offices are instrumental in promoting transparency and accountability in government.

Civil society organisations have also taken the lead in advancing an anti-corruption agenda, playing crucial roles in advocating for transparency and accountability. In Jamaica, organisations such as National Integrity Action (NIA)²⁹ and the Jamaica Accountability Metre Portal (JAMP) monitor government actions in the award of contracts and other public expenditures for potential conflict of interest or corrupt intent. CSOs are particularly important where no national integrity commission exists, especially where they have the credibility to lead anti-corruption advocacy and elicit responses from the State.

The rule of law in the Caribbean extends beyond corruption in public life to several other areas. Legislation has been enacted to address access to information³⁰, data protection, the composition and accountabilities of boards of public bodies, election campaigning, the design and conduct of the electoral system, police oversight and accountability³¹, utility regulation, and public procurement, among others.

Laws that establish institutional oversight for monitoring these areas help to build citizens' trust by ensuring greater transparency, providing avenues for complaints and redress regarding the behaviour of public and private bodies (such as utilities), reducing perceptions of corruption, and ultimately supporting democracy.

GOVERNANCE AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN THE CARIBBEAN

Where applicable, regional integration mechanisms can serve as effective supranational instruments for promoting good governance. They have the potential to enhance accountability and transparency and support adherence to the principles of democracy and the rule of law.

28. Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines all have Auditor General Departments. The AuGD conducts audits of government accounts, public funds, and financial operations to ensure compliance with financial regulations and promote transparency and accountability in public administration.

29. An affiliate of Transparency International.

30. Belize passed the first Freedom of Information Act in the Caribbean in 1994. Subsequently, Trinidad and Tobago (1999), Jamaica (2002), and Antigua and Barbuda (2004) have put in place laws to provide the public with a general right to access official documents held by government bodies, subject to exemptions in the public interest. The implementation and effectiveness of these laws vary across countries, with ongoing challenges such as administrative capacity and public awareness and utilisation. See <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/roundtable-status-access-information-caribbean>

31. Independent Commission of Investigations Act (2010) in Jamaica, and Police Complaints Authority Acts in Trinidad and Tobago (2006), Barbados (2002), and Antigua and Barbuda (2013).

The countries of CARICOM embraced the concept of regional cooperation even before gaining independence. The efforts towards regional cooperation were driven from outside as well as internally. Internally, opposition to Crown Colony rule rallied a generation of political and trade union leaders in the region who believed that uniting the territories was the best path toward achieving greater self-governance and, eventually, independence (O'Brien, 2011). External influence also came from the British government. In 1945, the British Colonial Secretary invited the Caribbean colonies to meet to discuss a likely federation. In 1947, when the meeting was held in Jamaica, there appeared to be consensus around a political union in the region, and a committee was set up to draft a proposed federal constitution. The initiative eventually culminated in the formation of a short-lived West Indian Federation (WIF) which was officially established on January 3, 1958, with a federal constitution that created a central government.

Notwithstanding the enduring interest in regional cooperation, the exact structure and nature of Caribbean regionalism have remained flexible, subject to revisions influenced by the ideologies and needs of the governments in the region. This is evident in the failure of the West Indies Federation (WIF)³², which was the first stable effort to forge a sustainable supranational model for regional cooperation among the countries of CARICOM. Jamaica's rejection of the WIF and Trinidad and Tobago's subsequent withdrawal were driven by conflicts and suspicions linked to the unequal distribution of power and resources among member countries. Scholars note that the resulting distrust left an indelible mark on future regional integration efforts (Bishop and Payne, 2010; O'Brien, 2011). Following the end of the WIF, the former British colonies of the Caribbean pursued individual self-government, achieving independence for two decades spanning the early 1960s to the early 1980s.

The WIF's short lifespan (four years) nonetheless laid the groundwork for later regional cooperation initiatives. The experience highlighted the need for greater economic, social, cultural, and political integration, and influenced subsequent efforts, such as the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) and eventually, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

CARICOM has evolved more as a vehicle for cultural, social, and economic cooperation, rather than the political unity envisioned by the WIF. It is based on the principle of intergovernmentalism, which is the 'loosest form of integration' (O'Brien, 2011), based on agreements between sovereign States making collective decisions through negotiations and agreements, usually requiring consensus or unanimity.

Originally established by the Treaty of Chaguramas in 1973, there were revisions to that institutional structure in 2002, most notably the introduction of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), which has been vested with a compulsory and exclusive jurisdiction to interpret and apply the revised Treaty (O'Brien, 2011). CARICOM is coordinated by a Secretariat, and has at its apex, the Conference of Heads of Government, the Council of Ministers³³, which has responsibility for the operation of the common market, and four other Ministerial Councils, which function as a quasi-cabinet in their specific portfolio areas³⁴.

32. WIF officially dissolved in May 1962.

33. Only decisions of the Heads and the Council of Ministers are binding on members states.

34. These four Ministerial Councils were introduced as part of the revisions of the Treaty of Chaguramas in 2002. They are the Council for Finance and Planning; the Council for Trade and Economic Development; the Council for Foreign and Community Relations; and the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) and replace a plethora of Ministerial committees which were established under the 1973 version of the Treaty.

CARICOM has been a vehicle for regional cooperation, not just through the operations of the Common Market, but in other important areas of cultural, social, and political life in the region. The CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) has been instrumental in facilitating the free movement of goods, services, capital, and skilled labour across the member states. This has provided opportunities for all countries to expand their economic activities, particularly in the area of trade and investments.

Politically, CARICOM has served as a hub around which to harmonise the diplomatic and international affairs of members. By coordinating diplomatic efforts, CARICOM countries can advocate more effectively for their interests in international forums. CARICOM has also intervened as a bloc to support member states who may be facing political crisis. A current example is the ongoing support for Haiti after the resignation of its President in 2021, and the regional efforts towards securing a new government and international security support. The organisation also supports collaboration in key sectors such as health, education, disaster management, and security, helping member states pool resources and expertise to address shared challenges in these areas.

Despite the key role it plays, one of the enduring shortcomings has been the extent to which member states implement decisions. As far back as 1992, the report of the West Indian Commission (WIC) criticised the absence of an effective mechanism in CARICOM to implement decisions made at the regional level by the Conference and the Council of Ministers (O'Brien, 2011). The critique remains valid today. A review of the implementation challenges has identified a chronic shortage of resources (financial, technical, human) as the main reason for the weak follow-through on CARICOM decisions.

Brewster has noted that this resource problem has undermined and even subverted CARICOM decisions (Brewster, 2005). Also at play are the varying political positions taken by member states, with each nation, because of the looseness of the integration mechanism – referred to by Brewster as ‘discretionary inter-governmental cooperation’ (Brewster, 2005) – asserting their sovereignty and adopting individually beneficial political and economic positions.

Also, the Caribbean as a whole is a ‘highly fragmented amalgam’ of people, cultures and jurisdictions ‘which reflect the wider region’s complex colonial history’ (Bishop and Payne, 2010).

Notwithstanding the implementation gap, CARICOM remains one of the oldest integration mechanisms in the world and has enhanced inter-governmental cooperation in the Caribbean. Beginning as a grouping of former colonies of Britain, membership has been expanded to include Haiti and Suriname, which, to some degree, share similar development challenges as the original members.

Outside of CARICOM, other regional mechanisms exist and operate to provide other pathways for regional cooperation. These include the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), which creates linkages between the CARICOM states and Central and South America (Bishop and Payne, 2010). There is also the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), comprising the so-called least developed countries (LDCs) in CARICOM. The OECS sub-region is more deeply integrated than other CARICOM countries, with their shared currency, shared Central Bank, and closer economic policy integration.

Though imperfect, and at times inefficient, these mechanisms have been hallmarks of the governance landscape in the Caribbean. They facilitate shared values and ambitions, helping the region to work together to address regional challenges such as citizen and border security, education and health, sharing expertise, infrastructure, and funding to improve overall well-being.

2. SECTORAL ANALYSIS

Creating a political and social framework conducive to economic growth and social progress is often the greatest challenge many countries face, despite broad recognition of the central role of governance. For many countries, a key question is: what types of policies and institutions have the most positive and measurable effects on improving governance and, consequently, social and economic well-being?

Using examples from policy areas related to human and social development, citizen security, the environment, and the digital economy, this paper examines how existing governance systems promote or impede development policies, options, and strategies in the Caribbean.

It also assesses the overarching fiscal policy framework—the foundation of government spending—by illustrating how the governance frameworks in this area influence the fiscal strength, flexibility, and stability of the countries in the Caribbean. In turn, these fiscal dynamics determine a state's capacity to finance its social and economic development agenda.

Fiscal policy framework

Fiscal 'space'—the capacity of the state to finance its public investment, social programmes, and debt servicing without jeopardising fiscal sustainability or macroeconomic stability—is the bedrock for government programming and expenditure. Essentially, it represents the room or flexibility within a government's budget to pursue its policy objectives while maintaining sound fiscal fundamentals. Without this fiscal capacity, the state is unable to set and pursue policies and programmes for economic and social development.

Several factors determine the level of fiscal space available to a government. These include tax receipts, grants (usually from international donor partners), loans from both domestic and international markets, government expenditure obligations, and public debt.

External shocks, such as changes in commodity prices, fluctuations in international financial markets, and geopolitical events, can impact fiscal space by affecting government revenue, borrowing costs, and expenditure requirements (ECLAC, 2023).

In the Caribbean, debt servicing has placed a significant strain on government resources. At times, debt-to-GDP ratios have exceeded 100 per cent (Table 2). This has caused

several CARICOM countries, at different times, to enter into balance-of-payment or fiscal management support arrangements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a means of paying down national debt.

TABLE 2

Debt to GDP Ratio in the Caribbean

Public Debt to GDP Ratio					
Country	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Antigua & Barbuda	84.1	100.1	95.4	87.1	
The Bahamas	62	60	75	100	89
Barbados	119	148.8	135.1	122.5	115
Belize	77.5	103	80.1	63.4	66
Dominica	98.3	113.1	107.2	102.9	93.9
Grenada	58.5	71.4	69.9	63.6	60.2
Guyana	43.6	51.1	43.2	26	29.9
Haiti	25.4	22	25.6	23.9	19.6
Jamaica	94.3	109.7	94.2	77.1	72.0
St. Kitts & Nevis	54.3	68	69.1	61.1	53.2
St. Lucia	61.9	94.2	82.9	74.1	73.7
St. Vincent & The Grenadines	73.6	79.5	89.3	87.8	88
Suriname	84.7	147.8	120	120	
Trinidad & Tobago				67	70.9

Source: Caribbean Development Bank Statistics.

Overall, fiscal positions characterised by rising revenues and declining expenditure are considered favourable to economic growth, as they result in smaller fiscal deficits and make way for long-term investments in national development. A country's fiscal policy framework is closely intertwined with the state of governance as it guides the government's use of taxation, spending, and borrowing to influence the economy, achieve social and economic policy objectives, and ensure fiscal sustainability.

Governance, on the other hand, encompasses the systems, processes, and institutions through which public resources are managed, policies are formulated and implemented, and decision-making is conducted. In this way, fiscal policy and governance intersect and influence each other. Effective governance ensures that fiscal policies are formulated transparently, based on sound analysis and consultation with stakeholders. Good governance practices,

such as accountability, transparency, and participatory decision-making, help ensure that fiscal policies are implemented effectively and efficiently.

Intersections are also seen in revenue mobilisation, as good governance practices affect the State's ability to impose and collect taxes and mobilise revenue through other means. Transparency and accountability also influence perceptions of the legitimacy of public expenditure, how debt is managed, and how public policy is coordinated and implemented for optimal outcomes.

Jamaica's success in achieving sustained reductions in its public debt and the debt-to-GDP ratio highlights the intersection between fiscal policy and governance. In 2012, Jamaica's debt-to-GDP ratio was 144 per cent; by 2023, this had been reduced to 72 per cent³⁵. This reduction was achieved despite the relatively slow growth of the Jamaican economy over the same period (Arslanalp, Eichengreen, and Henry Blair, 2024). The country also managed to sustain the reduction despite experiencing natural disasters and the Covid-19 pandemic.

This success was largely attributed to the fiscal governance frameworks³⁶ Jamaica adopted, first under IMF agreements and then continued even after those arrangements ended. The Fiscal Responsibility Framework, adopted in 2010, committed the country to lower its debt-to-GDP ratio to 100 per cent by 2016. Measures included capping public sector wages at 9 per cent of GDP, with flexibility to amend terms—subject to parliamentary approval—in cases of unforeseen circumstances, such as national disasters.

A key element of Jamaica's success was the independent oversight mechanism³⁷ to hold the government accountable and to promote transparency and consistency. Consensus-building and participatory mechanisms were built into the design of the framework. To achieve the target for public sector wages, social partnerships had to be nurtured and dialogue facilitated with key stakeholders (ibid). The Economic Policy Oversight Committee (EPOC)—which was jointly chaired³⁸ and comprised of representatives from the public and private sectors, civil society, and unions—was responsible for publicly reporting on the government's adherence to the agreed fiscal policy framework and providing independent verification of the data provided by the State. This helped to build credibility and trust and legitimise state actions and fiscal decisions.

Although the initial fiscal rules were part of an agreement with the IMF, the monitoring mechanism and the governance framework to implement these rules were designed and spearheaded entirely by the Government of Jamaica (Arslanalp, Eichengreen, and Henry Blair, 2024). EPOC was eventually transitioned to an independent Fiscal Council, which became effective in 2023.

Exploring the reasons this approach succeeded, Arslanalp et al (2024) note that Jamaica already had a history of social partnerships and multisectoral cooperation in the national

35. Under the Fiscal Responsibility Framework the target for 2028 is 60 per cent.

36. The governance framework was designed entirely by the GOJ, though not a requirement of the IMF agreement.

37. The Economic Programme Oversight Committee (EPOC).

38. It was Chaired by the Governor of the Central Bank and the President of the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica.

interest. Though not always successful, this approach was not new to the island's governance culture.³⁹ The severity of the economic situation in 2010, however, was the impetus for the commitment needed from all parties to stay the course and ensure the success of this initiative.⁴⁰

Additionally, the Fiscal Responsibility Framework set clear targets and associated deadlines for which monitoring data was easily available. This facilitated greater credibility, accountability, and transparency (ibid). In its March 2024 country assessment of Jamaica, the IMF noted that the 'outlook points to sustained growth and inflation falling within the Bank of Jamaica's target range amid sound external and fiscal positions and financial system stability' (IMF, March 2024).⁴¹

Jamaica is not the only country in CARICOM that has used this governance-led approach to improve its fiscal position. In the mid-1990s, Barbados faced with precarious fiscal fundamentals and seeking to avoid a possible exchange rate devaluation, secured a consensus on public sector wage cuts. This resulted in a reduction of debt-to-GDP from 74 per cent in 1994 to 50 per cent in 1999.

However, unlike Jamaica, Barbados did not institutionalise these reforms within a broader fiscal governance framework, and the island was unable to sustain the improvements. Eventually, Barbados adopted a more structured approach when they entered into an IMF programme in 2018 and began implementation of the Barbados Economic Reform and Transformation (BERT) plan. They have also established an independent fiscal council to monitor and advise on fiscal policy design and implementation.

These two case studies demonstrate the importance of governance frameworks in addressing challenges imposed by fiscal constraints, thereby setting the stage for the State to pursue its development agenda. Notably, Jamaica and Barbados are not the only countries in the region that have undergone debt restructuring to lower debt-to-GDP. Grenada in 2013–15, and St. Kitts Nevis in 2011–12 have used relief and restructuring as part of interventions that included substantial macroeconomic reforms, though without the formal structures used in Jamaica and Barbados (Blair-Henry 2017).

39. Faced with threats to the country's democracy from political tribalism, intimidation, and violence, Jamaica established an Electoral Advisory Committee in 1979 to promote transparency in its electoral process. The mechanism evolved into the Electoral Commission in 2006 and has been effective in ensuring the country has free and fair elections. Similar approaches have also informed reviews of the education system and assessments of the root causes of crime and violence, and labour productivity in the country.

40. The debt swap, which was used to cut debt servicing obligations in 2010/11, significantly affected domestic creditors. This provided the incentive for the local financial sector to insist that the GOJ keep its fiscal commitments and not jeopardise their investments.

41. International Monetary Fund (2024). 2024 Article Iv Consultation and Second Reviews Under the Arrangement Under the Precautionary and Liquidity Line and Arrangement Under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility. IMF Country Report No. 24/69.

Governance and human development

Human development in the Caribbean is influenced by a combination of socio-economic, environmental, and cultural factors. Central to these are health, education, citizen security, and social protection, and their intersections with economic opportunities and governance structures. This section of the report examines governance frameworks and State capacities in these sectors across the region, highlighting how the provision and adequacy of services are shaped by institutional factors. Included in this examination is an analysis of the challenges to successful policy implementation and capacity development in these areas.

Health and education have long been recognised as critical development issues, serving as both contributors to and outcomes of political, social, and economic advancement. The education and health status of individuals affect productivity levels and, therefore, a country's economy. This is particularly important for developing regions like the Caribbean, which are susceptible to poverty and economic vulnerability, and where leveraging all available resources, including human capital, is essential to drive socio-economic development.

In this context, social protection policies and programmes play a pivotal role in reducing inequality and providing a platform for citizens to access and convert opportunities into successful outcomes. Some social protection strategies and programmes include conditionalities aimed at improving human capital formation among poor and vulnerable households. These often involve requirements such as continuous school attendance and regular healthcare visits for children, pregnant women, and the elderly.

Governments in the region recognise how the intersection of these three pillars of human development—health, education, and social protection—is fundamental to anchoring the region's social and economic progress.

Health

The importance of individual and collective health to development is emphasised by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 3, which prioritises preventative and responsive measures to address key healthcare concerns in the areas of maternal and childcare, non-communicable diseases, substance abuse, sexual and reproduction health, road injuries and deaths, and capacity development for healthcare systems. All these priority areas align with the Caribbean's regional health agenda. Recognising the importance of health systems in supporting these goals, the Caribbean has long focused on building capacity and correcting institutional and resource deficits to deliver essential health functions (World Bank, 2023).

The Caribbean's commitment to ensuring the health and well-being of all its citizens is underscored by the commitment of its member states to global and regional policies, programmes, and plans that address communicable and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Threats to health, such as NCDs, HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis, violence against women and girls (VAWG), and most recently, the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), have highlighted the crucial role health plays in societal well-being. Several social determinants of health

mediate the achievement of good health and well-being. These include the social, cultural, and political conditions into which people are born and live and which create unequal living conditions that then influence poor health-seeking behaviours and health outcomes⁴².

Research on the gendered dimensions of health, including health status and health seeking, has found that men are more vulnerable to life-threatening diseases, and women face several barriers in healthcare despite displaying significantly greater health-seeking behaviours⁴³. The differences in health-seeking between men and women are a key factor in the gender differences in health outcomes in the Caribbean. Women are more likely to seek preventive care but remain particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of social inequities. Issues such as the gender wage gap, unemployment, the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, and VAWG place women at a higher risk of poor health. Consequently, although women are more likely to seek healthcare, they are also more likely to have health challenges over their lifetime than men. Moreover, despite having a higher life expectancy, women experience higher morbidity⁴⁴.

Addressing these challenges requires a robust governance structure capable of responding to the complexities involved in achieving health and well-being in the region. Effective governance structures significantly influence the provision and accessibility of healthcare services through policy development and regulations to address the region's unique health challenges, such as infectious diseases, NCDs, and healthcare infrastructure deficiencies. Throughout CARICOM, national public health policies establish guidelines for disease prevention and health promotion. For instance, immunisation laws in all countries mandate the vaccination of infants as a strategy to prevent communicable childhood diseases and ensure the long-term health of their citizens. CARICOM member states have also authorised a number of policies and plans to address national health concerns. While most countries lack an overarching health policy, they all have plans or policies to address chronic NCDs.

Governance also plays a crucial role in promoting equitable access to healthcare services, regardless of socio-economic status or geographic location. Strong frameworks prioritize healthcare infrastructure development, healthcare workforce distribution, and health financing mechanisms to reduce access disparities. Institutional structures that ensure access to quality care for all can help mitigate the social determinants of health by ensuring that health and well-being are not elusive to the poor and vulnerable.

Access to quality health care varies across CARICOM. Though progress has been made in securing universal health coverage (UHC) in the region, the World Bank points out that the COVID-19 pandemic and the redirection of resources towards response have disrupted this progress (World Bank, 2023)⁴⁵. The experience with the pandemic has demonstrated

42. <https://letsgethealthy.ca.gov/sdoh/>

43. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X22006954>

44. https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/toolkits-guides/gender-equality-index-2021-report/women-are-more-likely-have-health-limitations-over-their-lifetime?language_content_entity=en

45. Unlocking Access to Health: Caribbean and Central America Forge the Path to Universal Health Coverage. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/09/14/unlocking-access-to-health-caribbean-and-central-america-forge-path-to-universal-health-coverage>

that countries of CARICOM need to invest in improving the resilience of the region's health systems. This includes improving physical capacity at all levels of care and improving professional capacity by not only increasing the number of medical and support staff but also increasing the range of skills and specialisations available to citizens. Improvements in service delivery, supported by state-of-the-art, articulated data collection systems, should also attract increased investments.

Given the region's economic growth profile, improving health financing will require innovative frameworks and approaches to revenue mobilisation. Since households and the government are the main sources of healthcare funding in the Caribbean (World Bank, 2023), this includes diversifying funding sources, allocating resources more efficiently, and improving the cost-effectiveness of services (*ibid*). Efforts to mobilise resources for achieving UHC are ongoing in several countries, often through purpose-built fiscal instruments, typically funded by taxation. Some countries have established national health funds (Jamaica), health insurance schemes (St. Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago), or programmes to provide subsidised medication (Barbados, Jamaica), particularly for chronic conditions like NCDs. While the activities undertaken by these programmes differ in scope, their common goal is to expand access to healthcare and improve health outcomes.

The pandemic-era increases in health spending were unsustainable, but they demonstrated the need for ongoing coordination among stakeholders to build long-term capacity. This cooperation should hinge on reforms in the delivery of healthcare, identifying gaps in current capacity and the spending needed to close these gaps, improving health management information systems (HMIS) to improve both service quality and efficiency, and improving the capacity of policymakers in the sector to design and implement evidence-based interventions and innovation resource mobilisation strategies (World Bank, 2023).

Beyond resource mobilization and financing, governance principles such as credibility, trust, and legitimacy are critical to the success of initiatives to improve health outcomes. Perhaps this principle is most clearly illustrated by the response to efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, including the roll-out of the vaccine programmes. In Jamaica, despite ample financial resources dedicated to the vaccination programme, only approximately 30 per cent of citizens were vaccinated by the end of the pandemic. Research showed that issues such as long delays and uncertainties about when and where the vaccines were available and to whom, the failure to localise vaccine education and availability, and the sometimes conflicting messages all hampered the COVID-19 vaccination programme. Furthermore, there was no comprehensive assessment of likely uptake⁴⁶ and the factors that may influence this before designing the vaccination programme. Consequently, the programme was not anchored in a full understanding of the concerns and motivations of the general public (Watson Williams, 2022).

COVID-19 vaccine uptake was moderate in other CARICOM countries. Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, for example, inoculated just over 50 per cent of their populations. To understand the drivers of the high level of hesitancy in some countries of the region,

46. The MOHW did work in some communities with high incidence of infection to gauge views on the vaccines, but a comprehensive assessment was not done.

the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) conducted a cross-sectional study (CARPHA, 2021) among social media users aged 18 years and over among six CARPHA member states between February 17 and June 18, 2021⁴⁷. The study found that participants were most concerned about the possible side effects of the vaccine, the pace at which the vaccine was developed (it was developed too quickly), lack of knowledge about the vaccine, and they did not believe the vaccine could protect them from contracting the virus. These reasons resonated across various groups irrespective of age, level of education, and gender. The study revealed that vaccine acceptance was higher when participants were more knowledgeable about COVID-19, confirming that confidence is a critical factor in vaccine uptake.

Similarly, UNICEF (UNICEF, 2021) conducted a survey in October and November 2021 in six Caribbean countries, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago⁴⁸. The survey sought to understand whether vaccinated respondents were initially hesitant and if so, what changed their minds.

For the unvaccinated respondents, the study explored their reasons for not getting vaccinated and what could help to change their minds. The data showed that apathetic or hesitant respondents were primarily motivated by their lack of trust in the vaccines as well as their right to choose, recognizing that vaccination was a choice they were free to make. Anecdotally, it seems that unvaccinated persons across the region are more likely to oppose the government and thus refuse vaccination due to the perception that getting vaccinated is an act of support for the government. Respondents also noted that medical advice against vaccination was another reason for abstaining. The survey also revealed that most unvaccinated respondents preferred continued COVID-19 restrictions over vaccination. Overall, vaccine uptake across the region was influenced by issues of transparency, trust, and credibility.

Education

CARICOM has embraced the ideology of “education for all”, reflected in generally high enrolment and attendance in organised learning, even before the official primary-school age requirement, across the Caribbean. Several member states have also sharpened their focus on early childhood education⁴⁹, legislating regulations to govern the sector as in the case of Jamaica⁵⁰, working with International Development Partners (IDPs) to document and share good practices in the sector⁵¹, and expanding available early childhood spaces in the public education system. Secondary-level enrolment has also increased, consistent with the provision of more classroom spaces for students in the secondary cohort. Progress on the access and enrolment fronts has, however, not always been matched by progress in

47. Barbados, Curacao, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia and Trinidad & Tobago.

48. 62 per cent of survey respondents were vaccinated.

49. Early childhood enrolment is universal in some countries such as Jamaica, and averages just over 66 per cent in the OECS (OECS Education Sector Strategy 2012-206).

50. The Early Childhood Act, 2003.

51. Caribbean Early Childhood Development Good Practice Guide developed by UNICEF with support from the Caribbean Development Bank https://issuu.com/caribank/docs/ecd_gpg_2017-final-02-18_web?e=21431045/58372487.

outcomes. There is a consistent concern about the quality of education offered throughout the education system, with deficits becoming obvious in the secondary system's output.

Across the region, gender disparities in performance are seen across the system, beginning at the primary level and escalating as students move up the education system. Most students completing secondary school do not have the matriculation qualifications to move on to tertiary studies. However, by the tertiary level, girls' achievements have significantly outpaced that of boys, with women accounting for the majority of the 10–15 per cent of CARICOM nationals who matriculate to tertiary education⁵². Women and girls have, the data suggests, been the main beneficiaries of the education progress made in the region; they access higher levels of education and training at higher rates and outperform men and boys at every level of the system.

Women have achieved significant professional representation in the education sector, accounting for more than 70 per cent of the teaching labour force in some countries. However, the sector faces challenges in attracting and retaining the most qualified graduates, particularly in competitive disciplines such as Information Communications Technology (ICT), Mathematics, Science, and English, which often offer better opportunities in the private sector or other areas of the public sector (OECS Sector Strategy, 2011). Teaching remains one of the largest sources of professional employment for women in the region.

Numerous education reform initiatives have been undertaken across the region to address the evolving needs of Caribbean societies and the role of education in meeting these challenges. Reforms have generally focused on promoting equity, excellence, and innovation in teaching and learning. This has been done through increasing access to quality early childhood education, curriculum reform to make them more culturally and socially relevant, teacher training and professional development, increasing quality assurance and accountability, improving inclusivity by expanding provisions for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and pursuing partnerships to mobilise resources and support for reform efforts.

Where necessary, reforms have led to the establishment of new institutions or the review of existing institutional frameworks to ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place. Examples include Education Councils to oversee school board appointments, school inspectorates or inspectorate divisions to evaluate school performance, professional development and licensing agencies for teachers, resource mobilisation agencies/Trusts, and parent support services/agencies.

The success of these reforms depends heavily on stakeholder and public acceptance of their legitimacy, the availability of resources to carry out their mandate, and their relevance. Under-resourcing undermines the ability of reform-era agencies to operate effectively, limiting their scope and reach, and undermining their credibility. In situations of severe fiscal constraints as is generally the case in the region, institutions that anchor the education sector. The inadequacy of resources is a systems-wide deficiency, affecting all levels—from schools to

52. CARICOM Gender Equality Strategy. Caricom.org

macro-level policy, operational, and watchdog institutions. All function with limited capacity to effect desired outcomes.

Evidence suggests that under-resourcing may not always be directly related to government expenditure on education. In 2021, Jamaica carried out a review of public expenditure in the sector, which concluded that while the level of public education spending was adequate compared with the level of spending by governments in comparator countries, it was not delivering commensurate education outcomes. It found that Jamaica's learning-adjusted years of schooling, while comparable to countries of similar income levels, lagged behind those with similar expenditure levels (UNDP, 2023). This suggests that simply allocating more money to the sector without addressing the quality of inputs (e.g., teacher qualification) or the socio-cultural and economic causes of underperformance will not yield the desired outcomes.

Effectiveness also hinges on how these reforms account for historical and cultural beliefs and practices. Education remains the social sector in which the legacy of colonisation is most deeply rooted in the Caribbean. This is reflected in the elitist structure of the education system, despite efforts to promote inclusivity. Denny (2023) argues that CARICOM governments have taken a piecemeal approach to reform when, in fact, what is needed is systemic change. These reforms have, therefore, not addressed the root causes of the challenges, such as poor quality education, high drop-out and repetition rates, high failure rates, and outdated curricula (Denny, 2023).

Root causes can be found in the historical and socio-cultural legacy of plantation society, including elitism, racism, and values and ideologies premised on undervaluing the black majority population. These ideologies influence the education system in profound ways, including the hierarchies that schooling reinforces⁵³, the manner and language in which the curriculum is delivered, and the dominance of academism in the system. This colonial legacy is seen as a critical barrier to the progressive realisation of the ideals of education reform across the Caribbean and accounts for persistent gaps between education policy and practice.

These persistent gaps highlight the significant public distrust in the relevance and effectiveness of government policies and their capacity to meaningfully transform society through education reforms.

Citizen security

Rotberg (2004, p. 3) notes that among a “hierarchy of political goods,” nothing is “as critical as the supply of security, especially human security.” UNDP (2013)⁵⁴ defines citizen security as ‘the process of establishing, strengthening and protecting democratic civic order, eliminating threats of violence in a population, and allowing for safe and peaceful coexistence’.

Although citizen security is inherently concerned with protecting human rights, especially the right to life, it is not only about the reduction of crime. Ensuring citizen security necessitates a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy for ‘improving the quality of life of a population,

53. CARICOM Gender Equality Strategy. Caricom.org

54. [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/es/30012013_citizen_security_issue_brief\(English\).pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/es/30012013_citizen_security_issue_brief(English).pdf)

community action for crime prevention, access to an effective justice system, and education that is based on values, respect for law and tolerance' (UNDP, 2013.). A stable security environment is the foundation for sovereignty, effective governance, and social and economic progress and inclusion. High levels of crime destroy social capital by generating fear, eroding the level of trust in society, undermining cohesion and weakening institutions (IDB 2012). Crime and violence can, therefore, be serious obstacles to the formation of social and human capital, sustainable economic development, investment, and economic growth (Clayton 2016).

In the Caribbean, the rise in crime and violence is a major challenge to governance and poses a threat to development. Researchers (Clayton, 2016, Griffith, 2023) note that the high levels of violence in several Caribbean countries result from a number of factors, including the trans-shipment of narcotics through the region into the North American and European markets and the ready availability of illegal weapons. In Jamaica, for example, about 80 per cent of murders are committed with imported firearms (mostly illegal). The main sources of illegal weapons in Caribbean nations are the USA, Venezuela, Colombia and Haiti.

Currently, this threat to governance and stability is seen most acutely in Haiti, where lawlessness⁵⁵, in its multiple forms, has crippled the country. Political instability, as evidenced by frequent changes in government, weak institutions, and a history of corruption, has hindered the development of robust security institutions and the rule of law. Haiti experiences high levels of crime and violence, including gang-related activities, armed robberies, kidnappings, and interpersonal violence. Criminal organisations often operate with impunity, exploiting socio-economic vulnerabilities and political instability to perpetrate crimes and maintain control over certain areas, particularly in the capital Port au Prince.

The significantly diminished capacity of key state institutions, including the Police, the army, the judiciary and the Parliament⁵⁶, has weakened the ability of the State to respond to this threat, leading to the breakdown of law and order and severe curtailment of civic life and economic activity.

Haiti has struggled to re-establish order in an already tenuous political, social, and economic situation since the 2021 assassination of the president. Crime in Haiti, similar to other parts of the region, is driven by poverty and inequality, weak law enforcement, and corruption. However, in addition to the challenges experienced in other CARICOM countries, citizen security in Haiti has some unique features. In particular, internal displacement and irregular migration are common phenomena in Haiti, driven by factors such as natural disasters, political instability, and economic hardships. Displaced populations are often vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, and violence, exacerbating security risks within affected communities. Armed political conflict and unrest, fuelled by political instability, also add a unique dimension to Haiti's security challenges. Political protests, demonstrations, and social unrest often escalate into violence, leading to casualties, property damage, and disruptions to daily life.

55. In this context, this refers to the absence of the rule of law.

56. In 2022 only 10 elected senators of 30 remained in the upper house, while the lower house had no elected members. As a result, Parliament was unable to reach a quorum and ceased to function. See <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/haiti>

These incidents further strain law enforcement resources and undermine efforts to maintain public order.

Haiti's fragility—social, economic, political, and environmental—has deep historical roots. Following its independence through a revolution against the French occupiers, France imposed a massive indemnity as the price to recognise the country's independence⁵⁷. It was a crippling debt for the new country and took Haiti almost a century to repay. Alongside this unjust burden, the country faced diplomatic and economic isolation, particularly from the United States and European powers who feared the spread of slave revolts and did not believe that a Republic led by formerly enslaved Africans was a worthy economic partner. The economic precarity wrought by these circumstances escalated into political instability and corruption, leaving Haiti unable to establish the foundations of a stable society.

Addressing citizen security in Haiti therefore requires comprehensive and multi-dimensional approaches that address root causes, strengthen institutions, promote social inclusion, and empower communities. Sustainable solutions must prioritize building effective law enforcement and justice systems, addressing socio-economic inequalities, promoting good governance and the rule of law, and fostering community engagement and resilience. International support and cooperation are also essential in assisting Haiti in addressing its security challenges and advancing sustainable development and stability.

While Haiti is an extreme case, it is not the only country in CARICOM grappling with severe threats to citizen security. Jamaica has the highest homicide rate in the region, and, along with other CARICOM members, is impacted by transnational crimes, including 'PWPs', which are often linked to the international drug trade (Griffith, 2023). Crime and insecurity are offshoots of poverty, social exclusion, and inequality, lack of sustainable opportunities for citizens to improve their standard of living, corruption⁵⁸, trafficking of small arms, and failures of the criminal justice system to identify and sanction offenders, nurturing a culture of impunity (Lashin, 2005).

Caribbean police forces currently do not have the capacity to eradicate these threats. Many lack the necessary technical and forensic capabilities, and in some cases, they are also handicapped by outdated legislation and inefficient justice systems. Sometimes, these problems are compounded by a low level of trust in police forces and governments, which is largely due to the perception of corruption (Clayton, 2016). Although there is significant work to be done in these areas, some countries have begun the process of updating the legislative framework to tackle crime and violence, especially organised crime.

Jamaica, in 2014, enacted the Criminal Justice (Suppression of Criminal Organizations) Act, which was the first law in the country that provides law enforcement agencies with enhanced tools and powers to investigate, prosecute, and dismantle criminal organizations, including gangs. Known as the Anti-gang law, it gives a broad legal definition of a criminal organisation

57. Haiti declared independence in 1804, and the indemnity was imposed in 1825.

58. The President of Suriname was convicted, in absentia, of drug trafficking in the Netherlands in 1999. Despite this conviction, he was elected as President in 2010 and served until 2020.

and gives investigative agencies the power to conduct surveillance, such as wiretaps, in pursuit of evidence against criminal organisations. It has provisions for the protection of witnesses and informants who provide evidence against criminal organizations, ensuring their safety and confidentiality, and also allows for the seizure and forfeiture of assets acquired from the proceeds of criminal activities. It was employed successfully to convict several members of a large criminal network in 2023.

Trinidad and Tobago has also enacted similar legislation (Anti-Gang Act, 2018). In addition to law enforcement measures, the legislation includes provisions to prevent recruitment into gangs, making it a criminal offence to coerce or entice anyone to join a gang. That offence attracts a penalty of 25 years in prison (s.7). Bahamas' Criminal Code contains provisions related to gang activity, such as laws prohibiting gang participation, gang-related offences, and conspiracy to commit criminal acts.

Gender-based violence (GBV), particularly violence against women and girls (VAWG), is also a persistent threat to citizen security and one of the most common forms of insecurity experienced in the region (Sealy-Burke, 2023). How a society confronts VAWG goes to the heart of how women experience security.

Unlike men, who are more likely to experience violence in public spaces, women and girls often face violence in their homes or at the hands of intimate partners or family members (Sealy Burke, 2023). Not surprisingly, therefore, Caribbean women report being more fearful and concerned for their safety (UNDP, 2012, p. 33). This is partially due to the higher levels of sexual assault/abuse and experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) that women and girls endure. It is legally and politically agreed that VAWG is a violation of women's human rights. International human rights jurisprudence has established that the State's failure to offer protection for a woman it knows is in danger may amount to a violation of the international human rights norm of the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment (Bradley, 2018). However, efforts across CARICOM to prevent and respond to this rights violation and threat to women's security have not been consistent, strategic, or comprehensive.

The state's ineffective actions on this issue are influenced by the notion that certain aspects of social life, particularly in the home or the so-called private sphere, should not fall within the control of the state. Sealy Burke notes that there have been 'weak and under-resourced' attempts to set up specialized policing units and carry out training for duty bearers and first responders. These efforts have not improved women's security, as they do not address the real problems. Rather, what is needed is an understanding that VAWG has cultural and systemic roots, and the institutional and policy framework to eliminate it must focus on those root causes. Traditional approaches to security have focused on criminal behaviours in the public sphere, paying little attention to the issue of family violence (FV), or violence in the home.

The home is the first place in which many citizens experience violence. This is the result of widely accepted social norms which legitimize the use of violence in personal relationships—in intimate partner and parent-child relationships. This is used as a means of exerting control and reinforcing power hierarchies: the man over the woman, the woman over the child, and the man over them both. This pattern is a direct result of the patriarchal structure of society

and family relationships in the Caribbean. The absence of a clear focus on FV and VAWG in national security strategies reinforces the belief that these are private matters and helps to reinforce the culture of impunity that has developed around these issues. Additionally, the focus on generalised violence overshadows the violence experienced in the home and broadly in family and intimate relationships, sending a clear signal that these are of secondary national concern.

Feminist scholars point out that the security of women, in both private and public spaces, is integral to creating and sustaining security for any population (Srinivasan, 2011). Nonetheless, concerns specific to women have been traditionally absent from policymaking and programme development around national security, including the reduction of violent crime. This has largely been because the security sector is dominated by male decision-makers, who conceptualize security in ‘masculine’ ways, focusing on the pursuit and punishment of offenders more than on the prevention of offending. Often, too, these policymakers frame ‘security’ in the narrow terms of the absence of conflict/violence, with the operational focus on the restricted definition of ‘restoring law and order’ in the public space.

This has meant that strategic direction has often ignored the dynamic between FV and crime in society. Where family violence is not addressed in security strategies, the role and impact of violent masculinity on crime production are often overlooked. It is in the family setting that masculine ideologies of domination and control are rehearsed and then practised in the public space (hooks, 2004). By focusing on family violence prevention and reduction, crime-fighting strategies are targeting the source, the root, of pervasive violence in society.

A culture of impunity, weak justice systems, lack of trust in police forces, persistent inequalities, and a lack of socioeconomic opportunities are but some of the factors that encourage criminal activities throughout the region. Failure to cauterise these root causes of citizen insecurity undermines the legitimacy of the State and its actions to address these issues. The focus on ‘policing’ and the use of punitive, rather than transformative approaches to citizen security appeals to Caribbean citizens. Across the region, public perceptions on how to address crime are characterized by strong support for highly punitive measures that emphasize increasing the scope and degree of punishment for offenders.

A 2015 survey (Maguire & Johnson, 2015) of 11,000 individuals in seven Caribbean countries found that, on average, the public strongly supports increasing the severity of punishment for criminals, including the use of the death penalty. There is also some, albeit less strong, support for the militarisation of police forces, with the highest average levels of support for this in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago and the lowest in Barbados and Saint Lucia.

Environment

The right to a healthy environment has been recognised as a constitutional right in some countries of the region. Environmental concerns are critical to the development of the region⁵⁹,

59. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have included such provisions in their constitutions.

the most exposed in the world to climate-related natural disasters. Adaptation investment needs are estimated at more than USD 100 billion, equal to roughly one-third of the region's annual economic output⁶⁰. Building environmentally resilient societies is, therefore, a top priority for the sustainable development agenda in CARICOM member states.

Several key environmental issues arise from the region's unique geography, ecosystems, and socio-economic characteristics. The SIDS in CARICOM are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, more frequent and intense hurricanes and storms, shifting weather patterns, and coral bleaching. These effects threaten coastal communities⁶¹, infrastructure, agriculture, tourism, and freshwater resources. Additionally, threats exist from coastal erosion, loss of biodiversity, and air pollution.

These environmental threats have several far-reaching impacts on citizens' livelihoods and quality of life. Environmental degradation, such as air and water pollution, exposure to toxic chemicals, and climate change-related events, pose significant implications for public health. Poor air quality can lead to respiratory problems, cardiovascular diseases, and other health issues. Contaminated water sources can cause waterborne diseases, (Cann, Thomas, et.al, 2013), while extreme weather events can result in injuries, displacement, and mental health problems (Bell, et.al, 2016).

Environmental threats can force communities to relocate or migrate⁶², disrupting social structures, leading to loss of livelihoods, exacerbating poverty, and straining resources and infrastructure in receiving areas. Displacement can also contribute to social tensions and conflicts, particularly when communities compete for scarce resources.

Environmental threats can also carry significant economic consequences. For small islands, a single extreme weather event can cause damages and losses of nationally significant proportions. In 2017, Dominica reported economic losses and damages of USD 1.3 billion or 225 per cent of their GDP from Hurricane Maria, and Antigua and Barbuda reported estimated losses and damages of USD 222 million from the impacts of Hurricane Irma (Scobie, 2016).

The economic impact of environmental events is particularly severe for communities dependent on natural resources and climate-vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and tourism. Damage to infrastructure, loss of crops and livestock, disruption of supply chains, and decreased productivity can result in economic losses, increased unemployment, and poverty, all of which further exacerbate social inequalities.

These threats often disproportionately affect marginalized and vulnerable populations, including low-income communities, Indigenous peoples, women, children, and individuals with disabilities. The impact is more acute where these groups have limited access to the resources,

60. <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2023/06/27/caribbean-climate-crisis-demands-urgent-action-by-governments-and-investors>

61. In the Caribbean, approximately 70 per cent of the population lives in coastal cities, towns, and villages exposed to climate hazards.

62. The series of natural disasters in Haiti since 2010 demonstrates this point.

information, and services needed to cope with environmental hazards and recover from their impacts, heightening their vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities include susceptibility to stress, depression, and trauma arising from disasters or environmental degradation. Fear of future disasters, uncertainty about livelihoods, and loss of community and cultural ties can contribute to diminished mental health and well-being and undermine social cohesion and resilience.

Addressing these environmental challenges requires coordinated action, investment in sustainable development practices, strengthened regulatory frameworks, and collaboration among CARICOM member states, regional organizations, civil society, and international partners.

Safeguarding environmental rights is a critical first step in addressing the environmental challenges faced by the region. This includes establishing a legal basis on which these rights can be defined and accessed, developing the jurisprudence that protects them, and building an institutional framework within which the rights can be promoted and fulfilled. Access to information, public participation, and access to justice are at the core of good governance and open and democratic societies. The intersections of access rights, human rights, and environmental sustainability, constitute essential elements of sustainable development.

The Caribbean subregion has been at the forefront of the implementation of environmental access rights, even before the adoption of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (ECLAC, 2018)⁶³. A 2018 review of the decisions of regional courts and tribunals applying international, regional, and national environmental protection treaties and laws suggests that the region has made significant progress in the implementation of the rights of access to information, public participation, and access to justice in environmental matters (ibid). In the absence of specific legislation or regulations, courts have also used case law to protect these rights.

Notwithstanding this progress, gaps exist in the legal framework for protecting environmental rights. In countries where there is no access to information (ATI) legislation, which mandates disclosure of pertinent information, litigants face difficulty challenging state actions and administrative decisions. Even where ATI laws exist, it is argued (ECLAC, 2018) that the specific nature of environmental information may require targeted regulations to ensure that it is provided in 'suitable and comprehensible formats'.

The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean addresses several of these ATI issues with a view of widening access to information, thereby increasing public knowledge and participation in environmental decision-making processes, and rights claiming and protection. It is also seen as a platform for strengthening laws and institutions through cooperation and capacity-building under a rights-based approach in the region. States are also urged to encourage alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms other than litigation to save both time and cost, as well as to increase access to justice in this area (ibid).

63. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and Caribbean Court of Justice Academy of Law (CCJ Academy of Law), *Ensuring environmental access rights in the Caribbean: analysis of selected case law* (LC/TS.2018/31/Rev1), Santiago, 2018.

The justice system is but one mechanism for protecting the environment and environmental rights. Policymaking is perhaps the first frontier in safeguarding the environment. The extent to which countries in the region make and implement effective policies in this area is directly related to successful outcomes in this area. Studies examining the policy and institutional framework in climate change (Scobie, 2016)⁶⁴, and the blue economy (Hassanali, 2022)⁶⁵ found important weaknesses in the capacity of national and regional organisations to participate in ‘the complex international and regional architecture’ and coordinate national policy with regional and international mandates, relating to climate change (Scobie, 2016).

This exists despite the fact that climate policy integration is important for SIDS, which are heavily affected by and depend upon the environment for economic and social resources. The poorest SIDS are often the most vulnerable to climate impacts but have the least resources to develop and implement adaptation⁶⁶ policies and strategies (ibid). The IPCC notes that adaptation is the only effective way to manage climate change when mitigation measures cannot reduce impacts. Adaptation policy has ten broad areas of focus: development, poverty alleviation, livelihood security, disaster risk management, ecosystem management, spatial or land use planning, structural/physical actions (including engineered, technological, ecosystem-based options and services), institutional actions, social actions (changing behaviour, informational and educational options), and other broad spheres for change (practical, political and personal adaptation strategies) (Nurse et al., 2014, Barros et al., 2014). The broad areas of focus for comprehensive adaptation policies require significant multisectoral coordination and policymaking, which poses many challenges in the context of the financial, human, and technical resource constraints of many CARICOM countries.

Some countries, such as St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, and Saint Lucia depend heavily on donor funding through projects to advance adaptation efforts (Scobie, 2016). Resource limitations can also lead to inaction and tacit policymaking as public policy can develop not only from deliberate actions such as regulation and administrative, legislative, and judicial decisions but also from inaction, through which states institutionalise environmental harm (Alcañiz, I., & Gutiérrez, 2022)⁶⁷.

The under-capacitated policymaking machinery in the region also makes policy coherence difficult to achieve. New mechanisms and regulations often emerge to address new issues in environmental protection and justice. This, in turn, leads to the entry of new actors from both State and civil society, and this increased architecture can lead to greater fragmentation in governance across sectors and levels (Scobie, 2016). This poses a challenge to policy coherence and integration, making it more difficult to ensure that the various branches work together as part of an articulated framework. There is a large degree of fragmentation in the

64. Michelle Scobie, (2016). Policy coherence in climate governance in Caribbean Small Island Developing States. *Environmental Science & Policy*, volume, 58, 2016, pages 16-28.

65. Hassanali, K. Examining Institutional Arrangements Toward Coordinated Regional Ocean Governance and Blue Economy Policy Development in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). *Coastal management* 2022, 50 (5), 385 - 407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08920753.2022.2082835>.

66. Adaptation is the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects.

67. Alcañiz, I., & Gutiérrez, R. A. (2022). *The Distributive Politics of Environmental Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

application of environmental policy across the Caribbean, often with no mechanism to close the gaps. Silos in public environmental governance architectures, unwillingness to share data, insufficient political will; unsustainable project-based funding⁶⁸ and lack of accountability among actors are the main challenges to environmental policy coherence in the region.

Contradictory state actions also undermine policy coherence. This is seen when governments pass legislation and set up mechanisms to protect the environment, but, for economic gain, are willing to violate their own laws or circumvent the mechanisms in order to secure investments in an area that may have deleterious environmental impacts. Ultimately, this contradiction reflects the paradox between the logic of capital accumulation and that of democratic legitimacy: whereas some state actors prioritize greater regulation and protection of the environment, others lower standards and avoid strict regulation to favour economic activity (Alcañiz, I., & Gutiérrez, R. A. (2022).

Climate financing is also vulnerable to institutional deficiencies, which have been barriers to accessing available funds. Caribbean countries have been approved for about USD 800 million from climate funds (Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Fund, and Adaptation Fund). While most countries purchase disaster insurance from the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, and a few countries are also enrolled in the World Bank contingency credit line, coverage levels are below what would be needed for rehabilitation and reconstruction in the event of a natural disaster (IMF, 2023). However, even accessing the funds available in these facilities has proven a challenge for the region. There is a lack of administrative capacity to prepare proposals and meet all the requirements to access available climate funds. This costly and lengthy project preparation process requires input from several departments across government such as legal, economic and finance, and social development, to be compliant with the selection criteria.

Where risk sharing (e.g., guarantees for private sector financing) is required, limited fiscal space prevents governments from participating. Governments have, however, undertaken the issuance of ‘blue bonds’ and debt-nature swaps to reduce debt servicing, opening fiscal space for nature conservation investments in coastal areas (Belize and Barbados). They have also issued catastrophe bonds for financial protection against hurricane damage (Jamaica) and instruments that provide debt service relief after natural disasters under IMF-supported programmes, as in the case of Barbados and Grenada (IMF, 2023).

68. For example, after Grenada was battered by Hurricane Ivan, the country acquired funding under its strategic programme to build climate resilience. However, after the pilot project for climate change resilience ended, the government could not sustain that resilience project. Grenada is not unique in this regard.

3. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digital transformation refers to the integration of digital technology across all areas of business, fundamentally altering how organisations operate and deliver value to customers. This encompasses the core ICT and digital infrastructure sector, as well as the broader digital ecosystem, including digital services and platforms, data protection and privacy frameworks, digital literacy programmes, and strategies to promote digital inclusivity.

Globally, digital transformation has been credited with improving economic growth, job creation, social inclusion, and the delivery of public services (UNCTAD, 2019; ITU, 2023, FCDO, 2024). As citizens increasingly utilise digital technologies in their daily lives, these tools are playing an ever more significant role in civic engagement, political participation, and the development of humanitarian interventions worldwide (FCDO, 2024).

The potential impact of digital technologies on sustainable development is so profound that the United Nations has noted that 70 per cent of the SDG targets could directly benefit from the application of these technologies. This means that the attainment of 119 of the 169 SDG goals across thematic areas such as gender equality, poverty, climate change, health and wellbeing, and partnerships for development can be supported through digital transformation⁶⁹. Despite this potentially catalytic impact, the opportunities for digital transformation are not evenly distributed across the world as access to the basic technologies to fuel this transformation remains uneven (ITU, 2023). The data shows that people in developing countries are less likely to be online and tend to use less data than those in developed nations (ibid), suggesting that both access and uptake remain significant barriers. Among the most excluded groups, according to the UN, are women and girls, the poor, and individuals with disabilities (ibid).

A study by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) on the economic impact of digital infrastructure in the least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS) confirms that both fixed and mobile broadband positively affect economic growth in these vulnerable nations (ITU, 2019)⁷⁰. The report suggests that these countries would benefit substantially from increased investments in improving broadband connectivity, uptake, and access (ibid). For instance, a 10 per cent increase in mobile broadband penetration is estimated to result in a GDP per capita growth of 2.5 per cent to 2.8 per cent in LDCs.

69. <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/digital-technologies-directly-benefit-70-percent-sdg-targets-say-itu-undp-and-partners>

70. Using a cross-sectional time-series analysis, this study explores the economic impact of broadband in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS over the period 2000 to 2017. The study concluded that GDP per capita increases are associated with increases in broadband penetration from both fixed and mobile technologies.

The ITU cautions that ‘failure to ensure high levels of broadband access and use may have significant implications for these countries, with the risk of seeing them fall further behind’ (p.v). With approximately one-third of the world’s population still offline, increasing access will require investments in infrastructure, as well as in institutional and governance frameworks and regulations to ensure affordability.

Digital transformation in the Caribbean

The data from a variety of sources⁷¹ shows that internet penetration rates in the Caribbean vary, but average approximately 80 per cent for the region. Antigua and Barbuda leads with 96 per cent penetration, followed by Barbados (86 per cent), Guyana (85 per cent), and Jamaica (82 per cent). All other countries have rates ranging from 79–81 per cent, with the exception of Haiti, where less than 40 per cent of the population has access to the internet.

The digital ecosystem in the Caribbean is evolving, driven by advancements in technology, supportive government policies, and the active participation of various stakeholders. Continued investment in infrastructure, education, and innovation is essential to fully realize the potential of the digital economy and ensure inclusive growth and development across the region. Barbados launched its national broadband plan under the Smart Barbados Initiative, aimed at expanding access to high-speed internet and increasing ICT adoption across all sectors, including government services. Jamaica has established a Universal Service Fund (USF) to expand internet access, particularly in schools, and adopted a National ICT Policy. Trinidad and Tobago has developed technology parks to attract tech companies and support innovation and entrepreneurship.

Collaboration among Eastern Caribbean countries has also emerged through the Caribbean Digital Transformation Project (Digital Caribbean), Supported by the World Bank, this initiative aims to expand access to digital services and technologies. It is being implemented in Saint Lucia, Grenada, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the OECS Secretariat⁷².

There has also been the growth of E-government services across the region. There are now online portals for public services including tax filing and payment, business registration, and applications for social services. E-commerce is also growing with more online platforms and marketplaces enabling businesses to improve efficiency and reach wider audiences. This includes the use of mobile payment solutions and digital wallets which, though nascent, facilitate secure and convenient payment solutions for large and small businesses alike. Financial technologies have improved banking services and experiences, made remittances easier, and helped to support financial inclusion across the Caribbean.

Despite this progress, infrastructure limitations hinder further advancements. Inconsistent internet access and broadband penetration, particularly in rural areas, restrict access to

71. Including the World Bank, Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) and National Statistics Offices which collect data on internet penetration and use.

72. <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P171528>

online banking and other digital services, slowing the growth of e-commerce. Logistics and delivery systems are also underdeveloped, limiting the efficiency and reach of e-commerce across the region.

While the presence of digital technologies is central to digital transformation, the regulatory framework in which these applications are being implemented also affects the extent to which they can be transformative. Laws and regulations on data protection and privacy, digital consumer rights, cybersecurity, digital finance, and taxation for cross-border e-commerce are essential for building trust in digital services and incentivising participation by both investors and clients. Efforts are underway in these areas, with the Caribbean Technology Union (CTU) working to harmonise ICT policies across the region and promote regulatory frameworks that support digital transformation.

Initiatives include workshops, policy development support, and regional collaboration on ICT issues⁷³. This regional cooperation and harmonisation of regulations will further enhance the effectiveness of these efforts to promote digital transformation.

Digital technologies can also support transformation in social inclusion and political participation in the region. They can impact access to education and training, making new knowledge and skills available to more people who may have been excluded due to location or affordability constraints. By democratising human capital development, digital technologies allow societies to reap the social and economic benefits of investments in upskilling and educating more citizens. However, the pandemic highlighted capacity limitations, as remote and online education faced significant challenges in many Caribbean countries, leading to learning losses and setbacks.

Political and civic participation is another area poised to benefit from digital advancements and innovation. These applications can significantly enhance political participation by reaching wider audiences, providing citizens with more accessible and efficient means to engage in political processes, keeping them informed of issues that affect their lives, rallying them around causes/campaigns thereby shaping the environment in which policy debates take place, and by doing so promoting transparency and accountability in public life (Ochieng-Springer & Francis, 2019).

Digital transformation in the Caribbean is critical for enhancing economic competitiveness, improving public services, and promoting social inclusion. While challenges exist, strategic investments in infrastructure, digital literacy, education, and regulatory frameworks can drive significant progress.

73. See <https://ctu.int>

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The countries of CARICOM enjoy several strengths that enhance their capacity to capitalise on the benefits of effective governance. These include political stability⁷⁴ and a strong commitment to democratic values, economic and social progress, mechanisms for regional cooperation, a focus on sustainable development, and institutional effectiveness. Stable democracies, emerging accountability and transparency mechanisms, and active civil society organisations represent valuable entry points for institution and capacity building.

Nevertheless, effective governance in the Caribbean region faces several barriers rooted in a combination of historical, cultural, structural, institutional, and socio-economic factors.

Key barriers include:

1. Small size and limited resources

Many Caribbean countries are small island states with limited land area, population, and economic resources. This poses challenges in achieving economies of scale, resource availability, and capacity to address complex governance issues effectively.

2. Economic vulnerability

The economies of many Caribbean nations are highly dependent on a few sectors, such as tourism, agriculture, and natural resource extraction, making them susceptible to external shocks, including natural disasters, economic downturns, and fluctuations in global markets. This dependency can limit the government's fiscal capacity and resilience, hindering its ability to invest in essential services and infrastructure.

3. Historical legacies

The legacy of colonialism, slavery, and exploitation continues to influence Caribbean societies, perpetuating inequalities, social divisions, and institutional distrust. Historical injustices, such as land dispossession and discrimination, continue to shape power dynamics, governance structures, and public perceptions of legitimacy and accountability. These legacies also impact policy agendas, determining whose voices are heard in the policy-making process, who benefits from state actions, and how policies are implemented.

4. Weak institutional capacity

Challenges related to weak institutional capacity, including inefficient bureaucracy, lack of transparency, and corruption undermine governance in some Caribbean nations. Limited human and financial resources, outdated legal frameworks, and inadequate training and professional development opportunities for public officials exacerbate governance gaps and inefficiencies in some sectors.

74. With the notable exception of Haiti.

5. Geopolitical considerations

External geopolitical factors also shape the governance experiences and challenges in the region. As small island developing states (SIDS) with open economies and borders, CARICOM nations have to address external influences that can significantly affect their economic prospects and internal socio-political dynamics. Conditional economic engagement and aid, which seek to shape the region's political positions on international affairs, present additional challenges to effective governance.

6. Natural hazards and environmental vulnerability

The Caribbean region is highly vulnerable to natural hazards, including hurricanes, floods, droughts, and earthquakes, which can cause widespread devastation, loss of life, and displacement. Environmental degradation, the impacts of climate change, and inadequate disaster preparedness and response mechanisms compound these challenges, further straining governance systems and resources.

7. Brain drain and emigration

The migration of skilled professionals and educated youth in search of better opportunities weakens institutional capacity, hampers economic development, and limits the ability of governments to implement effective governance reforms and policies.

Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive strategies to tackle both structural and institutional challenges, promote transparency and accountability, foster inclusive and participatory decision-making processes, and build resilience to external shocks and crises. Regional cooperation, capacity-building initiatives, and partnerships with civil society, the private sector, and international organizations can play a crucial role in overcoming these barriers and promoting sustainable development and governance in the Caribbean.

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