

CLIMATE CHANGE:
Life Democracy Freedom Justice
Equality

A Report of the OAS General Secretariat

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Acronym and Reference List

Adapting to Climate Change in the Caribbean (ACCC)
Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)
Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA)
Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
Carbon Dioxide (CO²)
Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM)
Caribbean Planning for Adaptation to Climate Change (CPACC)
Central American Integration System (SICA)
Conference of the Parties (COP)
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI)
Gigatons of carbon dioxide (GtCO²)
Global Environment Facility (GEF)
Green Climate Fund (GFC)
Greenhouse Gas (GHG)
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
Gross National Income (GNI)
Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research (IAI)
International Financial Institutions (IFIs)
International Monetary Fund (IMF)
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)
Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
Office of the Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (REDESCA)
Organization of American States (OAS)
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
Small Island Developing States (SIDS)
United Nations (UN)
United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC)
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC)
United Nations International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (UNITLOS)
United States of America (US, USA)

“The Earth is one, but the world is not.
We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives.
Yet each community, each country, strives for survival and prosperity
with little regard for its impact on others.
Some consume the Earth’s resources at a rate
that would leave little for future generations.”

- *Our Common Future*

*The World Commission on Environment and
Development (1987)*

Preface

The objective of this work is of concern to us all.

The survival of the world as we know it and of people's rights, especially, those of the most vulnerable, compel us to rise to a unique challenge and to do so as a matter of urgency.

For that reason, this document's central premise is that we must now discharge an ethical obligation, one that leaves us no option.

This is not the first time that all humankind has faced an ethical dilemma. We have before and we have evolved as a species by overcoming it.

The capitalist organization of the modern world has enabled humanity to make tremendous progress, increased average standards of living and life expectancy by decades, and made progress inconceivable centuries and decades ago.

Humanity has also had to face seemingly intractable dilemmas of ethics and rights, but it has met them.

These are existential dilemmas that humanity has met by summoning the moral fiber needed if ethics and good were to triumph over the mechanical operation of capitalism, the means of production, and the pure profit mentality.

By reinforcing that moral truth, humanity has been able to transform these ethics into binding ethics, then into national norms, and then into international law and even jus cogens.

That is what we as humanity need today to counter climate change: based on an ethical principle to grow to moral force, and from there to inexorable moral force, so that this ethical principle is incorporated in custom, practice, and national and international law and becomes absolutely and irreversibly mainstream.

This has happened before with practices that were accepted but are now abhorrent and unthinkable, and that incur the harshest sanctions.

Child labor, wars of aggression, imperialism, worker exploitation, and many other now unacceptable practices are but a few examples of practices that for many centuries were acceptable.

Now, these practices are banned not only at the national level but also by the international community as a whole, by law. Not only that, but they also arouse the most robust moral and social repudiation.

Countering climate change is of that level of urgency and moral imperative.

Ethically and practically, we must counter it with the same urgency as that with which humanity abandoned now unacceptable practices that, moreover, are now punishable offenses.

Because failure to do so, and to do so now, is to condemn millions to poverty, forced exile, and the loss of their homes, workplace conditions, and most cherished rights.

For these reasons, the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (GS/OAS) understands that the fight against climate change has priority among the tasks of the Hemisphere and the world.

It is an obligation that as an international organization we have to our countries, and each of them to their populations.

And it is an obligation that we must meet now.

Introduction

This Report will briefly review the overarching threat that climate change and its consequences pose to the global community. This matter is well known and well documented and need not be rehearsed in this Report, except to emphasize or clarify an argument.

The first section underscores the ethical principles that we believe should guide our analysis and actions.

Then, the report will more closely examine the continuing impact of climate change on the regional members of the Organization of American States (OAS), highlighting the irreparable damage and the high costs that it has thrust on all of them, both in human lives, human dislocation, and economic destruction.

Based on the evidence, arising from expert reports including inter-governmental committees, this report will highlight the grave challenges that already confront OAS member states and how they can be aggravated -if the factors that cause climate change are not curbed.

Finally, the report proposes some actions that the Secretary General, and the General Secretariat propose to encourage political consensus and political will by member states of the Organization to confront the common and growing threat of climate change.

The Ethical Principles

For the GS/OAS, all actions to curb the impacts of climate change derive from a number of ethical principles.

A principle of protection of the right to life. Year after year, millions suffer the impacts of climate change, their lives at risk, and the most vulnerable dying from natural disasters, floods, and droughts that impact their lives directly or through food insecurity.

A principle of protection of the right to liberty. Millions are at risk of abandonment of their homes, and the most vulnerable in fact do so, uprooted, leaving behind their economic and social histories, and the opportunities of their land. And since they cannot be given refugee status because there is no regulatory framework that would allow other countries to receive and protect them, they are exposed to human trafficking and lose their liberty.

A principle of the defense and protection of economic rights. Billions are and will be impacted in their access to food, health care, education, housing, and potable water owing to the impacts of climate change.

A principle of the protection of equity. The most vulnerable populations come worse off out of each climate change-related event or series of perverse events. The most vulnerable countries as well. Moreover, our generation is paying the price of the consumption and production pattern of earlier generations, and future generations will pay the price of our inaction. Three ethically unacceptable inequities, within countries, among countries, and among generations.

A principle of justice. The large advanced industrialized countries that are most responsible for the causes of climate change owing to their consumption patterns and technologies are, in general, not those that suffer most from its impacts.

These principles derive from member states' ongoing experience of countering the impacts of climate change. Climate disasters are so frequent that their consequences are something to which we have become accustomed; by vulnerable populations accustomed for survival, accustomed in economic and social terms, a concept of permanent social and economic disruption for countries. We know that this year we will have to confront a marked dynamic of natural disasters, some gradual and others of immediate impact, and that next year it will be worse, and the year after, worse still.

Nature, altered by emissions that pollute our atmosphere and the impacts of climate change, produces specific natural disaster events, which lead to gradual processes in the existential dynamics of the small island states: coastal degradation for the riparian countries, and slow change in agricultural conditions for the food-producing countries. This means that climate change is not only disrupting the world as we know it but is also generating conditions of inhabitability for flora and fauna. This includes humankind, despite its technological advances and special capacities for adaptation.

The effects of climate change, in its randomness, are starting to accelerate, hence, the transformations are ceasing to be gradual and beginning to accelerate. This makes it much more difficult to adapt to them and to generate adequate conditions of habitability. This acceleration generates increasingly uncontrollable conditions and makes for more difficult decisions about the changes and adjustments in economic, social, productive, and migration dynamics that should be implemented to address the phenomenon.

Humanity is taking steps and entering into negotiations from a perspective of a gradualism that climate change no longer allows. We believe that negotiations must accelerate with a sense of urgency, considering that every day the process is more irreversible. In that sense we must take into account that the countries whose fundamental existence is most environmentally, socially, economically, and politically impacted are not the emitting countries, not the countries that are gaining from the emissions, not the historically emitting countries.

The countries that suffer the most terrible impacts of climate change are now indirectly/directly financing the extremely gradual process of economic and social adaptation that the world's main emitters are implementing.

Efficient solutions essentially depend on the levels of contribution and transfer by the developed countries, the emitting countries that have reaped the profits of the proceeds of the industrial revolutions, that have used energy most intensively. The countries that suffer the consequences and find the dynamics of adaptation the most difficult because it is impossible for them to concentrate material and financial resources to resolve these problems.

This concept of negotiation with dynamics of contributive justice and not of trade is complex. Vulnerable, underdeveloped countries, affected by emissions, do not have an interesting counterpart to offer in a negotiation.

The trade perspective leads to the negotiation advantage perspective, and that is the perspective that has led to the current situation. Climate change obliges us to guide negotiations and actions based on the principles of defense of life, liberty, and justice.

The key point in the negotiation of climate change is to transform the entire negotiation into an ethical approach to which we must all contribute for the good of the world and humankind. That is why we believe it is necessary to introduce in the dynamics of the ethical approach the concept that we are all equal, we all want what is the best for the world, and we all want solutions to counter the effects of climate change.

Countries, civil society, and governments are trying different things in this negotiation process, but they end up encountering obstacles in the models of interest that come together in the negotiation of real, urgent and current interests. They have never achieved the true perspective of an ethical approach.

In the international arena, trade perspectives would have to be completely undone were we to move to a shared vision of the coexistence of humanity and relations among countries. That ethical perspective is not yet here. It is unavailable and it is very hard to imagine or conceive of it in the existing models of relations among countries.

In the last 40 years, we have advanced in terms of discourse that raises demands, raising awareness among more people, but we have not advanced concomitantly with action. The alarming reality is moving faster than awareness, and much faster than adaptation and mitigation actions.

This is the approach of failing to resolve problems, owning them in discourse but not in action. This creates a vicious circle. This is a threat to everyone because, since as these truths are considered absolute, this starts to validate the emitters as victims of a problem that transcends them. As if we were all equally responsible. By characterizing

the problem as a global challenge, responsibilities are blurred; and the challenge is global owing to its consequences, but not its causes.

The threats to existence, well-being, the economy, and climate change adaptation are not countered because they have transcendent perspectives of inaction that overwhelm all countries and all humankind. Rhetoric is not enough to transform the approach into ethical actions.

The economic interests of energy producers whose emissions over the planet continue to raise its temperature.

The global dynamics of energy production and consumption and of the production and consumption of goods must be altered based on processes that lead to their actual unraveling.

If our problem becomes a question of problem identification, the climate change issue becomes an intellectualization of the problem and not identification of the objectives that need to be fulfilled to transform the prevailing reality of mitigation and adaptation. The climate change negotiation is different than the identification of the problem that emerges from convergent discourses. This ultimately misleads because we end up saying the same things in a context where there are victims and victimizers.

Many population groups are beyond or do not pertain to the negotiating systems in operation. The existence of island countries, the vulnerabilities of coastal populations, the productive conditions of the impoverished continue to have a level of priority below the issues prioritized by developed countries. Policy winds up being a system for ideological action in connection with climate change.

There is still no universal moral approach and for that reason, progress cannot be made toward just solutions. Those responsible have been identified, but they are not assuming the cost of their emissions.

In the developed countries, the political, cost of implementing industrial and energy reconversion policies is high. . The impact in terms of income, gross domestic product, and labor adaptation would accompany the economic cost would become politically unsustainable for those who must validate and revalidate themselves in public opinion or electorally.

There is consensus among economists to set a global price for carbon emissions. We still have to persevere in advancing in the design and implementation of a system of preferential access to trade and financing for vulnerable countries.

We believe that to address climate change from a comprehensive solution standpoint, a comprehensive justice approach must be structured/organized/implemented and executed, an approach that promotes dynamics of reallocation of the resources that are

absolutely essential to address vulnerabilities. The information gathered for this report indicates that, without resource reallocation, adaptation will not be possible for coastal populations of farmers of countries that need to continue specific forms of agricultural or raw material production, of food security, migration conditions, and ways of countering natural disasters.

This can only be achieved through an equation by which the global economic, financial, productive, and political power transfers material resources for infrastructure and the technology and subsidies that enable these dynamics to be countered.

Sustainable development policies are many and require many types of resources. The countries of the region need to assign priorities and sequence those policies, taking into account their vulnerabilities and capacities.

The developed countries are all very similar, and they have similar capacities and few vulnerabilities, whereas each underdeveloped country or country at an intermediate stage of development is vulnerable in its own way, has its own capacities, vulnerabilities, and restrictions. And its own way of combining them through law. Restrictions, vulnerabilities, and capacities are specific to each country; hence, so is the path towards sustainable development.

The prioritization and sequencing of policies is specific to each country.

Financing alternatives and resource transfers to break the vicious circle

However, they share some characteristics regarding the financing options for those policies that make it possible to suggest a specific prioritization at the international level and sequencing at the national level:

1. The developed countries have many capacities and the undeveloped many vulnerabilities. The concept of vulnerability should be considered by the developed countries in their cooperation policies and their positions in the international financial institutions so that countries can access at a differentiated and lower cost sustainable development and non-reimbursable funds.
2. There are countries that contribute more than others through their production structure and patterns of consumption to the perverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation; and there are countries that more suffer the consequences (droughts, floods, natural disasters). Under this approach, those who generate the negative externalities should pay more, and those who more suffer the consequences should receive more.

There are countries, such as those of the Caribbean and Central America, that are in the group that most suffers the consequences and, at the same time, are the most

vulnerable. We propose that they should have a special window with special terms in all international financial institutions and cooperation policies.

In every disaster, the situation of each country depends on its level of exposure, its vulnerabilities that reduce the likelihood of recovery, and its response capacities.

If special terms are not in place, the Central American and Caribbean countries will come out of each shock with more vulnerabilities and fewer capacities to deal with the next one.

The countries of the region periodically are faced with external shocks and a vicious circle. They face shocks with high vulnerabilities and low response capacity, meaning that they come out of each shock with more vulnerabilities and fewer capacities to handle the next one.

The same vicious circle is generated within countries, between the vulnerable population and those of greater capacities.

Each external shock increases inequality within and among countries owing to differences in levels of exposure to shocks, structural vulnerabilities, and response capacity. And every year, our region receives shocks caused by natural disasters. And in recent years, it has also received the impact of migration movements, and periodically it receives shocks caused by drops in export prices for its products and by financial market fluctuations.

Per capita GDP does not express levels of exposure, vulnerabilities, and response capacity. Therefore, this should not be the criterion for preferential access to markets, finance, and cooperation.

Development is a multidimensional process, as is underdevelopment and the process of rising from it. That is now accepted by organizations such as the United Nations, which has abandoned per capita GDP as a development indicator and moved over the years to a Human Development Index that takes multiple dimensions into account.

The international community needs to accept the multidimensionality of the problem when making available cooperation, preferential access to financing, and trade preferences. Among the multiple dimensions, preponderant weight must be given to the risk of exposure to external shocks, countries' vulnerabilities, their productive sectors, and households, and their State response capacity.

Developing countries cannot alone break the vicious circle so that they are able to deal with shocks and invest in development capacities.

We propose that this vicious circle must be broken by changing the per capita GDP criterion so that developing countries can access, in each shock, concessional financing, trade preferences, and cooperation. In this way, resources would be freed up on an inter-temporal basis to reduce vulnerabilities and invest in developing capacities that enable them to take a less vulnerable development path and a path less vulnerable to external shocks.

A global subsidy system is absolutely essential if we seek solutions for climate change adaptation processes. At least five categories should be eligible to receive such subsidies in the form of preferential rates and/or non reimbursable funds:

- a. Small island states;
- b. Developing countries with institutional weaknesses that lack capacity to bring public services to vulnerable populations;
- c. Countries highly dependent on the exterior (as a result of export concentration, dependence on remittances, dependence on external investment);
- d. Countries whose infrastructure and housing have been impacted by natural disasters related to climate change;
- e. Small family farmers or peasants whose recent crops have been damaged by a certain percentage to be determined in each shock, in each country
- f. Victims of natural disasters related to climate change.

A key point in achieving the conditions to be able to appeal to the global economic, financial, and political power. Without this intent, negotiation will be continue to be ensnared in a system of international values where there is no enforceability and no guiding ethical principle.

Mitigation and Adaptation: Resources Transfer

All climate change negotiations refer to adaptation and mitigation. These are actions to address the effects and causes of climate change, whose implementation needs a large component of economic and financial support.

The international perspective must be founded on values and scientific truths, on those conditions that address the needs of individuals and peoples. The guide should be the ethical principles analyzed in this report. We cannot condemn entire populations to enduring the effects of climate change. As human beings, we must care about this new threat and epitomize values that denote real solutions at real times for real people.

In the international perspective, there are no obligations to reallocate resources among countries and peoples, and no principles that promote this, but we need them when countering climate change.

If the humanity perspective is lost, we will lose ethical purpose, and then it will be impossible to develop an approach that leads to the necessary solutions. When we interact with one another and critical and contentious situations arise, it is the laws and institutions that enable us to manage and resolve them. The same thing happens in the interaction of humankind with nature: climate change obliges us to create a special regulatory framework to counter it so that it can be resolved with the least possible impact on life on Earth. It is essential to make progress with this imperative. We cannot dismiss the facts and scientific evolution in this area. We have an obligation to follow what science indicates and teaches us, and the ways forward it shows us. As an international community, we cannot separate ourselves from science.

We believe that the path we follow cannot come at anyone's expense. None of the world's peoples should suffer as a result of this situation, as a result the design of laws for accelerated industrial and energy reconversion is essential social dynamics must be generated in the process.

We are transitioning to new global, regional, national, and local laws and new mitigation and adaptation policies.

Some dilemmas may arise in the transition, which we analyze next.

1. Without sustainable technologies, growth generates the loss of natural capital for future generations, and climate change and natural resource degradation for current and future generations.
2. The development of new clean technologies for environmentally sustainable development may increase concentration and inequality, along with the other technological changes of processes (digitization, automation, etc.) now under way. Without inclusion and equity, unequal growth generates loss of social cohesion, social capital, and social acceptance. It delegitimizes governments and democracy itself, which are unable to address these problems.
3. Without growth, the environmental transition and social sustainability cannot be financed.

How can these dilemmas be resolved? Each country, each locality has its own specific characteristics, but some action lines can be suggested:

- Public intervention can align private interests with public objectives so that incentives facilitate resource reallocation towards cleaner production, taking social sustainability into consideration, with special emphasis on vulnerability reduction.

- Investment promotion and innovation can internalize the goals of the Paris climate change agreement for reallocation of resources among sectors, within sectors, to firms that do not pollute from those that do, and among companies' activities.
- the creation of public goods can be directed towards criteria of investment and innovation promotion and vulnerability reduction.
- Sustainable consumption can be encouraged.
- Financial instruments can continue to be developed to finance the energy transition, process change, and training for workers regarding the changes.

To summarize, we believe a balance must be maintained so that the increase in physical capital (investment) does not reduce human, social, and natural capital, in order to ensure growth is socially and environmentally sustainable, while at the same time developing human capacities.

Dilemmas and conflicting objectives need to be identified and a way sought to manage dilemmas of objectives and inter-temporal objectives.

And above all else, the most vulnerable population must always be the priority.

[The generation of international regulations on climate change and their enforceability](#)

International solidarity in the area of climate change should become enforceable, as should the responsibilities, obligations, and rights deriving from international climate change law and the commitments assumed. The enforceability of obligations and rights is the component that may make relations among countries change in this area. On the other hand, if the existing situation persists, it will countenance actions and omissions, public and private, that negatively impact the conditions that generate climate change. The key point is to define what is sufficient and the periods for achieving sufficiency conditions in countering climate change. When elements are combined in support of an efficient cycle, if not all necessary elements are included, i.e., essential de facto conditions, violations of the cycle by the most relevant actors divert and/or delay the sequence of positive or more positive results. If all the necessary elements are not contained in the process, referring to factual conditions of essentiality.

When we move the essential conditions to be resolved to the realm of the possible, this changes the conditions of the game so that what is possible is done and the sequence continues. So that if we do what is possible, we do not do what is enforceable. In a process with an ethical purpose, it is the ethical purpose that loses out. In social and economic dynamics, he who violates the system wins. Hence, he who does not alter his emission variables or makes insignificant changes to them (which is possible) wins.

In the negotiating process, the essential work is to lead the way and raise the ethical cost so as to begin to share the economic costs and, if possible, at the end of the process transfer them to those directly responsible for the effects and consequences of climate change.

The inequities of the process are the reflection and they are perpetuated by the inequities and asymmetries among emitters and impacted countries. The areas where intervention in the negotiation is needed are those directly impacting emissions and those directly impacting people in the impacted countries. Frequency and permanence of impacts signal de facto irreversibilities. Allowing this to occur without compensations signifies impunity in connection with the permanent damage.

Not all countries have the same pace of climate change impacts, and there are asymmetries among them of size and of size of their economies, and, on the other, their condition as island states, geographically remote from global markets means that compensations must also refer directly to these conditions inherent to some countries that cannot be changed.

The level of contribution to climate change, the level of exposure to it, and inherent vulnerabilities differ from country to country, and compensations must take these differences into account.

The direct impact of policy performance means that international climate change law must be made enforceable, while at the same time currents of opinion must be strengthened so that they mediate in this democratic process through scientific knowledge. Evidence-based efforts must continue moving ahead in development, social well-being, and labor processes, as they must in connection with the right to a healthy and safe environment, not exposed to the dramatic effects of climate change. Developed countries have not appropriately psychologized the impacts of climate change, and continue to see them more as an element for policy correction than as de facto factors that need to be countered so that they no longer impact the lives of so many people in the world. In the meantime, we must continue to make advances in science in order to guide, reorient, and support the behavioral processes of our societies.

Lack of understanding, commitment, and socially useful knowledge of climate change will perpetuate the problem. We are undergoing a destructive but gradual process. That gradualness leads to the absence of forceful and categorical reactions that would reverse the process. We are hindered by a lack of vision and relevant evidence to counter the common understanding of the significance of climate change. Climate change is perverse. It does not operate like a nuclear explosion dynamic for which humanity can act directly. It is instead an indirect process by which we impact nature and create a new one, one that processes these changes in a way not to be wished.

The ethical approach is vital, and we must move forward on that basis in an international society that adjusts its morality variables to the needs to those vulnerable, in this case, to climate change.

The tropical forests must be preserved based on a perspective that they are essential. Each of them is fundamental to the future of the world as we know it and how we are to live in it. Deforestation has dual impact on climate change, because it itself generates greenhouse gases and because there are fewer forests to absorb carbon dioxide.

Forests must be preserved understanding that the wealth they contain, whether in the storage of greenhouse gases, or in their biodiversity, or in the culture of the peoples who still live in them, is a wealth that cannot be lost. Rather, it must be fostered, grow, and be seen as essential to humanity.

Their essentiality for humanity cannot and must not impact the sovereignty of countries and their decisions as to how best to manage them. However, a transactional dimension is necessary through which, for development projects to be valid, they must include an enlargement of tropical forest areas. This transactional character derives from the economic nature of deforestation, explained primarily by the expansion of the agricultural and livestock-herding frontier, basically related to soy production and livestock-raising. Without economic incentives for forestation, growing urbanization worldwide and the growth of the middle classes in those cities will continue to promote the deforestation of tropical forests.

Tropical forests are essential in the humanistic perspective based on which development and life must be founded. For that reason, they must be preserved and incentives must be agreed upon so that forest areas are not lost, but instead are enlarged. Tropical forests must be incorporated in international financing projects. It is absolutely necessary to finance an international incentive plan through which work related to forests and their care, preservation, and expansion receive direct compensation for the emissions produced by the main greenhouse gas emitting countries. The green finance instrument framework should especially emphasize this point, since today's instruments are not written so that countries can obtain the US\$50 billion needed each year for reforestation and soil restoration.

It is impossible to conceive of the countering of climate change without a reforestation and soil restoration process, and enlargement the world's tropical forests, and it is impossible to conceive of that expansion without an appropriate incentive plan for it from international finance organizations. Countering climate change entails and can only entail a global moral approach to development, even when development is contingent upon the actions that countries in their sovereignty may taken regarding those emissions sinks. The option of development linked to the countering of climate change must take priority in the thinking of national and international finance.

Moreover, any notion of moral superiority it has been sought to promote in this area must be put aside. The concept can only be based on interaction wherein the efforts of so many countries to conserve and enlarge tropical forest areas constitute a common good which, since it is used by everyone, must be subsidized. Actions to maintain and expand forest areas are efforts that countries make in the interest of humanity and the world as a whole, and warrant adequate compensation.

In international and regional fora, the challenges faced by climate change have been underscored time and time again. Yet, while much progress has been made in understanding the issue of Climate Change and attempts at consultation between nations have been held in international fora, including the United Nations (UN), the narrow national attitudes described, in the quotation at the beginning of this paper, by the 1987 *World Commission on Environment and Development* in its Report “Our Common Future”,¹ has hardly changed. Those attitudes have led to the enlargement of the force of climate change and the worsening of its effects, particularly for small and underdeveloped countries.

According to a 2018 Special Report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018, the World is set to exceed its “carbon budget” in 12 years². To have a medium chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C, the world can emit 770 gigatons of carbon dioxide (GtCO₂)³. In 2020, with the worldwide COVID pandemic, energy sector CO₂ emissions dropped by roughly 2 GtCO₂. However global energy-related CO₂ emissions were projected to have rebounded by nearly 5% in 2021, approaching the 2018-19 peak⁴. Climate change is real, and the world is dealing with its harsh effects daily.

Coal was the single largest contributor to energy sector CO₂ emissions between 2015 and 2019, accounting for about 44% of energy sector CO₂ emissions in 2019. Oil accounted for about 34% and natural gas accounted for about 22%. Recent trends reinforce the near-term challenges facing energy sector mitigation - electricity sector emissions continue to rise despite deployment of wind and solar power; transportation emissions continue to rise, and petroleum remains the dominant fuel, despite advances in batteries and electric cars⁵. Some specific sectors, such as shipping and aviation, are facing longer-term challenges, including technology development and transfer, and capacity building.

¹ Our Common Future, p.27

² (Levin, 2018)

³ Ibid

⁴ https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg3/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_FinalDraft_Chapter06.pdf

⁵ Ibid

Climate mitigation efforts and climate adaptive measures are indispensable to the world's survival.

Why should the OAS and its Secretary General address Climate Change?

Climate change now threatens the security of the world in measurable and predictable ways. As is pointed out in greater detail in this Report, it is estimated that there will be 143 million internal climate migrants by 2050 unless concerted action is taken at the national and global levels. Of that number, up to 10.6 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean could become internal 'climate migrants' by 2050, stressing the human resource capacity of many countries that are already insecure and impoverished.

Refugees will have an impact on the largest and richest of the member states of the OAS. The 4th Assessment Report of the IPCC indicated that for Canada and the United States, future population growth is likely to be dominated by immigration, stretching the resources of these countries, and creating internal tensions that are already obvious.

Food security in many OAS member states is severely imperiled by the impact of climate change as crop predictability is disrupted by alternating unseasonable droughts and flooding. Fish stocks are also being depleted by global warming. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has pointed out that: "Climate change will affect fish and their habitats. Warmer temperatures will influence the abundance, migratory patterns and mortality rates of wild fish stocks and determine what species can be farmed in certain regions. These climatic effects on fish will have social and economic consequences for people dependent on fisheries and aquaculture - from workers to coastal communities to consumers of fish".⁶

More frequent and intense weather events are sparing no country, causing destruction which, in the case of the smaller member states, is total and its effects long-lasting. Consequently, many of these countries have become highly indebted and, increasingly, are facing the prospect of default on sovereign debt, a development which would affect not only their participation in the global trading and financial system, but also on the system itself as administered by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). At least 20 member states of the OAS now experience a debt to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio that is higher than 60%, the upper limit of what is internationally regarded as a prudential figure. Economic decline, leading to civil unrest, could undermine respect for democracy and democratic practices leading to the erosion of adherence to human rights principles in many countries as populations blame governments for their economic decline, loss of employment, expansion of poverty and crime.

⁶ (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018)

The world, including the member states of the OAS, already know some of the horrors caused by global warming. They are evident in forest fires, tornadoes, hurricanes and flooding in the United States; in permafrost and ice melt in the Arctic; sea-level rise, and more frequent and severe weather, such as once-uncommon heat extremes and major changes in precipitation in Canada; disappearing glaciers, disappearing lakes, severe water shortages, increasing wildfires, devastating flood and droughts in South America; destruction of food crops by alternating floods and droughts in Central America; and more frequent and intense hurricanes in the Caribbean, which have become a predictable harbinger of total economic destruction, leading to high and unsustainable debt, high costs of insurance and increased and repeated building costs.

All four pillars of the OAS are threatened by climate change: democracy, human rights, multidimensional security, and integral development. The Organization and its Secretary General should not be encouraged by others to sit on the sidelines of human survival, on the basis that it is the problem of some other hemispheric or international organization. Climate change and its effects are impacting every OAS member state. The problem, therefore, should also demand action within, and by, the OAS and its Chief Executive Officer who has already, by his public statements and action, acknowledged the gravity of the problem. As we have said:

“The recently released report *Global Warming of 1.5°C* of IPCC is an urgent call to start acting NOW on climate change. We cannot wait, future generations cannot wait, the World cannot wait”.⁷

The Secretary General will repeat this urgent call in any engagements in relevant international fora.

The Biggest CO₂ Emitters in the World and the OAS

According to the most recent data from the Global Carbon Project, the following countries emitted the most CO₂, which is the primary greenhouse gas contributing to climate change and its effects:

The Peoples’ Republic of China (28%); The United States of America (15%); India (7%); Russia 5%); Japan (3%); Germany (2%); Canada (2%); Mexico (1%); Brazil (1%); Britain (1%); Italy (1%); Poland (1%); and France (1%).

Of these 13 top CO₂ emitters, 4 of them are member states of the OAS and 8 of them are Permanent Observers. Up to April 21, 2022, when Russia’s status as a Permanent

⁷ (Almagro, @Almagro_OEA2015, 2018)

Observer was suspended, all 13 were either members or observers at the OAS. Together, the 12 countries account for 63% of the world's CO² emissions.

Also, among the OAS member states are 20 of the world's and the hemisphere's greatest victims of climate change – seven in the Central American Integration System (SICA) of the OAS and 13 in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Group⁸.

The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) points out that "... it is estimated that Central America produces only a minimal portion of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions: less than 0.3% of emissions without land-use change, and less than 0.8% of net total emissions".⁹ Yet, the global climate risk index created by the organization German Watch reports "Honduras as the country in the world most affected by climate risk between 1994-2013; Nicaragua is the fourth; Dominican Republic is the eighth; Guatemala is the ninth; El Salvador is the twelfth; Belize, the twenty-first, Costa Rica, the sixtieth; and Panama, the ninetieth".¹⁰

Regarding the CARICOM member states, the total CO² emissions of ten of the 14 countries (recorded in 2011) including Trinidad and Tobago, which has the largest emissions, amounts to roughly 0.166% of the world's total. Apart from Trinidad and Tobago (0.115%), the other 9 countries emit as follows: Suriname (0.017%), Guyana (0.015%), Barbados (0.008%), Grenada (0.004%), Saint Lucia (0.002%), Antigua and Barbuda (0.002%), Saint Kitts and Nevis (0.001%), Dominica (0.001%), and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (0.001%).¹¹

Since these results were published in 2011, the CO² emissions continued to be so small for all 14 countries in the CARICOM Group that only Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica were recorded in 2019 and 2020,¹² This is likely to change for Guyana from 2022 and onwards because of the discovery and production of offshore oil and gas, although its CO² emissions are likely to be offset by the country's preservation of its substantial rainforests, which make it an important carbon sink. Despite being minimum

⁸ Belize is geographically a part of Central America and politically a member of CARICOM. The Dominican Republic is geographically a part of the Caribbean, but politically a member of SICA. For the purposes of accurate measurement, Belize is listed here, geographically as one of the seven SICA members and the Dominican Republic is also listed as a SICA member and not in CARICOM of which it is not a member state.

⁹ ECLAC, Climate Change in Central America: Potential Impacts and Public Policy Options.

https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/39150/7/S1800827_en.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ According to data from the World Resources Institute Climate Analysis Indicators Tool (WRI CAIT) and the US Energy Information Administration (EIA); see:

https://www.ipsnews.net/Library/2019/02/2017_USAID_GHG-Emissions-Factsheet_Eastern-and-Southern-Caribbean-Regional.pdf (USAID, 2017)

¹² For the most and least emitters of CO₂, see: (World Population Review, 2022)

contributors to climate change, Caribbean countries are also among the greatest victims (as discussed later in this Report).

Given that 12 of the world's largest CO² emitters and 20 of the greatest victims are either Permanent Member States or Permanent Observers of the OAS, the Organization is well placed to initiate discussions between them, both formally and informally, that could lead to expert reports on what initiatives they could launch jointly, and actions they could take together, to address climate change in beneficial ways. No one would expect these very different nations to agree on every detail and every priority but given that the security and well-being and the survival of the planet depend on international cooperation, they might, at least, agree on actions that could institutionalize meaningful and beneficial measures.

The process would not be an alternative to IPCC and the Conference of the Parties (COP) process, but an effort by a smaller group to achieve a breakthrough where the larger group has not.

The Caribbean States Members of the OAS

In 1994 the effects of Climate Change and Global warming had already become evident as a grave threat to the survival of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific and the Caribbean. In that year, the government of the Caribbean Island, Barbados, hosted the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States at which the Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA) was adopted, focusing on sustainable development through adaptation to climate change impacts¹³.

Caribbean governments, under the umbrella of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), approached the OAS to request support for the development of regional projects aimed at building capacity to adapt to climate change¹⁴. The OAS and CARICOM jointly organized a series of national and regional workshops to facilitate maximum stakeholder consultation on climate change issues.

The result was a proposal, formed in the latter part of 1995, for the Caribbean Planning for Adaptation to Climate Change (CPACC) project, which was submitted for funding to the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Being small contributors to the production of greenhouse gas emissions, but extremely vulnerable to the impact of climate change, the Caribbean SIDS were well-positioned to qualify for assistance from the GEF¹⁵.

The four-year CPACC project, which ended on December 31, 2001, was the first major initiative in the Caribbean Region designed to support countries to prepare for the

¹³ (Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, 2022).

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ (Debb, 2002)

adverse effects of global climate change on coastal areas through vulnerability assessment, adaptation planning and capacity building¹⁶. CPACC was approved and granted USD \$5.6 million. Lasting from 1997 to 2001, CPACC was implemented by the World Bank, executed by the OAS, and overseen by a Project Advisory Committee chaired by CARICOM¹⁷.

Participating countries in CPACC included the majority of CARICOM members: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago¹⁸. Haiti was not a member of CARICOM when the CPACC was signed in 1995 and Suriname was not a member of the CPACC.

Some of the specific project achievements of the CPACC include the installation of 18 sea level and climate monitoring systems, along with related data management and information networks in the 12 countries, enhanced negotiation to relay regional priorities addressed to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol, and strengthen partnerships with banks and insurance companies¹⁹.

Before completion of CPACC, the Caribbean region successfully negotiated a CAD\$3.5 million grant from the Canadian Climate Change Development Fund of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). This grant supported CPACC's successor, the Adapting to Climate Change in the Caribbean (ACCC) project.

The CARICOM Climate Change Centre presented a study to the OAS in 2013, led by Carlos Fuller who is presently the Belizean ambassador to the UNCCC. Ambassador Fuller advanced the notions that more adverse than beneficial impacts on biological and socioeconomic systems are projected as a result of rising sea levels, reduced precipitation and higher temperatures²⁰. The adverse effects were identified as: weather-related mortality; increase in vector diseases; reduced crop yields; increased migration; deforestation; change in water supply; erosion of beaches; and loss of habitat and species.

In 2013, projections were that, by 2039, the temperature would rise to 1.06 degrees.; and by the end of 2099, the world's temperature would rise to 4.18 degrees Celsius causing sea level to rise by approximately 5 mm annually. For small islands in the Caribbean, a 0.5 m rise in sea level will result in 38% beach loss, which will see 1/3 of turtle nesting habitat being lost, and coral bleaching will become a natural

¹⁶ (Organization of American States, 2002)

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ (Fuller, 2007)

phenomenon, affecting the oceans' health and reducing its biodiversity.

It was pointed out in this same report that there is insufficient information on sea surface temperature and less scientific literature available for submission to the IPCC to prepare its 4th Assessment Report in 2007 than there was when it prepared the 3rd Assessment Report in 2001. The reason for less scientific literature is uncertain, but it may be attributable to lack of financial resources and brain drain issues in the Caribbean. Previous projects, funded by the CPACC, had been outsourced to international specialists. No training mechanism had been set up by the CPACC to attract Caribbean nationals to study climatic models and natural resource monitoring systems. Hence, at the external experts departed, there was no local capacity to fill the gap.

OAS - Agreement Establishing the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research

In Montevideo, Uruguay on May 13, 1992, the Agreement Establishing the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research (IAI) was adopted and signed by 16 governments, laying the foundation for the Institute's "function as a regional intergovernmental organization that promotes interdisciplinary scientific research and capacity building to inform decision-makers on the continent and beyond"²¹. There are presently 19 Parties who convene annually at the COP to monitor and direct the Institute's activities. The members are: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela.

It is noteworthy that Jamaica is the only CARICOM country that has acceded to the Treaty and is a Party to the IAI. Given the threats to tourism and agriculture that climate change poses to CARICOM, it should be important for the existing Environment Departments of each Caribbean government to link themselves to the IAI so as to better enhance research and advance scientific and socio-economic solutions. A study conducted by the World Bank in 2002, on the outcomes of the CPACC, emphasized the importance of maintaining data management tools. Specifically, it stated:

"Data requirements for risk analysis and vulnerability assessments are very demanding. The Caribbean SIDS lacked adequate institutional capacity for climate and environment monitoring. Climate data are essential, and require systematic and continuous records that extend for several decades. Without basic information, it is not possible to estimate the extent of the climate change impacts on the resource base or in key economic sectors. Economic assessment of climate change impacts requires data and baseline studies not yet available in the Caribbean.

²¹ (Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research , 2022)

Future climate change adaptation projects should build upon CPACC achievements to continue strengthening the 18 institutional capabilities for climate monitoring and to facilitate the use of the data gathered.²²

One of the objectives of the IAI is to “[p]romote regional cooperation for interdisciplinary research on aspects of global change related to the sciences of the earth, ocean, atmosphere, and the environment” and one of the items on its Scientific Agenda is the “study of impacts of climate change on biodiversity”, but since then it has been amended to state “understanding climate change and variability in the Americas”. However, it is important to note that this amendment appears to have been an internal decision of the IAI and is not recorded with the Secretariat for Legal Affairs of the OAS.

The IAI celebrated its 30th year of operation in May 2022. Between 1992 through 2002, the IAI supported 74 research projects in 9 countries²³ utilizing its research budget exceeding USD\$5 million facility; between 2002 and 2012, 70 projects in 12 countries²⁴ received support utilizing a scientific budget exceeding USD\$11 million; and between 2012 and 2022, the IAI has supported 31 research projects in 9 countries²⁵ utilizing a scientific budget exceeding USD\$11 million²⁶. In the last ten years, the IAI granted 239 scholarships to students to focus on research pertaining to social context of global change to generate relevant information for decision making. These research projects produced more than 450 publications²⁷, which were helpful to the international climate regime.

It seems logical and beneficial for CARICOM countries to avail themselves of the opportunities for climate-related scientific and socio-economic research established by the IAI. Their participation would help them to: (a) contribute to a collaborative regional database that measures the Western Hemisphere’s environmental issues comprehensively; and (b) better inform regional policy makers in their decision making.

Climate Change and displaced people in the Caribbean

The effects of climate change have dislocated people in the Caribbean for decades. One of the accepted consequences of climate change, and its attendant global warming,

²² (Debb, 2002)

²³ The 9 countries that received IAI support between 1992-2002 were: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and USA.

²⁴ The 12 countries that received IAI support between 2002-2012 were: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, USA, and Venezuela.

²⁵ The 9 countries that received IAI support between 2012-2022 were: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Uruguay and USA.

²⁶ (Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research, 2022)

²⁷ Ibid

is more frequent and intense hurricanes.

As in Florida, Texas, North Carolina, and Louisiana in the United States, over the last five decades hurricanes have dislocated thousands of people in many Caribbean territories. While the US is large enough and economically wealthy enough to accommodate such persons in other parts of the country where they either find employment or are maintained by financial assistance from the Federal Government, Caribbean islands are too small and too economically constrained to accommodate dislocated persons financially. Given that the entire country is often affected, alternative employment is simply not available. One hurricane can cripple an entire small Caribbean country for up to 3 years before normalcy returns, and then, only after expenditure of borrowed money which leaves these countries with large debt burdens.

In 2017, Hurricane Irma destroyed the island of Barbuda causing the government to have to evacuate all the estimated 1,600 residents to Antigua. In 2019, Hurricane Dorian, displaced residents of the Abaco islands which form part of The Bahamas island chain. The residents of Barbuda and the Abaco islands had, in effect, become climate refugees. Fortunately, for the Barbuda residents, they could be moved to Antigua and maintained by the Government, because the islands of Antigua and Barbuda are a twin-island State.

Similarly, the Abaco islands' residents could be transferred to other islands that constitute the single State of the Bahamas. If Antigua and other larger islands of the Bahamas had also been decimated, none of their inhabitants could have sought legal refuge elsewhere, since there are no international legal provisions for dealing with 'climate refugees'.

Further, the Caribbean Island of Dominica has experienced hurricanes repeatedly that have not only dislocated significant numbers of their population but displaced them as well. Friendly neighboring Caribbean countries have voluntarily accepted displaced Dominicans, including children of school age and elderly persons requiring medical treatment. But, had it not been for the generosity of neighboring states, the people of Dominica would have endured more hardship than they have by the destruction of hurricanes.

[Climate Change and Debt Accumulation in the Caribbean](#)

International and hemispheric development institutions link the high indebtedness of many Caribbean countries to the effects on their economies of climate change. The response of international financial institutions (IFIs) to providing financing for rebuilding after hurricanes and other natural disasters has usually been slow and cumbersome. The World Bank, for instance, says "rather than immediate disaster relief, the Bank sees its primary focus to support near and longer-term recovery and reconstruction in order

to reduce the vulnerability of affected communities”.²⁸ The International Monetary Fund (IMF) links its financing assistance “in a natural emergency” with the aim of “meeting immediate foreign exchange financing needs”, and then, only when it “is satisfied that the member will cooperate with the Fund in finding solutions to its balance of payments difficulties”.²⁹

In the case of those Caribbean countries that are ranked as ‘middle income’ or ‘high income’, they have been ‘graduated’ (a euphemistic terms for ‘barred’) by IFIs, thus depriving them of access to low-cost financing, and pushing them to borrow on the international commercial market at high interest rates with short repayment periods. Indeed, nine Caribbean governments are rated among the top 13 most indebted in the Latin American and Caribbean region based on their debt-to-GDP percentage, precisely because they were forced to borrow money repeatedly after natural disasters or exogenous shocks.

These Caribbean governments are: Suriname (132.2%), Barbados (121%), Belize (101.9%), Dominica (99.7%), Antigua and Barbuda (94.8%), St Lucia (92.4%), Bahamas (91.3%), St. Vincent and the Grenadines (87.8%), and Jamaica (83.7%). In Latin America, only the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (307%), Brazil (91%), and Bolivia (86.1%) rate alongside or higher than the 9 Caribbean countries identified here.³⁰

A debt-to-GDP ratio of 60% is regarded by the World Bank and the IMF as a prudential limit for developed countries. Both financial institutions regard exceeding this limit as a threat to fiscal sustainability. For developing and emerging economies, 40% is the suggested debt-to-GDP ratio that should not be breached on a long-term basis.

However, in April 2022, Alicia Bárcena, the Executive Secretary on the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), told a Ministerial Meeting of the Group of 24 that: “The issuance of SDRs and other initiatives to expand liquidity (such as FACE) must also be complemented by action towards reforming the international debt architecture. This would include the creation of a multilateral debt restructuring mechanism and the establishment of a multilateral credit rating agency”.³¹ The ECLAC statement was a response to the huge debt burden of Caribbean countries, and recognition that repayment of the debt is so onerous that governments are left with little or no fiscal space in which to provide for catastrophes or to provide relief to the poor and vulnerable. This reality was evident during the height of the health and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which crippled most Caribbean economies, increasing unemployment and expanding poverty.

²⁸ (Brettonwoods Project, 2005)/

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ (Statista, 2022)

³¹ (Bárcena, 2021)

Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Mottley has called for a debt repayment system for Caribbean countries "similar to what was granted to Britain after World War II that allowed that country to have the fiscal space to return to a path of development".³²

Climate Refugees and the Countries of Central America

The UN Human Rights Commission's accepted definition of "refugee" is: "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." This definition is drawn from the anachronistic 1951 Refugee Convention.³³ This narrow definition, reached 71 years ago when climate change was not yet an overarching threat to the world, has made it difficult for the international community to adopt the concept of climate refugees.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), such as *Climate Refugees*, an independent, non-profit organization created to bring attention and action to help people displaced across borders because of climate change, suggests that "climate refugees" are persons whose rights as human beings require protection because these persons are displaced internally and across borders as a result of climate change.³⁴ Many NGOs and the World Bank forecast a grim picture of internal displacement in the millions, as the adverse effects of climate change induce more extreme weather, rising sea levels, threaten food security and impact livelihoods.

Kristalina Georgieva, the Chief Executive Officer of the World Bank, in a foreword to a comprehensive 2018 report, entitled "Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration" warns that in studying the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America, the report reached the "startling conclusion is that they (these regions) may have to cope with more than 143 million internal climate migrants by 2050 unless concerted action is taken at the national and global levels"³⁵.

Up to 10.6 million people in Latin America could become internal 'climate migrants' by 2050, stressing the resources of countries that are already insecure and impoverished.³⁶ Additionally, the IPCC 4th Assessment Report indicated that for Canada and the United States, future population growth is likely to be dominated by immigration³⁷.

³² (Now Grenada, 2021)

³³ (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022)

³⁴ (Climate Refugees, 2022)

³⁵ (World Bank, 2018)

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007)

The urgency in Central America - Climate and irregular migration

The countries in the so-called 'Northern Triangle' are Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador are experiencing growing numbers of irregular emigration (eventually becoming refugees) because of the effects of climate change. Environmental changes gravely impact rural residents particularly in Guatemala and El Salvador. These countries are among the top 15 countries world-wide most exposed to natural disasters, especially earthquakes and droughts³⁸. In the case of Guatemala in the Suchitupéquez region, smallholders experienced their staple crops, such as maize, dying by approximately 30% between 2009-2011 due to the extended periods of drought, inconsistent with the typical seasonal changes as it rains more during the winter months and the rains that used to come in April now only come towards the end of May³⁹.

To survive and adapt to climatic changes, smallholders have adjusted their harvesting seasons from winter months to summer, so that the young plants have a better chance of survival, but that entails more expensive irrigation systems and using seeds more resistant to drought⁴⁰. The government's debt payment obligations to the IFIs have made it difficult to help finance technical support for climate adaptive projects.

With little to no money to feed their families, these smallholders like many other vulnerable groups end up having to face the choice of starvation or migration.

In 2019, the World Bank reported that approximately one million children in Guatemala under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition, which is irreversible. Consequently, the country's human capital, an important resource for economic productivity, deteriorates as malnutrition can affect a child's cognitive development by less than 40%⁴¹. The World Bank's Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean region at the time stated: "Without productive human capital, countries cannot sustain economic growth, as they lack a labor force ready for high-skill jobs and are unable to compete in the global economy. Worse still, they cannot reduce extreme poverty."⁴²

Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador constitute "the Dry Corridor" that cuts across Central America through Costa Rica and Panama, and which experiences severe drought conditions, or too much rain at the wrong time, thus destroying crops⁴³. All three countries have high poverty rates and lack economic opportunity. Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador have poverty rates of 59.3%, 61.9%, and 29.2%, respectively. In rural areas in particular, poverty rates and socioeconomic conditions are worse; 76%

³⁸ (Sigelmann, 2019)

³⁹ (Lawrence, 2011)

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ (Trotsenburg, 2019)

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ (Chang, 2021)

of residents in the Western Highlands of Guatemala live below the national poverty line and 27% live in extreme poverty.⁴⁴

While there are arguments that Guatemala's geographical location is what exposes it to extreme weather events, the evidence confirms that climate change worsens the situation. If climate mitigation solutions are not financed and implemented soon, then the issue of people seeking refuge in the US will worsen. So too, will malnutrition as it extends far beyond the Dry Corridor. Ultimately, this will lead to disruption of the supply chains of the Global North countries, which depend on food exports from its international trading partners.

A World Food Programme study revealed that Dry Corridor residents, in at least 72% of the interviewed households, have applied for emergency coping mechanisms to manage food insecurity in their household, such as selling their land⁴⁵, but ultimately found that emigration was the answer⁴⁶.

In 2015, an El Niño drought phenomenon that lasted for two years destroyed 60% of maize and 80% of bean crops in the Northern Triangle, resulting in more than 3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and 1.5 million people affected by food insecurity⁴⁷. Migrant families who left the region between 2014 and 2016 cited "no food" being the crucial factor for emigrating to the United States of America⁴⁸.

Legal framework for climate refugee status

The first time that human mobility was recognized in international climate policy was at the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) held in 2010, when Parties to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC) adopted the Cancun Adaptation Framework, including paragraph 14(f)⁴⁹ which invited:

"... all Parties to enhance action on adaptation under the Cancun Adaptation Framework... by undertaking, inter alia, the following: (f) Measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation, where appropriate, at national, regional and international levels"⁵⁰

At the time of writing, no nation has developed an asylum mechanism that offers legal

⁴⁴ (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2018)

⁴⁵ (Seay-Fleming, 2018)

⁴⁶ (Sigelmann, 2019)

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ (Refugees Migrants, 2017)

⁵⁰ Ibid

protections to persons fleeing their country because of climate change-related issues. Ioane Teitiota, a Pacific Islander seeking refugee status in New Zealand, on the basis that rising sea levels caused by climate change threatened his country's existence, and therefore his very own existence, was issued an order of deportation by a New Zealand's Immigration and Protection Tribunal as national laws dealing with refugees did not address the danger of climate change⁵¹. He was deported from New Zealand to his island nation, Kiribati, in September 2015, not because the judge disputed the reality that high tides pose as a risk to his country, but because there was no legislation in place to protect Teitiota's claim for asylum as a climate refugee.

Subsequently, Teitiota filed a claim against the government of New Zealand at the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) in February 2016 on the basis that his human rights were violated. Amnesty International released a statement on January 20, 2020, announcing the success of the ground-breaking asylum case, in which the UNHRC held "that governments must take into account the human rights violations caused by the climate crisis when considering deportation of asylum seekers"⁵².

Under international human rights law, the principle of non-refoulement guarantees that no one should be returned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm, and this principle applies to all migrants at all times, irrespective of migration status⁵³. In the case of *Teitiota v. New Zealand*, the UNHRC ruled that Teitiota's human rights were violated as supported by Articles 6 and 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁵⁴. The decision sets a global precedent for how the international community should act to have climate-related migration as a relevant consideration, in addition to

⁵¹ (Watson, 2021)

⁵² (Amnesty International, 2020)/

⁵³ (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018)

⁵⁴ Article 6 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates that: "Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life."

Article 6 (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates that: "When deprivation of life constitutes the crime of genocide, it is understood that nothing in this article shall authorize any State Party to the present Covenant to derogate in any way from any obligation assumed under the provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide."

Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates that: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation." <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

mitigating greenhouse emissions, when forming national regulations to satisfy its human rights obligations.

But, of course, the decisions and recommendations of the UNHCR are not enforceable. They depend on the willingness of nations to accept and implement them by codifying them in national laws. So far, this has not happened and there is no obvious enthusiasm by the nations, which are the largest CO² emitters to do so. However, there is some hope that, as the effects of climate change grow, affecting the environment of all countries, including the major polluters, that action will be taken in their own interest.

For instance, a year after the Teitiotia decision by the UNHCR, and less than a month after coming into office in January 2021, US President Joseph Biden issued the green light for his administration to study the interlinked challenges between migration and climate change pursuant to his Executive Order 14013, issued on February 4, 2021, called *“Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration”*⁵⁵. The Biden administration wishes to reform policy that legitimizes climate change as an item marker for refugee status. This is reflected in the Biden administration’s *Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration* that was released on October 21, 2021. According to Erol Yayboke, Director and Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Report is valuable as:

*“It thoroughly and accurately assesses the nuanced interrelationship between climate change and migration. When conducted in a regular, safe, and orderly manner, human migration offers solutions to many of the economic and demographic challenges ahead of us. But climate change is forcing people to make difficult decisions about leaving home on quicker timelines and under more precarious circumstances. In this way, climate change is a threat multiplier, exacerbating the underlying drivers of conflict, straining public budgets, offering new opportunities for smugglers and other bad actors, widening resource inequities, and increasing political and social tensions.”*⁵⁶

However, adoption of such a position by any US administration would require legislation approved by the US Congress. There is no guarantee that such legislation would be adopted. President Biden’s actions, as described above, are one positive element in tackling this huge and multi-faceted problem.

Further, within the OAS, account should be taken of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, adopted by a Colloquium on the International Protection of Refugees in

⁵⁵ (The White House, 2021 *“Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration”*.)

⁵⁶ (Yayboke, 2021)

Central America, Mexico, and Panama, which was adopted at Cartagena, Colombia in November 1984.

The Colloquium recognized even then (38 years ago) that “that the refugee situation in Central America has evolved in recent years to the point at which it deserves special attention”.⁵⁷ It also acknowledged that it is necessary to consider “enlarging the concept of a refugee” and recommended that “the definition or concept of a refugee for use in the region is one which, in addition to containing the elements of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, includes among refugees, persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances, which have seriously disturbed public order”.⁵⁸ It can be argued that the effects of climate change are seriously disturbing public order.

Loss and Damage

Emerging decades ago as a relatively obscure plea by small island states, loss and damage, as a result of climate change, has now gained recognition as the third pillar of international climate policy, after mitigation and adaptation⁵⁹. On December 19, 1991, the concept of “loss and damage” was first proposed by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) – a multilateral negotiating body of nations facing the brunt force of extreme weather events and other climate change risks – when seeking to introduce an insurance mechanism in the initial drafting of the UNFCCC. Specifically, the UNFCCC document states at Paragraph 3(a):

“The financial burden of loss and damage suffered by the most vulnerable small island and low-lying developing countries (hereinafter referred to as ‘Group 1 countries’) as a result of sea level rise shall be distributed in an equitable manner amongst the industrialized developed countries (hereinafter referred to as ‘Group 2 countries’) by means of a Pool”.⁶⁰

As the measure of greenhouse emissions are significantly higher in industrialized nations, thus harming the ozone layer and causing further damage to the environment, which includes but is not limited to the reduction of biodiversity in the seas and land due to coral bleaching and land erosion on coastal areas as a result of rising sea levels in vulnerable nations, it was argued that climate financing contributions for mitigation and

⁵⁷ (Organization of American States , 1984)

⁵⁸ Ibid., Art. III, para 3

⁵⁹ (Carbon Brief, 2017)

⁶⁰ (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1991)

adaptive measures should come from them. The “Pool” was regarded as compensation for developing countries.

Later in 2010, the Green Climate Fund (GFC) was spearheaded by the United Nations. The GFC garnered the commitment of several developed nations to raise \$100 billion in climate financing to help the most vulnerable nations impacted by climate change by 2020. However, at COP26 in 2021 in Glasgow, it was clear that the commitment was not being fulfilled; there was no further binding commitment to do so.

This development attracted widespread criticism from international NGOs and from small island developing states.⁶¹

The US and Loss and Damage in the context of its world leadership

“Loss and damage”, collectively, is one of the pillars of the Paris Climate Change Accord. While President Barack Obama was in office, he issued a pledge that the United States would donate \$3 billion in climate financing. To date, the United States has submitted \$1 billion dollars towards the GFC, of which \$500 million was submitted three days before Obama left office. Once President Biden came into office, he restored the United States’ membership to the Paris Climate Agreement and pledged to contribute financing in the amount of \$1.6 billion to the GFC. The pledge has not been satisfied to date. The US wants countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to “go Green”, discouraging the use of fossil fuels. However, the US has done little to provide the region with climate financing of any sort to improve infrastructure that can cater to their renewable energy goals.

Nevertheless, climate-related issues are being felt globally, affecting all economies of the world to one extent or another. In the US real estate industry, climate change has always been a factor in investment decisions, but it has not deterred persons from wanting to live near the water and in the woods. But it all boils down to who can afford the highly priced premiums and whether banks are willing to issue mortgages for properties that are likely to be under water or consumed by wildfires in the next 10 years. According to Jesse Keenan, Associate Professor at Tulane University, the US can have \$15-\$20 billion loss events every year. In recent years, the US has had between \$300-\$400 billion of losses from extreme weather events in just the past decade, which have an impact on vulnerable communities⁶².

Furthermore, according to Sean Kevelighan, President, and CEO of Insurance Information Institute, in the US, approximately 90% of insurance losses are related to natural catastrophes and the amount of loss costs have increased to 700% since the 80s,

⁶¹ (Rowling, 2021)

⁶² (CNBC , 2021)

thus causing a shift where insurance companies have been paying close attention to climate risk⁶³. Since insurance coverage and premiums in the Caribbean and Central America are linked to the US market, limitations on the type of coverage and the price of premiums, set for the US, have a knock-on effect in these two neighboring regions, with the result that insurance is becoming unaffordable for many, affecting both reconstruction and building resilience.

This emphasizes another aspect of the symbiotic relationship – or common interests – between the US and its neighbors, which both sides should recognize and develop in their mutual interest and in the fight to combat climate change, especially in the context of the much-vaunted slogan “Build Back Better”.

It is especially noteworthy that in the context of “Advancing sustainable and inclusive development” – one of the four main pillars of the OAS - the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (REDESCA) recall that the Inter-American human rights system recognizes a healthy environment as an autonomous right, interdependent with other human rights, as has been established by Advisory Opinion number 23 or in the judgment of the case *Lhaka Hontat (Our land) v. Argentina* of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.⁶⁴

Limitation by 2015 Paris Agreement on loss and damage

Note should be taken that the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, while recognizing in Article 8 that loss and damage should be averted, minimized and addressed, on one hand, to reject its own terms as a basis for liability or compensation.

The 2015 Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at COP 21 in Paris, on 12 December 2015 and entered into force on November 4, 2016⁶⁵. Article 8 (1) of the Paris Agreement states:

“Parties recognize the importance of averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events, and the role of sustainable development in reducing the risk of loss and damage.”⁶⁶

However, paragraph 51 in the accompanying addendum of the Paris Agreement called Decision 1/CP.21 states the following:

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ (IACHR, 2021)

⁶⁵ (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change , 2022)

⁶⁶ (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015)

“Agrees that Article 8 of the Agreement does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation;”⁶⁷

The alarming reality is that Paragraph 51 of Addendum to the Paris Agreement stipulates that no country shall be held liable for its non-compliance to the policies set out in the Treaty. Paragraph 51 does not allow parties to pursue liability of other parties for loss and damage or to seek compensation. Therefore, this structural inequity within the UNFCCC framework inhibits the right of those that suffer environmental damage to claim reparations.

The Canary in a Coal Mine

However, three small island states have decided to try to test the legal effectiveness of Paragraph 51. Antigua and Barbuda (Caribbean), Tuvalu (Oceania in the Pacific Ocean) and Palau (Western Pacific) registered a new commission with the United Nations on October 31, 2021, creating the possibility of claiming damages from major polluting countries through judicial means, such as the UN International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (UNITLOS)⁶⁸.

The activities of the Commission were set out, *inter alia*, as follows:

- (1) The activities of the Commission shall include *inter alia* assisting Small Island States in promoting the definition, implementation, and progressive development of principles of international law concerning climate change and the marine environment, including through the jurisprudence of international courts and tribunals.
- (2) Having regard to the fundamental importance of oceans as sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases and the direct relevance of the marine environment to the adverse effects of climate change on Small Island States, the Commission shall be authorized to request advisory opinions from the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on any legal question within the scope of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, consistent with Article 21 of the Tribunal’s Statute and Article 138 of its Rules.⁶⁹

In in respect to climate change, these three small island states believe that they are ‘the canary in the coal mine’; it would take their extinction to warn others that conditions are developing that threaten the World’s survival.

⁶⁷ (UNFCCC, 2016)

⁶⁸ (Saber, 2021)

⁶⁹ (Commonwealth Foundation, 2021).

At a media conference in Glasgow, launching the Commission, the Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister, Gaston Browne, explained that: “Small Island States’ emission of greenhouse gases is negligible, but they bear the overwhelming burden of its catastrophic effects, including persistent destruction, repeated costs of rebuilding and huge debts to finance resilience. This injustice must end. We insist that those States most responsible for this dire situation respect their legal obligations to stop global warming and to provide compensation to its victims. The time for empty promises is over.”⁷⁰

The Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Kausea Natano, stressed that: “For us, climate justice is a matter of survival. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, the decline of marine resources – these threaten our very existence. We see better than anyone else what is being done to our beautiful planet. It is time to put words into action, to save Small Island States, and to save the world from impending disaster.”⁷¹

Furthermore, the novel move saw the support from several international actors, as we have said: “[f]rom the beginning of our administration, we have maintained that international environmental responsibilities are legally enforceable responsibilities”⁷².

At the time of writing this report, the legal Commission is still in its developmental phase and a request for an advisory opinion has not yet been issued to the UNITLOS. In an interview with the Author, Dr. Payam Akhavan, human rights lawyer representing the Commission, explained that, as it stands, the Commission is already authorized to engage with the UNITLOS; however it is open to all small island states to join and of course this will be desirable to enjoy the full representation of small island stands.”⁷³ Dr. Akhavan further advised that the key importance of the claim is to “clarify the obligations of the major polluters of small island states and it will shape the future negotiations under UNFCCC.”⁷⁴

The Development of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index

On December 17, 2021, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 76/203, which established an expert panel to finalize the framework and recommend the implementation of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI). The purpose of the MVI would be to consider all the factors that cause small states to be more vulnerable than other larger and more developed states.

⁷⁰ Statement issued to the media in Glasgow on October 31, 2021

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² (Almagro, @Almagro_OEA2015, 2021)

⁷³ Phone interview with Dr. Payam Akhavan, April 29, 2022

⁷⁴ Phone interview with Dr. Payam Akhavan, April 29, 2022

In recent years, many academics and organizations have been developing Multidimensional Vulnerability Indices (MVI). Assa and Meddeb (2021)⁷⁵ are developing an MVI for the UNDP that “can be used for evaluating countries’ eligibility for concessional financing” in order break with today’s GDP criterion. They show that small islands are more vulnerable than the product indicator expresses.

The authors uses 11 indicators that they group into four dimensions:

Economic vulnerability dimension

1. Export concentration
2. Export instability
3. Agricultural instability

Financial vulnerability dimension

4. Tourism revenues as share of exports)
5. Remittances as percentage of GDP)
6. Net foreign direct investment inflows as percentage of GDP

Environmental vulnerability dimension

7. Agriculture (and fishing, forestry, and hunting) as share of GDP
8. Victims of disasters

Geographic vulnerability dimension

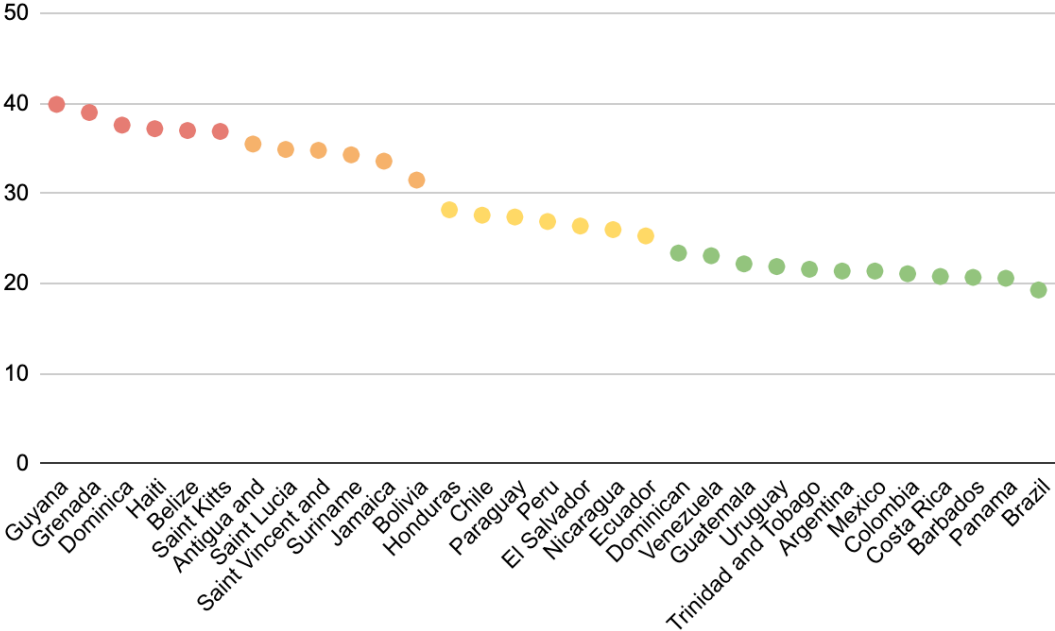
9. Remoteness and without coastline
10. Share of population in low elevated coast zones
11. Share of population living in drylands

As can be seen, not only can the MVI of the UNDP be useful as an alternate criterion to GDP for preferential access to financing, but also in identifying public vulnerability reduction policies.

A clusterization exercise was carried out on OAS member states using the UNDP’s MVI data. It explains the composition of each cluster and what characterizes each cluster using the components of that Index.

⁷⁵ Jacob Assa and Riad Meddeb (2021): Towards a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index [UNDP-Towards-a-Multidimensional-Vulnerability-Index.pdf](#)

Figure 5. MVI Clusters in OAS Member States



Different factors of the dimensions, or components, of the UNDP’s MVI explain the composition of each cluster.

The countries grouped in cluster 4, of greatest vulnerability (Guyana, Grenada, Dominica, Haiti, Belize, and Saint Kitts and Nevis) share certain characteristics:

1. Highly dependent on foreign direct investment;
2. Highly dependent on the tourism sector; and
3. Highly dependent on remittances.

Cluster 3 (Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Jamaica, and Bolivia) have:

1. High-average dependence on the tourism sector,
2. High-average dependence on foreign direct investment; and
3. Moderate dependence on remittances.

In addition, other explanatory factors include economic component items, such as export concentration, and geographic and environmental factors (as in the case of Bolivia).

Cluster 2, average vulnerability (Honduras, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Ecuador), is heterogeneous. The countries in it share some characteristics based on the vulnerability model, such as

1. Geographic and remoteness factors (in the South American cases); and
2. Dependence on remittance; or
3. Risk of displacement (in the Central American cases).

The countries grouped in the least multidimensional vulnerability cluster (Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Guatemala, Uruguay, Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica, Barbados, Panama, and Brazil) are even more heterogeneous, although their reduced vulnerability is explained primarily by economic and low financial dependence factors.

For countries such as Mexico and Brazil, healthy economic and financial factors, with a high level of diversification, explain their ranking, with the environmental component (drought risk) representing moderate vulnerability.

In Costa Rica, moderate investment flows, tourism, and good agro-ecological practices explain the resilience.

In cases such as Guatemala, for example, vulnerability is explained by high dependence on remittances and environmental vulnerability, despite favorable economic factors.

For the case of Uruguay, of low vulnerability, geographic factors (such as remoteness) are considered to be the only variable in red.

There are some paradigmatic cases in this cluster. In the case of Venezuela, for example, dependence on tourism, foreign direct investment, and remittances are measured as virtually nil – resulting in a low financial vulnerability assessment, using the UNPD's MVI metric. Similarly, Argentina has few financial ties (low levels of tourism, remittances, and investment).

As the MVI's purpose is to show the importance of vulnerabilities for preferential access to financing from international lending institutions, it basically reflects factors inherent to the smallest countries (dependence on foreign investment) and historical-structural factors that are hard to alter in the short term (dependence on tourism, dependence on remittances).

Nonetheless, the clusterization exercise carried out in the OAS shows the need for structural change and export diversification policies that would enable the weight of tourism and remittances in income from abroad to be reduced.

But there are also other vulnerability indices that can contribute elements for public policy formulation.

Ram et al.⁷⁶ are working on a Multidimensional Index based on the work of the Caribbean Development Bank, focusing on structural characteristics of small island states that make them more vulnerable than larger states to shocks.

The work indicates that “[t]hese structural characteristics are independent of a country’s political will or policy-induced factors and therefore do not result from recent policy choices of the government.” (emphasis added)⁷⁷

In that work, economic vulnerabilities in small states are linked to countries’ inherent factors and historical-structural characteristics, such as:

- (a) remoteness from global markets;
- (b) lack of diversification;
- (c) dependence on external financing;
- (d) susceptibility to natural disasters;
- (e) small internal markets and lack of economies of scale; and
- (f) dependence on non-renewable sources of energy (emphasis added).

Among the above-mentioned structural factors, those that we consider can be addressed through public policy are lack of diversification and dependence on non-renewable energy sources.

In their proposed Index, the authors also include the social dimension, which incorporates measurements of social vulnerability, such as indicators of health care, education, gender equity, poverty, and crime. All these variables reflect areas for possible State action.

According to that Index, in 2017, none of the Caribbean countries analyzed were included in the low vulnerability group. Haiti was the included in the high vulnerability category, and the rest of the countries were included in “medium-low vulnerability” and “medium-high vulnerability.”

What vulnerabilities should an MVI take into account?

This vulnerability approach using multidimensional indices leads to reflection on the type of vulnerability a country may have:

⁷⁶ Ram J., Cotton J., Frederick R. and W. Elliot: “Measuring Vulnerability: A Multidimensional Vulnerability Index for the Caribbean

⁷⁷ The added emphasis on “recent” underscores that some of these structural characteristics may be policy-induced, but their timeframe may be longer than that of the next shock.

a. **Vulnerabilities inherent to the country where work cannot be done:** geographic factors (island states, remote from global markets), size factors (small internal market, leading to problems of scale for the implementation of activities requiring a critical mass or diverse specializations).

b. **Historical-structural characteristics that take time and for which action is expensive:** export diversification in terms of products and markets, change of energy matrix, reduction of dependence on tourism and remittances, and reduction of the weight of the primary sector. This point is especially important.

The pandemic has deepened existing vulnerabilities for millions of small producers and agricultural workers, heightening uncertainty for much of the population.⁷⁸

Risks at the international level and supply- and demand-side risks pose risks to international agricultural trade.

International risks include (a) raw material price volatility; and (b) exchange rate fluctuations. Supply-side risks include (a) labor supply reduction; (b) logistics and transport interruptions; (c) domestic price volatility; and (d) trade policies that impose goods import/export restrictions.

Demand-side risks include (a) interruptions impacting access to essential products; (b) purchasing power reduction; (c) economic slowdown; (d) unemployment; and (e) greater poverty and inequality.

Possible documented policy responses to risks such as those listed for agricultural trade include: digitization of bureaucratic and other procedures, including e-commerce; the use of ICTs to improve logistics, and others.⁷⁹

Urban-rural vulnerability differences are relevant in appropriate policy design. Rural areas have specific characteristics that require differentiated responses and are especially vulnerable to the impacts of shocks owing to factors such as informal work; poverty concentration; less social protection; and seasonality. In this context, special emphasis needs to be placed on children.⁸⁰ Our region's rural areas are impacted by poverty rates of over 48%. This makes it essential to understand the challenges small farmers face.⁸¹

⁷⁸ FAO / ECLAC, Analysis and responses of Latin America and the Caribbean to the effects of COVID-19 on food systems, No. 2 (April 2020)

⁷⁹ FAO / ECLAC, Analysis and responses of Latin America and the Caribbean to the effects of COVID-19 on food systems, No. 3 (May 2020)

⁸⁰ FAO / ECLAC, Analysis and responses of Latin America and the Caribbean to the effects of COVID-19 on food systems, No. 7 (April 2020) (June 2020)

⁸¹ IDB, Challenges for family agriculture in the context of COVID-19, (June 2020)

c. **Complex problems for which the State and civil society need to be strengthened**, as do relations between them, so as to be able to act on civil, political, and economic rights, education, health care, poverty, and equity.

Inequality and poverty have increased in the wake of the pandemic in the region and, in general, increase after each shock. Vulnerable populations, such as those living in chronic poverty, have experienced the exacerbation of many adverse conditions not related to income: overcrowding, lack of access to water and sanitation, difficulties in following epidemiological recommendations to prevent infection during the pandemic, stressful situations, including domestic violence and child abuse, and service interruptions disproportionately impacting the population living in poverty (access to food, medical care, schooling, and early childhood services). Socioeconomic impacts are unevenly distributed among quintiles: losses tend to be greater for the population living in moderate poverty, the vulnerable, and the middle classes.⁸²

In the analysis of vulnerability, failure to take account of institutional and governance weaknesses that do not make it possible for States to ensure equitable access to rights in preferential access to external financing for vulnerability reduction is to condemn vulnerable countries to greater internal inequality.

Incorporating complex problems in the analysis (point c) means that response capacity must be incorporated in it; and that the analysis of vulnerabilities must be expanded to include resilience.

But it also entails **recognizing institutional weaknesses, governance weaknesses, and factors that may be associated with the fragility** of States.⁸³ The most fragile States are also those most vulnerable to shocks.

As it stands, IFIs do not provide concessional financing to developing states considered to be high-income or middle-income based on their GDP per capita or the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita. The purpose of the MVI is to serve as an additional measurement tool that provides a holistic view of a country's profile in terms of its capacity to sustain or recover from exogenous shocks. Gaston Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, and Erna Solberg, former Prime Minister of Norway are the Co-Chairs of the High-Level Panel of Experts.

⁸² Tulane University, Short- and Long-Run Distributional Impacts of COVID-19 in Latin America (November 2020)

⁸³ See for example: [Avoid a Fall or Fly Again: Turning Points of State Fragility \(imf.org\)](#) “While there are many ways to define fragile countries, reflecting its complexity, they seem to have common characteristics. These include: (i) significant institutional and policy implementation weakness; (ii) a fractious political context; (iii) severe domestic resource constraints; and (iv) high vulnerability to shocks.”; “In most of the academic studies, states are considered as fragile when their weak institutional capacity, political instability and weak governance severely limit the state's ability to guarantee security to its citizens and deliver basic public services”

In the process for this work an interview was conducted with Antigua and Barbuda’s ambassador to the UN, Aubrey Webson, who advised that there is progress on the MVI development, which will be presented to the UN’s Secretary-General for assessment before it is introduced to the UNGA in September 2022. When asked how the OAS could provide assistance to the development on the MVI, Ambassador Webson stated that “the OAS will be helpful if they emphasize the importance of the MVI as the GNI for vulnerable small island states”⁸⁴.

According to Ambassador Webson, who currently chairs the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) at the UN, the survivability of small island states would be aided by financing from IFIs in order to build sustainable and resilient infrastructure to withstand the effects of Climate Change.

The Need for Enlightened Leadership

The OAS has provided enlightened leadership on many issues, affecting the peoples of the Hemisphere, including human rights, democracy, and the right of people to live in freedom. The issue of climate change summons the OAS to provide such enlightened leadership now for the benefit of all its member states and the global community.

It is not adequate to say that other institutions are closely concerned with this issue and the OAS should leave it to them. Climate change and its consequences threaten the existence of some OAS member states and the well-being of all of them. Confronting it successfully requires political will, which will only come from forging political consensus – a task for which, in the Hemisphere, the OAS is not only ideally suited, but is also the only Organization that has the capacity to advance it.

⁸⁴ Phone interview with Ambassador Aubrey Webson, April 30, 2022

Summary of Recommendations

Based on the research and findings that informed this Report, the following recommendations are made:

1. Actions to curb the impacts of climate change derive from a number of ethical demands. At stake are the lives of millions in this and future generations, as well as their liberty and economic rights, and equity and justice.
2. Ethics prompts us not to become accustomed to the impacts of climate change.
3. Climate change has impacts that are cumulative for the vulnerable and that are accelerating. There is an urgent need for high-impact actions.

Based on the research and conclusions presented in this report, the OAS General Secretariat makes the following recommendations:

1. The international community as a whole should consider repeating his call for urgent action on climate change in any engagements in relevant international fora.
2. Ethical demands must appeal to the de facto powers and the status quo, who reiterate the thinking behind the negotiation of a problem that calls for non-negotiable ethics.
3. Those responsible must assume their responsibility. He who pollutes must pay, and he who pollutes more must pay more. It is time to implement a global price on carbon emission.
4. Not all countries suffer equally the consequences of climate change. The most vulnerable should have preferential terms for access to financing and to nonreimbursable funds; and trade preferences.
5. A global system of subsidies is absolutely essential if we seek solutions for climate change adaptation processes. At least five categories should be eligible to receive those subsidies in the form of preferential terms and/or nonreimbursable funds:
 - a. Small island states;
 - b. Developing countries with institutional weaknesses that lack capacity to bring public services to vulnerable populations;
 - c. Countries highly dependent on the exterior (as a result of export concentration, dependence on remittances, dependence on external investment);

- d. Countries whose infrastructure and housing have been impacted by climate change-related natural disasters;
 - e. Small family farmers or peasants whose recent crops have been damaged by a percentage greater than x%; and/or
 - f. Victims of climate change-related natural disasters.
6. We might encourage the creation of special fund to finance an expert study, focused on the critical challenges of climate change to the countries of Central America and the Caribbean particularly, but including climate effects on all OAS member states, that could inform discussion and consensus building within the OAS, and in OAS advocacy to international financial and development institutions.
7. Given that 13 of the OAS member states are caught in a debt trap that constrains their capacity to finance resilience from the effects of climate change and to rebuild after destruction, we advocate for debt relief for them with the International Finance and Development Institutions.
8. We encourage the member states of the CARICOM Group to avail themselves of the opportunities for climate-related scientific and socio-economic research established by the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research.
9. As the hemisphere's oldest and most mature political organization, the OAS, through the Secretary-General and the General Secretariat propose launching a campaign of greater awareness among international institutions of the dire situation in Central America, especially in the Northern Triangle countries, which is producing refugees as a consequence of the harmful effects of climate change.
10. The General Secretariat will seek funds to finance a study and report by an Expert Group with recommendations for both national and hemispheric action that could act as a catalyst for action for tackling irregular migration and refugees caused by the effects of climate change. Part of the Group's terms of reference will be consideration of defining "Climate Refugee" as well as proposing appropriate machinery for combatting the problem in all its aspects.
11. The Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI) will place on its agenda of work, the subject of loss and damage caused to member states by climate change and ways to address it.
12. The Secretary-General will convene (Brundtland Commission et al , 1987) a meeting of the OAS member states, which are members of the Association of Small Islands States (AOSIS) at the UN, to consult with them on how he could help to advance the recommendations of the UN High-Level Expert Group on the

creation of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) as a measurement of qualification for concessional and development financing from IFIs.

13. Noting that the U.S. administration is acting to reform policy that legitimizes climate change as an item marker for refugee status, the Secretary General will consider ways in which the OAS can support this initiative in the US Congress, including by providing testimony to relevant Committees. The “Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection”, which was issued by many Heads of Government of the OAS member states, while they were gathered for the Ninth Summit of the Americas, provides a sound basis for action in the US and all other member states.

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