Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CADRES</td>
<td>Caribbean Development Research Services Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDEMA</td>
<td>Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDM</td>
<td>Comprehensive Disaster Management</td>
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<td>CSSI</td>
<td>Caribbean Safe School Initiative</td>
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<td>ECA</td>
<td>Eastern Caribbean Area</td>
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<td>EMIS</td>
<td>Education Management Information System</td>
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<td>GAR</td>
<td>Global Assessment Report</td>
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<td>IADB</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
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<td>LAC</td>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
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<td>NDMO</td>
<td>National Disaster Management Office/Organisation</td>
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<td>NEMO</td>
<td>National Emergency Management Office/Organisation</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
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<td>UNDRR</td>
<td>United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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Acknowledgements

The experiences, lessons learned, and good practices shared by participants during the event showed how school safety is a key to ensuring education continuity, physical and mental wellbeing, and long-term development and economic goals. Our appreciation goes to everybody who contributed to the success of the workshop: Ministers of Education, Ministers of Finance, Permanent Secretaries, National Emergency Management Office directors, School Safety Focal Points, international financial institutions, NGOs, school manager, teachers, and staff, students and youth who participated in the event.

The Virtual Pre-Ministerial Forum was made possible thanks to the commitment and work by the Organising Team comprised of the Ministry of Education Culture, Youth and Sport of St. Maarten, the Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, CDEMA, IsraAID, UNDRR, UNESCO, GADRRRES, and the Regional Education Group for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Report prepared by Marcel Goyeneche M.

2021
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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the systemic nature of risk more evident than ever, highlighting the exposure of different societal systems to multiple hazards. Its unprecedented cascading effects have impacted all sectors and levels of our economies and societies. Caribbean countries have been responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic while at the same time implementing actions to mitigate the potential consequences of the upcoming hurricane season. As national and regional entities design recovery plans and other instruments, they present an opportunity to reiterate the value of education in building resilient societies and the need for multisectoral, multi-stakeholder, and regional coordination. In this order of ideas, the Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI), which aims to advance school safety in the Caribbean, is the regional mechanism to rehearse this link between education and resilience and secure coordination. In the context of systemic risk and a multi-hazard approach, it explores and identifies policy opportunities and gaps for Education Sector Resilience and regional coordination. Eighteen countries and territories have already signed the Declaration during the First and Second Ministerial Forum, and more Caribbean states are expected to follow suit during future Forums.

The Ministry of Education in Sint Maarten will host the Third Ministerial Forum and was initially scheduled for May 2021 but deferred to 2022. In its place, the “Virtual Caribbean Safe School Initiative Pre-Ministerial Forum: 2021 Regional Review on Systemic Risk” took place from March 15 until 26, 2021. The Virtual Pre-Ministerial helped maintain momentum around the regional dialogue on safe schools, capture the good practices and lessons learnt from the COVID-19 response, how the pandemic impacted hurricane season preparation activities, and other interacting factors that emerge within a multi-hazard context. It also served to define the topics to be discussed at the next III CSSI Ministerial Forum, aiming further to build education sector resilience in the Caribbean region.

The Forum consisted of four Special Sessions tailored to Ministers of Education and Permanent Secretaries to facilitate high-level discussions and decision-making, and six Technical Sessions complemented these high-level events, focusing on specific sectors and topics, namely: School Safety Focal Points; National Disaster Management Offices; inter-sectoral partners; practitioners; Youth; and school safety investments as a critical element of the economic recovery. These ten sessions were held over two weeks. Furthermore, a “Call for Good Practices” was launched across the region ahead of the Pre-Ministerial Forum, capturing experiences and evidence on the impact of disaster risk management in the education sector and sharing innovations emerging from past disaster experiences. In total, 381 people representing over 200 institutions registered to the event.

Technical Sessions provided a platform for sharing and discussing views on making the education sector more resilient through the lens of specific industries or actors. School Safety Focal Points brought forward concerns stemming from their experience implementing school safety agendas. Focal points highlighted how effectively addressing abuse and violence requires further legislation development and specialised institutions. Also, protecting investments in education infrastructure must be prioritised through maintenance, repair and retrofitting programmes with dedicated budget allocations. At the same time, reduce the instances of schools being used as shelters. School-level implementation of national programme-based school disaster management actions must be encouraged. Finally, regional disaster risk and resilience curricula framework for all levels developed and used as a reference by countries in the region.

The second technical session focused on the synergies between education and the disaster risk management sector. Addressing systemic risk requires systemic approaches, put into practice through multisectoral, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary management of different hazards, including biological ones. Session speakers underscored that national legislation must anchor collaboration and synergies between Ministries of Education and NEMOs or equivalent. Speakers raised how increasing capacity for identifying and understanding risk in the education sector will lead to better evidence-based decision-making about making schools safer and how the education sector can contribute to long-term resilience through its teaching processes. Finally, national and regional stakeholders invested in school safety need to refine the role and contribution of the private sector and further elaborate strategies to involve it in disaster preparedness and response. Clear contribution by the private sector can directly influence and improve education sector preparedness plans.
Technical Session 3 tackled how the education sector collaborates daily with other sectors, such as water, health, transport, infrastructure, telecommunication, and energy. More and more countries actively promote an intersectoral approach to their various workflows. Working across sectors requires a better understanding of how the CSSI Regional Roadmap and national agendas align and connect with risk reduction agendas from other sectors, including non-traditional partners. Non-traditional partners can contribute to safer school infrastructure, better school disaster risk reduction and resilience education, yet how to tap into this resource is not fully understood by stakeholders. At the same time, traditional and non-traditional partners must come together to enhance school curricula to address better Climate Change Adaptation and biological hazards, among others. At present, countries are missing out on opportunities to learn from one another due to insufficient prospects to exchange technical knowledge and staff involved in implementing school safety agendas.

Caribbean Youth has, over the years, displayed their resilience and showed resilience through core youth movements such as national student councils, youth parliaments, CARICOM youth ambassadors and other youth advocacy movements across the region. Their work has not been without challenges, as discussed during Technical session 4. Youth can contribute to inclusion, reduce the digital divide, improve school safety, foster child protection, address cyberbullying, and protect the environment. However, authorities need to take Youth more seriously and promote more active participation opportunities for this contribution. Leaders must provide youth participation beyond token consultations but create practical instances and opportunities for Youth to participate in regional decision-making processes related to the CSSI. This participation will lead to the inclusion of strategies in which national school safety agendas can involve and profit more effectively from the contribution by Youth.

Interviews with teachers, principals, school staff, government officials, and partners from various sectors allowed Technical Session 5 participants to hear about the special efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Speakers argued how specialised exchanges on school safety could improve the educating sector’s effort to address the needs of Early Childhood and Special Needs Education. Learning from such interactions can inform reviews of school safety policies and agendas. With much of the COVID-19 response efforts focusing on psychosocial support strategies for students, teachers, staff and families, good practices should be systematised and shared among the regions School Safety Focal Points. Parents are a vital element in remote learning, and schools should streamline into distant learning programmes specific suites reinforcing their skills and abilities to support their children’s learning process.

Building on the First and the Second Ministerial Forum on School Safety, the CSSI Virtual Pre-Ministerial Forum incorporated a more substantial component on investment in the education sector. Technical Session 6 fostered a meaningful dialogue between the Ministries of Finance and the Ministries of Education representatives. Experts highlighted the fact that governments can stimulate economic recovery through school safety and education continuity. Thus authorities must find relevant strategies amid fiscal constraints affecting the region’s growth due to the financial crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The World Bank showed how COVID-19 is augmenting learning poverty, and governments must take action to minimise learning losses or experience a substantial diminishment in national productivity. The IDB showcased how Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) can foster data-driven decision-making and action to protect school infrastructure, resulting in long-term savings in education expenditures, complemented by more comprehensive insurance coverage. The use of EMIS will lead to reduced fiscal pressure caused by losses of education infrastructure. Finally, UNDRR presented a model proposal where governments carry out ex-ante financial planning for safe schools with an investment approach. Governments measure their return on investment by creating a conducive environment for investment and growth, resulting from avoided losses from disaster impacts.

The final session of the Forum served for Ministers of Education to put forward their school safety priorities to be addressed through national agendas and the III Ministerial Forum on School Safety. Following the Comprehensive School Safety Framework, priorities related to education sector policies and plans call for a consolidation of school safety frameworks and guidance, incorporating school maintenance into these policies and fiscal budgets. Legislators must revise national DRM policies to
strengthen the participation of the education sector, which is anticipated to promote school safety management committees with the involvement of stakeholders from across industries.

School maintenance dominates priorities for Pillar One, Safe Learning Facilities, focusing on the set-up of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) to assess school infrastructure and plan proactive maintenance actions linked to maintenance plans and resource mobilisation. In addition, the education community expects school design, retrofitting or repair projects to be sensitive to children with special needs requirements.

Pillar Two, School Disaster Management, sees the need to plan for education continuity during emergencies and more effective response management, tied to leadership development and partnerships. Also important is the safe reopening of school and inclusion of Youth in the design of responses targeting this age group and planning for mechanisms to absorb students arriving from other countries due to crisis.

Pillar Three, Risk Reduction and Resilience Education, firmly focused on reviewing the curricula and developing a standard curricula framework for the Caribbean. A curricula review is further supported by priorities addressing the digital divide, investments in teacher training, cyber-bullying and community outreach.

Ministers also advocated for including school safety into fiscal budgets and developing a resource mobilisation strategy to make the education sector safer in the long term. Finally, Ministers put forward more inclusion of child protection actions in the education sectors, adding to the promotion of exchange of experiences.
Workshop overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the systemic nature of risk more evident than ever, highlighting the exposure of different societal systems to multiple hazards. Its unprecedented cascading effects have impacted all sectors and levels of our economies and societies. The Global Assessment Report 2019 (GAR) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction reflect the certainty that in an ever more populous, networked, and globalised society, the very nature and scale of risk have changed to such a degree that it surpasses established risk management institutions and approaches.

In the Caribbean, the COVID-19 pandemic has directly impacted the education systems of all countries in the region. Governments have been responding to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic while at the same time implementing actions to mitigate the potential consequences of the upcoming hurricane season. Adding to this are ongoing preparedness activities to other latent hazards, such as geological ones (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis) and social ones (migration). The region is experiencing the effects of systemic risk as we witness the interplay and amplification of the varied impacts of multiple events. As national and regional entities design recovery plans and other instruments, they present an opportunity to reiterate the value of education in building resilient societies and the need for multisectoral, multi-stakeholder, and regional coordination. In this order of ideas, the Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI), which aims to advance school safety in the Caribbean, is the regional mechanism to rehearse this link between education and resilience and secure coordination.

In this context, development actors have organised several virtual fora to generate meaningful dialogue around this pertinent matter. CDEMA, with the support of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean, on behalf of the Safe School Working Group, organised on May 28, 2020, the webinar: “Systemic Risk and Education Sector Resilience in the Caribbean Region”. It aimed to share country experiences on how the education sector faces the pandemic, lessons learned, and recommendations for sector response and recovery related to a global pandemic. Several key recommendations emerged from the online seminar, including those intended to influence and shape:

- The pertinence of the Comprehensive School Safety Framework, upon which the CSSI has been structured.
- School-related public health measures that keep students and educators safe from death, injury, and harm in schools.
- Securing the continuity of education through all expected hazards and threats management.
- The nature of support from regional partners to advance the CSSI.
- School preparedness, mitigation, recovery, and response for education resilience.

"As Ministries of Education, we can only start to tackle the interconnected nature of systemic risk by becoming connected ourselves. We must do this despite territorial and political boundaries, across sectors and regardless of language differences."
Honorable Drs. Rodolphe E. Samuel, Minister, Minister: Education Culture Youth and Sport (St. Maarten)

"The COVID-19 pandemic has made evident the systemic nature of risk and highlighted the exposure of different systems to multiple hazards, as its unprecedented cascading effects have impacted all sectors and levels of our economies and societies – including, of course, the education sector. A systemic risk approach will help us to better understand the complexity of the challenges that the education systems are facing."
Raúl Salazar, Head of the UNDRR Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office
Some specific recommendations that emerged that would be relevant to future dialogue at the regional level include:

- Support partners, as they must recognise their role in mobilising resources to ensure effective advancement of the Caribbean Safe School Initiative and promote synergies as a commitment to energise efforts in advocating for political support.
- Strengthening the relationship between regional and national governance mechanisms allowing the sharing of good practices.
- Strengthening emphasis on biological, anthropogenic, and other threats in assessments, policy, and contingency planning for the education sector, where needed.
- Ensuring that local information is accessible and reliable and understand the COVID-19 contagion trends in specific areas.
- Develop a decision model for closing and reopening schools as needed due to the resurgence of community transmission.
- Coordinate with National Teachers Unions and PTAs re contingency measures for outbreaks of illness in staff or students.
- Implement strategies aiming to close the digital gap and provide students with resources to manage learning gaps.
- Review of online teaching and exam options. Continue blended learning, by trying to adopt emerging technologies and other modalities that facilitate learning, especially in times of crisis.
- Adapt and revamp current curriculum to integrate all-hazards and be ready to develop a minimum curriculum adapted for emergency situations.
- Understand how current and emergent practices in ensuring education continuity for the most vulnerable might be recorded, assessed, adapted, replicated, and integrated into existing policies and strategies
- Provide Financial and dietary support to marginalised students.
- Update policy and plans to consider biological hazards with a multi-hazard approach based on risk information and knowledge.
- When reopening it is important to consider: wellbeing, protection, policy frameworks, financing opportunities, safe operations, reaching the most vulnerable, and learning.
About the Ministerial Forum

The Caribbean Safe School Ministerial Forum is the flagship biennial meeting attended by Ministers of Education from the whole region, disaster risk reduction practitioners, and international and regional stakeholders. In the context of systemic risk and a multi-hazard approach, it explores and identifies policy opportunities and gaps for Education Sector Resilience and their regional coordination. It is the Forum for attaining and affirming the support by the region’s Ministries of Education for the Antigua and Barbuda Declaration on School Safety in the Caribbean and its implementing tool: the Regional Road Map for School Safety. The Declaration embraces the Comprehensive School Safety Framework as its internationally recognised approach to reducing risk to various hazards in the education sector.

Eighteen countries and territories have already signed the Declaration during the First and Second Ministerial Forum, and more Caribbean states are expected to follow suit during future Forums. The Ministry of Education in Sint Maarten will host the Third Ministerial Forum, initially scheduled for May 2021. To promote full participation at the Forum and consider the uncertainties stemming from COVID-19 affecting the various states’ ability to ensure their respective involvement in these times, the Organising Committee deferred the Forum to early 2022. Nonetheless, the opportunity remained to capture and synthesise the plethora of dialogues on Education Sector Response to the COVID-19 pandemic carried out by multiple partners, including the range of responses that Ministries of Education and other partners would have implemented by the end of the 2020 Hurricane Season.

The Virtual Caribbean Safe School Initiative Pre-Ministerial Forum: 2021 Regional Review on Systemic Risk

Leading up to the Third Ministerial Forum, scheduled for 2022, the “Virtual Caribbean Safe School Initiative Pre-Ministerial Forum: 2021 Regional Review on Systemic Risk” took place from March 15 until 26, 2021. The titling of the virtual event considers the plethora of dialogues on Education Sector Response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has already taken place through multiple partners and the range of responses that the Ministries of Education and other partners have implemented.

The event allowed for the review of experiences of the Education Sector’s COVID-19 response and recovery before and during the 2020 Hurricane Season. Furthermore, the event endorsed discussions about the need for coordinating policies and actions to build education sector resilience through risk prevention and mitigation and disaster preparedness.

Overall, the virtual event served to:

1. Maintain momentum around the regional dialogue on safe schools, despite the challenges of hosting an in-person meeting in 2021.
2. Capture the good practices and lessons learnt from the COVID-19 response and how preparation activities for the Hurricane season were impacted by the pandemic and other interacting factors that emerge within a multi-hazard context.
3. Define the topics to be discussed at the next III CSSI Ministerial Forum to build further education sector resilience in the Caribbean region.
Objectives and outline

To fulfil its role as an event leading up to the III CSSI Ministerial Forum, the virtual Forum’s objectives were:

1. To promote the sharing of lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic in a multi-hazard context towards increasing school safety across the Caribbean.
2. To derive inputs for the improvement of existing policies and tools.
3. To promote the expansion of countries committing to the Antigua and Barbuda Declaration across the Caribbean.
4. To set the agenda for the Third CSSI Ministerial Forum to be held in Sint Maarten in 2022.

In this sense, the 2021 Virtual Pre-Ministerial Forum achieved the following outcomes:

1. Outline ways in which technical partners can support the advancement of the CSSI. Recommendations for shaping the CSSI and its Road Map to be tabled at the Third Ministerial Forum on Safe Schools.
2. Recommendations for setting the agenda for the Third Ministerial Forum on Safe Schools Key CSSI messages to be brought forward during the subsequent regional and global Platforms for DRR and the CDEMA-CDM Conference.
3. Documenting and sharing the lessons and experiences beyond the Ministerial Forum.

Methodology

The Organising Team oversaw the event’s planning, an association of representatives from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport of St. Maarten, the Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, CDEMA, IsraAID, UNDRR, UNESCO, and UNICEF. The Organising Team’s decision to hold the event online gave way to new challenges, opposed to in-person events, such as restricted time allocation and audience interaction. Nonetheless, new opportunities were seized, with extensive preparation work conducted virtually with School Safety Focal Points and speakers.

Design and Planning

The Organising Team maximised an online forum to reach a wider audience across the Caribbean involved in education sector resilience. At the same time and in contrast to previous meetings, where their face-to-face nature allowed for extended presentations and discussion, a 10- session and 2-hour duration per session format was opted for. With participants interest in the forefront of the design process, the Organising Team agreed upon two types of sessions: four Special Sessions, to be attended by Ministers of Education, their Permanent Secretaries, and School Safety Focal Points. These sessions provided the political commitment and decision-making instances during the Pre-Ministerial Forum. Six Technical Sessions complemented these high-level events, focusing on specific sectors and topics, namely:

- School Safety Focal Points
- National Disaster Management Offices
- Inter-Sectoral Partners
- Practitioners
- Youth
- School Safety investments as a key element of the economic recovery
Technical Sessions were open to all persons interested and offered a valuable opportunity to bridge boundaries across sectors and partners.

The Organising Team set out to look for participation from Ministries of Education beyond CDEMA Participating States, inviting additional countries and overseas territories. In the weeks leading up to the event, the Organising Team repeatedly engaged with the region’s School Safety Focal Points through group meetings. These Focal Points identified and discussed specific progress and experiences with the potential to enrichen the Pre-Ministerial Forum. Building on this effort and emulating the previous Ministerial Forum, the Organising Team launched a “Call for Good Practices” across the region. This call permitted Governments to capture experiences and evidence on the impact of disaster risk management in the education sector and share innovations emerging from past disaster experiences. Later, specific Technical Sessions showcased these Good Practices.

Sub-groups among the Organising Team took leadership in the planning of Technical Sessions. These sub-groups sought to enrich these sessions with the participation of high-level representatives from countries in the region. Through their effort, Ministers of Education and Ministers of Finance, national authorities, such as National Disaster Management Office Directors, regional and intergovernmental institutions, such as the World Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank became involved. Furthermore, Technical Session drew on the participation and experience of a range of experts and practitioners.

**Implementation**

The Pre-Ministerial Forum was hosted online through the Pheedloop event platform to manage the variety of participants and presenters. The platform enabled event promotion, participant registration and management. Besides the agenda overview, it also included information and biographies on all speakers who took part in the event.

The session themselves were held using Zoom, due to its widespread use, usability, possibility to enable/disable participants functionalities allowing to run a 300+ person meeting (as opposed to a webinar) and its versatile interpretation functions. Participants could enjoy sessions with English, French and Spanish interpretation. CDEMA live-streamed Technical Sessions on its Facebook page. Slido enabled exchanges with the audience during the sessions, running moderated Q&As segments, word clouds and multiple-choice questions.

**Participants**

A range of local partners, national authorities, intergovernmental and international organisations, NGOs, and civil society attended the event. In total, 381 people registered to the event, representing over 200 different institutions and connecting from 44 different countries, mainly from the Caribbean and also North, Central and South America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific. Registration did not collect specific gender data, which is therefore not included.
Schedule

The event was held over two weeks during March, with a total of 10 two-hour sessions. Out of these, four were Special Sessions targeting Ministers of Education and Permanent Secretaries, while six Technical Sessions provided a space for discussions around relevant school safety topics.

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<td>Technical Session 1: SCHOOL SAFETY FOCAL POINTS DISCUSSION</td>
<td>Technical Session 2: NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT OFFICES’ DIRECTORS</td>
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<td>Technical Session 3: INTER-SECTORAL PARTNERS</td>
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<td>Special Session 2: PERMANENT SECRETARIES</td>
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What is systemic risk in the education sector?

A paradigm shift has occurred since the mid-twentieth century. The systems approach, enabled by increases in computational power, the availability and mobilisation of vast streams of data and observations, models and narratives, increasingly helps to make sense of the failure of linear constructs in a world where everything is connected (linear constructs refer to the pervasive extraction - production - distribution - consumption - disposal linear process of resource use in the current economic paradigm). Earth is one system - a system of systems. Systems thinking is evident and essential to creating the future enshrined in the 2030 Agenda.
Systemic risk events can be sudden and unexpected, or the likelihood of occurrence can build up through time without appropriate responses to precursor signals of change. The systemic risk lens is a helpful entry point to understand how risks are being materialised. Systemic risk is typically manifested by:

1. Cascading failures in most or all of the system
2. The shock is propagated through a network via risk-sharing or contagion
3. It is the result of indirect impacts

For instance, this approach can help stakeholders identify blind spots and ensure that national strategies for school safety link these with relevant sectors (E.g., the telecommunications sector, to enable remote connectivity, access to materials and virtual classrooms). These are essential lessons left by the pandemic that we need to integrate into the School Safety agenda that has been set collectively by Ministers of Education in 2017, with the signature of the Antigua and Barbuda Declaration.

It can be said that within the education system, risk is being realised when: we fail to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, as well as when we are unable to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; when the education sector struggles to reduce disaster damage to educational facilities, and when the disruption of the education services becomes prolonged. These are conditions that create new risks and vulnerabilities.

The Caribbean is considered one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world. According to the Long-Term Climate Risk Index, 3 out of the ten countries most affected by extreme weather events in the last 20 years are in the Caribbean. In addition to this, there is a prevalent physical vulnerability of the educational infrastructure in the Caribbean. Many old buildings still require maintenance and retrofitting; some of them were built with poor materials. Others do not count with access to water and sanitation facilities, and there is general overcrowding of students in classrooms.

These underlying disaster risk drivers are the conditions, often created by our development choices, that influence the level of disaster risk by increasing exposure and vulnerability or reducing capacity. They include poverty and inequality, climate change and variability, demographic change and urbanisation and the lack of disaster risk considerations in land management, among many others. Inequities in education provision are likely to be particularly impactful for marginalised students. For instance, inequalities in access to high-speed internet, which have been made evident by remote learning strategies implemented during COVID-19, can reduce learning capacities, notably among those more vulnerable.

Similarly, current deficiencies in school infrastructure and the provision of water and sanitation facilities can have numerous negative impacts on the capacities of schools to operate and on the health of children and teachers. All these underlying factors are setting the context for the realisation of systemic risk.
Technical sessions discussion

Technical Sessions provided a platform for sharing and discussing views on making the education sector more resilient through the lens of specific sectors or actors. For this purpose, these sessions focused on the priorities of School Safety Focal Points, linkages between the education sector and National Disaster Management Offices, inter-sectoral synergies, experiences and lessons learned from education-sector practitioners, inclusion of Youth and how school safety investments can play a crucial role in economic recovery. The following sections provide a summary of the main talking points stemming from each Technical Session. Each section offers a link to the YouTube recording of the session.

School Safety Focal Points Discussion

School Safety Focal Points are key staff at Ministries of Education across the region, overseeing and implementing the school safety agendas in their respective countries. They represent a trove of knowledge, experience and institutional memory. In the weeks leading up to the Forum, School Safety Focal Points worked together, identifying areas of concern and eventually prioritising four: abuse and violence in the education sector, maintenance programmes and budget allocations to protect education sector investments; school-level disaster management; and curricula review for disaster risk and resilience education.

In the case of abuse and violence against children, evidence suggests a significant and growing concern in the Caribbean. According to the UNICEF Office for the Eastern Caribbean¹, about 2,600 cases of child abuse were reported in 7 countries in the ECA within a period of a year. This figure amounts to 35% of all reported cases of abuse. However, only 61% of persons would have reported an incident, and only 27% would seek help for the child. CADRES’ 2019 Social Survey Report showed that the most common reasons for not reporting child sexual abuse are narrowed to people’s perception of a situation not being of their concern, fear of negative consequences for reporting or embarrassment of stepping forward. Nonetheless, other reasons also reference delays and effectiveness of processes and authorities or cases where people consider reporting as not merited. At the same time, most cases of abuse, including sexual abuse, take place within a family’s inner circle.

In this context of underreporting and lacking support to children leading to long-lasting emotional and physical effects, School Safety Focal Points seek to raise awareness on the issue. Moreover, from the perspective of School Safety Focal Points, more efforts should be invested in developing and promoting policies and protocols for dealing with abuse, including support and services for victims. Better frameworks and services are recommended to go in hand with continuous training and retraining, accommodating staff turnover among educational establishments or sensitising wider audiences through mass media. Schools have to promote positive attitudes, address stigma and create a safe

environment for children. From a school-level perspective, identifying barriers to enforce protocols and offer protection must be assessed, developing strategies to improve reporting and access to support by victims of abuse.

Another area of concern often highlighted in the Caribbean is maintaining infrastructure investments in the education sector. A reactive approach to maintenance will, in the long run, result in higher expenditures by Ministries of Education, which is where a significant gap exists to date. In addition, while advocated against, Caribbean countries’ schools often continue being used as emergency shelters. Besides affecting children’s rights to education, the practice causes lasting damage to buildings and infrastructure, which frequently is not adequately repaired. Efforts by Ministries of Education staff to mobilise resources through yearly fiscal budgets tend to be cut short by decision-takers, affecting Ministries’ abilities to provide the resources needed for maintenance.

Beyond the financial argument, there are also particular associated disaster risks. School building construction years often date far back. Many are not considered earthquake-resistant or unable to withstand hurricane-force winds, posing a significant risk to children, teachers and staff.

Policy-makers need to be further sensitised about these risks and the long-term costs of sub-standard maintenance programmes. In hand with the above, concrete proposals to make infrastructure safeguarding more effective and efficient must be made, such as using maintenance software to track conditions. Such an application would help keep track of maintenance programmes, schedule retrofitting or replacements and support more relevant expenditure to cover short-, medium and long-term maintenance needs. COVID-19 has shown that IT infrastructure is also a key component of school facilities, and their upkeeping directly influences the quality of education during the implementation of remote learning strategies.

NEMOs and CDEMA are vital partners to advance these proposals. Construction assessments and plans of action actions can be linked with risk assessments and hazard mapping. The region has been using the CDEMA Model Safe School Programme assessment tool since 2013, being a valuable resource. A collaborative approach to ensure technical expertise is used together with better financial planning and increased budgetary allocations will make the education sector safer and more cost-efficient.

Schools themselves also play a vital role through school disaster management, putting in place disaster preparedness actions and resilience education. Schools are encouraged to set up emergency units with the participation of students, teachers and staff. However, the overburdening of staff with multiple responsibilities is a barrier for them engaging in school disaster management. In addition, few professional development opportunities exist through which teachers and staff can acquire the necessary disaster risk management knowledge and skills.

Approaching teacher associations and unions is seen as a path to develop an interest in school disaster management and involve more teachers in this area. Options, such as the offering of grants for specialised courses, could be explored. Tied to school safety is a closer collaboration with disaster management offices to align the education sector disaster risk management policies, plans and
strategies with the national disaster management plans and plans from other sectors. This link has to be reflected in school-level protocols, training, drills, etc. Furthermore, cooperation with social society institutions, such as the Red Cross or NGOs, will offer additional support to schools to implement disaster management activities and help develop life skills among children and Youth joining in these activities. In this way, stakeholders can boost Youth participation.

In this sense, one proposal brought forward by School Safety Focal Points is the development and implementation of a regional Disaster Resilience Curriculum Framework. Such a development implies reviewing existing disaster resilience resources within the region’s current regional curriculum offerings. Based on this, a new disaster-resilient framework can be developed, which builds upon good practices within the region and is strengthened to include resources relating to biological hazards. As a result, the school safety community can offer a centralised framework with age-appropriate resources, able to be tailored to country-specific requirements, which can be delivered through an infusion approach. Consequently, it will be possible to develop better the ability of persons, communities, organisations and states to adapt to and recover from hazards, shocks or stresses without compromising the long-term prospects for development.

National Disaster Management Offices’ Directors

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an example of the systemic nature of risk generated by the extreme levels of interconnectivity in our world today, and addressing systemic risk requires systemic approaches. Such an approach means institutionalising and strengthening multisectoral, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary management of different hazards, including biological ones. Active collaboration between disaster risk management institutions and authorities, platforms, and critical sectors such as health, food system, transportation, finance, planning, and education is required. Such enhanced cooperation and collaboration across sectors must work towards a human-centred approach focusing on the most vulnerable, articulated with science policy and practice, resulting in evidence-based decision-making.
The British Virgin Islands (BVI) was heavily hit by Hurricane Irma in 2017, exposing vulnerabilities in the local systems. Lessons learned from this experience provided an advantage in the education sector response to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of these focused on a “safety first” approach to schools. BVI had been implementing a Smart School approach, which includes making facilities safe and healthy, integrating disaster management practices into the curriculum, promoting climate adaptation and supporting resilience education. Part of the process focused on assessing schools, identifying and amending gaps, resulting in labelled schools as safe when criteria were met. The “safety first” approach, stemming from this work, was deeply rooted in response to Hurricane Irma. Authorities erected temporary learning spaces while schools were assessed and repaired. Lacking learning space led to a staggered return of students to classrooms, prioritising vulnerable students, such as children with special needs. Remote learning was also a key element, but unlike the COVID-19 response, this was based on retrieving learning materials to carry out homework.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were again considered unsafe, leading to remote learning replacing in-person schooling. However, this time partnerships with the Health authorities and telecom providers were vital, with devices being provided to students and data being offered at a reduced rate or free to students and teachers. Lessons learned from the previously implemented staggerer return to classes were also applied during COVID-19. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth Affairs, Fisheries and Agriculture, together with the Department of Disaster Management, had recently developed an education continuity plan for emergencies. Ensuring safe learning environments was, therefore, easier to implement.

Robust risk management governance is an essential pre-condition to achieve this, such as seen in St. Lucia, where the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) and the Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development work hand-in-hand, empowered by its national policies. Here, the link between education and the disaster risk management sectors is enshrined in legislation governing NEMO and through the inclusion of disaster risk management in the education policy. This policy established standardised measures schools have to put in place to be deemed safe. Furthermore, governance for disaster risk management is strengthened by a shared responsibility between NEMO and the Ministry of Education. In practice, this means continuous support from NEMO in terms of training and technical capacity. In turn, the Ministry of Education ensures the safety of schools, the existence of school emergency plans and an education-sector contingency plan to ensure educational continuity during emergencies. It also enables efforts to diversify places used as emergency shelters, over time reducing the number of schools being used for this purpose.
The inclusion of the education sector in disaster risk management is also strengthened by the National Emergency Management Advisory Committee, of which the Minister of Education is part. Continuing strengthening the education sector through revised policies guiding school site selection, design and construction, is one of the areas which can thus be addressed.

In the area of risk reduction and resilience awareness rising among the population, education authorities have a crucial role, such as seen in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, where the Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation is part of tsunami and volcano sensitisation campaigns, promoted by the National Emergency Management Organization. This cooperation has enabled NEMO to reach a more extensive population base through schools and communities. Also, this joint work has resulted in increased risk management learning opportunities for teachers, the inclusion of disaster risk reduction into the national curriculum, conducting of drills. Nonetheless, more needs to be done to leverage funding for the national Safe School programme or include child protection in emergencies, particularly during the current remote learning strategy being implemented due to COVID-19. These considerations must be addressed systematically and not only as a consequence of a crisis or a localised initiative to develop a school emergency plan.

From a regional perspective and as part of its Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Strategy, CDEMA has been supporting the education sector through the launch of the Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI), with the backing of Ministers of Education from across the region. Specifically, the development of national fiscal policies to link education and disaster risk management sectors and coordination, with the development of national, multisectoral safe school committees, who lead the safe school agenda in their countries. CDEMA encourages these committees to be steered by the Minister of Education and the National Disaster Management Office, incorporating various experts, such as, e.g. climate change specialists. Here, a multisectoral representation can facilitate a systemic approach to risk. National and regional levels are linked by bringing together these school safety committees and the Education Sector Subcommittee of the CDM Coordination and Harmonization Council.

In 2013, CDEMA launched the Model Safe School Programme (MSSP), which included a tool to assess the safety and greenness of schools. Its paper-based solution has now been digitised, making it easier to apply and analyse. The MSSP assessment has so far been used in 33 schools across six countries. This has also aided channelling support from other partners, such as the Australian Development Agency, the Caribbean Development Bank, UNICEF and the Government of Norway.

National Emergency Management Offices session key messages:

The session underscored how advancement on collaboration and synergies between Ministries of Education and NEMOs or equivalent must be anchored in national legislation. It was also raised how increasing capacity for identifying and understanding risk in the education sector will lead to better evidence-based decision-making as to how make school safer, but also how the education sector can contribute to long-term resilience through its teaching processes. Finally, strategies to involve the private sector in disaster preparedness and response in the education sector need to be further elaborated upon as to better identify the sector’s role and contribution. This will directly influence education sector preparedness plans.
Inter-Sectoral Partners

The education sector collaborates daily with other sectors, such as water, health, transport, infrastructure, telecommunication and energy. More and more countries are actively promoting an intersectoral approach to their various workflows. In the Caribbean, multiple examples in this regard exist. From a protection perspective, the Regional Integrated Protection Protocol aims to link during emergencies health, education, social protection and other services essential to children’s development. The education sector is being recognised as a strategic sector to reach climate change targets, with policy-makers aligning climate change agendas with the education sector priorities. Caribbean countries have experienced an acceleration in access to funding in climate finance since creating the Green Climate Fund in 2015. Evidence of this is the recent retrofitting of schools in Antigua and Barbuda, making them more resistant to a category five hurricane, or in Dominica, where further financing by the Green Climate Fund is being targeted.

Equally essential to address climate change and disaster risk reduction is the education sector’s role in shaping tomorrow’s workforce. It is in this scope that the Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines recently reviewed the secondary school curricula, with the support from the Climate Investment Funds, the European Union and the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment, the Ministry of Transport and the National Emergency Management Organisation. As a result, climate change and disaster risk reduction considerations were introduced into the secondary level syllabus for science, language and literacy, technology, social studies, history, home economics and family resource management.

Among the non-traditional stakeholders to work with the education sector is the private sector. A common nexus between the two is the introduction of renewable energies for schools. Renewable energy, however, can also be approached more holistically, as has been done in The Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian. Here, well fields have been solarised as part of a partnership between UNICEF and the Water and Sewage Corporation, with support from the non-profit organisation Water Mission. The solarisation project enables pumping treated water to the entire city, including its schools. More so, selected schools have been retrofitted with a rainwater catchment and solar-powered treatment systems. This upgrade makes them completely autonomous, enabling them to function independently when the main water supply is interrupted. This capacity has a direct impact on preventing water-borne diseases as well as overall hygiene promotion, such as needed for COVID-19.
During an emergency response, working across sectors is vital as well, for example, following Hurricane Maria in Dominica, the Ministry of Education, Human Resource, Planning, Vocational Training and National Excellence implemented UNICEF’s Return to Happiness tool and provided teachers with training to conduct psychosocial support sessions with students. Nonetheless, the demand far exceeded the capacity of the teacher workforce, and a partnership was established with the Dominican Psychological Association. However, with suitable venues in short supply, support was often offered remotely but again hindered by telecommunications-related issues, underlining the systemic nature of response strategies that need to be considered.

This systemic nature of response strategies was one of the lessons learned presented by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vanuatu. Like many other island-states located in the Pacific, Vanuatu shares a similar risk profile as Caribbean countries. Following Cyclone Harold, the Ministry of Education and Training closely collaborated with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and other stakeholders in the National Education Cluster. The existence of cooperation and coordination mechanisms articulated around a school safety program, with clear roles and functions to support the implementation of the Comprehensive School Safety Framework, is critical.

**Inter-sectoral Partners session key messages:**

Working across sector requires a better understanding on how the CSSI Regional Roadmap and national agendas align and connect with risk reduction agendas from other sectors, including non-traditional partners. Non-traditional partners can contribute to safer school infrastructure, better school disaster risk reduction and resilience education, yet how to tap into this resource is not fully understood by stakeholders. At the same time, traditional and non-traditional partners must come together to enhance school curricula to better address Climate Change Adaptation and biological hazards, among others. At present, opportunities to learn from one another are being missed out due to insufficient opportunities to exchange technical knowledge among Caribbean countries and staff involved in implementing school safety agendas.
Youth

Caribbean Youth has, over the years, displayed their resilience and showed resilience through core youth movements such as national student councils, youth parliaments, CARICOM youth ambassadors and other youth advocacy movements across the region. Youth have embarked on many campaigns to advocate for climate change, policy development, gender equality and equity, education, among other subjects. Their work has not been without

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**Snapshot of Good Practices: Inter-sectoral partners**

**St Lucia – Technology Support for Distance Learning:** As part of the COVID-19 response, the Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development made use of data from an existing school feeding programme to identify at risk students. Recognising the particular challenges these students would face to access remote learning opportunities, coordination with the private sector and telecoms agencies allowed for the provision of tablets, laptops, e-books, Chrome books and access to G-Suite. As a result, 32% of vulnerable students at primary level gained full access to online classes.

**Cayman Islands – COVID-19 and Children’s Mental Health:** The Cayman Islands Red Cross engaged key partners in a short term, community-based programme geared at children and adolescents to assess their physical and mental health following the national lockdown and curfew measures. While reports of child abuse decreased due to school closures, it is a well-known fact that child abuse and domestic violence increase in emergencies. The aim of the Mobile Health and Wellness Project was to provide families and individuals with referrals for additional services or support in an effort to ensure the wellbeing of individuals and families, especially those most vulnerable, to mitigate against potential abuse, and to identify any red flags for existing abuse for necessary referrals. Out of the 178 children who accessed the services, 99 referrals for physical health follow-ups, 118 referrals for mental health follow-ups, and 49 referrals for parental support were made.

**Cayman Islands – Closing the Digital Divide:** This entailed the purchasing, donation and delivery of 1,600 laptops to supply all students in need of devices, identified from school surveys and cross-referenced with supporting charities. It also included purchased and sponsored MiFi and hard-line internet connections to supply families in need of internet services, negotiated and distributed free sim cards to teachers to support contact with parents, provided advice and distribution support for other private sector laptop donations, roll out and support of on-boarding of multiple synchronous and asynchronous online learning platforms such as Microsoft Teams. This programme could be replicated based upon this experience, provided procurement processes as sufficiently flexible to respond in a timely manner during emergencies. Government departments, schools, educators, charities, businesses, students and parents need to be engaged in varying levels for this practice to be replicated successfully.
challenges, often struggling to be involved in decision-making, participate in the agenda-setting or development planning processes, mobilise their peers to voice themselves on major sustainable development issues, influence education curricula and raise awareness on existing youth initiatives and programmes among educators, parents and stakeholders.

Their work has become even more complex now, as COVID-19 heavily impacted youth activism by closing schools and restricting social encounters. Therefore, awareness-raising and advocacy initiatives on child rights, inclusion, climate change and environmental protection could no longer go forward. In turn, Youth started to resort even more to social media and online platforms to advocate for various causes. Nonetheless, the inability to connect with others is seen as one of the main challenges.

At the same time, remote learning strategies implemented in response to COVID-19 have impacted teaching and learning processes. Discussions often focus on teachers having gone through a “crash course” on online schooling; nonetheless, the adaptation has been equally hard on students. Children and Youth grew up with a clear distinction between school and home environments, associating behaviours and attitudes to each. With home-based remote learning, this boundary has become blurred, and Youth voiced their struggles in this regard. Some of the suggested recommendations shared during the session include limiting online sessions to 30 minutes but providing more structure to the session, maximising its potential, and using a more comprehensive range of technological resources, such as educational games, to provide variety during the virtual classes.

In this context, the question arises as to what participatory platforms can strengthen youth involvement with the community and disaster risk reduction. Speakers developed this matter further to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities, provide more knowledge about the importance of protecting the environment, develop a long-term vision among their peers on the positive consequences of actions they can take today. The articulation of youth councils was seen as particularly beneficial to favour participation by Youth. In parallel, speakers expect governments to prioritise school safety even further, considering its impact not only on physical safety and education continuity but also on the long-lasting effect disaster risk reduction has on behaviour and life choices.

Youth are an untapped resource for disaster risk management, and at the regional level, CDEMA recognises the Youth’s potential to impact change. They bring unique knowledge and skills to the table, including their intrinsic understanding of how new media can influence and shape this change—supporting youth capacity building for them to be able to meet their potential as agents of change and resilience effectively.
Practitioners

The COVID-19 pandemic generated an acute crisis in education systems worldwide, leading to prolonged school closures to prevent the spread of the virus regionally and internationally. Regionally, the ministries of education have implemented emergency procedures through remote learning to ensure education continuity and mitigation of gaps. Remote learning requires special efforts by teachers, principals, school staff, government officials and partners from across various sectors.
Such an effort is even more challenging when working with children with special needs. The Lighthouse School adapted their teaching approach at the onset of the pandemic in the Cayman Islands, implementing four key actions. Firstly, a strategy to communicate to students about the need to stay home during the pandemic was carried out. This was important since many of the school’s students require structure and routine as part of their learning process, and social distancing measures heavily disrupted that. For this purpose, social stories were developed by teachers, tailored to students’ needs, to be read to children by their parents. Secondly, a support programme for parents was implemented, covering the families’ health and wellbeing, including maintaining the free meals service for students and accompanying parents by transferring the necessary knowledge and skills to advance their children’s teaching process. Parent support included the remote sessions using Seesaw, Zoom and Teams platforms. Thirdly, schools sent specialised equipment to parents, so they can adequately work with their children. Lastly, speech, language and occupational therapists, together with vision and hearing teachers and other support services, ensured that parents have the necessary tools and skills to implement the integrated and multi-disciplinary approach used by the school. Overcoming the digital divide was eventually achieved with support from the Government and the private sector.

Across the Caribbean, psychosocial support strategies were rolled out, as seen in the cases of The Bahamas, St. Lucia and St. Maarten, where impacts in this area include separation anxiety by students, loss of interest, increased level of depression. Other more severe factors stemming from staying at home involve increased levels of child abuse or exploitation. Parents’ perception that children were not receiving enough instruction resulted in them putting excess pressure on kids. Among secondary students, dropout levels increased during the pandemic. Following the loss of face-to-face interaction, teachers struggled to keep in touch with students and were less able to identify those in need of support on a timely basis. More so, teachers themselves were under increased stress levels, caring for their children at home while adapting to remote teaching practices and trying to keep up with the yearly syllabus.

In St. Maarten, surveys among students, teachers and parents sought to inform decision-making during the COVID-19 response continuously. These enquired about their mental wellbeing, employment status, nutrition, among others. Some schools conducted daily emotional support sessions, allowing teachers to gauge students’ feelings, and staff benefitted from mindfulness and stress management sessions or fitness programmes to stay healthy. In addition, some schools had teachers submit a weekly reflection on how they were dealing with online learning. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport of St. Maarten followed up on the wellbeing of students throughout the year. Referral systems to care teams, in-house counselling and external agencies were set up. Linkages with child protection agencies were reinforced to deal with the
increase in reports of abuse or neglect. In St. Lucia and St. Maarten, the Return to Happiness approach was implemented to help children deal with the pandemic.

The digital divide and connectivity gap is widely seen as a relevant challenge. However, in Guyana, where many populations live in remote rural regions with no internet access, digital-based remote learning is not an option. Here, the Ministry of Education developed worksheets based on a consolidated curriculum matched to the syllabus of the various grades. These worksheets were distributed around the country, enabling students to study and work from home. Internet hubs were set up, through which teachers were trained on how to support students in this process. This teacher development was made possible by mobilising and working across sectors like Telecom and the private sector. As a consequence, smart classrooms have started to be installed in schools located in remote areas. In this way, the pandemic is capitalised upon to strengthen and develop the education sector.

In contrast, in The Bahamas, a country with 700 islands, out of which 30 are inhabited, the Ministry of Education set up a virtual learning network following the destruction of schools caused by Hurricane Dorian in 2019. This network was again mobilised during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, a multi-sector stakeholder committee came together to prepare a 3-tier plan based on face-to-face, hybrid and remote learning. This plan enabled The Bahamas to quickly transition from one level to another, adapting to the evolving COVID-19 situation. Furthermore, the psychosocial support programme rolled out after Hurricane Dorian saw school psychologists trained to offer support services to children. Together with the support received from the Ministry of Health and the Bahamas Psychological Association, this service was again valuable during the pandemic.

**Practitioners’ session key messages:**

Experiences showed how the needs of Early Childhood and Special Needs Education could be better addressed if more exchanges on school safety nuances for these target groups took place. Learning from such exchanges can inform reviews of school safety policies and agendas. With much of the COVID-19 response efforts focusing on psychosocial support strategies for students, teachers, staff and families, good practices should be systematised and shared among the regions School Safety Focal Points. Parents are a key element in remote learning and specific programmes reinforcing their skills and abilities to support their children should be streamlined into distance learning.
School safety investments as a key element of economic recovery

Building on the First and the Second Ministerial Forum on School Safety, the CSSI Virtual Pre-Ministerial Forum incorporated a more substantial component on investment in the education sector. Ministries of Education attended the session and of Finance, School Safety Focal Points, and representatives from National Disaster Risk Management Offices, international and regional development banks, donor community, as well as other education sector practitioners, civil society partners, Youth, and other interested parties working on securing the implementation of the Caribbean Safe School Initiative. The session fostered the establishment of a meaningful dialogue between representatives from Ministries of Finance and the Ministries of Education, highlighting the fact that ensuring school safety is amongst the first steps towards

Snapshot of Good Practices: Practitioners

Virgin Islands (U.K.) – Collaborative Lessons Planning Supported by Technological Tools: The Core Subject Officers set up the collaborative lesson plans during the lockdown in May 2020. This was done to allow teachers to contribute to producing unified lesson plans in Google Drive. They created slides that were shared with the teachers in each Core Subject (English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies) at each Grade Level. Increase teacher collaboration and uniformity in the delivery of the curriculum was therefore achieved.

The Bahamas – Ministry of Education Pre-school Virtual Learning Platform: This platform is located within the Ministry of Education website’s Virtual Learning Portal and is accessible to all including preschool age children, teachers, parents and other individuals throughout The Bahamas. Parents of pre-schoolers and students were invited to log in and engage in daily learning activities, live sessions and resources through the virtual learning classroom. A stronger sense of community established between the preschool educators throughout the country, collaboration between stakeholders and officers in other sections of the Department of Education increased, virtual learning in private preschools through accesses to the virtual learning platform and standardization of the preschool programme and practices across schools and districts was strengthened, and an online bank of indigenous digital resources was developed. Preschool teachers independently collaborated and connected with each other, an increase in the creation and use of culturally relevant resources was observed, educators were motivated to explore technology and new technological strategies such as digital assessment applications were applied.

St. Maarten – COVID-19 Protocols for Schools: Caribbean International Academy: COVID-19 protocols of socially distancing in small numbers were maintained. Washing and sanitizing hands and desks as students move to classes, and universal wearing of masks on campus were promoted. Adherence to protocols resulted in Caribbean International Academy campus has managed to stay open.

Cayman Islands – A Review of Home Learning in Cayman Islands Government Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A key finding from the review is that home learning currently serves as an imperfect substitute to school-based provision. Therefore, the Government plan includes a 3-tier approach based on face-to-face, hybrid and remote learning.
stimulating economic recovery while discussing the fiscal constraints that are likely to affect the region’s growth due to the financial crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID 19 pandemic has demonstrated the systemic nature of risk generated by the extreme levels of interconnectivity in our world today and its potential to disrupt the normal functioning of society through a diversity of cascading effects, as we have observed over the last year. The Caribbean region faces many economic challenges, such as low growth and lack of competitiveness, aggravating accumulation of current account deficits, unsustainable debt levels and fiscal constraints being key challenges, affecting public investment in social areas. The enormous economic burdens caused to the education systems as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic have emphasised the need to enhance the overall investments in the education sector and the Comprehensive School Safety Framework in particular. Governments at the sovereign level in the region are facing challenges with limited capacity to respond. The lack of specific preparedness measures to face natural hazards, including biological ones such as COVID-19 and Dengue Fever, is causing further strain on the education sector.

Disasters from the past decade have caused a colossal setback to the developmental gains in the region and have affected the investments made over some time. The fact that merely one-third of total damages were insured underlines the fiscal pressures each country on its own, and the entire region as a whole has to undergo as a direct result of natural and man-made hazards. Besides, these hazards affected more than 26 million people, with the death toll standing at 224,285 in the last ten years alone. The economic returns to school safety investments are potentially tremendously high because the ex-ante investments in school safety are very low and will yield diminishing returns as ex-post expenditures in school safety keep increasing.

One relevant aspect to underscore this is the simulations on potential learning losses due to COVID-19 carried out by the World Bank. The study analyses different educational indicators: the Learning Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS), part of the World Bank Human Capital Index, and the PISA standardised assessment. The study intended to forecast how the pandemic will affect the future earnings of today’s students. The Learning Poverty Measure, which refers to the percentage of children unable to read by the age of 10, further adds perspective to this analysis. In 2019, before the effects of COVID-19, 53% of children in low-and middle-income countries could not read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school. At that point, the rate of progress would have lowered this number by 2030 to only 43%, when the Sustainable Development Goals are due. The most pessimistic scenarios of the study forecast that one year of school closure will increase learning poverty by ten percentage points, putting the world even further behind and slowing down the pace of progress. The model used to build scenarios and forecast Learning Poverty incorporates variables combining health, economic and the educational sector,
accounting for school closures. For the various strategies, governments have been implementing to provide remote learning opportunities and the resulting dropout rate or future incorrect learning. The mitigation measures put in place by governments to provide education services are assessed on three parameters. The first is the governmental supply of distant learning services. The second focuses on the access or take-up of these mitigation efforts by households, conditioned by devices, connectivity, and electricity availability. The third is the assessed effectiveness of distance learning. The combination of the above accounts, therefore, for a quantity and a quality effect.

As a result, the simulations forecast the Learning Adjusted Years of School for Latin America and the Caribbean to drop from 7.8% to 7.5% in an optimistic scenario or 6.7% in a very pessimistic scenario if no additional action is taken, equivalent to a diminishment of -3% to -14%. The World Bank modelled the average PISA scores to fall an average of 4%. Students performing below PISA level 2 will increase from 53% to between 60 to 70% in the LAC region. For the LAC region, the aggregate economic costs at present value will be about 0.4 trillion USD in the optimistic scenario and 1.5 trillion USD in the pessimistic scenario. Globally, private losses will be the equivalent of 20% of world GDP today. Concerning the current cohort of students and the related expenditure by governments in LAC, this loss represents up to 25% of investments in the education sector going to waste. However, with no precedent for pandemic shocks this size, these figures may vary.

Actions recommended to address the above include a health and safety-first approach, avoiding reopening schools based on learning losses alone, but to “test and trace” students’ learning losses. Governments are encouraged to develop a rapid recovery curriculum and prepare teachers for lower levels of learning and higher levels of inequality in their classrooms. Also, to plan re-enrolment campaigns, conditional cash transfers and lower examination standards.

From another financial perspective affecting the education sector, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) seeks to support governments using data to make more efficient investments in safe school infrastructure. When disaster strikes, good data can make an essential difference in how quickly schools can be repaired and reopened. Good data can also allow for a quick picture of how schools have fared and where governments should place their resources in emergency cases. Yet, some schools still take attendance by hand and tally these later on an Excel sheet, and some ministries still keep paper records. Hence, when data is needed, it takes weeks or even months to find the relevant documents and compile all the information. Furthermore, when digital platforms were set up, these often weren’t interoperable, meaning data could not be easily exchanged among them.

Concerning school infrastructure, an in-depth study of education management information systems in 18 countries and cities across the region carried out by the IADB established apparent differences between access to the internet and adequate bandwidth. Low bandwidth and service interruptions are frequent, especially in rural areas.
An Education Management Information System (EMIS) is a set of educational management processes designed to comprehensively record, exploit, and generate strategic information online and framed by a specific legal, institutional, and technological infrastructure. About the management of school infrastructure and equipment, the IADB looks at three components: the systematisation of baseline data, the data collection on school buildings and the use of data for management and action.

The data on school buildings describes how the schools are used, the condition of the physical infrastructure, furniture and equipment, and what repairs may be needed. This information should be captured regularly through an infrastructure census. It also captures the essential services, including water, electricity, sanitary facilities, telephone, and internet connectivity. As the pandemic has shown, internet connectivity should be considered an essential service from now on. Data on building conditions and equipment helps decide how to plan and prioritise preventive maintenance and emergency repairs. Priorities for maintenance and repair should be established against minimum standards for infrastructure and equipment, depending on the type of schools such as early childhood, primary, or secondary schools, and the curriculum, such as academic or technical. Studies have shown that emergency repairs can cost between 3 and 10 times more than a good maintenance program, and yet in many countries, the budgets are minimal. The use of real-time data allows for good planning and budget control. Updated and systematised information can be shared across ministries and cases where another ministry, such as Public Works, is responsible for school infrastructure. E.g., Suriname completed their first comprehensive infrastructure census in early 2020. When the pandemic struck, this real-time data allowed them to quickly identify the schools that required upgrades to bathrooms and other sanitary facilities to reopen the schools safely following international safety guidelines. In Jamaica, the information is helping the Government to determine where to invest in digital infrastructure to improve schools, connectivity, and bandwidth for successful hybrid education.

A study carried out by UNDRR on the economic returns to school safety for the Caribbean region shows investment in education overall is high. Still, investments in areas covered by the three pillars of the Comprehensive School Safety Framework are relatively low within this spectrum. Studies and scenario
analysis have shown that the lack or absence of investments in Comprehensive School Safety also triggers other vulnerabilities in social, physical, and economic areas. The impact of disasters, through any of these vulnerabilities, leads to loss of labour force, which eventually leads to small and medium entrepreneurial exits, which in turn leads to loss of public revenue, resulting, in the long run, in reduced national productivity. Fewer school days leads to individual loss and lower individual earnings, further contributing to losses in national income. An opportunity exists to use ex-ante financing through a bond, where its return on investment is tied to its social impact, in the context where social and economic prosperity creates a conducive environment for further investment and financial gain. This approach combines governmental policy choice, making an informed decision to address contingent liability in due time with the moral and social duty to care for its population in the wake of a disaster.

Speakers also highlighted the need for Governments to develop a comprehensive evaluation of schools, identifying strengths and capacities, in addition to creating a matrix with safe and resilient school strategies, fragile and marginal school strategies, and most vulnerable school strategies. Further, a program must be designed to compensate for learning losses. From the financial point of view, an investment must be made in such a way as to reduce economic, social, environmental, physical, and lack of governance vulnerabilities. The Ministry of Education must be the priority in national budget preparation, which should make projections for costs and emergency funds.

The Caribbean region must strengthen its capacity to respond effectively to shocks as those caused by COVID-19, including access to emergency funding and supplies. Furthermore, trained personnel and adequate information systems to identify people and activities most likely affected by specific crises, allowing for targeted and timely action. This goes in hand with improving and modernising telecommunication infrastructure across the region and investing in educators’ professional development and capacity building to enable them to manage online learning spaces with confidence and comfort. At that point, schools can be furnished with the equipment to facilitate remote teaching and learning, and teachers and students must be able to acquire devices to participate in online learning. Governments are encouraged to invest in diversifying educational programs so that economic fallout does not impact mostly vulnerable groups.
Special Sessions

During the 'Regional Review on School Safety in the context of Systemic Risk: The Virtual Caribbean Safe School Initiative Pre-Ministerial Forum', the six technical sessions were framed to inform four Special Session targeting Minister of Education, Permanent Secretaries and their representatives. The first special session provided the opening platform to kick-start the virtual Forum. The second and third special sessions allowed Permanent Secretaries to discuss school safety advancements and priorities. These discussions included increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) Framework implementation by fostering a systemic risk approach and advocating for an increased financing and resources allocation to regional and national school safety agenda. The need for regional and national monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms to observe, assess and learn from the progress made on school safety was also identified. These sessions provided the necessary background information and resources on the event’s outcomes to inform the fourth and last Special Session.

School Safety Priorities by Ministers

Special Session 4 brought together all discussions, lessons learned, and good practices shared during the virtual Pre-Ministerial Forum. The session provided Ministers of Education or their representatives with the instance to tackle the challenges and opportunities for advancing school safety in the context of systemic risk and giving critical inputs for the agenda of the Third Caribbean Ministerial School Safety Forum to take place in 2022 in St. Maarten.

The following section summarises the key points raised by my ministers during the Fourth Special Session, categorised by the three pillars of the Comprehensive School Safety Framework, including its enabling education sector policies and plans domain. An additional cross-cutting category was added for priorities pertaining to all three pillars but going beyond enabling environment itself.

Education Sector Policies and Plans

- **Policy consolidation:** Where necessary, countries must consolidate their various school safety frameworks and guidance into the national education policy. School safety disaster response mechanisms should be integrated into education sector policies. These policies are approved at the highest country-level and well comprehended among relevant stakeholders.
• **Infrastructure maintenance**: Education sector policy and plans must be improved by including explicit provisions on regular and comprehensive school maintenance. This inclusion goes in hand with more systematic assessments, facilitating data-driven fiscal budget planning.

• **Participation in national disaster risk management**: Ministries of Education must have formal participation in national emergency management committees, ensuring the education sector is part of crisis preparedness and response at all stages.

• **Country-level coordination**: School safety management committees are platforms Ministries of Education should promote to bring together stakeholders traditional and non-traditional stakeholders directly or indirectly invested in school safety and advance national plans in this area.

**Cross-cutting priorities**

• **Fiscal budgets**: Fiscal budgets must incorporate a specific school safety line item.

• **Investment in education**: Investments in the education sector need to be further improved, ensuring that education infrastructure is well taken care of and that children and teachers have access to the necessary technologies, part of today’s learning processes.

• **Region-wide international resource mobilisation**: International funding opportunities should be sought as a Caribbean group of nations instead of individual country initiatives.

• **Investment for COVID-19 recovery**: The Caribbean countries’ education systems need to come with appropriate funding and support. In this way, the education system will better prepare children for future life and work opportunities.

• **Exchange of experiences**: Place specific emphasis on sharing experiences and best practices among the region and national and sub-national levels. This exchange plays a critical role in encouraging and motivating others and, at the same time, providing the opportunity for others to identify and adopt new initiatives and new ways of doing things.

• **Child protection**: Children must be safeguarded from violence stemming from bullying, drugs and others. These actions must be part of a national plan and connect with the relevant child protection and violence prevention stakeholders. Child protection policies, strategies and plans must be backed by applicable national legislation.

**Pillar One: Safe Learning Facilities**

• **EMIS**: Countries must invest in Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) to assess school infrastructure and plan proactive maintenance actions.

• **School maintenance plans**: Caribbean countries must develop a vision and advocate for long-term maintenance plans backed by accurate infrastructure assessment and funding.

• **Design sensitive to children with special needs**: Where schools are being repaired, retrofitted or replaced, the design must be reviewed to accommodate the requirements of children with special needs.

• **Resource mobilisation for school maintenance**: The role of international financing mechanisms to invest in the maintenance of school infrastructure must be explored further. Such an initiative must be part of a strategic, long-term maintenance plan.

**Pillar Two: School Disaster Management**
Youth: During the pandemic, much attention has been given to the voices of teachers to be heard; more needs to be done to increase participation and consultation of young people. This is relevant to fully comprehend the extent to which their physical and mental wellbeing is being affected by crises, such as COVID-19. The creation of student councils and health and safety committees can contribute to this process.

Education continuity: Disaster risk management planning in the education sector should account more for the fact that schools are at the centre of teaching and learning but of other community activities as well, and this must be built into our education continuity plans.

Planning for student mobility: Education sector school safety plans must accommodate provisions to facilitate the integration of students arriving/migrating from disaster-struck countries.

Safe reopening of schools: Safety-first return to school protocol needs to be developed and implemented. This includes improving essential services in schools, such as access to safe water, green and autonomous energy internet and bandwidth and devices.

Foster partnerships: Establish stronger partnerships to develop and implement education sector contingency plans to uphold education continuity during emergencies.

Response management: Management of response systems need to be strengthened through the development of leadership capacity, both at a ministerial and at school level.

Education in Emergencies: Response plans must incorporate an Education in Emergencies approach, addressing the needs of all children and sensitive to learning gaps exacerbated by the various crises.

Pillar Three: Risk Reduction and Resilience Education

Curriculum review: A regional-wide curriculum review should result in a regional disaster-resilient curriculum framework. Primary, secondary and tertiary education ought to be covered. Such a review must be conducted with participation from traditional and non-traditional partners and sectors. Furthermore, the resulting curriculum needs to be sensitive to children with special needs and other vulnerable groups.

Curriculum review for COVID-19 recovery: The curriculum must be reviewed to accommodate students’ and teachers’ needs upon return from COVID-19 social distancing once schools start to open again. This effort must be sensitive to children with special needs.

Investment in teacher training: More consistent investment in teacher training will enable them to streamline and adequately incorporate the resilience education, social, emotional and pedagogical aspects into their teaching processes.

Reduction of the digital divide: With technology becoming more intertwined with education, reducing the digital gap needs to be prioritised.

Community outreach: Increase resilience-building activities not only among students but also among the wider community.

Remote vs blended learning: Further explore remote and blended learning strategies, reinforcing these with better teacher training and learning platforms.

Cyber-bullying: With the move to remote learning, additional efforts need to be made to address cyber-bullying among students.

Conclusions
The ‘Regional Review on School Safety in the context of Systemic Risk: The Virtual Caribbean Safe School Initiative Pre-Ministerial Forum’ allowed speakers and participants to share and exchange lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic and from advancing school safety in a multi-hazard context. School Safety Focal Points, representatives from National Emergency Management Offices, Ministers and representatives from various sectors, international financial institutions, practitioners and Youth put forward inputs to improve existing policies and tools and implementation strategies. Repeated emphasis was made throughout the event on collaboration among traditional and non-traditional education sector partners, as well as the need to advance a shift in multiple paradigms, such as infrastructure maintenance and its financing, the need for greater inclusion of children with special needs, the necessity to review education curricula, the importance of reducing the digital divide through access to devices, connectivity and bandwidth, and, finally, the need to consider psychosocial needs of all persons during crisis.

Speakers put forward ways in which technical partners can support the advancement of the CSSI through these and other areas, such as youth participation, information technologies, financing strategies and risk reduction and resilience education. Each session brought forward key CSSI messages to inform the following regional and global Platforms for DRR and the CDEMA-CDM Conference. The first-time participation of several countries from the region is evidence of the importance allocated to school safety. It promotes further the expansion of countries committing to the Antigua and Barbuda Declaration across the Caribbean.

### Potential Third Ministerial Forum on Safe Schools agenda items

The event provided input and recommendations to shape the CSSI and its Road Map. These will support the design of the Third Ministerial Forum on Safe Schools agenda. To promote linkages between the Pre-Ministerial Forum and the Third Ministerial Forum the following table suggests potential sessions to be incorporated into a future agenda:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Sessions</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding disaster risk and risk outlook in the Caribbean</td>
<td>Experts provide an overview on components of risk, risk drivers and the systemic risk approach. Speakers can make a business case for disaster risk reduction. A specific analysis of risk outlook for the Caribbean would underscore main areas of concern and provide context for the subsequent discussions. This session can also make linkages with potential Anticipatory Actions in disaster risk management in the education sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive School Safety Framework Updates</td>
<td>Present any updates to the CSS Framework, stemming from ongoing review processes during 2021-2022. This overview will also provide the necessary background on the CSS Framework to first-time participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019 Caribbean Regional Roadmap on Schools Safety progress</td>
<td>Present activity progress achieved by governments and regional actors for each of the Road Map’s priority areas. Findings on enablers and barriers can be included in this session, if such an analysis is carried out prior to the Third Ministerial Forum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Thematic Sessions | The Third Ministerial Forum can incorporate a range of thematic sessions, such as:  
- Bullying and cyber-bullying  
- Anticipatory Action in the education sector  
- Education in Emergencies  
- Social protection and education continuity  
- Curricular review  
- Education resilience for children with special needs |
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<th><strong>- Child Protection</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Engagement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Private Sector Engagement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>NEMOs</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Gaps and opportunities to prioritise education resilience in fiscal budgets</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Working sessions to update the Regional Roadmap on Schools Safety</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**More information**

Visit the Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI) website to access all information and files related to the present and past CSSI events: [https://eird.org/americas/safe-school-caribbean/](https://eird.org/americas/safe-school-caribbean/)