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BARBADOS, WEST INDIES

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT, SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL WORK AND PSYCHOLOGY

POLICY BRIEF

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DISRUPTION VS. TRADITION: THE CASE OF AIRBNB AND BARBADIAN TOURISM

Brief adapted from Lorde, Troy, and Tennyson S.D. Joseph. 2018. 'Airbnb, Technological Change and Disruption in Barbadian Tourism: A Theoretical Framework'. Munich Personal RePEc Archive (MPRA)

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What is the issue?

The Tourism industry is one of the leading contributors to the Barbadian economy. The direct Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contribution in 2017 was 13%, while the direct contribution to employment was 17,500 jobs or 13.5% of total employment (World Travel & Tourism Council 2018, 1). Due to its substantial economic impact, tourism is coveted as a significant foreign exchange earner and mass employer, or as colloquially described- the 'bread and butter" industry.

Despite the statistics, the Tourism industry in the Caribbean has been criticised for perpetuating age-old colonial economic dynamics. Maurice Bishop (1979) described the "old tourism" as one characterised by imperialism's worst features, while 21st century writers such as Alfred Wong (2015) posits that there needs to be a change from the 'classical' tourism to alternatives such as sustainable and eco-tourism.

Barbadian tourism is not immune to the criticisms levied at the industry in the region. Lorde and Joseph (2018, 18) identify a range of concessions granted to the industry operators, comprising of duty-free imports, value added tax (VAT) waivers, loan interest write-offs and loan guarantees from the Central Bank of Barbados among other subsidies. While tourism may generate at least 50% of Barbados' foreign exchange (Lorde and Joseph 2018, 17), much is also invested in maintaining the industry at the expense of the state. Nonetheless, there has been some change to the traditional low-tax approach to tourism. For example, in 2019, Prime Minister Mia Mottley declared an increase in the VAT rate for the hospitality industry from 7.5% to 10%. According to Prime Minister Mottley, this was done "to make sure that the sector carries its full share of taxation in this country by not receiving ongoing refunds from the Barbados Revenue Authority (BRA)" (quoted in Madden 2019).

Nevertheless, a transformation of the 'classical' or 'old' tourism, to use the terminology of

of Wong (2015) and Bishop (1979) respectively, may not be the prerogative of the Government or tourism operators. In their work "Airbnb, Technological Change and Disruption in Barbadian Tourism: A Theoretical Framework," Dr. Troy Lorde and Dr. Tennyson S.D. Joseph explore the tensions between traditional established tourism interests in Barbados and Airbnb, contextualising the former's reactions within the broader discussion on class relations.

Airbnb is an online platform which allows its members to advertise their lodging, apartments, villas or houses to customers. Airbnb uses web 2.0 technology, which does not require users to possess advanced or moderate web design or programming (The University of Melbourne, 2008). In so doing, such technologies have helped to subvert the traditional factors of production which would have excluded the masses, due to their lack of access to "capital and other opportunities of wealth ownership" (Lorde and Joseph 2018).

Traditional tourism players responded to the prevalence of Airbnb operations, citing a lack of standards and regulations that are levied unto hotels, guest houses and other traditional tourist accommodation businesses. Rudy Grant, the CEO of the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA), acknowledged that the sharing economy had to be accepted by tourism players (Carter 2017). He added that the BHTA had a responsibility to attend to its member's interests, using the decline in hotel occupancy versus an increase in tourist arrivals as an example of the pressures which they face (Carter 2017). Conversely, Lorde and Joseph (2018, 4) argue that "a central issue underlying the concerns of established hotel interests is not only competition from less formal market entrants, but the sense of related reduction in "class power" and “ownership of Barbadian tourism." The emergence of a thriving Airbnb sector in Barbados can be seen as a threat to the well-cultivated political authority and economic power of the association and those of similar interests.

Why is it important?

Lorde and Joseph (2018, 6) explain these tensions between the traditional tourism sector and Airbnb operators within the framework of Marxist social analysis which posits that technological innovation is the "key determinant of class conflicts and social transitions." Technological transformations facilitate a change in the conventional production infrastructure, which prompts modifications in social and class relations, as well as ownership patterns (Lorde and Joseph 2018, 6). The authors also utilise Joseph Schumpeter's concept of "creative destruction" and Clayton Christensen's concept of 'disruptive innovation' to explain how new products or services help in subverting established capitalist forces.

Bower and Christensen (1995) explain that managers of established companies, usually invest in technologies that meet the demands of their lucrative clientele. Disruptive technologies, on the other hand, do not satisfy the desires of a mainstream market but eventually gain momentum by catering to an emerging market (Bower and Christensen 1995, 47). Ultimately, the success of disruptive technology allows it to penetrate the mainstream and even usurp the established companies. Bower and Christensen (1995, 47) aptly conclude that "the problem is that managers keep doing what has worked in the past" while managers of disruptive technology companies, look at emerging markets and develop their technologies to meet those needs and even surpass them (Bower and Christensen 1995, 47).

However, Joseph and Lorde (2018, 9) do believe that a genuine critic of such platforms is justified, concerning the potential of such

operators evading regulations and redressing the complaints of injured customers. Alas, the system of peer review which should mitigate such experiences are "unreliable and manipulable" (Lorde and Joseph 2018, 9). Consequently, more oversight needs to be implemented. However, the opposite is also true. Traditional tourism players can invoke their power, authority and historical relationship with the Government to suppress unwanted competition. As Joseph and Lorde (2018, 8) propose, the objective should be to negotiate the innovation of 21st century information technology with legal protection for consumers without stifling or punishing new operators.

The protection of customers is especially important in the era of a 'sharing economy.' The sharing economy speaks to a "set of practices and models" that permits consumers to share products and services via temporary access with the use of technology (Lorde and Joseph 2018, 9). Sharing economies flourished during the recession when companies such as Airbnb and Uber enabled access to "idle" resources such as hotel rooms and car rides (Ville and Pranav 2018). The sharing economy is lucrative to patrons and their founders as they amass millions in profit.

In general, these innovations represent a drastic change in production, and the advent of Airbnb in Barbados is the first wave. As Grant acknowledged, "the sharing economy is here to stay" (quoted in Carter 2017). Addressing the sharing economy, its implications for traditional business and the social tensions which it generates is essential in preparing Barbadian society for modernity, especially in the case of its most significant foreign exchange earner- tourism.

What should be done?

In order to ensure effective regulation of Airbnb, policymakers should use research to inform regulations and taxation. The sharing economy and its subsets, Airbnb, Uber and Lyft, are new phenomena. As a result, researchers, reformers and economists are still in the nascent stages of determining how best to regulate and tax these new business models. Generally, the current literature seems to advocate that while regulation is necessary, the regulations conventionally placed on established businesses should not be imposed upon Airbnb [Edelman and Geradin 2015; Wright 2018, Cohen and Sundararajan 2015; Quattrone et al. 2016].

Instead, regulations should be made to address the specific market failures that emerge in the sharing economy. For instance, Edelman and Geradin (2016) identify overcrowding of neighbourhoods, excessive traffic, and misuse of public spaces and goods, as market externalities of Airbnb. Governments (national and municipal) would then regulate to resolve these issues. Edelman and Geradin (2016, 1) call this "enlightened policy," that is, a regulatory framework that allows the efficiency of software platforms and also protects the rights of consumers and other third parties.

When approached in this manner, regulations, taxes, and standards transcend generating revenue and address the social and spatial implications of Airbnb. Understanding the impact of Airbnb on communities, is especially crucial, as its listings tend to go beyond 'tourist' areas. For instance, in mapping out locations of Airbnb in London, Quattrone et al. (2016, 1386) found that while Airbnb properties (especially rooms) are located in hotel areas, hotels are not in Airbnb areas.

Authorities can only make these discoveries after undertaking adequate research. Thus, in regulating Airbnb in Barbados, the relevant quantitative and qualitative studies must be executed before any policies are adopted. Research questions should be answered before policies are created, for instance:

- Where are Airbnb properties located?
- What are the environmental impacts of Airbnb properties?
- Who are Airbnb hosts and to which socio-economic class do they belong?
- What are the impacts of Airbnb on local communities?

If policies are not grounded in research, it is likely that negative externalities will continue to harm customers and even operators. On the other hand, positive externalities may not receive the necessary attention. There have already been some steps to regulate Airbnb. As part of a $1.2-billion-dollar austerity package, Prime Minister Mottley announced that the Government would levy a 10% tax on platforms such as Airbnb, Home Away and other shared accommodation (EY Caribbean 2018). The Prime Minister declared that there was a "gaping omission" in tax revenue collection from these entities and the 10% shared levy would allow for that sector to contribute since they fall below the threshold for VAT payments (Mottley 2018).The shared economy levy assisted in bringing Airbnb operations under legal purview. The policy calls for the registration of Airbnb properties by stipulating that persons who advertise and/or provide accommodation online must register with the Barbados Product Authority (BTPA)

KEYPOINTS

- Research should be undertaken to identify specific market failures of Airbnb operations
- Protectionist regulations should be avoided to allow the sharing economy to flourish
- The Government of Barbados should consider signing an agreement with Airbnb to allow the software platform to collect and remit taxes

(Barbados Revenue Authority 2018). Hosts must include the tax in their advertisements and charge guests upon booking. The tax is then administered through the national Tax Administration Management Information System (TAMIS) and collected through the Barbadian Revenue Authority (BRA). The policy. The policy also stipulates that persons must "keep appropriate records" for five years, and a BRA officer can at any time inspect or examine records (Barbados Revenue Authority 2018, l. 13).

The current procedure is satisfactory in that (i) tax rate is competitive (ii) the process is straightforward and readily available as operators can report the levy on their own TAMIS profile. However, Wright (2018) contends that some hosts are unaware of tax rules because they have not generally operated as businesses. Therefore, tax collection by hosts is not always reliable or consistent. Furthermore, because Airbnb hosts usually have several small transactions, it is more time consuming and cumbersome for regulators to review for fraud or corruption (Wright 2018, 296). In the case of Barbados, registration via the BTPA and the simple tax report process on TAMIS may reduce the disadvantages of tax ignorance.

Nonetheless, Wright (2018, 279) suggests that Airbnb should collect and remit taxes on behalf of the hosts in order to ensure compliance. For example, Airbnb collects taxes on behalf of San Francisco under the Airbnb Law (Wright 2018, 290). Upon reserving any room in San Francisco, the breakdown of the guest's payment includes occupancy taxes and fees with the query information icon (?) displaying "Transient Occupancy Tax" (see figure 1 on page 5). The Barbadian Government and the Tax Authority should consider an agreement with Airbnb which would ensure that any guest booking in Barbados pays the levy automatically, instead of relying on hosts to claim taxes annually. Hosts who do not register with the BTPA, would still pay taxes and thereby maintain compliance and enforcement. Registration should, however, continue to be enforced, to ascertain regulation and representation.

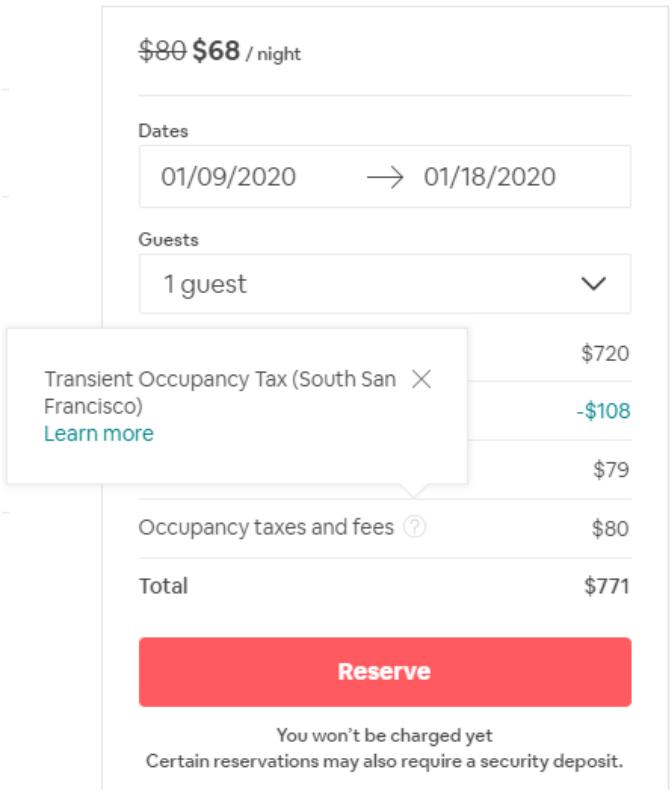

Figure 1: Photo of Airbnb reservation with breakdown of fees.
Source: airbnb.com

Airbnb has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a few Caribbean countries including Anguilla, Aruba, the Bahamas, Jamaica and the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) to enhance Tourism in the region (Airbnb 2017). The possibility then does exist for Barbados and Airbnb to collaborate to ensure the effective collection and remittance of tax. The CEO of the Grenada Tourism Authority (GTA), Patricia Maher, encouraged the Barbadian Government to embrace Airbnb. Citing their MOU with the shared economy platform, Maher advised that Airbnb operators "pay taxes equivalent to what the hotels are paying in VAT [Value Added Tax]." (quoted in Mounsey 2017).

However, the Government of Barbados was correct in creating a separate levy for home-sharing operators. Rather than a blanket tax, the Government could carry out further investigation into the earnings of each type of lodging. According to Quattrone et al. (2016), there should be a differentiation of regulations between types of Airbnb accommodations, apartments, villas, rooms, since the socio-economic conditions of each type may be different.

Differentiation in levies applies to Barbados listings, which charge as high as US$1800 a night and as low as US$23 a night. Under the current policy, all Airbnb hosts pay the same levy despite earnings. In Jamaica, this occurence has led Wayne Cummings, past president and council member of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA) to ask the Government to investigate Airbnb operators in that island whose accommodation exceeds USD $2000 but are hiding these lodgings under the guise of a "small hustle" (The Jamaica Gleaner, 2019).

There is no "one size fits all" regulatory policy for Airbnb. Strategic quantitative and qualitative research must be undertaken to correct the shortcomings of shared economy platforms. While the works of Edelman and Giradin (2015), Quattrone et al. (2016), Cohen and Sandararajan (2017), and Wright (2018) have helped to highlight general issues and deficiencies of Airbnb, there needs to be data specific to the Barbadian context. Regulations based on class tensions and fear will not provide the essential standards for fair and efficient policy.

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CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, GOVERNANCE AND THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

Brief adapted from Hinds, Kristina. 2019. Civil Society Organisations, Governance and the Caribbean Community. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

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"Civil Society Organisations, Governance and the Caribbean Community" is a qualitative text, using both secondary and primary research. The findings of the research are analysed within a social constructivist framework, which calls for a deconstruction of terms and concepts, as they are considered products of human social and cultural activity. Social constructivist theory is useful in examining concepts such as governance and civil society which are European philosophical constructions. European philosophy often excludes non-European peoples which comprise the majority of Caribbean peoples.

Deconstructing these traditional concepts is essential in appreciating the roles civil society and civil society organisations play in the region, the limitations they face and the opportunities which exist to expand their participation in national and regional politics. Thus, the author's analysis of CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) is twofold: at the national level, the author explains that CSO's and civil society can assist in making the political systems in the region more democratic and participatory. While at the regional level, the same can also be done as the author analyses the interplay between domestic governments, civil society, and regional institutions as mutually inclusive. Figure 2 displays the relationship between regional and domestic politics.

Figure 2: Diagram showing relationship between domestic and regional levels
Source: Hinds, Kristina. 2019. Civil Society Organisations, Governance and the Caribbean Community. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pg 11.

What is the issue?

In contextualising civil society and CSOs within the broader discourse on Caribbean democracy, Hinds (2019, 23) argues that in the English-speaking Caribbean "questions can be raised about the persistence of authoritarian tendencies combined with divisive party politics in the region." The state-centred approach to governance at the domestic level is mirrored at the regional level, with the establishment of CARICOM (Caribbean Community) and OECS (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States) as top-down structured institutions (Hinds 2019, 81). The OECS from inception "had provided for deeper levels of harmonisation" than CARICOM but still did not possess "participatory mechanisms." Since the 1980s both CARICOM and OECS have sought to be more inclusive. The Pan-Caribbean Partnership against HIV and AIDS (PANCAP) and the Social Development Unit (SDU) respectively are such examples cited by Hinds (2019). However, despite these improvements, Hinds (2019, 90) believes that frameworks for civil society and CSOs need to be created in both institutions to facilitate their participation at a systematic level.

In raising the issue of exclusionary politics, the author takes a well-travelled route in Anglo-Caribbean political studies. Many Caribbean scholars have addressed the question of substantive versus procedural democracy, such as Barrow-Giles and Joseph (2006, 2008), Bishop (1980), Ghany (1994), Girvan (2007, 2015), D. Hinds (2006, 2008), inter alia. Hinds (2019) not only identifies the issue but explores how CSOs can help narrow the gap between government, governance, and people. The author's analysis is historical in approach, drawing from the long history of civil activism in the sub-region, from the colonial period to the contemporary period. Some examples are the anti-slavery movement, trade unionism, women's movements and black nationalist movements.

"Civil Society Organisations, Governance and the Caribbean Community" is a topical text, problematising many historical and contemporary issues such as Caribbean regional integration, governance, participatory democracy and indigenous political movements. At the theoretical level, it demonstrates the importance of having a nuanced discourse, that brings together issues that are sometimes examined in isolation but are vital in understanding each other. Regarding praxis, the book reinforces the need for changes to governance to facilitate the much-needed transformation of the Westminster political system.

However, the text is normative, and as such, does not propose any specific policy implications. On the contrary, the brief will draw on the findings of Hinds (2019) to offer policy recommendations, in order to incorporate substantive CSO and civil society engagement in governance from the national to the regional level. The aim of which is to deepen and widen civil participation in Government.

Why is it important?

Caribbean countries have maintained an exclusionary and authoritative style of governance, inherited from colonialism, despite their status as independent states. Hinds (2019) argues that in its approach to collaboration, Caribbean governance is characterised by "informing and consulting stages of participation," "mostly bureaucratic and political governance models…with authoritarian tendencies," and "straddles the management and policymaking approaches to governance with low to moderate levels of inclusiveness" (Hinds 2019, 73). If political and social stakeholders are indeed committed to a democratic state, these tendencies need to

be corrected to guarantee substantive and not only procedural democracy.

Civil society and Civil Society Organisations can be instrumental in the transformation of Caribbean governance. Hinds (2019, 24) defines civil society as "an area of social interaction that is largely separate from the state and market control and from which a variety of associations and groups emerge." To clarify further, the author differentiates CSOs from NSAs (Non-State Actors). The latter includes businesses, political parties and criminal networks that are motivated by the interests of one select group (political party, company or mob), while CSOs "attempt to address collective interests or concerns" (Hinds 2019, 24). CSOs have found significant currency within national, international and global fora based in policy-development, social activism, and decision making. For example, UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) collaborates with CSOs in India to maximise the reach and impacts of programmes, open-up dialogue with Government and other actors and to create community-led plans ('Civil Society Organisations | UNICEF' 2019). CSOs are beneficial socio-political partners, as their ground operations enable them to have access to people, and to intangible resources such as communal trust, history and relationships, all of which are essential in making democratic and equitable decisions and in enforcing them.

KEYPOINTS

- Caribbean governance and democracy is not inclusive or participatory
- CSO participation can help to democratise the region's political model and culture
- The investigation into the operations and role of CSOs is important in allowing them to make effective contributions to governance

However, there are limitations to the relationship between CSOs and international organi-sations/agencies. The latter often places the standards expected of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) on Civil Society Organisations (policymaking, social media activism and fund management), what Hinds (2019, 30) calls the 'NGO-isation' of CSOs. Since some Caribbean CSOs do not have the capacity to engage in such activities, they may be seen as sub-par or "weak and wanting" (Hinds 2019, 30).

This operationalisation of CSOs, once again places them within the framework of Western politics, converting them to bourgeois institutional organisations. This issue is not unique to the process of 'NGO-isation' but rather is symptomatic of western capture of mainstream conceptual output. For instance, the idea of "good governance" arose during the paradigm shift to neoliberalism in the post-Cold War era. According to (Hinds 2019, 18) "The acceptance of neoliberal globalisation as an inevitability has been combined with a "good governance" vocabulary that suggests for governance to be "good," it must seek to follow Western-liberal democratic models."

However, Caribbean civil society and CSOs have made significant contributions without such institutional regulations; they have and continue to shape the Caribbean political and and socio-economic landscape. It is crucial to analyse all aspects of their operation to ensure that they are incorporated equitably in decision-making processes. CSOs represent people, communities and their interests, consequently, their inclusion in the working of Caribbean states' political machinery is essential. Furthermore, in preserving the authenticity and grass-roots nature of Caribbean civil movements, and decolonising our understanding of politics and social movements, one must confront the issue of reshaping and redefining of CSO's according to the interest of external groups.

What should be done?

1. Changes to the political culture: Hinds (2019, 188) argues that Caribbean states have

made changes to their governance style while operating within a political culture which is antithetical to the practice of good governance. The task of changing political culture cannot be easily written into law, especially in a region marked by a history of significant ethnic, class and gender differences. However, making substantive changes to the political structure could also help to stimulate a new political culture that thrives on civil participation and CSO involvement. Emphasis must be placed on structure, as Caribbean states have attempted to include CSOs and civil society but in an ad hoc manner that is not conducive to long-term cultural changes.

2. Create structural spaces for CSOs: At the regional and national levels, there have been many ad hoc arrangements established to allow for civil society participation. Hinds (2019) highlights that this is usually seen in times of economic crisis when CSOs are consulted for strategic purposes. For instance, the social partnership arrangement in Barbados was a response to the economic crises in the late 20th century (Hinds 2019, 102). The social partnership has endured and has even played a significant role in the current government response to yet another economic crisis but is not written into law. Thus, according to Hinds (2019), there still exists the possibility that it can be nullified, if any subsequent government chooses not to employ it. Implementing permanent structures in governmental structures would help to make CSO participation stable features in decision-making. The problem with ad hoc or strategic consultation is that their utility and input ends with that process. In order to develop a political culture that is based on civil society participation, consultation and collaboration, their incorporation needs to be perennial.

3. Equip CSOs with material and human resources: While Caribbean states should not pigeon-hole regional CSOs into the standards of neo-liberal institutions, these organisations should be given opportunities for capacity building. One extremely important area for capacity building would be social media use antithetical to the practice of good governance. and webpage or website development. Hinds (2019, 191) recommends that Caribbean states must find avenues for social media in their work as the internet is a common and accessible place for information sharing and socio-political interaction. The same logic can be used for CSOs, for whom, social media presence would not be a sin qua non of their CSO title, but rather a means of expanding their visibility and interacting with the broader public.

For the sake of political inclusion, social media presence could also provide CSOs opportunities to mobilise support for their interest groups and causes. Other avenues for capacity building would be training and workshops, where governments could connect CSOs with human resources, experts and specialists from whom they would otherwise have been alienated. Once again, the objective of these capacity-building activities would be to help CSOs expand on their already existing advantages rather than shaping them into what the government or others believe they should be. Consequently, even drafting policies for the inclusion of CSOs should begin with CSOs themselves.

4. Make Public Information available: In addition to training and resource management, governments should also make public information available to CSOs. Government monopolisation of information perpetuates the exclusionary politics which they are supposedly seeking to address. Access to information better enables CSOs to make decisions to assist the groups which they represent. Furthermore, public information should not only come in the form of databases but also in the form of public hearings and meetings. In a region still plagued with educational shortcomings presenting informa-

tion to the public in succinct and straightforward formats would help to educate and inform those who would otherwise be unable to understand legal jargon. This would also create opportunities for think tanks that could also inform policymaking and law drafting. Hinds uses the work of Benjamin (2017) to explain how Freedom of Information acts place 'financial and procedural' burdens on Caribbean states which do not have the resources to create these databases. Furthermore, they may not have this information readily available in any case to share with the public. Regional institutions can help to ease the burden felt by states in this aspect. CARICOM and the OECS can help with the compilation and presentation of public information for its member states.

Furthermore, the member states and regional institutions can also employ the assistance of the UWI in gathering and compiling the information. CSOs can also play a role. For instance, in light of a shortage of information on women suffering from reproductive disorders in the Caribbean, the Barbados Association of Endometriosis and PCOS (Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome) is seeking to submit a proposal to undertake such research.

5. Collaborate with CSOs on their inclusion: Of foremost importance to these recommendations, are incorporating CSOs even in the initial stages of making institutions more democratic. CSOs could inform policymakers on how they would like to be included and why specific mechanisms would work and not work. Doing this would hopefully help prevent superficial or ineffective strategies meant to democratise existing political institutions. In the long-term, governments and other authorities must consider CSOs and civil society input, when creating the organisational structures.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR DISASTER MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS

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Climate change has forced Caribbean agents to re-configure their approaches to governance, development and social welfare. While natural disasters have always been part of Caribbean realities, the recent scale-breaking natural disasters have made geography and meteorology pertinent factors in strategic planning for the short and long term.

The infrastructural and socio-economic impacts of natural disasters, especially hurricanes, are consistently highlighted and examined in policies and the media. However, concurrent with infrastructural damages are the psychological losses caused by catastrophic natural disasters. According to Lugo (2000, 247), "hurricanes also affect people's psyches as the level of anxiety and other syndromes increases after experiencing one of these events." Monica La Bennet Vice-President of Operations of the CDB (Caribbean Development Bank) echoed this sentiment, stating that in addition to infrastructural recovery, preparing for natural hazards also necessitates "focusing on mental and psychosocial wellbeing" (quoted in caribank.org 2018). At the core of mental healthcare in disaster management is the personnel who deliver these services to victims and survivors. Critical to holistic recovery and rehabilitation in the aftermath of natural disasters is the work of mental health workers, in helping survivors to cope with their loss and trauma.

What is the issue?

Mental health workers undergird the resilience of countries during disaster emergencies by providing immediate psychosocial support to the survivors and first responders (Kestel, Estev & Rodriguez, 2012). Kestel, Estev and Rodriguez (2012) stated that the frequency of mental disorders often increases, as well as, other issues such as increased alcohol consumption, violent behaviour, and emotional manifestations during disaster emergencies. Additionally, studies on Dominica revealed an increase in mental instability and psychosocial need, especially for men and boys in the aftermath of the hurricane (Collymore et al., 2018). The increase in mental disorders post-disaster is significant as psychosocial support was identified as one of the priorities in disaster management among affected persons in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and Maria (Collymore, Carby, Rees – Gildea & Thongs,

2018). Therefore, the provision of pyscholo-gical interventions offered by mental health workers is crucial, to manage the onset of these disorders and provide the skills and coping strategies necessary to help individuals recover after disasters.

However, while mental health workers play a crucial role in disaster response, they usually function in stressful and emotionally demanding conditions (Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 2007). In the Caribbean, these individuals often expose themselves to significant risks without adequate safeguards for their wellbeing. This occurrence was revealed by a rapid review which highlighted a lack of psychosocial support for persons working in response operations across countries in the Caribbean (Collymore et al., 2018). Lack of psychosocial support has implications for their mental health, their capacity to offer effective service on the ground and the overall integrity of the disaster response operation. Therefore, the provision of psychosocial support for mental health workers is not only crucial for the sustainability of effective disaster management operations in the Caribbean but is also an indication that governments and organisations are committed to protecting the wellbeing of their staff.

The call for psychosocial support for mental health workers must also take into consideration the state of mental health care in the Caribbean. Lack of proper facilities and human resources can further frustrate and stress mental health workers. For instance, Saint Lucia National Emergency Management Organisation has a Stress Management Response Team (SMART) which provides mental health support for emergency workers who are "adversely affected by critical incidents and to mitigate the effects of these incidents" (Government of Saint Lucia 2002, sec. 2.0). While this plan is commendable, its target is emergency responders who may include firefighters, police officers, paramedics among others. Whether mental health workers would qualify for support is not specified. Mental health professionals are the ones expected to provide debriefing and other support services to these responders (Government of Saint Lucia 2002, sec. 9.0). In any event, St. Lucia's mental health care system demonstrates severe deficiencies. The National Wellness Centre provides 71.8 beds per 100 000 people, there is only one social worker for the psychiatric department, of the nurses, nursing assistants, and other medical support staff only one nursing practitioner is trained in mental health (Francis, Molodynski, and Emmanuel 2018). Even in a situation where psychosocial support is provided for mental-health workers, the question of stress, overwork, and mental breakdown would persist in a country whose mental health system is inadequate even for its daily requirements. Thus, the psychosocial care of mental health workers should also extend to the broader conversation of building effective and resilient mental health care systems in the region.

This policy brief provides guidance for governments and organisations in the Caribbean to provide psychosocial support for disaster mental health workers. It defines psychosocial support as the actions that address both the psychological and social needs of individuals to decrease the risk of developing mental disorders and also helping individuals overcome and deal with psychosocial problems that have arisen (Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 2007).

What is it important?

Psychosocial support of mental health professionals is important because their exposure to the disaster also makes them susceptible to the psychological impact of trauma. Their working environment and the nature of the work exposes disaster mental health professionals to significant stressors. These stressors include "direct or indirect

exposure to death, grief, injury and loss; long hours and other physical hardships; and difficult living conditions, as well as, associated negative experiences such as separation from loved ones" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 2007; Quevillon et al., 2016). As Bartley (2007), a mental health professional working in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina recounted, mental health workers often share the emotional burden of the trauma, become witnesses to the damage, and observe the inequitable distribution of resources.

As a result, disaster response personnel are susceptible to secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatisation, compassion fatigue and burnout (quoted in Quevillon et al., 2016). They experience various issues including anxiety, depression, alcohol abuse, exhaustion and anger (Quevillon et al., 2016; O'Sullivan et al., 2015), and have a 24% - 46% risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorder (Thormar et al., 2016). Therefore, support efforts are needed to minimise the adverse outcomes for these individuals and enhance their ability to perform their roles and remain healthy (O'Sullivan et al., 2007 & Quevillon et al., 2016). Psychosocial support for disaster mental health workers reduces the impact that exposure to disasters can have on their psychological health and increases worker resilience. For example, Brooks et al. (2015), found that preparedness and support received during and after disaster relief work are of particular importance for safeguarding the wellbeing of relief workers. The findings indicated that preparing workers emotionally, with an emphasis on coping with exposure to tragedy contributes to workers developing resilience. Quevillon et al. (2016) add to this by emphasising the impact of education in disaster mental health on workers' resilience. Education prior to deployment that personally prepares the workers for various challenges that may be encountered during deployment proved to be beneficial. For instance, awareness of personal vulnerabilities and signs of burnout and compassion fatigue promotes positive outcomes after the event.

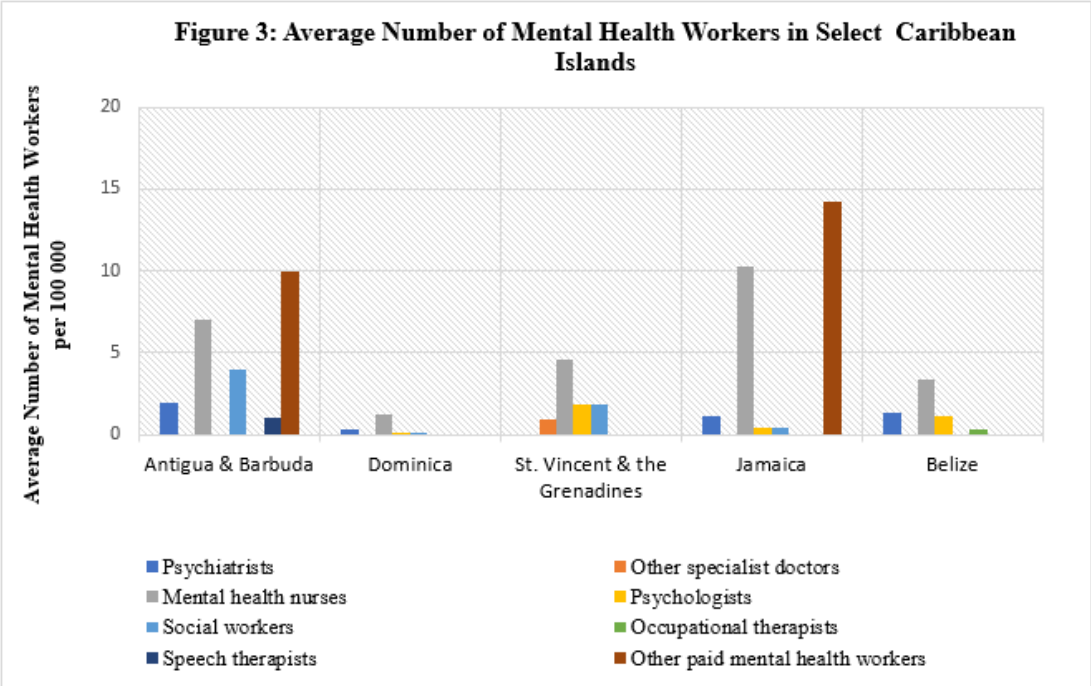
KEYPOINTS

- There is a lack of psychosocial support for persons working in disaster response operations in the Caribbean
- Psychosocial support for disaster mental health workers reduces the impact that exposure to disasters can have on their psychological health
- Provision of psychosocial support for disaster mental health workers should focus on each stage of the operation – pre deployment, deployment and post – deployment

What should be done?

Before prescribing support strategies, one must highlight the need for more specific research on the psychosocial wellbeing of mental health workers in the Caribbean. While O'Sullivan et al. (2007) and Math et al. (2014) provide a useful framework upon which training can be provided in the Caribbean, there may exist unique regional circumstances or useful frameworks that their work did not explore. For example, in the aftermath of the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti, mental and medical professionals recognised the role Voudou played in survivor's responses or understanding of mental health. The cultural significance of Voudou in Haiti has led researchers such as Chung and Tiberi (2016) to suggest that a dual approach to mental health treatment, Voudou and traditional medicine, is better suited to treat patients. Mental Health workers, operating in such spaces, would have a significantly different experience than those operating elsewhere.

Furthermore, the limitations of mental health care systems place an added strain on health workers. While they may possess the necessary training, they feel overburdened by the lack of resources, facilities and personnel. Figure 3 (on the next page) shows the insufficient numbers of mental health workers in Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica and Belize (mental health categories which do not



Information source: Mental Health ATLAS 2017 Members State Profile

appear for each country are either at zero or not reported). O'Sullivan et al.'s (2007) research on support mechanisms incorporated within emergency plans also indicated similar findings. The study highlighted the importance of support mechanisms in safeguarding the health of health care workers by buffering the adverse effects of stress. The authors highlighted three primary support mechanisms, which are informational, instrumental and emotional supports. Informational support encompassed communication and education, which served to alleviate fear and reduce irrational behaviour. The instrumental supports which focused on the policies and procedures for accomplishing work-related tasks helped to reduce discomfort and fatigue and enhance safety and work performance. Finally, emotional supports which included the provision of post-deployment psychosocial services, such as grief counselling and pastoral services, helped healthcare workers to readjust to their normal life post-deployment.

In providing psychosocial support to mental health workers, Math et al. (2014) suggested monitoring the mental and physical health status of workers during disaster pre-deployment (assessment of personality and training), deployment (ongoing support) and post-deployment phase (to build resilience).

The provision of psychosocial support for disaster mental health workers should focus on each stage of the operation: pre-deployment, deployment and post-deployment.

Pre-Deployment Support

1. Enhance the psychological capacity of disaster relief mental health workers through systematic educational training programmes that emphasise both psychological and physical preparedness.

2. Provide workers with appropriate guidelines, handbooks and policy documents, which also include potential risks of the job and a detailed work plan including working principles and clear job duties.

3. Conduct pre-deployment screening and

interviews to assess workers' characteristics and increase their self-awareness for them to identify key factors in their lives that would increase their susceptibility to trauma.

Deployment Support

4. Ensure that work-related policies and structures are implemented that promote health self-care practices for workers and reduce work-related stressors.

5. Provide ongoing emotional support to relief workers that promote self-efficacy and provides an outlet for the non-judgemental sharing of experiences. This should include mechanisms to identify vulnerable care workers.

Post-Deployment

6. Provide short to long term psychosocial support to help workers discuss and make sense of their emotions after the event.

7. Inclusion of mental health professions in the planning team to identify and manage priority mental health needs for future disaster response operations.

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