



My Island, My Life

An open letter to the Second Ministerial Forum on School Safety in the Caribbean convened on 29 and 30 April 2019 in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.



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ECS
The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction



UNISDR
The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



UNICEF
United Nations Children's Fund

Contributing Youth

| Name | Country Representing |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Kellecia Anderson | Antigua & Barbuda |
| Lyle Thierry Jackson | Antigua & Barbuda |
| Rashana Jones | Barbados |
| Brendon Taylor | Barbados |
| Jaimeson Hazel | British Virgin Islands |
| Phael Lander | Dominica |
| Annel Bernasha Lewis | Dominica |
| Lakeyia Joseph | Dominica |
| Melissa Andrea Forrester | Grenada |
| Keyola Tiffany Greene | Montserrat |
| Ke-Shawn Damion Tavianó (Accent on O)Thornhill | Montserrat |
| Sophie Elizabeth Amy Klien | St Lucia |
| Mc. Allister Hunt | St Lucia |
| Terez Renay Laurel Lord | Trinidad |
| Donique Bilingy | St. Vincent and the Grenadines |
| Deona Nero | St. Vincent and the Grenadines |
| André Browne | St. Vincent and the Grenadines |

Overview

From April 25th to 26th, twenty of the Caribbean's youth leaders convened in St Vincent for the hosting of the "My Island, My Life" Caribbean Safer School's Youth Forum aiming to identify safety issues around the three pillars of the Caribbean Schools Safety Initiative. The first Youth Forum entitled "My Island, My Life", was an opportunity for young people to share their perspectives and engage on the Caribbean Schools Safety Initiative from the disaster risk reduction, and climate change perspective.

Goals

1. Engage youth in discussing the Caribbean Schools Safety Initiative.
2. Explore mechanism for youth engagement on policy development and implementation on school safety issues.
3. Identify pathways and means to support youth to surmount challenges they face when a disaster occurs and meaningfully contribute to the implementation of the Regional Road Map on School Safety and resilience in national and school level.
4. Share knowledge on school safety and the regional initiatives as well as foster personal, professional and cross-cultural networking among youth within the Caribbean around school safety issues.
5. Provide a space for youth representatives to voice their unique view on the Caribbean Schools Safety Initiative.
6. Provide an avenue for identifying and addressing emerging issues related to school safety (such as climate change impacts, etc.).

Methodology

The Forum featured opening and closing plenary sessions. The Forum adopted participatory methods to raise awareness, stimulate creativity, encourage innovation, and engage participants. Activities included performances, interactive panels, hard talk role plays, workshop, group discussions and a site visit.

Resolution

Moving forward from the 1st My Island, My Life Youth Forum we the youth of the 10 participating countries have concluded that to achieve true school safety in the region the following resolutions should be considered at the Second Ministerial Forum on School Safety in the Caribbean convened on 29 and 30 April 2019 in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

I. Engagement of Youth Groups & Subsidiaries

This pillar allows for the interaction between young people and the governmental/ other relevant bodies in order to enable the youth to effectively and efficiently disseminate information, and coordinate effective actions, such as:

A. Media, Marketing & Sensitization

These initiatives may include but are not limited to:

1. Social media campaigns, TV and Radio Ads that target persons on the Ministerial, Educational and Community levels
2. Youth/ Community involvement.
3. Educational Campaigns: these include activities that would engage the young creatives through poster designs, jingles, quiz and debate competitions.

B. Representation of youth in decision-making, planning and policy development as it relates to D.R.R. & School Safety

In keeping with the declaration of Paramaribo, we the youth of the “My Island, My Life” Forum reiterate the importance of youth playing a role in the decision making, and policy development process. As such we propose the following:

1. Youth representation on Disaster Management and Risk Reduction Boards/Committees
2. Youth involvement in the review of policies related to D.R.R
3. Youth engagement in the planning and execution of initiatives related to D.R.R

II. Allocation of Human & Financial Resources to D.R.R. & School Safety

We the youth recognise the scarcity of resources and the great need to prioritize areas of expenditure. However, given our vulnerability to natural hazards and the effects of Climate Change on our nations in recent times we see a great need to dedicate resources to these two (2) vital components:

A. Capacity Building

There should be a focus on equipping personnel directly involved in school administration, community and national response mechanisms with the right tools and skills to perform their duties in an emergency, in line with United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction UNISDR¹ standards.

Capacity building should be tailored to this specific region.

B. Safe Learning Facility Development

This involves ensuring that every new school is safe, and every existing school (has been assessed in order to) take(s) the necessary steps to upgrade their safety in regard to structural integrity, and that the necessary mechanisms for maintenance and the provision is made for monitoring, and timely evaluations to take place.

III. Safe Learning Spaces

Children are a very vulnerable class of people; as such their dependence on adults is significant. Child protection and child rights are two fundamental components in the discussion “Disaster Risk Reduction and School Safety”. In support of articles four and twenty- three of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (unicef.org); child protection and child rights inclusive of those in the special needs community, should be the prime responsibilities of the government. It is their duty to prioritise the well-being of children pre, during and post emergency. In addition, assistance should be provided by non-governmental organisations, communities and other parties under the guidance of the Ministry of Education. With this mechanism in place all children can return to a safe alternative learning environment in a timely and friendly manner post disaster.

¹ UNISDR - United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction transitioning to UNDRR: United Nations office for Disaster Risk Reduction as of May 1st 2019

IV. Creation of partnerships for the execution of engagement activities/tangible solutions

To create partnerships, all relevant stakeholders must be identified. These should include but are not limited to:

- Funding Agencies- (governmental "*local, regional & international*" and nongovernmental, private sectors, development banks)
- NGOs - This entails all the relevant authorities on disaster risk management and recovery. E.g. IsraAID, Samaritan's Purse, etc. to promote DRR among youth.
- Relevant Regional Organizations - CDEMA, CARICOM, OECS etc.
- United Nations Organizations - UNDRR, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP etc.
- Youth Organizations - National Youth Councils, Youth Ambassadors corps, Interact/Rotaract, Adventist Youth Association, Caribbean Youth Environment Network, Youth Business Trust, United Youth Leaders of Barbados etc...

Through the development of policies, engagement of the relevant NGO's and youth organizations, awareness campaigns, development and retrofitting of infrastructure to meet standardized building codes, disaster risk reduction can be enacted through a series of collaborative efforts across multiple platforms. Youth are engaged on several fronts; social media, conventional media (TV and radio), innerschools and community activities (town hall meetings and roadshows), and youth focused sporting events.

Tangible solutions should include but are not be limited to:

- Development of a metric to quantify level of disaster readiness of learning environments (*based on their own unique differences*)
- A thorough assessment of the current learning environments.
- Prioritizing the learning environments based on lowest scoring metric as highest priority, and using funds allocated to bring them up to code.
- Conducting a comprehensive performance assessment of these facilities pre and post-disaster to inform standard and code reviews.

Conclusion

Moving forward from this regional forum, we believe that through the four pillars of: youth group and subsidiary engagement, D.R.R and Safer schools human & financial resource allocation, development of safe learning spaces and creation of partnerships for the execution of engagement activities/tangible solutions, that each individual island in their own unique way will be able to create safer learning environments for their youth and children. The first lady of Japan, Mrs. Akie Abe, said “The younger generation have a better approach to decision making because many adults make decisions limited by social norms and rules.” We the youth of the My Island, My Life Caribbean Safer School’s Forum believe that the young people of the Caribbean have the power to effect change. We therefore urge the ministers of the Second Ministerial Forum on School Safety in the Caribbean to take into consideration our recommendations and open new avenues for the involvement of young people in the D.R.R. & Safer Schools initiatives. The Caribbean being a melting pot of cultures has put us in the right place to bind our cultures, expertise and knowledge to create a safer environment for our young people.