

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

25th INTERSESSIONAL MEETING PREPARATORY TO THE 28TH ORDINARY MEETING OF THE ACS MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

ACS Secretariat, Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

(Virtual Meeting)

18th January, 2023

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INTRODUCTION

This report of the Secretary General's to the Intersessional Meeting preparatory to the 28th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council for the ACS that covers the period the 27th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council held virtually on 29th April 2022 under the Chairmanship of Mexico to December 2022 under the new Chairmanship of Guatemala.

Over the period under review a number of events and mandates emanating from the 27th Meeting of the Ministerial Council determined the focus of the Secretariat, key amongst them:

1. Supporting the four pronged vision of the new Chair of the Ministerial Council, Guatemala, for enhanced international cooperation; promotion of a green and blue agenda; economic recovery post pandemic and advancing the Region's migration agenda;
2. establishing the foundation for the effective implementation of the first six year Plan of Action of the ACS (2022-2028);
3. Mapping a more effective governance and management of the ACS through, in the first instance, the conduct of the first ACS Internal/ management Audit aimed at *"ensuring that the processes of the organization are in alignment with industry practices and standards"* and that resources are used effectively *to support the functions of the Secretariat in fulfilment of the objectives of the organization to the benefit of the people of the Greater Caribbean Region"*
4. preparing for the postponed 9th Summit of ACS Heads of State and Government to be held in Guatemala in May 2023, including the negotiation of the Draft Declaration of Antigua, Guatemala;
5. Restoring the statutory calendar of the ACS in the post pandemic period

The aforementioned was pursued against the background of considerable resource limitations and change related to human, financial and time. These included the departure, for personal reasons, of two Directors ahead of contract and shifts in the scheduling and format of meetings due in part to the unpredictable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Members.

The ongoing effects of the pandemic, climate related disasters and the fallout from the war in Ukraine, what one Associate Member categorized as the catastrophic 3 Cs- climate, conflict and COVID- all negatively affected global production and economies and directly impacted Members. This in turn affected the latter's capacity to host and/or participate in meetings in person, and deliver on financial commitments to the ACS and by extension, deepened the Secretariat's budgetary deficit. In order to offset some of these challenges, the Secretary General:

- recruited external expertise in the areas of international cooperation and political affairs;
- convened, virtually, several meetings that had initially been intended to be in person and proposed the hosting of key statutory meetings outside ACS headquarters. The latter was approved by the 11th Extraordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council on 21st September 2022. Consequently, and in the first instance, an Extraordinary and Ordinary Meeting of the Special Committee for Budget and Administration as well as the 8th Meeting of the Coordination Mechanism and the Intersessional Meeting preparatory to the 28th ordinary Meeting to the Ministerial Council were carded to be held in Panama in January 2023, however, they were finally convened to be held virtually;
- re-deployed internal resources to meet the heavy workload of the Secretariat in a pre-Summit year.

The Secretary General also leveraged Secretariat resources to begin the work of preparing for the first ACS Strategic Plan mandated by the 26th Ordinary meeting of the Ministerial Council and reflected in both the Draft Declaration of Mexico and the Draft Declaration of Antigua. He conducted an intense in-house capacity building programme in strategic management that produced very preliminary elements of a vision and mission and SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis that might be used as an input to the strategic planning exercise that it is hoped the CAF will assist in financing. This first ACS Strategic Planning aims to: i. recalibrate and align the ACS Vision and Mission to reflect new realities and the refined role of the ACS ii. define the Association's values and; iii. enhance the profile and image of the ACS;

The Secretary General supported the Chair of the Ministerial Council in the following activities:

1. Coordinating 3 further meetings of the ACS Drafting Committee (Meetings 7, 8 and 9 on 17 y18 August; October 25th and 1st December) to finalise the Draft ACS Declaration;
2. Coordinating of 5 Working Group Meetings to examine Internal Management Audit produced by AEGIS Business Solutions Ltd in keeping with the mandate enshrined in Agreement 11/22 of the 26th ordinary meeting of the Ministerial Council
3. Coordinating of the XI Extraordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council on 21st September in New York, US The key policy documents approved by the XI Meeting were the ACS Paper –*Coordinating Caribbean Cooperation*, *ACS List of Priority Projects* and three Ministerial Agreements 14/22, 15/22 and 16/22 These documents are at **INF.005**, **INF.006**, **INF.010**, **INF.011** and **INF.012** respectively ;

4. Coordinating of the 16th Extraordinary Meeting of the Special Committee for Budget and Administration (16th January 2023);
5. Engaging with representatives of Member States, Associate Members, Observer States and organisations as well as with new and non-traditional development partners;
6. Efforts to stabilise the financial situation of the ACS and advance the progress of the administrative restructuring of the Secretariat for greater efficiency and best results. These efforts included bilateral meetings with some of the States which are late in the payment of their contributions;
7. Coordinating the following statutory meetings of the ACS:
 - 6th ACS International Cooperation Conference
 - 7th and 8th Meetings of the Coordination Mechanism
 - 25th Intersessional Meeting preparatory to the 28th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the ACS;
 - the 43rd Ordinary Meeting of the Special Committee for Budget and Administration;

Further detail in respect of the above are provided in **Section 1** of this report titled **"Office of the Secretary General"**

The activities of the Directorates in support of the 4 pronged thrust of the Chair and longer term strategic thrust of the Association are outlined under **section 2** of the Report entitled **"Directorates"**. The task of mobilizing resources in support of future cooperation was continued by the Directorate for Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation and an update on results obtained to date in that regard are outlined later in the Report.

The Secretary General conducted oversight of the directorates' undertakings, complementing same with bilateral engagements aimed at supporting, in particular, resource mobilisation. In that regard, he held strategic and often repeated engagements with certain Members-namely Cuba, Venezuela, France, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, Korea, the Government of Turkey and the European Union (EU).

With a view to promoting greater synergy and more effective financing of the ACS Plan of Action 2022-28 the Secretary General engaged the heads of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Latin American Development Bank (CAF), the World Bank (WB) are noteworthy.

The Secretary General also made a special effort to engage the sub-regional membership of the ACS at the bilateral level, meeting with the Secretaries General of the Caribbean

Community, the Central American Integration System (SICA), the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and of the Latin American Integrating System (SELA) during the period under review, all in an effort to promote greater complementarity of cooperation.

As part of efforts to strengthen ACS presence and positioning in a dynamic geo-political cooperation economy, the Secretary General took advantage of regional and global preparation for a much anticipated EU-LAC Summit under the Spanish Presidency of the EU to strengthen dialogue with both the EU and CELAC but also with the CAF which, headquartered in Spain, plans to convene a meeting of EU and LAC Foreign and Finance Ministers in 2023 and via correspondence on 20th December, 2022 has requested Observer Status in the ACS.

1. OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

1.1 POLITICAL AFFAIRS

1.1.1 Policy Consultations facilitated in accordance with Ministerial Mandates:

In accordance with Ministerial Mandates, Members' requests and/or instructions of the Chair or Executive Boards of ACS statutory bodies, the following consultations were facilitated:

1.1.1.1 Meetings of the Executive Board of the Ministerial Council of the ACS

The Executive Board met on two occasions during the period under review on the 1st June and 7th September respectively. At its **59th Meeting in closed session**, Guatemala, in its capacity as Chairman introduced the work programme of Guatemala which established (4) pillars of action:

- (i) Increase multidimensional cooperation
- (ii) Strengthen a regional green and blue agenda
- (iii) Reactivate the economy, through the attraction of investments and development
- (iv) Address the migration cycle from a development perspective

The Board adopted the draft calendar of statutory meetings for 2022. The **Representative of Cuba**, a special guest to the closed meeting, gave details about the upcoming 6th International Cooperation Conference to be held in Havana, Cuba on November 11th 2022. Special note was taken of the Implementation Plan which was due to be approved by the Special committees and thereafter presented to the 6th ACS International Cooperation Conference. The ACS Secretariat was asked to prepare a payment plan to be discussed with Member states regarding outstanding contributions.

The meeting noted the ongoing efforts of the ACS Secretary General to:

- (i) pursue cooperation with banking institutions, including through the impending conclusion of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the Caribbean Development Bank and Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI);
- (ii) update MoU's with such entities as COCATRAM and SELA and;
- (iii) pursue relations with the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA).

The 60th Meeting of the Board in Open Session was convened to select a new Director for Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation from the Central American grouping. Referencing *Agreement 7/19*, the Secretary General outlined the process for interviewing the candidates. Upon the withdrawal of the candidate from Honduras during the meeting, the sole candidate from Guatemala, Ms. Rita Mishan, was interviewed to ascertain her experience, her strategic direction for the directorate and the objectives of the ACS in terms of cooperation.

The Meeting was also informed about the Secretary General's proposal to host upcoming ACS Meetings in person as per Article 10 of *Agreement 9/95*. The Chair closed the meeting and directed that a note verbale be circulated to Membership to address the deliberation of hosting the meetings, whether in person or virtually, at the forthcoming 11th Extraordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council scheduled for September 21st, 2022 in New York.

1.1.1.2 The 7th and 8th Meetings of the Coordination Mechanism

Consistent with Agreements 10/18 and 11/18 regarding the functioning of the Coordination Mechanism and the Guide for the Annual Calendar of the ACS respectively, the 7th of the Coordination Mechanism was held on the 2nd of August while the 8th Meeting is scheduled for the January 2023. The **seventh meeting** sought to familiarize the new Executive Boards with their roles and function, particularly as the Association prepares to implement the 2022-2028 Plan of Action adopted by the 27th Ordinary Meeting of the ACS Ministerial Council on 29th April 2022.

The eighth meeting scheduled for 17th January, 2023 is expected to:

- Consider the Draft Implementation Plan of the 2022-2028 Action Plan, taking due account of the outcomes of the 6th ACS International Cooperation Conference;
- Discuss the priorities for the period leading up to the 9th ACS Summit of Heads of State and/or Government (January to April 2023).

1.1.1.3 Meetings of the ACS Drafting Committee

The establishment and functioning of the ACS Drafting Committee is formalised in Agreements:

1. 10/ 18 Terms of Reference for the functioning of the Coordination Mechanism and

2. 15/18 approving the terms of reference for the convening and hosting of Summits of the Association of Caribbean States. The latter establishes in paragraph 3 that:

"The Chairman of the Executive Board of the Ministerial Council shall preside over the establishment of a Drafting Committee which shall be supported by the Secretariat.

The Drafting Committee shall have responsibility for the Preliminary drafts of:

- *The Declaration of the ACS Summit; and*
- *The Triennial Plan of Action;*

for the dissemination and consideration of Member States and Associate Members. The Drafting Committee shall comprise members of the Coordination Mechanism and be open-ended among all members and shall meet according to the agreed frequency, to discuss and develop the Draft of the Declaration and the Plan of Action."

Essentially therefore the Members of the Coordination Mechanism (the entire Executive Board of the Ministerial Council and Chairs of all other ACS bodies) plus any other interested Member State delegation have the responsibility to collectively, as the Drafting Committee, prepare the preliminary version of the draft Declaration and Action Plan.

The **7th Meeting of the Drafting Committee** was held over a two day period on 17th and 18th August, 2022. The Committee considered the first version of the Draft Declaration of Antigua formulated by Guatemala in its capacity as Chair of the Ministerial Council and host of the Summit.

In opening this first Drafting Committee under the Chairmanship of Guatemala **the Delegation of Guatemala** highlighted the following:

1. The Declaration's text was formulated taking into account the draft text of the Declaration of Mexico which was finalised by the last drafting committee;
2. Updates would need to be made to capture work to be undertaken up to 2023, in alignment with the Chair's priorities, as well as actions articulated within the ACS

Plan of Action 2022-2028, Special Committees, and the Caribbean Sea Commission;

3. The draft retains key thematic coverage from the previous Declaration given their relevance to membership. Such topics include ACS institutional strengthening, pandemic recovery, resilient and sustainable tourism, blue economy, climate change and the environment, trade and external economic relations, and principles of the UN Charter for Peace. Further, considerations for SIDS vulnerability, ICTs, partnerships, financing, and cooperation for development are reflected;
4. The declaration emphasises cooperation, economic development and alliances across the Greater Caribbean.

The Chair reiterated its commitment to the integration of members' inputs, in the hope that the Declaration could be adopted at the next Summit of ACS Heads of State.

- The **8th Meeting of the Drafting Committee** held on 25th October reviewed Version 3 of the Declaration of Guatemala.
- **The 9th Meeting of the Drafting Committee** held on 1st December, 2022, reflected on the contributions received from Members from the aforementioned meeting as well as inputs made during the course of the meeting and produced the 6th version of the Draft Declaration based on consensus and collaboration.

1.1.1.4 9th Inter Secretariat Meeting of the Founding Observer Organizations of the ACS

Efforts to convene the heads of the 6 Founding Observer Organisations of the ACS in the margins of the 77th Ordinary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in New York proved unfruitful as only the ACS Secretary General and a High Representative of SICA were able to engage under the chairmanship of Guatemala. The trilateral meeting was nonetheless very useful in confirming the will of ACS and SICA to work towards a more structured and regular engagement towards the alignment of the former's Plan of Action and the latter's recently completed Work Programme. The Chair underscored his support for such rapprochement and urged the parties to continue to seek to engage with other Founding Observers, in an effort to build technical synergies to the benefit of their overlapping membership. He considered it particularly important for the ACS, CARICOM and SICA Secretaries General to meet at the earliest and tasked Secretary General ACS with organising same. The meeting was also a useful precursor to the Secretary General's fruitful bilateral with newly named SICA Secretary General Vargas Werner the next month

in Peru in the margins of the OAS General Assembly. Efforts continue to secure the meeting of the Chair with the ACS-CARICOM-SICA Secretaries General.

1.1.1.5 11th Extraordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the ACS Ministerial Council , 21st September, New York

In the old tradition of face to face meetings, The Secretary General met with Ministers of the ACS Membership, during the week of the 77th United Nations General Assembly in New York, to provide insight on the actions and partnerships to advance ACS cooperation. He highlighted the following:

1. The CELAC-ACS Breakfast held on September 19th,2022 which initiated a synergistic partnership to benefit of the Greater Caribbean Region premised on CELAC's comparative advantage of consolidating political position and that of the ACS to channel synergies via projects, programmes and joint work programmes based on climate change, disaster risk reduction, trade, transport and sustainable development.
2. Development of a common LAC positions with CELAC ahead of COP27- a Draft Statement/ Declaration was agreed by Membership via round robin and presented by the Chair on behalf of the ACS at the COP 27. The final document is at **Annex 005**.
3. The signature of the ACS – CAF Memorandum of Understanding and the intention to mobilise the latter's support for the elaboration of the first ACS Strategic Plan amongst other priorities.
4. Proposed cooperation plans in collaboration with UNCTAD to address connectivity in the Greater Caribbean Region via capacity building for digital platforms for transport and trade logistics.
5. An engagement with the World Bank to deepen the dialogue in respect of funding windows to support implementation of the 2022-28 Plan of Action and to promote ACS consideration of the World Bank's Catastrophe Bonds;
6. Ongoing efforts to formalise and institutionalise partnerships with development banks to open funding opportunities for the Region, e.g. the Central American Economic Integration Bank (CABEI) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB);
7. The ongoing deliberations of the Working Group to examine the recommendations of AEGIS Business Solutions Ltd in respect of the functioning of the ACS.

The Extraordinary Ministerial Council Meeting also welcomed and approved the candidacy of Ms. Rita Mishaan, as per *Draft Ministerial Agreement 14/22*, as the new Director of Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation and saw the approval of *Draft Ministerial Agreements 15/22 and 16/22* viz the physical hosting of meetings for the period 2022-2023 and the White Paper Coordinating Caribbean Cooperation and List of Priority Projects respectively.

1.1.1.6 25th Intersessional Meeting preparatory to the 28th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the ACS and 9th Summit of Heads of State and/ or Government of the ACS.

The 25th Intersessional Meeting was scheduled from 2nd December, 2022 to 18th January 2023 virtually. It is expected to:

- Review and approve ACS Chairmen Reports and the Report of the Secretary General
- Note the progress of the Working Group
- Note preparations for statutory meetings to be held in Antigua Guatemala in May 2023, including venues and logistical preparations.
- Consider for recommendation application/s received for Associate, Observer or Social Actor Status within the Association.
- Review draft implementation plan of the plan of action 2022 – 2028 and the final draft of the Declaration of Antigua, Guatemala as finalised by the Drafting Committee for presentation to the Preparatory Meeting to the 28th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council and thereafter the 9th Summit of ACS Heads of State and/or Government.

1.1.2 Engagements with Representatives of Membership and Existing and Potential Development Partners

Over the period May - December 2022, the Secretary General met in person or virtually with representatives of ACS Membership as follows:

Date	Member/ Organisation	Representative
6th May 2022	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	H.E. Faisal Falah Alharbi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Havana, Cuba
10th May 2022	Argentina	H.E. Marcelo Suárez, Ambassador
13th May 2022	Türkiye	S.E. Bengü Yiğitgüden, Ambassador
13th May 2022	Trinidad and Tobago	Senator Dr. The Honourable Amery Browne, Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs
17th May 2022	Venezuela	Courtesy Call H.E. Álvaro Sánchez, Ambassador
23th May 2022	Korea	H.E. Dong-il OH, Ambassador
31th May 2022	Belize	Senator The Honourable Eamon Courtenay, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade
1st June 2022	Guatemala	59th Executive Board Meeting of the ACS Ministerial Council (closed meeting)
2nd June 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	2nd Executive Board Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism (closed meeting)
7th June 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	2nd Executive Board Meeting of the Special Committee on Transport (closed meeting)
8th June 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	2nd Executive Board Meeting of the Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations (closed meeting)
10th June 2022	France	H.E. Didier Chabert, Ambassador
13th June 2022	Italy	H. E. Massimo Ambrosetti, Ambassador of Italy to the Republic of Panama
13th June 2022	Venezuela	H.E. Álvaro Sánchez, Ambassador
15th June 2022	Dominican Republic	H.E. Wellington Bencosme, Ambassador
17th June 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	1st Executive Board Meeting of the Special Committee on Budget and Administration (closed meeting)
17th June 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	42th Meeting of the Special Committee on Budget and Administration

30th June 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	1st Meeting of the Special Committee on Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation
1st July 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	XLII Meeting of the Executive Board of Disaster Risk Reduction
4th July 2022	San Vincent and the Grenadines	The Honourable Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister
6th July 2022	Maritime University of Panama	Victor Luna Barahona, Chancellor, University of Panama
14th July 2022	United Nations	Virtual Meeting, H.E. Abdulla Shahid, Ambassador, United Nations
15th July 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	1 st Meeting of the Working Group on the ACS Management Audit
20th July 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	3 rd Executive Board Meeting of the Caribbean Sea Commission
26th July 2022	Venezuela	H.E. Raúl Li Causi, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Caribbean
28th July 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	2 nd Meeting of the Working Group on the ACS Management Audit
28th July 2022	Comisión Económica para Latinoamérica y el Caribe de las Naciones Unidas (CEPAL)	Sr. Ricardo Sánchez, Oficial Senior de Asuntos Económicos, División de Comercio Internacional e Integración y la Sra. Miryam Saade Hazin, Oficial de Asuntos Económicos, Unidad de Infraestructura y Logística, División de Comercio Internacional e Integración
29th July 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	28th Anniversary Celebration of the ACS
2th August 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	7th Meeting of the Coordination Mechanism
5th August 2022	Colombia	Presidential Hanover Ceremony, Elected President Gustavo Petro
11th August 2022	Kingdom of the Netherlands	H. E. Varga van Kibéd, Ambassador, Mr. Linley Geeban, Trade Officer and Mrs. Lisette Blüm, Deputy Head of Mission
11th-15th August 2022	Cuba	H.E. Tania Diego Olite, Ambassador
17th-18th August 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	Drafting Committee for the 9th Summit of the ACS Heads of States and/or Government – Draft Plan of Action
18th August 2022	Korea	Dinner hosted by H.E. Dong-il OH, Ambassador

19th August 2022	Trinidad and Tobago	TT Agri-Investment Forum and Expo II
22nd August 2022	Cuba	H.E. Tania Diego Olite, Ambassador
23rd August 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	31st Meeting of the Special Committee on Transport
25th August 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	37th Meeting of the Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations
26th August 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	3 rd Meeting of the Working Group on the ACS Management Audit
30th August 2022	Kingdom of Spain	H.E. Fernando Nogales Álvarez, Ambassador
30th August 2022	Ukraine	H.E. Sergiy Kyslytsya, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations
1st September 2022	Kingdom of Spain	H.E. Fernando Nogales Álvarez, Embajador del Reino de España
2nd September 2022	Russia	H.E. Alexander S. Kurmaz, Non-Resident Ambassador of Russia to the ACS
2nd September 2022	Central American Integration System (SICA)	H.E. Werner Isaac Vargas, Secretary General
2nd September 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	22nd Meeting of the Caribbean Sea Commission
5th September 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	30th Meeting of the Special Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction
6th September 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	30th Meeting of the Special Committee on Transport
7th September 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	60th Meeting of the Executive Board of the ACS Ministerial Council – (Open Meeting)
8th September 2022	Estados Unidos de América	Mr. Shante Moore, Chargé d'affaires, a.i.
8th September 2022	Japan	H.E. Yutaka Matsubara, Ambassador
12th September 2022	Israel	H.E. Itai Bardov, Israel Ambassador to Panama
13th September 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	36th Meeting of the Special Committee on Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation
15th September 2022	Italy	H. E. Massimo Ambrosetti, Ambassador of Italy to the Republic of Panama

17th September 2022	United Nations	Mr. Pedro Moreno, Director, Office of the Secretary General, Mrs. Chantal Line Carpentier, Chief Officer, Office of the Secretary General
21st September 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	11th Extraordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the ACS
21st September 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	9th Inter Secretariat Meeting of the Founding Observer Organizations of the ACS
21st September 2022	Italy	H.E. Marina Sereni, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs
22nd September 2022	World Bank	Mr. Carlos Jaramillo, Vice-President for Latin America and the Caribbean
22nd September 2022	AEC-GCCMI Joint event	Launch of the Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative (GCCMI)
23rd September 2022	United Arab Emirates	H.E Omar Ghobash, Viceministros de Asuntos Culturales para el Caribe
23rd September 2022	Cuba	S. E. Bruno Eduardo Rodríguez Parrilla, Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores
26th September 2022	Guatemala	S.E. José Lambur, Embajador de Guatemala en Bélgica
26th September 2022	European Union-Brussels	Helena König, Policy Officer Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago
27th September 2022	Panama	H.E. Yavel Francis Lanuza, Ambassador of Panama to Belgium
27th September 2022	Barbados	H.E. Joy-Ann Skinner, Ambassador of Barbados to Belgium
28th September 2022	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian aid Operations - ECHO	Mr. Michael Koheler, Acting General Director
28th September 2022	Trinidad and Tobago	H.E. Colin Conelly, Ambassador of Trinidad and Tobago to Belgium and Permanent Representative to the European Union
29th September 2022	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)	Desmond Simon, First Secretary, Embassy of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
29th September 2022	The Bahamas	Kerry F.M. Bonamy, Minister Counsellor, Embassy of The Bahamas and Permanent Mission to the European Union

26th September 2022	Guyana	Lloyd Gunraj, First Secretary, Embassy of Guyana and Permanent Mission to the European Union
5th-7th October 2022	Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA)	LII Sesión Regular de la Asamblea General de la Organización de Estados Americanos realizada en Lima, Perú
11th October 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	ACS Webinar: "Investing in Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (MHEWS) to empower those Most at Risk"
12th-14th October 2022	Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC)	7 th Meeting of the Round Table on Caribbean Development and 29 th Session of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee held in Paramaribo, Suriname
18th-20th October 2022	Panama Logistics Business Council	7th World Forum of Cities and Logistics Platforms "Green logistics and artificial intelligence in the supply chain" held in Panama
20th October 2022	University of Panama	Congress "Challenges of Logistics in a Post-pandemic World"
24th-26th October 2022	Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC)	39 th Session of the Commission
25th October 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	Drafting Committee for the 9 th Summit of the ACS Heads of States and/or Government – Draft Plan of Action
26th October 2022	Venezuela	Bilateral Meeting- H.E. Carlos Faría, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Delegation
27th October 2022	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the European Union	3rd CELAC-EU Ministerial Meeting
31st October 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	Seminar Microplastics in the Caribbean: Sources, Impacts and Monitoring Methodologies

31st October 2022	ACS Meeting	Webinar Gratuito - Microplásticos en el Caribe: fuentes, impactos y metodologías de Monitoreo
2nd November 2022	Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration, SIECA	SIECA- COMITRAN Mobility and Logistics Master Plan
10th-11th November 2022	ACS Statutory Meeting	6th ACS International Cooperation Conference
10th November 2022	Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambassador Andrej Gregor Rode, Ambassador of Slovenia, Embassy of Slovenia in Ottawa, Canada • Ambassador Frank But, Ambassador-at-Large, Special Envoy for the UN Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia • Mrs. Urška Učakar, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Slovenia to the UN Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia
11th November 2022	United Arab Emirates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Omar Saif Ghobash, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for Culture and Public Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for Culture and Public and Public Diplomacy • Mr. Bader Almatrooshi, UAE Ambassador to Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, and Saint Kitts and Nevis, Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the ACS, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates • H. E. Dr Saghira Alahbabi, Director of American Affairs Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation • Mrs. Kawthar Al Hebsi, Head of Caribbean Section, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation • Mr. Saeed Alsaheed, Science and Technology Advisor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Jassim Saif Alshamsi, Second Secretary of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in the Republic of Cuba
15th November 2022	CAF Development Bank of America	CAF's Flagship Economy and Development Report (RED 2021) "Pathways for Integration: Trade Facilitation, Infrastructure and Global Value Chains"
16th November 2022	United Nations Development Programme, UNDP	Courtesy Call-Mr. Gerardo Noto, Resident Representative for the Caribbean
21st November 2022	CAF Development Bank of America	Dr. Stacy Richards-Kennedy, Regional Manager for the Caribbean
22nd November 2022	Kingdom of Spain	H.E. Fernando Nogales Álvarez, Ambassador
25th November 2022	Türkiye	S.E. Bengü Yiğitgüden, Ambassador
28th November 2022	Korea	S.E. Yun-young Lee, Vicepresidente de la Agencia de Cooperación Internacional de Corea
30th November 2022	Korea	12th High-Level Forum in Korea-Caribbean Partnership
6th December 2022	CAF Development Bank of America	CAF-ACS Cooperation
16th December 2022	Latin American and Caribbean Economic System, SELA-Pro Tempore Presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)	Forum "Responding to the challenges of integration for the development of Latin America and the Caribbean, proposed by regional and sub-Regional Integration Mechanisms"

1.2 LEGAL AFFAIRS

1.2.1 Memoranda of Understanding and Partnership Agreements

In keeping with its mandate to pursue cooperation and concerted action for the development of the Greater Caribbean Region, the ACS Secretariat negotiated memoranda of understanding and Framework Cooperation Agreements as follows:

Framework Agreement for Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of TÜRKİYE and the ACS

The Republic of Turkey was accepted as an Observer to the ACS by the 6th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council on 7th December 2000. In this regard, the Republic of Turkey has supported development projects in the areas of the preservation of the Caribbean Sea and sustainable tourism. The ACS and the Republic of Türkiye have sought to further define the areas for cooperation through the conclusion of a Framework Agreement which was signed on 13 March 2022 and which includes possibilities for cooperation across the focal areas of the ACS and notes the inclusion of the cross-cutting issues affecting women and other vulnerable groups as important subjects to be mainstreamed as far as possible into projects, with the aim of satisfying the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)

The CDB was accepted as a Social Actor of the ACS by the 27th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council on 29th April 2022. The CDB and the ACS concluded a Framework Cooperation Agreement on 22nd June 2022 that identifies as areas of priority for cooperation: the Recovery Duration Adjuster, which is a resilience-adjusted gross national income measure for SIDS to access concessional finance taking into account the economic, social and environmental economies of SIDS. Also identified as areas for cooperation are the topics of, disaster risk reduction, promotion of the development of small-scale and mid-scale enterprises and protection and preservation of the environment, natural resources and the Caribbean Sea..

The Cooperación Andina de Fomento (CAF)

This Memorandum of Understanding was concluded on 19th September 2022 and is geared towards coordinating actions with regard to the implementation of joint efforts for achieving sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The MOU highlights the possibility of developing projects in the areas of:

- the Green Economy and Blue Economy Development;

- Transport, Logistics and Infrastructure for Integration;
- Climate Change, Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction; as well as
- Institutional Strengthening of the ACS.

The Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB)

The Framework Cooperation Agreement between the ACS and the Ibero American General Secretariat was signed on 11th November 2022 during the ACS 6th International Cooperation Conference, Havana, Cuba. The Agreement is intended to form the basis upon which the two parties will work in the joint preparation of plans of action aimed at establishing collaborative projects in areas such as climate change and the environment, disaster risk reduction, trade and external economic relations, sustainable tourism, transport *inter alia*.

The Central American Maritime Transport Commission (COCATRAM)

The Specific Agreement on Cooperation between the Secretariat of the Association of Caribbean States and the Central American Maritime Commission (COCATRAM) was also signed on 11th November 2022 during the ACS 6th International Cooperation Conference in Havana, Cuba. The Agreement establishes a basis for the development of a joint work programme for the period 2023-2028 focused on actions in relation to:

- Modernisation of the regional maritime transport sector
- Facilitating access to empirical information for evidence-based decision making
- Capacity building
- Maritime transport initiatives within the context of environmental protections.

1.2.2 Request for Observer Status

Subsequently, the CAF requested Observer Status before the ACS via correspondence on 15th December, 2022.

1.2.3 Social Actors

SMCL Investments Trinidad Limited applied for admission as a Social Actor within the ACS by letter dated 16th March 2022. A circular informing Member States of the application was transmitted on June 2nd 2022 in keeping with Ministerial Agreement 21/18 on the Adoption of the Terms and Conditions for the Participation of Social Actors in the Meetings of the Ministerial Council and the Special Committees of the Association of Caribbean States. According to Agreement 21/18, article 5, subsection A, Non-Governmental Organisations are accepted as Social Actors, “taking into account the possibility of contributing to the achievement of the purposes, scope and objectives established in the Convention”.

To this end, the application letter received from SMCL Investments Trinidad Limited (attached hereto) outlines the manner in which it seeks to collaborate with the ACS. In this regard, the application expresses an aim of halting the effects of Climate Change through concerted action in projects that promote the tenets of Sustainable Development and Net Zero Carbon Emissions.

To date the Secretariat has received one response from the Republic of Guatemala, seeking more information from the company on its work related to the Clean Development Mechanism and Circular Economy. This information was received and circulated to Membership.

Article 7 of Agreement 21/18 provides that an application for admission as a Social Actor shall be discussed at the Intersessional Preparatory Meeting in order to obtain a consensus decision that shall be submitted by the Secretary General to the Ministerial Council.

Accordingly, the application is submitted to this 25th Intersessional Preparatory Meeting for its consideration.

1.2.4. Ratification and Entry into force of Legal Instruments

The matrix reflecting the status of the signatures and ratifications of the ACS Legal Instruments for the period under review is attached.

1.3 COMMUNICATIONS

Introduction

This document is intended as a summary of actions carried out by the Unit since the new Communications Officer joined in April 2022. It structures the work done, as well as observations and findings.

The Communications Unit within the Association of Caribbean States has the responsibility of guiding and assisting with the dissemination of information and is accomplished via collaboration between the unit and the different directorates, the work done can be described as complimentary.

Marketing and Communication strategy

To achieve its objectives, the ACS must use a concrete strategy to promote its image and strengthen its reputation among Member States, partners, and the general public. It is therefore essential to put in place a marketing strategy, which, through a process of study and reflection, will make it possible to identify the objectives and ensure that coherent methods and actions are defined to achieve them. Consultations, analysis, interviews, and opinions of staff were among the activities used to create the draft strategy.

External Communication

The Communications Unit assisted in external communication activities with relation to projects initiated by the ACS but also in collaboration with partners as follows:

- Social Media

The Communications Unit worked steadily on the visibility of the ACS, particularly its presence on social media platforms. The strategy thus far has been to continue the use of existing social media profiles but in a more efficient manner. The association is currently active on Instagram, Twitter, Youtube and LinkedIn. The Unit utilised these different platforms to promote the different external activities (International Cooperation Conference, Microplastics webinar, etc.) of the Association but also increased interest and engagement in the organisation through their promotion. It should be noted that proposals for restructuring social networks are planned.

- Campaigns

The Communications Unit carried out a "Did you know" campaign for Micro and Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Campaign. In collaboration with the Shridath Ramphal

Centre and Caribbean Export Development Agency, the ACS hosted a social media campaign to promote greater awareness of how important MSMEs are to communities, articles and "fun facts" about regional MSMEs. A special filter was also created to allow users to show their support for these businesses and entrepreneurship in the Greater Caribbean.

Promotion of Projects and Events

FitCuba

The promotional displays and material for the ACS booth used in Cuba, were well received.

ACS anniversary

The unit assisted in developing the programme/agenda layout for the anniversary celebration, messages from Associate members and promotional videos.

Multi-Hazards Early Warning Systems (MHEWS) Webinar

The unit produced various content items and Visuals for this event as well as five additional deliverables were created for the "Did You Know" campaign.

The event generated *300 Webex link clicks and over 90 participants in the webinar.*

Microplastics in the Caribbean: Sources, Impacts and Monitoring Methodologies (31st October to 4th November - Virtual)

The unit produced 15 "Fun Fact" visuals, as well as an Ebook ("virtual gift"). An event page (landing page) was also proposed but was rejected.

Overall, there were 947 Webex link clicks and 458 participants in the webinar.

International Cooperation Conference (10th-11th November - Cuba):

The Communications Unit played an active role in the promotion of the Cooperation conference as the following visuals were designed by the unit: save the date visual, rollout banners, magazine and catalog, agenda, official logo, badges, presentation folders,

bookmarks, videos; communication on social networks, development of the cooperation.acs-aec.org website; etc.

Pre and post press releases were also done to promote the conference. There was promising engagement across social media platforms.

The ACS participated in the promotion of the GCCMI project by writing and distributing the press release to specific media.

The unit promoted the Secretary General's trip to various international engagements.

Website

The current contract for the overhaul of the ACS website has been terminated and a new RFQ will be distributed in order to select an agency that will best meet the needs of the website and the AEC.

Internal Communication and collaboration

- Audit and optimisation of processes

This process resulted in the creation of a request form through which units make requests from the Communication Unit. This is in order to better formulate tasks in the unit, save time and improve productivity. The request form outlines pertinent generic information needed for the unit to carry out its tasks, including expectations and indicators.

- Training of Communications Unit

Members of the Unit were encouraged to follow online training sessions to obtain skills that would be beneficial and useful to communication tasks.

- Diagnostic surveys (staff and representatives)

Two diagnostic surveys were executed over the period under review – one with ACS representatives and one with Staff members to evaluate the communication methods of the ACS internally and externally. They served as an audit of communication methods to assess the effectiveness of systems already in place, identify areas of concern, and ensure

that all relevant personnel were included in the creations of methods that would directly impact them.

- Business Intelligence excel file

This is a file comprising regional organisations actors. It summarises their missions and provides basic general information on them. There is also an overview of their communications on social media as well as engagement through subscriptions.

- Branding guide

A brand identity was developed for the ACS and the organisation's graphic identity redesigned.

Brand identity is the basis of communication and an integral part of marketing strategy. It brings together the elements that make an organisation recognisable to its audience. A brand guide outlines rules to be respected, the colour codes to be used, the graphic elements and the typography. The original colours of the ACS were adjusted:

- Blue, the different variations of blue are brighter- symbolising trust and seriousness. This represents the organisation's guarantee of quality. It also reminds us of the sea, the cradle of the Caribbean.
- Green, adjusted to give more dynamism to the variations of blue and to recall the fundamental axes of the ACS around the themes of the environment, climate change issues, etc.
- Coral, will occasionally add a modern touch to the brand image, emphasising positivity, novelty and energy.

Blue, Green and Orange economy

A graphic charter and guidelines were developed for the use of the ACS logo for internal support as well as for the use by members and partners.

1.4 BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION

1.4.1 Budget

For the year 2022 so far the Secretariat has received Contributions from twenty countries in the amount of US\$1.9M. This has gone some way to reducing the increasing debt owed to the Association year on year however there still leaves room for improvement as the deficit continues to adversely affect the Secretariat and its mandates.

Notwithstanding this increasing Contribution Debt, the Secretariat has tried to maintain its standards and has provided and displayed efficiency and professionalism towards the membership.

Gradually the Government of Trinidad and Tobago relaxed all COVID related measures including the need to work from home and as such the Secretariat has discontinued all Work from Home arrangements.

In addition the ACS has conducted Meetings both Virtual and Face to Face and the organisation has resumed its Missions schedule to pre COVID frequency.

In this period the organisation is in the process of change brought about by the approval of an ongoing Management Audit at the Secretariat. On conclusion it is hoped that there would be far greater efficiency and effectiveness of the work produced by the Association to give additional benefits to its Members.

1.4.1.1 The Approved Ordinary Budget for the Biennium 2022 – 2023

The Budget for 2023 was approved at the 27th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council held virtually on 29 May 2022 under the Chairmanship of Mexico.

The budget is as follows:

Association of Caribbean States			
Budget of the ACS for the Biennium 2022 – 2023			
		Approved BUDGET 2023	
1	HUMAN RESOURCE		
1.1.	INTERNATIONAL STAFF		
	Basic Salary	841,985.97	
	Pension Fund	117,878.04	
	Medical Insurance	23,200.85	
	Housing Allowance	24,000.00	
	Representation Allowance	12,000.00	
	Contract Termination Reserves	122,659.03	
	TOTAL INTERNATIONAL STAFF EXPENSES	1,141,723.89	
		52.50%	
1.2	LOCAL STAFF		
	Basic Salary	166,443.72	
	Pension Fund	23,302.12	
	Medical Insurance	14,824.96	
	Overtime	4,000.00	
	Contract Termination Reserves	13,870.31	
	TOTAL LOCAL STAFF EXPENSES	222,441.11	
		10.23%	
1.3	TEMPORARY CONTRACTS		
	Unit & Research Assistants	157,521.60	
	Medical Insurance	8,135.74	
	TOTAL TEMPORARY CONTRACTS	165,657.34	
		7.62%	
1.4	EXTERNAL CONTRACTS		
	Consultants	39,000.00	
	Consultants/ System s Administration	26,074.63	
	Sanitation	28,200.00	
	TOTAL EXTERNAL CONTRACTS	93,274.63	
		4.29%	

Association of Caribbean States		
Budget of the ACS for the Biennium 2022 – 2023		
		Approved BUDGET 2023
1.5	HUMAN RESOURCES PROGRAMME	65,000.00
		2.99%
	TOTAL HUMAN RESOURCES	1,688,096.96
		77.62%
2	GENERAL ADMINISTRATION EXPENSES	
	Premises Expenses	24,411.76
	Equipment, Materials & Supplies	67,529.41
	Communications	20,258.82
	Depreciation & Motor Vehicle Expenses	78,382.35
	Financial Management Expenses	11,500.00
	Contingencies	3,554.40
	Information and PR Activities	5,000.00
	TOTAL GENERAL ADMINISTRATION EXPENSES	210,636.75
		9.69%
3	MEETINGS & MISSIONS	
	Meetings	138,000.00
	Official Missions	72,000.00
	TOTAL MEETINGS & MISSIONS	210,000.00
		9.66%
4	MINISTERIAL COUNCILS & SUMMITS	
	Ministerial Council	50,000.00
	Summit	16,000.00
	TOTAL MC & SUMMIT	66,000.00
		3.03%
	TOTAL BUDGET	2,174,733.72

Any amendments to this Budget would be presented at the 43rd Budget and Administration Meeting scheduled for January 16th 2023 for consideration.

1.4.1.2 The 2022 Budget Performance

The budget execution report to 31st October 2022 can be summarized as follows:

	Approved Budget	Actual Expenditure	Surplus at Oct'22
Human Resources	1,743,993.62	1,380,088.42	363,905.19
General Administration	169,640.11	146,184.33	23,455.78
Meetings & Missions	201,100.00	237,478.37	(36,378.37)
Min. Council & Summit	60,000.00	85,956.32	(25,956.32)
	2,174,733.73	1,849,707.44	325,026.28
	100%	85%	15%

Resultant from the relaxation of Covid-19 Restrictions, the Approved Ordinary Budget for 2022 saw increases in external Meetings and Missions from the previous year. The deficits in this category relate to missions undertaken by the Office of the Secretary General deemed critical for the organisation to achieve its objectives in conjunction with the ongoing efforts to revitalise and restructure the Secretariat.

The deficits in the category of Ministerial Council and Summits is in relation to Extraordinary Ministerial Council Meetings not previously budgeted for in addition to extra Summit Drafting Committee Meetings.

The main factors constituting the overall Surplus, separate from the estimated costs to the end of the year is as a result of vacancies within International and Temporary Staff.

1.4.1.3 Contributions

The Contributions debt due by the membership as at 31st October, 2022 is US\$ 3,722,888.34. Some major contributors include - El Salvador, Mexico Suriname and Venezuela.

For the year so far the Secretariat has received \$1,937,149.90 in Contributions from Member States. Of this total amount received only \$1,034,996.80 relates to the Contributions for 2022.

The delayed payments of annual contributions accompanied by the increasing outstanding debt, compromises the Secretariat's ability to meet financial obligations. Further, it makes planning difficult and makes for inefficiencies in budget execution. The Contributions due from the Membership are crucial to the success of the work programmes of the Directorates.

Every effort should be made to tender timely contribution payments to avoid the persistent cash deficits of the Secretariat.

1.4.1.4 Audit

Bakertilly, Ramcharitar, Montano Company is in the final stages of completing the Audit of 2021. The report will be presented at the 43rd Meeting of the Special Committee on Budget and Administration to be held on the 16th January 2023.

The report which is in its draft stage have repeated similar findings from previous audit reports conducted by the same firm such as inadequate project files within Directorates.

Also a concern regarding the mounting debt owed to the Association by Venezuela which stood at US\$2.4M. Bakertilly advises the Secretariat to remedy this situation but has acknowledged the attempts the current Secretary General has made through dialogue and correspondence to address this matter.

The auditor also encouraged the Secretariat to follow up with its other members on the payment of balances due.

The opinion of the Auditor is that the financial statements presents fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Association as at December 31, 2021, and its

financial performance and its cash flows for the year 2021 in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards.

1.4.2 Administration

1.4.2.1 Meetings of the Working Groups to examine Internal Management Audit Report of AEGIS Business Solutions Ltd

The **1st Meeting of the Working Group on the ACS Management Audit** was held virtually at the ACS Headquarters, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on Friday July 15th, 2022. It focussed on **Information and Technology (IT)**.

Mr. Wayne Oudit, Project Lead, delivered a detailed summary of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Audit on behalf of the Management Firm of Aegis Business Solutions Limited. He highlighted the following gaps identified in the ACS IT environment:

- Risk management
- Information security
- Business continuity and disaster recovery
- Backup retention and restoration
- IT Operations

He then presented a Roadmap for the way forward as follows:

1. Creation of a comprehensive IT Procedures Manual AND strengthening IT Security Policies and Procedures into an overarching IT security programme.
2. Establishment of a Security Risk Management Process at an operational level, consistent with ERM (Enterprise Risk Management) practices.
3. Strengthening of the IT Security Procedural Framework.
4. Formalising of Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery programs.
5. Formulation and formalising an IT Strategy and IT Roadmap.
6. Assessment of the Cyber Maturity Level of the ACS and conducting Vulnerability Assessments, at least annually.
7. Remedying the lack of Segregation/Separation of Duties within the IT Function

8. Remedying the IT Operational Risks due to "100% reliance" on Mr. Dickson.

The **2nd Meeting of the Working Group on the ACS Management Audit** held virtually at the ACS Headquarters, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on Thursday 28th July, 2022 focused on **Procurement**.

In his presentation on behalf of AEGIS, Mr. Oudit highlighted the following:

- The Audit on the procurement functions within the ACS covered the period January 1st 2019 to December 21st, 2021 with the aim of identifying internal control design deficiencies and operational deficiencies.
- That ACS does not have a Strategic Procurement Plan or Procurement Policies and Procedures Manual and no minutes on procurement matters are recorded.
- The absence of an official for procurement was concerning.
- There is need for an Analysis and a Financial Visibility Assessment must be undertaken. The procurement process for translators and interpreters should be reassessed. Additionally, rental of interpretation equipment should be assessed regarding the interest to rent, purchase or lease this type of equipment.
- Findings related to past procurement procedures of the ACS fell short of proper procurement processes and it was proposed that three (3) quotes for competitive tenders should be obtained.

Finding and results

- The ACS does not have a Procurement Policy and Procedures Manual.
- Several inconsistencies were noted regarding the Procurement Evaluation System.
- Several inconsistencies were noted in relation to the Tendering Process.
- Tender Committee Minutes which facilitate accountability and transparency and provide structure to the process, are not recorded.
- Filing of tender documents are poor

Recommendations

- ACS should develop and adopt a Procurement and Procedures Manual to include the composition, roles and responsibilities of the tenders committee.
- Procurement Evaluation System must have clearly defined Benchmarks or Standards to measure technical capability, conformance, compliance, performance and other factors.
- Tending process must be clearly defined to procure goods and services at the best possible "Value for Money". It should include an updated database of "fair global market rates" for regularly purchased items.
- Minutes of Tenders Committee meetings must reflect decisions made.
- Tender documents should have a proper filing system for hard and soft copies to mitigate loss of documents.

Roadmap - includes the following steps over a seven (7) month period:

- Assessment
- Control environment
- Transformation
- Implementation

Conclusion: Aegis proposed that the ACS focus efforts on five (5) key areas considering that only a few basic components of the required control framework exists, although they are unstructured and inconsistently applied.

- Formulation of a Procurement Policy and Procedures Manual
- Nurture/foster Procurement Best Practice Culture
- Formally document the composition, roles and responsibilities of each member of the Tenders Committee
- ACS must foster a culture of innovation
- Ensure buy-in from all key stakeholders

The **3rd Meeting of the Working Group on the ACS Management Audit** was held on August 26th, 2022 via videoconference at the ACS Secretariat, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and focussed on **Finance**.

As he had in the first two meetings of the Working Group, Mr. Oudit explained the difference between an External and Management audit. He described the purpose of the Phase 2 Management Audit, finance as seeking to improve overall Operational Effectiveness of the ACS' Finance Function by identifying any weaknesses. The benefits of this phase of the Audit, he indicated, would lead to establishing a solid foundation and momentum for:

1. Continuous improvements towards global best practices, inclusive of efficiency improvements, the minimising of risk exposure and the maximizing growth and achievement of ACS strategic objectives in a structured manner;
2. Improved accountability and transparency which would include governance and customer-centricity of the Finance Function of the ACS.
3. Positive culture enhancement in which a mindset of positive finance-related practices is nurtured to the benefit of the ACS and all stakeholders.

The auditor then presented the Executive Summary of the audit based in part on interviews with the Finance Manager and the Finance Officer through a departmental finance questionnaire and audit findings. He attested that:

1. AEGIS was provided with a comprehensive range of evidence covering the period January 1st 2019 to December 31st 2021.
2. The review and testing of the control environment with respect to the finance function focused primarily on identifying internal control design deficiencies and identifying internal control operational deficiencies.
3. **Key focal areas of the Finance Phase 2 Audit** centered on:
 - a.) Segregation/Separation of duties,
 - b.) Payroll,
 - c.) Compliance with ACS Financial Regulations,
 - d.) Accountability and Approvals for US\$ Platinum Credit Card,
 - e.) Accountability for the handling and disbursement of US\$ Petty Cash,

- f.) Preparation and Approvals of ACS Bank Reconciliations,
- g.) Reasonableness General Ledger transactions 2019-2021,
- h.) Departmental Variance Analysis meetings,
- i.) Customer Service by Finance,
- j.) Finance Procedures Manual and Finance Process Maps and
- k.) UTC ACS Staff Pension / Savings Plan Agreements.

Findings of the Finance Phase 2 audit were elaborated as follows:

- The lack of Segregation / Separation of Duties which exposes the ACS to high Operational Risk.
- No inaccuracies were found within ACS Payrolls processed for 1/1/19 to 31/12/2021.
- Compliance with the ACS Financial Regulations was satisfactory, except for Procurement.
- Test checks undertaken with respect to Accountability and Approvals for the two ACS US\$ Platinum Credit Cards proved to be “in good order”, despite the significant “financial loss” due to the expiration of 244,782 US\$ Platinum Reward Points.
- Accountability for the handling & disbursements of US\$ Petty Cash proved to be “in good order”.
- No irregularities were found regarding the Preparation & Approvals of ACS Bank Reconciliations.
- No irregularities were found regarding the Reasonableness General Ledger transactions for 2019 -2021.
- A total absence of Departmental Variance Analysis meetings (hosted by the Finance department) to support the Budgetary Process.
- The Level of Customer Service by Finance was found to be unsatisfactory.
- An absence of Finance Procedures Manual and Finance Process Maps.
- The procurement and review of UTC ACS Staff Pension / Savings Plan Agreements were unsuccessful.

Based on the audit findings, the auditor outlined several **recommendations** which included:

1. The Finance Department can be competently and optimally operated with the existing Finance Officer and a Finance Unit Assistant, only;
2. The continued inclusion of HR within the preparation and approval of all payroll processing;
3. No recommendations deemed necessary regarding compliance with the ACS Financial Regulations, except for procurement;
4. No recommendations deemed necessary with respect to Accountability and Approvals for use of ACS US\$ Platinum Credit Card. It was, however, recommended that hotel accommodations and meals should be paid for via the ACS Credit Card;
5. The discontinuation of the practice of large US\$ cash for hotel accommodations and meals and have the Finance Department operate a US\$ Petty Cash Float on an Imprest System;
6. No recommendations deemed necessary for both the Preparation and Approvals of ACS Bank Reconciliations, and the processing of General Ledger transactions;
7. Hosting "one on one" Quarterly Budget versus Actual Variance Analysis meetings with all ACS departments which have budgetary allocations with official minutes.
8. The Finance Department must "fully furnish" all requests for supporting Financial documentation within one week of the request.
9. The contracting of a qualified firm to formulate a comprehensive Finance Departmental Procedures Manual, in addition to Process Maps.
10. The contracting of a suitably qualified firm to perform an independent assurance review of these UTC ACS Staff Pension / Savings Plans.

The **4th Meeting of the Working Group on the ACS Management Audit** was held on October 25th, 2022 via videoconference at the ACS Secretariat, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and focussed on **Human Resources**.

The Auditor then indicated that the primary objective of the Management audit is to identify errors and weaknesses within the organisational processes and management activities.

The Human Resources (HR) Audit focused on eleven areas to examine in detail the effectiveness of:

- Current policies and practices relating to recruitment
- Labour relations
- Compensation philosophy
- Alignment of the performance management system to the ACS's objectives and job roles
- Applicability of training and development
- Procedures relating to code of conduct and ethics
- Conflict of interest
- Adverse performance issues
- Disciplinary procedures

The following observations were made and recommendations were tabled to address weaknesses:

- Fully engaged Departmental Heads can inspire and motivate partially engage employees
- Departmental Heads should actively work towards goals, thereby increasing effectiveness
- Development of a culture and People strategy
- Implementation of a talent acquisition framework (talent acquisition strategy and talent management strategy)
- Update salary scales to the categories referenced in the United Nations salary scale

- Onboarding and orientation - a written and documented plan should be developed where the roles and responsibilities of HR, IT and hiring managers are defined.
- Handover Reporting Structure and Mechanisms - the HR Unit should design and implement a handover policy with inputs from all Departmental Heads
- Exercise flexibility in the management of contracts considering the alternative types of appointments outlined by the United Nations
- Performance appraisal system should be governed by a policy and supporting procedural documents
- Improvements to the existing training and development policy supported by structured individual development plans
- Develop a comprehensive motivation and recognition strategy
- HR Unit should be tasked with the responsibility of:
 - ✓ providing guidance and should be allocated a budget to implement strategies to manage workplace conflicts
 - ✓ enforcing accountability through effective key performance indicators (KPIs)
 - ✓ developing customised team building activities and allocating a budget for their execution.

The road map recommended the recruitment of a Chief Operating Officer-COO.

The **5th Meeting of the Working Group on the ACS Management Audit** was held on December 14th, 2022 via videoconference at the ACS Secretariat, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and focus on **Governance**.

The report highlighted deficiencies and proposed recommendations in twelve key areas:

- Strategic Planning and Strategic Alliance Building;
- Organisational Culture and Employee Engagement;
- Organisational Structure and Manpower Resourcing;
- Risk Management Systems;

- Performance Management Systems;
- Internal Control Systems;
- Policies and Procedures;
- Communication Systems;
- Institutional Knowledge Retention;
- Handover Reporting Structure and Mechanisms;
- On-boarding and Orientation;
- Segregation/Separation of Duties.

The Representative of AEGIS also presented a seven (7) month roadmap for implementing the Recommendations and concluded by highlighting the benefits of the recommendations to the ACS, the deliverables which the Executive team of the ACS should be responsible and accountable for and the components of the cost for implementing the recommendations.

1.4.2.2 16th Extraordinary Meeting of the Special Committee for Budget and Administration

This Meeting will finalise the recommendations of Phase 1-3 of the ACS Management Audit conducted by AEGIS Business Solutions. The Working Group will decide which recommendations will be put forward for overall approval by the Ministerial Council.

1.4.2.3 the 41st, 42nd and 43rd Ordinary Meetings of the Special Committee for Budget and Administration

The key points coming out from the **41st Meeting of the Special Committee for Budget and Administration** was the setting up of a Working Group to discuss the findings and recommendations of Phase I the ACS Management Audit conducted by Aegis Business Solutions. Other notable decisions were the extension of the contract of the Political Advisor and amendments to the Budget for the Biennium 2022 – 2023.

At the **42nd Meeting of the Special Committee for Budget and Administration** further amendments were made to the Budget for 2022 which focused mainly on increasing the Budget line for consultancies. In addition a decision was made for AEGIS Business Solutions to Complete Phase 2 and 3 of the ACS Management Audit. The Meeting also held discussions around finalising a scheduled of Meetings of the Working Group.

The **43rd Meeting of the Special Committee for Budget and Administration** which is set for January 2023 will speak to the Budget performance of 2022, presentation of the Audit Report for 2021 and any amendments to the Budget for 2023.

1.4.2.4 Human Resources Overview

The Human Resource Unit provides strategic and operational support to the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) through Human Resource Planning as follows:

- Facilities Management
- Procurement
- Benefits Administration
- Drafting of procedures and policies
- Leave Administration
- Industrial Relations Matters
- Training and Development
- Performance Management
- Recruitment and Selection
- Employee Orientation
- Records Retention and Management

Facilities Management

The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs indicated that the lease for the present location at 5-7 Sweet Briar Road has been renewed for one year.

Procurement

There are currently two procurements being undertaken to acquire services for the migration to Microsoft 365 and digitization of the ACS' documents to strengthen the ACS' records retention and management systems.

Recruitment

All vacant posts were advertised and interviews were held for several positions within the organization. For the period under review the organization was able to fill the following vacancies:

- Communications Officer
- Adviser – Directorate, Disaster Risk Reduction Environment and Caribbean Sea.
- Director Cooperation & Resource Mobilisation
- Research Assistant – Office of the Secretary General

Within the last quarter of the year several posts became vacant due to termination of contracts and resignations as follows:

- Finance Manager
- Administrative Assistant – Disaster Risk Reduction Environment and the Caribbean Sea
- Human Resource Manager
- Director - Trade and Sustainable Development
- Adviser – Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation
- Adviser Trade & Sustainable Development

The posts of Political Adviser and Unit Assistant - Conference and Protocol are also vacant and were previously advertised but there were no suitable applications. The latter has since been re-advertised.

Consultants

There are currently four consultants engaged at the ACS assigned as follows:

- Office of the Secretary General
- Trade and Sustainable Development
- Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation
- KOICA Project

The consultant paralegal contract ended in November 2022, however a paralegal consultant would be engaged with effect from January 2023.

Training

Staff continue to receive training and attend seminars virtually, on topics relevant to the work of the ACS, in order to continue building capacity to carry out the work of the organization effectively.

Members of staff are currently engaged in an internal Strategy Exercise conducted by the Secretary General.

Internship

In collaboration with The University of the West Indies – Tourism and Hospitality Management the ACS hosted one intern who was assigned to the Directorate of Trade and Sustainable Development.

Additionally, for the first time since the COVID -19 pandemic the organisation was able to continue its collaboration with the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) and two interns were accommodated in-person in the Directorate of Disaster Risk Reduction, Environment and the Caribbean Sea.

In both instances the interns have been retained by the ACS to utilise their services within the organisation.

Other

The COVID-19 regulations that was developed in 2020 has been amended in keeping with the Ministry of health Regulations within Trinidad and Tobago and such additional costs for testing unvaccinated staff at the ACS has been eliminated.

2. THE DIRECTORATES

2.1 THE DIRECTORATE FOR TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 THE DIRECTORATE FOR TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

During the reporting period, the Directorate continued to navigate an uncertain environment characterized by pandemic-induced disruptions and other geopolitical issues. Global events continue to prolong uncertainties and challenges in the productive sectors within the preview of the Directorate. In this light, the adoption of a nimble, agile approach to planning the work had become necessary to move ahead with the implementation of work programmes.

The Directorate continued to execute its mandate in the three focus areas – sustainable tourism, trade and transport – and recalibrated its work to focus on emerging issues to adequately meet the needs of the membership. In that regard, the Directorate engaged a number of strategic partners to identify and develop collaborative work. The following are some of the stakeholders engaged over the period, with further stakeholder engagement being highlighted under the respective focus areas of the Directorate:

- i. **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** – The Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development, in collaboration with the Directorate for Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation, met with representatives of the UNCTAD TrainforTrade Programme to identify potential synergies with its Trade Capacity Building Programme. During this meeting with UNCTAD, the Directorate highlighted the priority areas for capacity building for the ACS membership and there was immediate opportunity to collaborate on the development of a course in digital trade. The Directorate assisted UNCTAD in completing a needs assessment to develop said course and facilitated Membership's participation in the *National Coordinators for Trade Facilitation Course*.
- ii. **Central American Commission for Maritime Transport (COCATRAM)** – The ACS through the Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development conducted several meetings with COCATRAM to finalize a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a continued partnership.
- iii. **Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA)** – The Directorate has continued to explore its partnership with SIECA and has begun discussions to explore potential areas for continued collaboration that will be covered by an updated MoU. Representatives of SIECA also presented an update on the work accomplished to develop the Central American 2035 Mobility and Logistics Plan which has many parallels with specific projects in the ACS Transport Work Programme.
- iv. **Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)** – The Directorate had discussions with IDB representatives in preparation of the submission of a project proposal on MSME Development to the IDB Regional Public Good (RPG) Call for Proposals 2022. In August 2022, the ACS received approval for the project and was awarded

USD\$720,000 for project development and implementation. The Directorate is currently working with the IDB team to develop the relevant Technical Cooperation (TC) documents.

- v. **Other engagements** – The Directorate virtually represented the ACS at a number of international and partners meetings, namely the *Trade and the Blue Economy* short course organized by the University of the West Indies (UWI) Shridath Ramphal Centre and the 7th International Forum of Cities and Logistics Platforms hosted in Panama.

Below are the main achievements in the focus areas under the purview of the Directorate for the period April-December 2022. The work of the Directorate would be expounded further in the reports of the Chairs of the various Special Committees which guide the work in the thematic areas highlighted below.

2.1.1 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The COVID-19 pandemic remained a significant challenge for the regional tourism industry. Adopted actions in the Sustainable Tourism Work Programme focused on identifying and leveraging opportunities to build back a stronger tourism sector. In accordance with the sustainability-building imperative in the tourism industry, actions undertaken focused on harmonizing social, economic, and environmental considerations in cultivating visitor experiences and prioritized the adoption of crisis management best practices. In particular, the main objectives of these initiatives were to:

- a. Communicate the value proposition of tourism as a lever of economic recovery;
- b. Promote industry cooperation and collaboration;
- c. Build resilience and share recovery best practices;
- d. Strengthen regional tourism branding;
- e. Mobilise resources to strengthen tourism resilience

The specific activities implemented by the Directorate are noted below:

I. Project Concept Document (PCD) Finalisations for Sustainable Tourism

A project brief for the *Digital Transformation of the Greater Caribbean Tourism Industry Project* as well as the terms of reference for the *Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Greater Caribbean (STZC) Steering Committee* were approved at the 33rd Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism. The dissemination of a Request for Information (RFI) is pending to complete the budget of this project.

II. Tourism Research

Since the formal conclusion of negotiations with George Washington University (GWU) to undertake a COVID-19 Destination Governance Impact Study, work has been rescheduled to start in October 2022 due to changing academic schedules and the limited availability of graduate researchers. Final publication is expected by May 2023. As per the initial scope of the Letter of Understanding (LoU), the publication is expected to reveal industry-tested models for tourism governance protection during crises.

Additionally, under the ACS Observatory Project, the Directorate has also started research to identify sustainable tourism indicators and data sources.

2.1.1.1 Strengthening Capacity Building in the Tourism Sector

i. 1st Workshop on Social and Environmental Sustainability

In keeping with the vision espoused within the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028, the Directorate conceptualised a tourism stakeholder workshop in the area of social and environmental sustainability. The workshop is proposed under the theme "*From Theory to Practice – Modernising the Greater Caribbean Tourism Outlook*". Tourism experts would be expected to explore strategies and best practice approaches to improve the sustainability of regional destinations. Notably, the Secretariat secured technical support from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Caribbean Sub-Regional Office and GLP Films, both recognized as global experts in the field. Although it was initially scheduled for October 2022, this activity was postponed to 2023 due to competing commitments and to ensure the participation of all partners.

ii. ACS-RESEMBID Project "Advancing Collaboration as a Strategy for Building Tourism Crisis Resilience in OCTs of the Greater Caribbean"

In December 2021, the ACS began the implementation of the *Advancing Collaboration as a Strategy for Building Tourism Crisis Resilience in Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) of the Greater Caribbean Project* funded by the RESEMBID (Resilience, Sustainable Energy and Marine Biodiversity) Programme COVID-19 Resilience Response Facility. Improved capacity for contagion mitigation and management in the tourism industry of the three beneficiary countries (Bonaire, Curaçao and Sint Maarten) is one of the key areas of focus. Thus far, the Directorate has contracted Communication and Monitoring, Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL) consultants. Evaluation of proposals to develop and operationalize a best practice guide on managing contagion scenarios in Greater Caribbean OCTs is currently underway. The terms of reference for the development of a contact tracing tool have been drafted and approved and are expected to be published in November 2022.

2.1.1.2 Membership Engagement, Consultation and Endorsement

i. 2nd Meeting of the Executive Board of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism

The 2nd Meeting of the Executive Board of the ACS Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism took place virtually on 2nd June, 2022 and was presided over by Dr. Anasha Campbell, Minister of the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR) of the Republic of Nicaragua in her capacity as Chair. Members of the Executive Board were briefed on the structure and functions of the Directorate and Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism, as well as the mandated programmatic areas for which they have oversight. The presentation delivered by the Directorate focused on the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Board and Coordination Mechanism as well as the Special Committee's relationship and expected contributions to other ACS statutory organs. The presentation also included a progress report on the 2021-2022 Sustainable Tourism Work Programme.

ii. 33rd Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism

The 33rd Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism was held on Tuesday 30th August, 2022 via videoconference, and was presided over by Dr. Anasha Campbell, Minister of the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR) of the Republic of Nicaragua in its capacity as Chair of the ACS Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism. During the first session of the meeting, the stakeholder session with tourism focused on tourism reactivation. Experts from the following organizations made interventions during this session: United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), iUrban and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA). The closed working session held during the second half of the meeting focused on strategic planning for ACS actions in sustainable tourism as guided by the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028. The meeting also approved the 2023 Sustainable Tourism Work Programme, Sustainable Tourism Implementation Plan, Project Brief on Digital Transformation and the STZC Steering Committee draft Terms of Reference.

iii. 7th Meeting of the Coordination Mechanism

H.E Anasha Campbell, Chair of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism delivered a presentation on the priority areas related to sustainable tourism as reflected in the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028. In her intervention, she highlighted key projects and activities planned under the 2023 Sustainable Tourism Work Programme. She emphasized the organisation of the high-level tourism event in 2023 and the ACS Project *"Advancing Collaboration as a Strategy for Building Tourism Crisis Resilience in OCTs of the Greater Caribbean"* funded under the RESEMBID Covid-19 Response Facility.

2.1.1.3 Partner Engagements and Alliances

i. 67th United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Regional Commission of the Americas

The ACS was invited as a special panelist to the 67th UNWTO Regional Commission of the Americas Meeting in Uruguay from May 19th – 21st, 2022. The Adviser for Trade and Sustainable Development represented the ACS and delivered a presentation outlining *"Greater Caribbean Perspectives on the development of Policies and Legislation for the protection of Tourists and Crisis Management in Emergency situations"*. Additionally, the Adviser participated in a High-Level Tourism Policies Panel Discussion and offered development agency insights into (a) short-term tourism development prospects (b) Greater Caribbean priorities for recovery and resilience, and (c) obstacles to accelerate recovery and build resilience.

ii. 4th Meeting of Strategic Partner Agencies in Tourism

On June 30th, 2022, the Directorate hosted the 4th Meeting of Strategic Regional Partner Agencies in Tourism to promote continued coordination and cooperation in regional tourism recovery. The Meeting was attended by representatives of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS); with invitations also extended to the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat (SITCA), the Central American Tourism Agency (CATA), and the Organization of American States (OAS) who were unable to attend.

iii. Participation in the Organization of American States (OAS) High Level Forum

On July 20th – 21st, 2022, the Directorate participated in the OAS High-Level Policy Forum for Building Small Tourism Enterprises (STE) Disaster resilience in the Caribbean to better understand operators' needs. The discussion highlighted concerns about financial recovery support, business continuity planning, and crisis planning. From the insights gained, the Directorate opted to expand its capacity-building programme to address the aforementioned areas of concern.

2.1.2 TRADE DEVELOPMENT AND EXTERNAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

As the Directorate continues to ensure strategic alliances for the purpose of trade advancement in a post pandemic era, there are particular areas of interest that have been prioritized. Given the current context characterized by high consumer demand, inflationary pressures and the acceleration of digitalization, the Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development continues to address the needs of member countries through

trade development activities and projects that harness regional competitive advantages to build a strong, resilient trade ecosystem. Progress achieved in these activities is recorded below:

i. Project Concept Document (PCD) Finalisations for Trade

A project brief for the *Digital Transformation Project for the Promotion of Trade Competitiveness in the Greater Caribbean* and the *Strategic Framework for the Economic Expansion of the Ocean Economy of the Greater Caribbean Project* were approved at the 37th Meeting of the Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations. The dissemination of a Request for Information (RFI) is pending to complete the budget of these projects. **In order to fully implement these projects, the Directorate continues to use these PCDs as the basis for strengthening resource mobilization efforts and the organization's partnership portfolio.**

ii. 15th Business Forum of the Greater Caribbean

In February 2022, the ACS Secretariat received official communication from the Republic of Guatemala confirming its interest and commitment to host the 15th Business Forum of the Greater Caribbean. Since then, the Directorate conducted several working sessions with the relevant focal points in Guatemala to agree on tentative dates and activities, exchange initial ideas and expectations for the event and start preparations for the event. Consequently, a draft concept note was developed and is currently being finalized with the host country. Following numerous consultations between the ACS Secretariat and organizers in Guatemala, it was agreed that the 15th Business Forum would be hosted on 9th – 10th May, 2023 as a pre-event to the ACS Summit and Cooperation Conference. The Directorate continues to work with Guatemala to start promoting and marketing the event and will partner with other regional investment and trade promotion agencies to ensure the participation of companies across the region.

iii. Promote the Development and Competitiveness of Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in the Greater Caribbean

The Project Concept Document (PCD) on MSME Development and Competitiveness approved at the 35th Meeting of the Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations formed the basis of a project proposal developed and submitted to Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Regional Public Goods (RPG) Call for Proposals in May 2022. The overall project objective is to promote the development of value chains and MSMEs in the Greater Caribbean, particularly in the sectors of community-based tourism, the creative industry and agribusiness sector. ACS member countries who are also Borrowing Member Countries (BMCs) of the IDB were engaged and as such, the ACS received letters of commitment from Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, Honduras, Nicaragua and Trinidad and Tobago. In August 2022, the ACS received

conditional approval for the project and was awarded USD\$720,000 for project development and implementation. Work by the Directorate and the IDB RPG team is currently underway to complete the Technical Cooperation (TC) documents.

2.1.2.1 Membership Engagement, Consultation and Endorsement

i. 2nd Meeting of the Executive Board of the Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations

The 2nd Meeting of the Executive Board of the ACS Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations took place virtually on 8th June, 2022 and was presided over by H.E Ambassador Gerardo Torres Zelaya, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Policy Affairs of the Republic of Honduras in his capacity as Chair of the Executive Board. The Directorate briefed the Executive Board members on their role and functions in executing the Work Programme for Trade Development and External Economic Relations, as well as on the key duties of the Special Committee and the Coordination Mechanism. The Chair of the Executive Board highlighted the priority actions to be undertaken during his chairmanship and confirmed that its priorities were in alignment with the Trade Work Programme.

ii. 37th Meeting of the Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations

The 37th Meeting of the Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations was held virtually on August 25th, 2022 and was presided over by H.E Ambassador Gerardo Torres Zelaya, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Policy Affairs of the Republic of Honduras in his capacity as Chair of the Executive Board of the Special Committee. During the first session of the meeting, a stakeholder session was organized so that trade experts would have the opportunity to share valuable insights on the current state of the industry and its impact on the Greater Caribbean. Experts from the following organizations made interventions during this session: United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, Digital Trade Network (DTN) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The closed working session held during the second half of the meeting focused on reporting achievements and initiatives executed in the 2021-2022 period and a presentation of the Trade Work Programme and ACS Implementation Plan developed to meet the trade development objectives outlined in the ACS Plan of Action for 2022-2028. The 2022-2023 Work Programme and the accompanying Implementation Plan for Trade Development and External Economic Relations were endorsed and approved by the membership.

iii. 7th Meeting of the Coordination Mechanism

In his capacity as Chair of the Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations, H.E Gerardo Torres Zelaya delivered a presentation on the strategic actions in trade emanating from the ACS Plan of Action that govern the projects and initiatives proposed in the Implementation Plan for trade. He also provided an overview of the projects and activities that will be prioritized during his chairmanship, namely the organisation of the 15th Business Forum of the ACS in Guatemala, digitalization, trade research, MSME development, trade facilitation and capacity building initiatives.

Strengthening Trade Capacities and other Relevant Matters

i. World MSME Day 2022

For World MSME Day 2022, the ACS through the Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development collaborated with the Shridath Ramphal Centre (SRC) of the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the Caribbean Export Development Agency to host a week-long social media campaign that culminated in a Lunch Time Chat held under the theme, "*The Power of Small: The Important Role of MSMEs in Economic Performance*". The Lunch Time Chat in particular enabled robust and thought-provoking discussions on MSMEs as the backbone of economic activity in the region. The following regional partners participated in the discussion: Jamaica's Promotion Cooperation (JAMPRO), Baron Foods Ltd and UWI Cave Hill Campus. Over 150 participants connected and actively engaged in this webinar.

2.1.3 TRANSPORT

The ACS recognizes transport connectivity in the Greater Caribbean as the cornerstone of economic development. The pandemic-induced disruptions experienced in the transport sector in the Greater Caribbean have worsened the regional dilemma of limited transport connectivity. The challenges and opportunities of this paradigm shift in transport planning must be carefully considered so that the transport ecosystem of the Greater Caribbean becomes more connected and equipped to sustain regional value chains and business activity. In this light, the ACS programme of work for regional transport development has been developed to support member countries adopt approaches, tools and methodologies that are appropriate to these evolving needs of the regional transport sector.

i. PCD Finalisations for Transport Projects

A project brief for the *Digital Transformation for the Transport Sector in the Greater Caribbean* was approved at the 31st Meeting of the Special Committee on Transport. The dissemination of a Request for Information (RFI) is pending to complete the budget of this project.

ii. Maps of Maritime Routes of the Greater Caribbean

The ACS continues to support the maintenance of the Maps of Maritime Routes platform managed by COCATRAM. The Secretariat covers the annual license fees for this platform and participates in its steering committee. On 28th July, 2022, the Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development participated in a meeting with COCATRAM to evaluate the performance and user analytics of the platform. The data demonstrated high website traffic by users both within and outside the region.

iii. Maritime Transport and Logistics Strategy

The Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development received a study completed in June 2022 by UNECLAC on "*Inputs for the future Greater Caribbean's new maritime Strategy*". The study makes a strong case for strengthened regional and sectoral cooperation on maritime transport and shipping operations in container ports and covers 77 ports in the Caribbean Basin, the Gulf and the Pacific coast of Panama. It provides a quantitative analysis of some of the key factors that influences a port's competitiveness and a comprehensive assessment of the presence of Global Terminal Operators in the Caribbean, the share of exports, imports, ports' performance and connectivity, and other recommendations related to handling the disruptions in the transport sector caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

iv. A Regional Ferry Network

UNECLAC completed a feasibility study in June 2022 for a regional ferry network. Based on a supply and demand data analysis, the study identifies three potential hubs – Caucedo, Saint Lucia and Port of Spain – and four potential routes:

1. Rotation 1 – departing from Caucedo, Dominican Republic, bound for Castries, St. Lucia, via the British Virgin Islands, Dominica and St. Barthélemy.
2. Rotation 2 – Departing St. Lucia for Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, before calling at the islands of Barbados, Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.
3. Rotation 3 and 4 – The third and fourth proposed rotations use the Port of Spain hub to integrate Suriname and Guyana in the southern direction, while in the other direction they integrate Colombia, Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) are recognized in the study as a viable means of attracting support for investment and operation by the private sector. In this regard, the Directorate will work towards developing a framework for the development of a regional PPP to support this project.

2.1.3.1 Capacity Building

i. Multimodal Transport Webinar

Since May 2022, the Directorate has been working closely with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to conceptualize and execute a webinar on multimodal transport. This webinar seeks to address multimodal transport solutions that can be leveraged to improve regional connectivity and allow countries to capitalize on the physical proximity between regional markets in order to meet the needs of businesses and consumers. The concept was developed with input from transport experts from the IDB and was tentatively scheduled to take place in October, 2022. However, due to competing commitments and activities hosted by the ACS Secretariat during this period, this activity will be rescheduled.

ii. ACS Connectivity Conference

The Directorate, with the guidance of the Chair of the Special Committee on Transport, developed a concept to host the first ACS Connectivity Conference under the working theme "*Rising above Vulnerabilities and Challenges: Rethinking Transport Connectivity in the Greater Caribbean*". The event is expected to take place during the first quarter of 2023 in Martinique. Some of the topics tabled for discussion include smart solutions for transport connectivity, bridging connectivity gaps and multimodal transport solutions that can help improve last mile delivery in the region.

2.1.3.2 Partnerships and Strategic Alliances

- i. The Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development represented the ACS at the *IMO Carib-SMART Stakeholder Webinar* which was held virtually on August 11th, 2022. The webinar focused on sustainable maritime transportation, during which industry experts offered information that positioned stakeholders to identify issues relating to it. The Directorate presented the Transport Work Programme, during which, areas such as Digital Transformation, the establishment of a Regional Ferry Network, Port Development and Maritime Transport and Logistics were discussed, demonstrating how the ACS can support the *Carib SMART* project.
- ii. The Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development participated as a panellist in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) "*Studies on the Regulatory Impact of Air Services Agreements for the Promotion of the Liberalization of the Air Transport Market in Latin America and the Caribbean*" webinar. Held on September 13th 2022, the webinar facilitated discussions on the positive benefits of regulation and liberalisation of air markets within the Greater Caribbean region. The Directorate presented on the potential impact of air services agreements in the region, analysing the major challenges faced by the industry while positioning the work of the ACS and its Air Services Agreement as a potential measure to stimulate growth and encourage operational efficiency.
- iii. The ACS, represented by the Secretary General and the Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development, participated in the *7th International Forum of Cities and Logistics Platforms* hosted in Panama from the 18th -20th October, 2022. The Directorate researched and prepared a presentation on the Blue Economy and Public-private Partnerships (PPPs) which was presented by the Secretary General. The presentation focused on the potential of this industry that can be enabled through PPPs. The opportunity was also taken at this conference to meet with key transport stakeholders including GeorgiaTech to discuss possible collaboration.
- iv. The Directorate continued to execute the mandate of the ACS and recalibrated their work to focus on the emerging issues to adequately meet the needs of the ACS membership. In that regard the Directorate engaged a number of strategic partners to identify and develop collaborative work. The following are some of the stakeholders engaged over the period:
 - **Meeting with the International Maritime Organization (IMO):** The ACS Secretariat, through the Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development and the Directorate for Cooperation and Resource Mobilization, had a meeting on 13th July,

2022 with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to discuss the ongoing Carib-SMART Project. The project is focused on the sustainable development of ports in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The needs assessment phase of the project is underway and the IMO representatives proposed sharing the data and findings of the assessment with the ACS.

- **Meeting with the Caribbean Alliance:** In keeping with the ACS' commitment to capitalize on synergies and partnerships with regional and international development partners, the Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development held a meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Economic Development of Curaçao and the Curaçao Tourist Board in May 2022. The purpose of the meeting was to follow-up on a project proposal to collaborate on the Caribbean Airlift Alliance project to the ACS. Considering air connectivity strategy in the transport work programme, the Directorate participated in this meeting and recognized the many synergies and opportunities to develop a joint project proposal.

2.1.3.3 Membership Engagement, Consultation and Endorsement

i. 2nd Meeting of the Executive Board of the Special Committee on Transport

The 2nd Meeting of the Executive Board of the ACS Special Committee on Transport took place virtually on 7th June, 2022 and was presided over by H.E Mr. Serge Letchimy, President of the Executive Council of Territorial Collectivity of Martinique, who represented Martinique in its capacity as Chair of the ACS Special Committee on Transport. The ACS Directorate for Trade and Sustainable Development briefed the meeting participants on the role of the Directorate, the respective role of each member of the Executive Board of the Special Committee on Transport, the ongoing programme of work related to transport and planning for the ACS Work Programme for Transport in 2023. The Chair of the Executive Board underscored the priority actions to be undertaken during the chairmanship of Martinique.

ii. 31st Meeting of the Special Committee on Transport

The 31st Meeting of the Special Committee on Transport took place via videoconference on Tuesday 23rd August 2022, and was presided over by Ms. Sandra Casanova, Advisor to the Assembly of Martinique of the Territorial Collectivity of Martinique, in the capacity as Chair of the ACS Special Committee on Transport. The meeting included a sectoral stakeholder session that focused on key thematic areas such as regional cooperation in the transport industry, port sustainability and digitalization. Experts from the following organizations made interventions during this session: UNECLAC, Port Management Association of the Caribbean (PMAC), IMO, ICAO, COCATRAM and the Federated Network of Information Exchange in Future Logistics. The closed working session during the second half of the meeting focused on reporting achievements and initiatives executed

in the 2021-2022 period and a presentation of the Transport Work Programme and ACS Implementation Plan developed to meet the transport development objectives outlined in the ACS Plan of Action for 2022-2028.

iii. 7th Meeting of the Coordination Mechanism

During this meeting, Ms. Sandra Casanova, in her capacity as Chair of the Special Committee on Transport, delivered a presentation on the strategic actions in transport emanating from the ACS Plan of Action. She also provided an overview of the projects and activities that will be prioritized during her tenure of chairmanship, namely the organisation of a regional Conference on Connectivity, the promotion of investment in transport infrastructure and the strengthening of multimodal transport networks in the Greater Caribbean.

2.2 THE DIRECTORATE FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE CARIBBEAN SEA

2.2.1 DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

The Caribbean Sea is internationally recognised as an area of unique biodiversity and a highly fragile ecosystem that requires the implementation of regional initiatives aimed at promoting the sustainable conservation and management of coastal and marine resources, including consideration of the concept of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development, including its designation as such, without prejudice to international law. Accordingly, there is a need to promote the conservation of the Caribbean Sea through tools such as international cooperation and policies that favour sustainable development, and for relevant regional and international development partners to work together to formulate and implement the region's initiatives.

In the Greater Caribbean, we live and operate in a multi-hazard environment. This was well exemplified between 2021 and 2022, when the region experienced simultaneous and cascading hazard events including tropical cyclones, floods, drought, volcanic activity and earthquakes, all amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. These events resulted in significant displacement, death, injury and material losses, and crippled already fragile regional economies.

Added to this, climate change poses a serious threat to human wellbeing in the region. According to the World Meteorological Organisation's 'State of the Climate in Latin America and the Caribbean 2021' report, the Greater Caribbean region is experiencing extreme weather and climate change that may cause irreversible damage and endanger lives and livelihoods. The recent devastation caused by the passage of Hurricanes Ian and Julia is a stark reminder of this.

CHANGES IN THE DIRECTORATE

The directorate experienced staff changes in April, August and September 2022. On 25th April, Mrs. Cherisse Braithwaite-Joseph assumed the role of Advisor to the directorate. Mrs. Sharane Mohammed tendered her resignation as Administrative Assistant and demitted office on 25th August, 2022. This role was temporarily filled by Mrs. Gina Cabrera-Tilokee for the period 1st to 30th September. The recruitment process to full this role is currently ongoing.

In August, the directorate welcomed two interns from the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Segregated Portfolio Company (CCRIF SPC). Justyn Alexander commenced his internship on 2nd August and Jamala Alexander commenced on 18th August. Justyn Alexander completed his CCRIF SPC internship on 7th October and will continue to work

as an ACS intern for the period 10th October to 16th December. Jamala Alexander will complete her CCRIF SPC internship on 26th October and will continue to work as an ACS intern for the period 27th October to 16th December.

CHALLENGES

The current staff members of the directorate are the Director, Advisor, Two Research Assistants, and a Project Assistant, contracted for the Sandy Shorelines project. Moreover, with the absence of an Administrative Assistant, the directorate is operating below full capacity.

At the same time, interests in the areas of Disaster Risk Reduction and the Environment continue to increase due to heightened global concern for climate change and other risk-related issues. As such the directorate continues to receive invitations to participate in various regional and international projects and initiatives.

In this context, the directorate is seeking to maximise its limited resources to execute ongoing projects and activities that respond to recurrent natural hazards, while establishing strategic partnerships that are relevant to, and address, current and future risk issues.

DRR Meetings:

- **Meeting with United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)**-This meeting was held on 9th May 2022 with representatives from the UNDRR and facilitated by the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management of Trinidad and Tobago (ODPM TT). The participants discussed ways in which the ACS and UNDRR could collaborate regarding early warning systems and climate risk within the Greater Caribbean Region.
- **Partnerships for Weather, Water, and Climate Services, Early Warning and Anticipatory Action to Increase Resilience**- This meeting was held on 13th May, 2022. The Director met with the World Meteorological Organisation Representative for North America, Central America, Mr. Rodney Martínez Güingla and other regional stakeholders to discuss opportunities for collaboration in matters related to climate and disaster risk management.
- **Meeting with the Office for Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM TT)** – This meeting was held on 1st June, 2022. Its objective was for the

DECS and ODPM TT to present current initiatives as well as visions for upcoming projects and activities in order to identify opportunities for collaboration. The DECS considered the meeting an opportunity to build future partnership for the benefit of the Greater Caribbean states.

- **Meeting with the Chair of the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction (SCDRR)** - This meeting was held on 13th June, 2022. The DECS met with His Excellency Álvaro Enrique Sanchez Cordero, Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Chair of the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction (SCDRR) to discuss the ACS' Plan of Action 2022-2028 and the disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategy to be operationalised during this period.
- **1st Meeting of the Executive Board of the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction** - This meeting was held on 1st July, 2022. The meeting served to familiarise the newly elected Executive Board Members with their important role and function.
- **Meeting with the Anticipatory Hub** - This was held on 19th July 2022. The DECS hosted a meeting with Doctor Lydia Cumiskey, Partnerships and Community Engagement Advisor of the Anticipation Hub to discuss areas of common interest and opportunities for partnership and collaboration. The ACS is currently considering formalising a partnership agreement with the Anticipation Hub.
- **5th Meeting of the Regional Early Warning Consortium** - The 5th Meeting of the Regional Early Warning Consortium was held on September 1-2, 2022 in Bridgetown, Barbados. It was hosted by CDEMA and the UNDRR with the purpose of developing a strategic and advisory body for the advancement and strengthening of Early Warning Systems within the Caribbean Region. DECS Advisor, Cherisse Braithwaite-Joseph attended the meetings and delivered a presentation on the DECS' early warning systems initiatives.
- **30th Meeting of the Special Committee for DRR** - The 30th Meeting of the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction (SCDRR) was held virtually on 5th September, 2022. In the meeting, Members provided feedback on the ACS Plan of Action 2022 to 2028, the Implementation Plan 2022 to 2028 and the DECS work programme 2022 to 2023. Members also provided input for three projects proposed by the directorate.

- **4th Regional Dialogue Platform in Latin America and the Caribbean on Anticipatory Action**-This was held from 28-29 September, 2022 in Antigua Guatemala. It was hosted by the Anticipation Hub in collaboration with the German Red Cross and the World Food Programme. The Disaster Risk Reduction Research Assistant, Ms. Christal Benjamin attended this conference and highlighted the ACS' ongoing work to strengthen regional early warning systems. Coming out of this conference, the DECS has established new partnerships and has strengthened existing partnerships with regional organisations focused on anticipatory action.

Joint Initiatives

- **UNDRR-ACS Regional Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) Report**-The directorate is currently working on a joint report with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction which evaluates capacities for MHEWS in the Caribbean region. DECS Advisor, Cherisse Brathwaite- Joseph participated in the presentation of the report at the 5th Meeting of the Regional Early Warning Systems (EWS) Consortium from September 1-2, 2022 in Barbados. The report received positive feedback and the comments are currently being reviewed.
- **UNDRR Regional Assessment Report 2023** The DECS is participating in the production of the UNDRR Regional Assessment Report 2023 (RAR2023). Director Ana Leticia Ramírez Cuevas is a member of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee for the report. As such, she has had the opportunity to contribute to its strategic focus and content.
- **Workshop on Risk Management Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid** The Director of the DECS attended the Workshop on Risk Management Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid, held within the Framework Partnership Agreement for Copernicus Users Uptake (FPCUP). This was held from 27th to 28th October in Panama and its objective was to facilitate a discussion with stakeholders of Copernicus, The Earth Observation Programme of the European Union, in order to improve and facilitate dialog between all national end users and enterprise community members' representatives.
- **Participation in relevant events** – In this period, DECS staff participated in several regional and international virtual events related to disaster risk management in the region.

International Days

- **World Humanitarian Day-** This day was observed on 19th August, 2022, under the theme, "It Takes a Village". The DECS commemorated this day by posting a media brief on the ACS social media platforms, which highlighted and celebrated the important role that humanitarian workers play in crisis response.
- **World Meteorological Day-** This was commemorated on 23rd March, 2022. The DECS observed this day by publishing a media brief on the ACS' social media platforms highlighting the importance of hydrometeorological and climate information for disaster risk reduction.
- **International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction:** October 13. This year, DECS commemorated this important day by organising a Webinar on Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems.
- **World Tsunami Awareness Day-** This was commemorated on 5th November, 2022. The DECS observed this day by posting an article on the ACS website.

2.2.2 CARIBBEAN SEA COMMISSION

CSC Meetings:

- **3rd Meeting of the Executive Board of the Caribbean Sea Commission** - This meeting was held on 20, July 2022 and was chaired by Dr Rahanna Juman, Director (ag.) of the Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA) of Trinidad and Tobago in her capacity as Chair of the Caribbean Sea Commission. The objective of the meeting was to establish the responsibilities and functions of the CSC Executive Board as well as to finalise the schedule of meetings and actions to be taken to continue the Commission's projects and initiatives.
- **22nd Meeting of the Caribbean Sea Commission** - The 22nd Meeting of the Caribbean Sea Commission (CSC) was held virtually on 2, September 2022. The purpose of this meeting was to review relevant plans, agreements and reports relating to the work of the Caribbean Sea Commission.

Projects of the Caribbean Sea Commission:

- **Designation of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development** - The Directorate prepared and submitted the Secretary General's Report to the UNGA on 31, May 2022 on progress on the concept of the Designation of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development.
- **Sandy Shorelines:**
 - **Component 1: Focal Point Network** – The VII Focal Point Meeting was held on 7 July 2022. The meeting agreed to send the update on the progress of the monitors' network for review by the Technical Coordinator. In addition, the Focal Points agreed to hold individual meetings to discuss the network.
- **Component 1.4:** The Project Manager consulted with the project's Technical Coordinator, Dr José Luis Juanes, and held formal meetings in May 2022 at the ACS Secretariat General in Port of Spain. The project team determined that a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is required for component 5 and 6, namely the Beach Rehabilitation Manual and the Sandy Shorelines Conference in June 2023. The group of Technical Experts to develop the Manual are as follows: Dr. Jose Luis Juanes Martí, Dr. Constanza Ricaurte Villota, Mr. Ywenn De La Torre, and Dr. Miguel Canals.
- **Component 2.1: Conferences/Trainings** - Dr. José Luis Juanes, Technical Coordinator of the Sandy Shorelines Project, has submitted an Abstract "Erosion Process on the Caribbean Sandy Beaches" for participation in the International

Conference on Coastal Engineering ICCE Conference 2022 to be held in Sydney Australia on 4-9 December 2022.

The consultancy GAMMA, SA in the implementation of the Executive Projects in both Trinidad & Tobago and Antigua & Barbuda delivered training courses entitled "Post Graduate Course in Coastal Processes and Beach Methodologies for Beach Restoration". These were held at the Institute of Marine Affairs, Chaguaramas Auditorium, Trinidad, from 25 April 2022 to 6 May 2022 with 13 participants/experts from across Trinidad, including the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the Environmental Management Authority, the Coastal Protection Agency and the Institute of Marine Affairs, among others, and subsequently from 11 May 2022 to 17 May 2022 at Dunbar's Lab Complex, St John's Antigua & Barbuda with 9 participants from the Fisheries Division, Department of Environment and Department of Metrological Services

- **Component 3: Coastal Equipment Procurement Strategy** -The Project Manager and the Technical Coordinator held individual meetings with the (9) Project Focal Points from 18 to 29 August 2022 to request the documents concerning the custody transfer agreement and the supply of the equipment to the Member States, essential documents in order to finalise the delivery of the equipment.
- **Component 4.1: Executive Projects** – During this period, ACS's consultant CITMA/GAMMA (a Cuban company responsible for conducting extensive coastal studies/works in the region) successfully completed Beach Rehabilitation Studies at Runaway Beach, St John's Antigua & Barbuda, and Bonasse Beach, Cedros Trinidad & Tobago. This completes all fieldwork exercises and post-graduate courses at all three sites for the Executive Beach Projects with the previous project completed at Viento Playa Frio in Panama in October 2021.
- **Component 4.2: Video Monitoring Tower in Jamaica** – (This component is managed by KIOST and NEPA). The ACS is in consultation with NEPA Jamaica, to organise capacity building exercises as part of its Beach Monitoring Tower Project in Hellshire, Jamaica. Representatives from the Korea Institute of Ocean Science and Technology (KIOST) arrived in Jamaica on July 11, 2022 to commission and train nominated NEPA representatives in the use of the Tower's Video Monitoring System (VMS). A six-month trial period of the equipment is expected until the end of the year after which the Sandy Shoreline teams will be exposed to the use of

video monitoring systems to assess coastal processes on beaches and their benefits.

- **Componente 5.1: Beach Rehabilitation Manual** - The development of the Beach Rehabilitation Manual forms part of consultations held between the Project Manager and the project's Technical Coordinator Dr José Luis Juanes during formal meetings in May 2022 at the ACS Secretariat in Port of Spain. The results of the Beach Rehabilitation Studies in Panama, Antigua and Barbuda, and Trinidad and Tobago provide the region with the opportunity to show site-specific variations in formulas established with the extensive data collected from the sites, which will then allow for mathematical modelling and the development of unique strategies for the rehabilitation of their beaches.
- **Component 5.4: Online Platform** - The Sandy Shorelines project team drafted a terms of reference document and initiated a series of consultations with IT companies for the development of the platform. ACS hosted a meeting on 9, September 2022, with the objective of discussing the TOR for the online platform with three potential bidders.
- **Component 6: Regional Conference on Beach Preservation** - The ACS continues to work towards the completion of the Sandy Coasts project, which is expected to end in June 2023 with the organisation of a conference that not only highlights the work of the project, but also provides a platform for other experts/scientists currently engaged in similar research/projects on the effect of climate change and land degradation on the beaches and coasts of the Caribbean and Latin America to present their work and allow discussions on the topic, best practices and areas where further research may be needed. This conference is called the Greater Caribbean Region Beach Preservation Conference 2023. The ACS has chosen the following countries as possible venues for the conference: Antigua and Barbuda, Cuba, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago. Criteria for choosing a conference venue would include cost-benefit analyses of conference/auditorium space in member states and the availability, accessibility and logistics within the country. The ACS is currently in contact with the Focal Points within the chosen member states and will make a final determination in November 2022. The Project Director and the Sandy Shoreline Project Technical Coordinator completed a Draft Concept Note for the Beach Preservation Conference, which will evolve from the theme, agenda, experts, presenters and all aspects of the conference.

Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative (GCCMI) - The Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the World Bank (WB), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) established an unprecedented partnership to address the challenges of climate-forced mobility in the Greater Caribbean region. The Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative (GCCMI) will produce a comprehensive report on the extent, nature, implications and response to climate displacement and migration, in all relevant areas, in the Greater Caribbean.

- **High Level launch of the Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative** - This event was held in New York City on 22, September 2022 to launch the Wider Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative in collaboration with the Global Climate Mobility Centre (UNOPS). It provided a constructive high-level forum for the exchange of views on challenges and opportunities.
- **Pre-launch meetings:**
- **Meeting with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** This meeting was held on 9, May 2022.
- **Meeting with the Africa Climate Mobility Initiative (ACMI) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)** – This meeting was held on 10, May 2022.
- **Meeting with the United Nations for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and ACMI** This meeting was held on 16, June 2022.
- **The ACMI Stakeholder Forum** – This forum was held from 26, July to 28, July 2022.
- **ACS DECS, Communication Unit meeting with Sharon Johnson; Kamal Amakrane, Miguel Verzbolovskis; David Lonnberg; Hyun Kim** - This meeting was held on 8, September, 2022.

Virtual Courses

- CSC Seminar: "Microplastics in the Caribbean: Sources, Impacts and Monitoring Methodologies** - The Association of Caribbean States (ACS) in collaboration with the Institute of Marine Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago (IMA), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP CEP) through the Secretariat of the Cartagena Convention, the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID), the Centre for Research and Advanced Studies of the National Polytechnic Institute (CINVESTAV), and the Basel Convention Regional Training and Technology Transfer Centre for the Caribbean (BCRC-Caribbean), the Centre for Research and Advanced Studies of the National Polytechnic Institute (CINVESTAV), and the Basel Convention Regional Centre for Training and Technology Transfer for the Caribbean (BCRC-Caribbean) are jointly organising the Caribbean Sea Commission (CSC) seminar entitled: "Microplastics in the Caribbean: Sources, Impacts and Monitoring Methodologies". This seminar, was held virtually from Monday 31 October to Friday 4 November 2022. The seminar had a total of 22 facilitators from 12 countries and 468 attendants from 52 countries.

Commemoration of International Days

- International Earth Day - April 22, 2022** - This day was commemorated on 22, April 2022. DECS prepared an article for the AEC website and social media platforms to raise awareness on environmental issues such as climate change and environmental degradation.
- World Environment Day - June 5, 2022** - This day was commemorated on 5, June 2022. DECS prepared an article for the ACS website and social media platforms to raise awareness on environmental issues such as climate change and environmental degradation.
- World Beaches Day – September 1, 2022** - This day was commemorated on 1, September 2022. DECS prepared an article for the ACS website and social media platforms to raise awareness of the ecological issues that are negatively affecting our global beaches.
- International Coastal Cleanup Day - September 17, 2022** - This day was commemorated on 17, September 2022. ACS staff joined the International Coastal Cleanup Day organised by ICC Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Planning and Development, the Institute of Marine Affairs, the Environmental Management Authority and the Basel Convention Regional Centre for Training and Technology

Transfer for the Caribbean. In addition, DECS prepared an article for the ACS website and social media platforms to raise awareness about marine litter.

2.3 DIRECTORATE FOR COOPERATION AND RESOURCE MOBILISATION

2.3 COOPERATION AND RESOURCE MOBILISATION

This report reflects the progress made in cooperation and resource mobilisation to generate partnerships for sustainable development cooperation in the Greater Caribbean.

2.3.1 The organisation and monitoring of statutory meetings:

36th Meeting of the Special Committee on Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation (13/09/2022) which was attended by twenty-one delegations from the Membership. This meeting allowed for the sharing of the European Union's new cooperation strategy - European Neighbourhood and Development Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the windows of opportunity for a more cohesive and expanded cooperation between Europe and the Caribbean region. The Multidimensional Vulnerability Index - Resilience Duration Adjuster (MVI-RDA) and the Caribbean Development Bank's Internal Resilience Capacity (IRC) Framework were presented, thereby encouraging ACS Members to apply the IRC in their operations, as well as providing a more equitable opportunity to underpin Caribbean countries' access to concessional finance.

6th International Cooperation Conference (10-11/11/22) under the theme "*The Greater Caribbean: building bridges of transformation and innovation towards a future of sustainable progress*", was held in Havana Cuba from 10-11 November 2022 and was attended by fifty-one delegations from the membership, including high level officials, as well as 33 Cooperation Agencies. The event was attended by 29 speakers from various sectors. Two educational videos were shown, one addresses the Early Advisory System (EAS) that monitors the movement of sargassum offshore, the conditions leading to beaching and how to improve resiliency and promote ways to utilise the seaweed for transformational adaptation; the other deals with mitigating the environmental and economic impact of sargassum, the latter being converted into products for climate resilience in the Caribbean. The Annual Cooperation Magazine was presented, which includes research articles on the main thematic areas of the ACS, as well as the publication of the First Edition of the ACS South-South and Triangular Cooperation Catalogue, which highlights regional best practices. Concrete achievements include the signing of two Memoranda of Understanding with the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) and the Central American Maritime Transport Commission (COCATRAM), as well as the positioning of a strategic and comprehensive vision through project proposals prioritised by the Ministerial Council, in the search for and consolidation of cooperation and the mobilisation of new financial resources, with the aim of generating bridges that allow construction based on the fundamental elements of development, so as to achieve innovative economic, social and environmental growth for the Greater Caribbean Region, towards the desired "sustainable development".

2.3.2 Cooperation initiatives and partnerships

ACS South-South and Triangular Co-operation Catalogue - seeks to compile best practices of Member Countries in different sectors of common interest that can be shared at the regional level, thus creating a bridge of cooperation between countries.

First Edition of the ACS White Paper - includes a historical overview of the institution, the Plan of Action 2022-2028, immediate priorities and next steps.

Calls for Proposals - the Directorate continues to follow up on potential calls for proposals with the respective Directorates on an ongoing basis. These opportunities have been fruitful to date with ACS participation in RESEMBID and IDB proposals.

Portfolio of cooperation partnerships - exploratory and technical meetings have been held, led by the DCRM, in the search for opportunities. New relationships and partnerships have been established to identify strategic donors and multilateral agencies to request and secure funding, technical assistance and cooperation from different development partners.

Participation in cooperation events and high level meetings - the DCRM, in its aim to promote the visibility and relevance of the ACS, in order to achieve greater linkages and meaningful partnerships with development actors, was part of the delegation that accompanied the Secretary General to the 77th UN General Assembly in New York, as well as in several bilateral meetings with the Central American Integration System (SICA), the World Bank, the Government of Italy and the Government of the United Arab Emirates. Subsequently, a mission was undertaken to Brussels, Belgium to meet with European Union officials to initiate inter-institutional relations with the Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG-ECHO), the Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG-INTPA), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Ambassadors representing permanent missions to the EU (The Bahamas, Barbados, Guatemala, Guyana, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States).

Memoranda of Understanding - The Directorate reinforces its commitment to strong partnerships and agreements have been signed with key institutions. Memoranda of Understanding have recently been signed with the Latin American Development Bank (CAF), the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) and the Central American Commission for Maritime Transport (COCATRAM). Agreements with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the Commonwealth Secretariat, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Brazil, Peru and the University of the French West Indies are currently being studied and developed.

Technical cooperation initiatives - As an additional part of its mandate to promote co-operation and institutional strengthening of the ACS Secretariat, the DCRM continues to be instrumental in obtaining technical assistance for ACS staff members in the areas of Strategic Planning and training, including languages through Spanish language courses.

Development Assistance Committee (DAC) eligibility and application process

The DCRM remains committed in its efforts to seek and receive a favourable response regarding eligibility status for official development assistance (ODA) through the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

2.3.3 Project Management

The DCRM works closely with the other two Directorates of Trade and Sustainable Development and Disaster Risk Reduction, Environment and the Caribbean Sea of the Secretariat in order to design, draft and negotiate project proposals, as well as promote the prioritised List of Projects endorsed by the Ministerial Council, in the strategic search for financial resources to generate the expected results for the construction of Sustainable Development in the Greater Caribbean Region; all of which includes a range of South-South and Triangular cooperation projects.

2.3.4 Administrative activities

In addition to the above, the Directorate performs a number of administrative functions for its internal organisation to ensure the overall success of its activities, including:

- Creation and production of the ACS Annual Review of Cooperation and the digital brochure of the 5th ACS International Cooperation Conference;
- Creation and production of the ACS Annual Review of Cooperation and the digital brochure of the 6th ACS International Cooperation Conference with i) 8 research articles on international cooperation, urban planning, geospatial cooperation, climate change, disaster risk reduction, trade, tourism and transport, ii) information on the 13 project concept papers in the ACS portfolio;
- Creation of the website for the VI International Cooperation Conference providing a space for registration, the agenda, panelists, special guests, photographs of the event, the projected presentations, the logistics manual, the cooperation magazine, the cooperation catalogue, the biographies and photographs of the panelists, as well as ACS contact information;
- Creation of the e-mail address conferencedesk@acs-aec.org for the receipt of correspondence relevant to the Directorate's events;
- Preparation of the Report and Executive Summary of the VI International Cooperation Conference;

- Participation in various cooperation-related webinars;
- Elaboration of a monitoring matrix for all Memoranda of Understanding between the ACS and partners;
- Research on donors/partners for the development and systematisation of a map;
- Research and update of the Inter-Secretariat Matrix.

IN CONCLUSION

The DCRM is an important pillar in the strategic action of the Secretariat as it is responsible for supporting the Directorates and Units in the conceptualisation of programmes and projects that respond to the strategic lines of action of the Action Plan 2022-2028, as well as in the identification of international partners and allies, as key development actors, to provide the necessary funding and/or technical cooperation based on best practices established over time.

During the last semester, the Directorate had a renewed generational change that allowed a transformational window of opportunity as an additional impetus for the organisation and hosting of the 6th International Cooperation Conference, obtaining a successful result due to the multiplicity of actors; multilateral agencies and banks, donors, panelists from different actors of society, Members, Associate Members, Observer Countries, Founding Observer Organizations, placing this meeting as a historical milestone of the organisation having had a total of more than 220 participants in person.