

EIGHT WEEKS AFTER HURRICANE BERYL: IMMENSE PROGRESS

BY

UNITY LABOUR PARTY

RELIEF, RECOVERY, RECONSTRUCTION

Eight weeks after Hurricane Beryl struck SVG, devastatingly, on July 1, 2024, immense progress has been, and is being, made in the process of relief, recovery, and reconstruction [Three Rs] on all material fronts, on all practical indicators. Still, much, much more remains to be done over a protracted period of life, living, and production. Strengths and possibilities exist in the pursuit of the Three Rs, hemmed in by major constraints of time, material and personnel resources.

Immense progress has been made in the vital areas of relief (food, water, shelter); security; social protection; clean-up; electricity; water; public buildings and infrastructure; re-opening of schools; housing; governance and administration; and mobilization of resources.

RELIEF, SECURITY, SOCIAL PROTECTION

As at August 30, 2024, the Ministry of National Mobilisation had recorded that 4,582 households reported damages; over 15,000 persons were thus directly affected by the hurricane. Of this number, 2,599 households or 10,124 persons were registered into private home placement and 400 households (slightly under 1,000 persons) were in public shelter placement. The remainder were living in their partially-damaged houses.

In the shelters adequate food, water, and security were, and are, being provided. Food packages numbering 4,707 have already been delivered to affected persons in private accommodation. This programme continues. Very shortly, though, the food programme would be transitioned into monthly cash payments to affected persons of various categories. Security by the Police Force from SVG, supported by contingents from the Regional Security System (RSS), has been provided more than adequately.

Save and except the Bequia Anglican Primary School and the Georgetown Secondary School, all other schools have been closed as public shelters as at August 31, 2024. These two schools which are still being used as shelters are likely to be closed as shelters by Friday September 6, 2024, in time for their probable reopening to receive students on September 9, 2024.

CLEAN-UP

The massive clean-up in Canouan, Union Island, and Mayreau is almost at an end. The disposal of the debris (galvanized sheetings and so forth) is being done through the barging of the material

to Trinidad as scrap metal. Hundreds of workers were so engaged through BRAGSA and its independent contractors. This clean-up programme has an estimated price tag of EC \$22 million.

In tandem with this there was the usual annual August road-cleaning programme nationally by BRAGSA involving over 5,000 workers at a cost of some EC \$3.2 million.

ELECTRICITY, WATER, TELECOMS

On Union Island, Mayreau, and Canouan, almost every electricity pole was blown down along with the power lines; most of these poles were also damaged or destroyed. On Union Island, the power plant was severely damaged and the generators destroyed. On Mayreau and Canouan the generators were damaged or severely compromised. On all of these three islands dozens of transformers were destroyed. On the rest of SVG (St. Vincent and Bequia) the delivery of electricity was severely compromised for at least 48 hours after the passage of the hurricane. VINLEC has been doing great work to restore electricity everywhere.

As at August 30, 2024, the whole of Canouan and Mayreau is energized; and on Union Island, in a short radius in the Clifton area, power has been restored. On Canouan over 100 houses and main public facilities have been reconnected with power; on Mayreau, the clinic has had power restored. On both Canouan and Mayreau, it is a matter now for buildings to be ready and inspected to receive electricity. On Union Island, as the poles and power lines are built out, electricity would be restored in phases; the powering up of all of Union Island is expected to be concluded by the end of 2024. VINLEC is hard at work on this.

On all of SVG, water delivery was compromised because of Hurricane Beryl. Water was restored to most of SVG within 24 hours after Beryl's passage, and everywhere on St. Vincent within seven days in parts of North Leeward and North Windward. In the interim, water was trucked into the affected areas where the delivery of pipe-borne water was compromised.

In the Southern Grenadines, the water systems were destroyed, damaged or severely compromised. Regular supplies have been restored, but there is still fragility; in the meantime, gaps have been filled with deliveries on a regular basis of bulk water and bottled water from St. Vincent.

Normal telecoms services have been restored on St. Vincent and Bequia, and partially in the Southern Grenadines with Union Island still being the worst affected. The two telecoms providers have given assurances of building out, as the electricity supply in Union Island permits.

PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In the Southern Grenadines, the reconstruction on public buildings as at August 30, 2024, is, in summary, as follows:

- (a) On Canouan: Full repairs and reconstruction of the primary and the secondary schools completed; the Administrative Building's reconstruction is near complete; the terminal Building at the airport has had its roof repaired along with retrofitting of doors, windows, and other enhancements; rebuilding of two Teachers' Hoses near completion; Society Buildings repairs finished; the Doctors' Quarters has had its roof restored and ceiling and electrical works are ongoing; the Clinic is nearing completion; the Nurses' House repairs are currently being done; the Police Station has had its roof repaired, but some internal retrofitting is to be done as soon as relief distribution, which takes place from the Station, is slowed; the clean-up is almost completed through the intense efforts of 225 workers; assistance has been provided to 65 home-owners mainly with the reconstruction of roofs — adequate supply of materials are on the ground to continue the rebuilding exercise; and a Water Purification System is in the process of being installed near to the Police Station.
- (b) On Union Island: The Headquarters of the Police and Rapid Response Unit of the Police is being currently reconstructed with expanded works to accommodate 45 officers, including a wing for senior officers — to be used temporarily to house also some categories of construction workers; the Hospital has had its roof extensively repaired with internal works ongoing; the Clinic in Clifton is having substantial repair work done on its roof; the substantial repairs on the Union Island Secondary School are completed and water tanks are being installed for likely reopening of school on September 9th; the extensive repairs on the Stephanie Browne Primary School are currently being done for likely school reopening on September 16th or before; the ongoing reconstruction of the Mary Hutchinson Primary School, expected to be completed by end of 2024; estimates for rebuilding of the airport are being done; Community Kitchen has been established in Clifton; repairing of Jones' apartments completed; repairing of Roots Man Apartments being done; assistance being provided to two other apartments/guest houses for purposes of providing accommodation to workers; the utilization of Canouan as a "beach head" in providing 140 workers per day to Union Island; repairs started at Tobago Cays building in Clifton; repairs started on 15 houses.
- (c) On Mayreau: Repairs completed on Clinic; roof repaired at relief warehouse; roof repaired at hardcourt shelter; Police Base of operations (Owen Isaacs's place) repaired; nine house roofs repaired; Bunk House for BRAGSA workers had its roof replaced.
- (d) Wharves: All are being addressed by SVG Port Authority, namely: Ferry Terminal Kingstown (Berth 5); Campden Park Port; Bequia Tender Jetty; Mayreau Inter-Island Jetty; Mayreau Cruise Tender; Canouan Jetty; Kingstown Cruise Terminal; Kingstown Main Wharf.

RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS

Fifty-five of the 65 primary schools have their re-opening in the first week of September (September 2nd - 4th); eight primary schools are due to be opened on September 9th, and two on September 16th.

The ten primary schools to be re-opened later are as follows:

- (A) On September 9th: Diamond; Calder; Canouan; Lodge Village; Lower Bay; Sion Hill; Mary Hutchinson (on mainland); and Stephanie Browne (on mainland).
- (B) On September 16th: Mayreau; and Paget Farm.

Please note that primary education on Union Island may commence on September 9th or September 16th depending on multiple variable factors arising from the devastation of Union Island by Beryl. It is to be noted, too, that of the 445 students from Union Island (240 primary and 205 secondary), 306 have indicated a preference to be temporarily educated on St. Vincent (157 primary and 112 secondary for the temporary schools; and 38 mixed primary and secondary students in existing secondary schools).

In respect of the secondary schools, nine of the 26 six secondary schools are scheduled to be opened after the first week of September 2024 as follows:

- (A) On September 9th: Adelphi; Canouan; JP Eustace; Georgetown; Petit Bordel; St. Joseph's Convent Kingstown; Troumaca; and Union Island Secondary (mainland).
- (B) On September 16th: Bishops College. (It is to be noted that this school will start instructional time on September 9th at two temporary locations — the Guides' Hut and the Education Annex behind Victoria Park).

The late openings are due to two main reasons: (i) The extent of the damage to the schools caused by the hurricane; and (ii) the use of schools as shelters. It has been a remarkable effort in all the circumstances to have the vast majority of schools being opened as scheduled. All the relevant stakeholders have done, and are doing, heroic work!

HOUSING

Across St. Vincent and Bequia 550 houses (levels 1 and 2 damage) are currently being addressed. On Canouan there are 65 houses which are being or have been repaired; on Mayreau, nine houses have been repaired; on Union Island, 15 houses are being repaired — all this information is at 30th August 2024.

From September 2, 2024, more seriously-damaged houses (levels 3 and 4) are to be addressed for reconstruction by the Housing and Land Development Corporation.

There will be a ramping up of repairs on the houses at levels 1 and 2 damage.

Monies from Budget 2024 and the Supplementaries are currently financing the housing recovery.

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

The Supplementary Appropriation Bill and Supplementary Estimates were passed on July 19, 2024, to address post-Beryl relief, recovery, and reconstruction. Appropriate administrative arrangements have been put in place to give effect to the Three Rs; adjustments to these arrangements are being reviewed on an ongoing basis on St. Vincent, Bequia, Union Island, Canouan, and Mayreau. The government is working well with regional and international agencies on the ground, private investors and non-governmental organisations, and people from the communities.

Meanwhile, the government is actively putting in place, in collaboration with the World Bank, the programme to be funded under the repurposed loan of US \$63 million (repurposed from the Arnos Vale Acute Care Hospital, which is now being financed by a loan from Taiwan).

This repurposed World Bank loan will cover three components: (a) Early recovery income support and enhancement of income-generating activities; (b) Resilient reconstruction and critical infrastructure and services, but does not include housing; and (c) Project Management. The VEEP model will apply.

The government is pursuing the repurposing of the US \$30 million loan from OFID (part of the original funding for the Arnos Vale Hospital). This repurposed loan from OFID will be for housing and some critical public infrastructure.