

Assessing the Vulnerability of Tourism-related Livelihoods to Tropical Cyclones in Small Island Developing States: A Comparison of Tobago and Jamaica

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Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are vulnerable to climate-related hazards such as tropical cyclones which threaten critical economic sectors that are key income earners for SIDS. The tourism sector is an important source of GDP and foreign exchange for most SIDS but is often threatened by tropical cyclones. Sustaining and protecting livelihoods is critical to ensuring the continuity of tourism in coastal towns within the islands and it is essential to understand the underlying vulnerabilities that workers are exposed to.

This paper examines the factors that contribute to the vulnerability of people working in tourism to hurricanes and tropical storms in Tobago and Jamaica. These two Caribbean countries were chosen so that the impacts of cyclones on an economy supported by oil and gas and one that relies heavily on tourism could be compared.

To gather data on tourism livelihoods, a mixed methods approach was used; a sequential exploratory approach was followed to collect data in two phases with the qualitative component being conducted first followed by a quantitative component. Qualitative interviews were carried out using a Community-Based Vulnerability Assessment tool by Smit and Wandel (2006). These semi-structured interviews targeted key informants and persons whose livelihoods were directly-dependent on the tourism industry. Qualitative interviews allowed an in-depth exploration of the underlying factors contributing to vulnerability within the resort towns studied. In order to quantify vulnerability, Hahn et al.'s (2009) Livelihood Vulnerability Index (LVI), originally used for agriculture was adapted for tourism to create a Tourism Livelihoods Vulnerability Index (TLVI). The TLVI was calculated for selected sectors and then compared across the sites to investigate the factors that contributed most to vulnerability.

Preliminary results indicate that the main factors affecting the vulnerability of tourism livelihoods to hurricanes and tropical storms include the global economic crisis, ensuing changes within the tourism industry including an extension of the slow season, difficulties in securing financial safety nets such as insurance and environmental degradation. Results from the TLVI indicate that generally livelihoods within the selected sites in Tobago were less vulnerable than those in Jamaica. Insights gained from this research can be used to reduce the risk to stakeholders involved in tourism and put in place appropriate strategies to ensure the sustainability of the industry.