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COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS

UPDATE

BERMUDA

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Abbreviations

BIOS	Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences
BIOS	Blue Ocean Prosperity Program
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
DOS	Department of Statistics
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MCO	Multi-Country Office
MSDCF	Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
STEPS	WHO STEPwise approach to non-communicable disease risk factor surveillance
UNCT	United Nations Country Team

Executive Summary

In 2023, Bermuda, like other territories and countries within the remit of the Jamaica MCO, has experienced a strong rebound in economic activity. Progress on the SDGs remains difficult to capture in a systematic way given limited access to standardized and timely data. As such, this update relies on readily available public data and information linked to significant policy changes that have taken place since 2022.



With respect to the impacts from climate change, while it was threatened by several major storms; Bermuda was fortunately spared during the 2023 Hurricane season.^[1] However, concerns remain in relation to Bermuda’s vulnerability to sea-level rises, changes in the frequency and/or intensity of extreme weather, and extreme temperature.

As it relates to peace and security concerns in Bermuda, the crime rate remains relatively low compared to other territories/states under the Jamaica MCO’s remit. In 2023, however, in July, the Ministry of National Security rolled out an initiative to introduce CCTVs throughout the territory, not only as a deterrent to (and aid in investigations of) criminal activity but also as a means of enhancing residents’ and citizens’ collective sense of security.^[2] The Minister of National Security noted that his ministry has prioritized fighting crime because the country is “in a situation right now where crime has been a major issue – gun crime, other violent crime.”^[3]

Introduction

The CCA is a key instrument designed to reflect the United Nations integrated, forward-looking and evidence-based joint analysis of the context for sustainable development, in view of achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. It forms the basis of UN programmatic support through the Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF).

This document is the third CCA update of the newest cycle, with the second CCA update for Bermuda completed at the end of 2022. This document provides an overview of major changes that have taken place in 2023 and highlights the data that has become available since then.

At the time of this update, Bermuda is experiencing a strong rebound in economic activity despite geopolitical uncertainties. The first three sections of this CCA update will outline developments on the political, economic, and human rights front in Bermuda during 2023.

The latter two sections of the report will: 1) highlight SDG progress (and the government’s policy efforts to advance these) and 2) delve into the upcoming threats and opportunities as identified by the Agencies, Funds and Programmes that contribute to programming in Bermuda. For this report, the inputs of the different UN entities, civil society, and the government were sought.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



[1] Johnston-Barnes, O. (2023, December 2). Hurricane season ends with Bermuda little affected. Available at <https://www.royalgazette.com/weather/news/article/20231202/hurricane-season-ends-with-bermuda-little-affected/>

[2] Loop Caribbean News. (2023, July 18). Bermuda launches major crime initiative. Available at <https://caribbean.loopnews.com/content/bermuda-launches-major-crime-initiative>

[3] Ibid.

Political Developments

In May, the Municipality of Hamilton and the Municipality of St. Georges each held municipal elections. In October, Bermuda held a by-election in Smith's South due to the resignation of an opposition member of parliament – who was replaced by a member of his party, the One Bermuda Alliance.^[4]

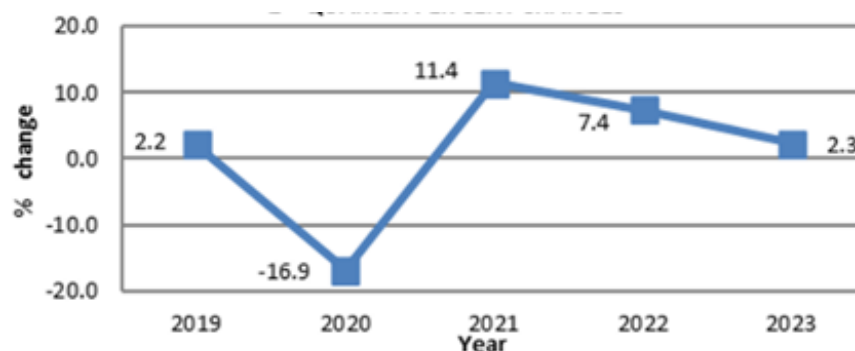
Of note in 2023 was Bermuda's plans to apply for full membership in CARICOM. The territory has expressed its intention to the UK who has responded positively to the Bermuda's move toward fuller integration in the sub-region. Wider consultations within the region and with the Bermudan public are expected to get underway in 2024.^[5]

Economic Developments

In December, the Minister of Economy and Labour shared that the Bermudan “economy is growing and is larger than pre-pandemic levels.” He noted that because of inflationary pressures, household purchasing power has shrunk and the government is continuing to address the cost-of-living crisis. In the Speech from the Throne in November, the Governor outlined several initiatives already undertaken to alleviate financial stress among its citizens by reminding of “the legislative and policy tools available to assist the people, increase and expansion of child day care allowance, elimination of duty on staple goods, expansion of financial assistance in instances of sudden hardship, and continued reduction of the tax burden on the majority of Bermuda's workers and businesses.” The Cost-of-Living Commission is expected to continue its work to further reduce the financial pressure faced by the population.^[6]

According to the Department of Statistics (DOS), during the second quarter of 2023, quarterly Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices was estimated at \$1,674.2 million, rising 2.3 per cent year-over-year adjusting for inflation (see Figure 2). In current prices, GDP increased 3.9 per cent (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: GDP in Constant Prices (2nd Quarter percent changes)



Source: Department of Statistics

[4] Parliamentary Registry. (2023). Smith's South By-Election 2023. <https://elections.gov.bm/elections/results/electionss.html?kid=405>

[5] CMC. (2023, November 28). Bermuda Gets Green Light from UK to Seek Full CARICOM Membership <https://www.caribbeantoday.com/sections/politics/bermuda-gets-green-light-from-uk-to-seek-full-caricom-membership>

[6] Deacon, J. (2023, December 18). 'The economy is growing – that's a fact'. Available at <https://www.royalgazette.com/politics/news/article/20231218/the-economy-is-growing-thats-a-fact-says-hayward/>

[7] Government of Bermuda. (2023). Speech from the Throne – Serving the People. Available at <https://www.gov.bm/throne->

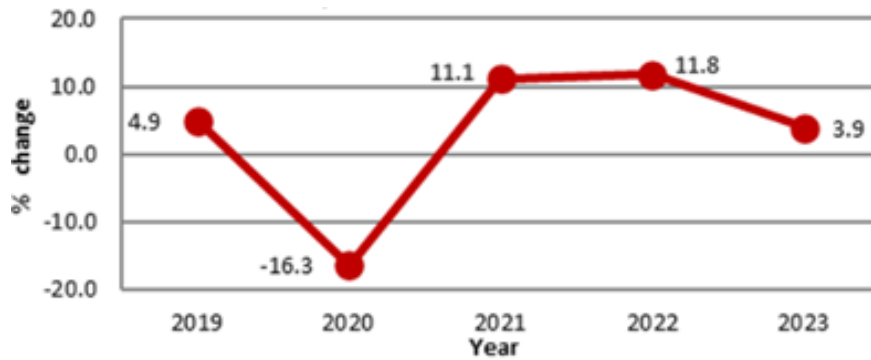


Figure 3: GDP in Current Prices (2nd Quarter percent changes).

Source: Department of Statistics

Human Rights Developments

In commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights, the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors noted that changing how family is defined within Bermuda’s Human Rights Act will “ensure that our legislation evolves with the changing dynamics of our society, embracing diverse family structures and protecting the rights of every individual within them.”^[8] There is no clear explanation of what that definitional change would be, but it is a development worth heeding in 2024.

Progress on the SDGs

In lieu of government strategies or plans that explicitly align with the SDGs, the previous CCAs referred to several plans/initiatives which are implicitly aligned with a range of SDGs actively being implemented. These include the 2020 Economic Recovery Plan (ERP), the Bermuda Health Strategy 2022-2027, and the 2022 Blue Ocean Prosperity Program (BOPP). In 2023, while the aforementioned plans continue to be implemented, the Government of Bermuda introduced its 2023-2027 Economic Development Strategy (in which elements of the ERP have been embedded).

The Economic Development Strategy includes the following strategic priorities: 1. Local and International; Business Retention and Expansion; 2. Business Attraction and Investment promotion; 3. Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development; 4. Continued Economic Recovery Plan Execution; and 5. People. These priorities are intended to be operationalized via strategic initiatives, which contain the following actionable items outlined in the plan: “Immigration, emigration, new business development and labour policy changes for current and future sectors; Driving investment, innovation and improved opportunities for a sustainable Bermuda; and Expansion of current and future sectors and activities to promote sustainable growth, increased job creation and accelerated recovery.”^[9]

[8] Ausenda, S. (2023, December 12). Furbert celebrates declaration of human rights. Available at <https://www.royalgazette.com/general/news/article/20231212/furbert-celebrates-declaration-of-human-rights/>

[9] Government of Bermuda. (2023). Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027. Available at <https://www.gov.bm/articles/economic-development-strategy-2023-2027>

At the time of the previous CCA Update, the Government of Bermuda's Project Management Office (PMO) (the entity overseeing the rollout of the ERP) had no information on its landing page. However, the page now has updates to several initiatives, valid as of 21 November 2023. These include, inter alia, the development of an initial business plan which presents four pathways to implement the Bermuda Digital Bank; an announcement of the public launch of the virtual market www.bybermuda.bm; and completed administrative tasks to establish marine economic development zones.^[10]

With respect to relevant health information for Bermuda, the health statistics in the 2022 CCA Update were drawn from the 2019 health strategy. The Governor expressed concern over the lack of current data on the health ecosystem in Bermuda, and indicated in the November 2023 Speech from the Throne that the Ministry of Health will undertake the STEPS 2024 population health survey to provide that evidence and establish public health priorities, tracking the trends and magnitude of these risk factors, and leading the fight to prevent chronic noncommunicable diseases.^[11]

In other attempts to benefit its residents, the government has unveiled a timeline for the delivery of universal health coverage – with the phased implementation of basic services beginning in April 2025.^[12]

As it relates to ensuring gender equality and the advancement of women and girls, the recent CCA Update cited Bermuda's establishment of a Gender Affairs Council (which replaced the Women's Affairs Council). At the time, no members had been appointed. However, following the call for interest in the final quarter of 2022, ten members were appointed to serve on the Council and tasked with creating a terms of reference for their work – which is not yet available on the Council's landing page.^[13] As a reminder, the Gender Affairs Council, to be comprised of CSO representatives, government officials, and private sector representatives is intended to assist the Government in an advisory capacity to bring perceptions, experiences, and interests of women and men to influence legislation, policy, and decision-making. Council members will “identify, review and advise on social, educational, economic and legislative factors that advance principles of gender equality and equity in national programmes and plans. [And] will also be asked to address issues facing Bermuda's LGBTQ+ community.”^[14]

Finally, Bermuda continues to foreground its marine environment in its climate action and environmental sustainability efforts. Since the introduction of the 2022 Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme [BOPP], the team has engaged with a vast range of stakeholders from “Bermuda's residents and local industries, including commercial fishermen.” To ensure that a balance is struck between sustaining livelihoods and the marine ecosystem, BOPP undertook an ocean use survey in 2023 to garner insights from groups and individuals who use Bermuda's marine assets and would be most affected by the implementation of the Marine Spatial Plan and Blue Economy Strategy.^[15]

[10] Government of Bermuda. (2023). Economic Recovery Plan Status as of 21 November 2023. Available at <https://www.gov.bm/economic-recovery-plan-status>

[11] Government of Bermuda. (2023). Speech from the Throne – Serving the People. Available at https://www.gov.bm/throne-speech?fbclid=IwAR14TcCSPRyGgtIqik_tMFRC6y7Xo2lZhK7n42kuxT7QrAzHmqDL7snYjE

[12] Bell, J. (2023, October 9). Timeline emerges for delivery of universal health coverage. Available at <https://www.royalgazette.com/health/news/article/20231009/timeline-emerges-for-delivery-of-universal-health-cover/>

[13] Finighan, G. (2023, January 16). Ten-member Gender Affairs Council created. Available at <https://www.royalgazette.com/politics/news/article/20230116/ten-member-gender-affairs-council-created/>

[14] Bernews. (2022, 30 September). Submit To Serve On Gender Affairs Council. Available at <https://bernews.com/2022/09/eoi-gender-affairs-council-membership/>

[15] Bernews. (2023, September 28). Work continuing on draft blue prosperity plan. Available at <https://bernews.com/2023/09/work-continuing-on-draft-blue-prosperity-plan/>

Emerging Opportunities and Challenges

Bermuda, despite its high income status, is quite vulnerable to economic and climate shocks. There are also domestic issues around violence and inequity that cannot be ignored and could interfere with the success of initiatives aimed to increase inclusion and prosperity. As such, it will need to continue to seek ways in which to ensure that it can adapt to both. There are ample opportunities for growth, provided the plans and strategies are effectively resourced and actioned.

A potential opportunity lies in Bermuda's exploration of a range of interventions including "legislation for a new class of development finance, wherein an array of state and non-state financiers, philanthropists and investors can blend funds that could address the first 16 sustainable development goals around the globe" while developing models to address catastrophe risk.^[16]

Because the government and other stakeholders are pursuing innovative solutions to key challenges; there is an opportunity to ensure that vulnerable, marginalized, and otherwise underrepresented populations are included in the early stages of development strategies.

Conclusion

Bermuda currently has momentum as it emerges from the global pandemic and pursues economic recovery strategies. As expressed in the previous CCA update, unless explicitly included; persons with disabilities, persons living in extreme poverty, and other vulnerable groups remain at risk of being left behind.

[16] Horner, P. (2023, December 8). Bermuda can become 'Climate Central'. Available at <https://www.royalgazette.com/opinion-writer/opinion/article/20231208/bermuda-can-become-climate-central/>