

## Foreword

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*Strengthening Disaster Resilience in Small States: Commonwealth Perspectives* is published at a time when small states' vulnerabilities are exacerbated by recent natural disasters experienced in many parts of the world. It follows from evidence that the extent to which natural disasters continue to adversely affect small states calls for more concerted efforts to review and address the international architecture for managing natural disasters. As the longstanding champion of the international recognition of the inherent vulnerabilities of small states, the Commonwealth Secretariat – through its inaugural Research Conference for Small States – initiated a collaboration among academics and international partners to further investigate how we can work together to build and strengthen the resilience of these countries to natural disasters.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's call for papers on this topic sought to explore cutting-edge disaster risk reduction techniques useful for informing small states' economic and disaster risk management policies, with the aim of collating and sharing important lessons with member governments, and galvanising international efforts for reducing the impact of natural disasters.

Readers will find most useful the thought-provoking ideas on the utilisation of existing data and technologies for significantly enhanced natural disaster preparation – a leading theme of the conference and publication. These would include, among others, mobile and satellite data for geospatial mapping; sensor technologies for the advancement of early-warning systems; and the application of blockchain technology for improved insurance products – a necessary and sorely needed financial mitigation resource. In the chapters that follow, you will also be exposed to perspectives on the need to mainstream gender in disaster risk reduction; lessons from past experiences with responding to natural disasters; and expert advice on how to manage and make use of existing knowledge for better disaster preparation.

The authors' perspectives on these issues were presented for further deliberation at the Commonwealth's Fifth Global Biennial Conference on Small States, held in March 2019 in Apia, Samoa. Faced with new research evidence and proposals, senior officials from small states and development partners provided their own perspectives regarding the urgent need for a fresh and concerted approach for managing and reducing the impact of natural disasters in small states.

Arising from the papers and their conclusions, as well as from the key discussions held with academics, international partners and member governments, are suggestions on small states' governments; the Commonwealth and other international partners can re-organise themselves to ensure that the legal, physical and technological infrastructure is put in place to effectively support the development of appropriate

mechanisms for addressing natural disaster risks in small states. These are provided for your own reflection.

With that brief prelude I am pleased to hand over this unique publication, which provides a focused set of contributions from small states' academics and experts, whose aim it is to foster a better understanding of the dynamics of natural disasters, and ways in which we can work together to ensure enhanced and effective risk reduction in these countries.

Note that this collection of papers is intended as a reference document for small states' policy-makers and stakeholders within the fields of social, environment and economic policy making. The contribution of various experts in this field, including that of Secretariat staff, is duly noted and highly appreciated.

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