



The New Normal: Weathering the Storms of a Changing Trinidad

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A story on Lived Impact of The
Climate Crisis



Trinidad, my island, has always been a paradise of contrast, beauty, and warmth, and it is facing a transformation. The rich tapestry of culture, the vibrant streets pulsing with the rhythms of steelpan and calypso, and the tranquil landscapes of lush forests, waterfalls, and sun-kissed beaches have been the hallmarks of this Caribbean gem. But in recent years, a shadow has begun to creep over our idyllic surroundings. The weather has turned unpredictable.



SOURCE: DENIEL NOVELLA



The familiar patterns of rainfall, dry spells, and seasonal transitions have become more erratic and more extreme. What was once an island of serene balance has found itself at the mercy of a new, more volatile climate.



I've lived in Trinidad all my life, and I've watched these changes unfold, particularly at the university campus, which has been a constant in my life since secondary school. Over the years, I've witnessed the campus evolve. There have been updates to accommodate students — new walkways, covered footpaths, and additional structures to keep pace with an ever-growing student body. As the space has changed, so has the weather, and not for the better. What used to be a predictable rainy season has transformed into a long, intense downpour that turns roads into rivers and floods areas that were once immune.

I remember the dry seasons of the past when the grass would turn brown, and the air would feel warmer, but it was bearable. The rainy season was equally predictable — heavy, occasional showers that came and went, with the sun shining through after the storm. Now, I find myself walking across campus under the relentless heat, as if the island's once-cool breeze has been replaced by a furnace. The rainy season has lengthened and is more erratic, with intense spells of heat followed by torrential rains that feel more like a monsoon than a tropical downpour.

This year, the weather has been even more unpredictable. Hurricane season arrived early, and the destructive force of Hurricane Beryl left its mark on several Caribbean islands, including Carriacou, Petit Martinique, and Union Island, where nearly 98% of the structures were destroyed. I waited anxiously for news from relatives and friends, hoping that they had survived Beryl's passing. It was a stark reminder of how extreme weather can reshape lives in the blink of an eye. The floods that were experienced in Trinidad only drove home the reality that no place, no community, no person is immune.

Living in the Maracas Valley for nearly a decade, I only experienced the river crossing the road once — about two years ago, after days of heavy rain. But this year, the floods have become an all-too-familiar sight. The river has repeatedly breached its banks, a raging brown snake that blocks the way home. And it's not just Maracas. Everywhere I turn, I see the same troubling patterns: roads turning into rivers, homes being flooded out, and communities cut off, sometimes for days or even weeks at a time. The new normal of flash floods and torrential rain is no longer a rare event — it's something we now anticipate.



SOURCE: NICOLE LEWIS



One conversation I had with a young woman from the Clacton Bay area struck me deeply. She told me, almost casually, that if it rains, you're stuck — whether you're at home or out. If you're home, you can't leave; if you're out, you can't get home. When it rains, it floods, she said, and you have to find somewhere to stay — often with family or friends — until the waters go down. Her casual tone reflected a grim reality: this was not an occasional inconvenience; this was her norm.

The effects of these increasingly intense weather events go beyond just the inconvenience of disrupted daily life. The ripple effects are felt across every sector of society. The agricultural sector is especially vulnerable. Floods damage crops, ruin fishing grounds, and destroy coastal resources. As farmers struggle to make up for their losses, they raise prices, further inflating the cost of living. And it's not just the farmers who feel it — working parents face the added stress of balancing work with childcare when schools are closed due to floods. For some, this means burning through vacation days or taking unpaid leave, further straining household budgets.



SOURCE: JADE TRIM

For those who rely on public transportation, the problem is compounded. The already fragile public transport system becomes even more unreliable. And those who own vehicles face the risk of their cars being submerged or having to drive through floodwaters, risking damage. The mental strain of constantly navigating these challenges is taking its toll on everyone — whether it's the anxiety of checking the weather report, worrying about whether your home will flood, or the pressure of finding money for repairs or healthcare when a disaster strikes.

In these times, we find ourselves grappling not only with the physical and financial costs of climate change but with the mental and emotional toll it takes on us. It's exhausting trying to keep up with the unpredictable swings of weather, the constant anxiety, and the looming threat of destruction. But even in the face of these challenges, we can hope and be intentional in our response to these changes. And we must do so with a unified voice and a sense of collective responsibility. We need to foster active, equal participation in decision-making and find innovative solutions that are grounded in sustainability and equity. This means engaging local communities in grassroots organizing, listening to their needs,

and co-creating solutions that take into account the complexities of their lived realities. It also means revisiting our indigenous practices — those tried-and-tested methods of living in harmony with nature — and finding ways to incorporate them into modern-day solutions.

In the Caribbean, we also face the challenge of financing these responses. We are a region with a historical trajectory marked by colonization, economic exploitation, and, more recently, the growing impacts of climate change. As a region, we need to advocate for reparations that include climate and loss-and-damage funding to help us build resilience. The time has come to reimagine our future, not as victims of a changing climate but as active participants in shaping the solutions we need to survive and thrive.

In the end, the climate has changed, and floods are part of our new reality. But that doesn't mean we are powerless. We have the strength, the creativity, and the unity to forge a path forward — one that is grounded in solidarity, resilience, and a commitment to protecting our islands, our people, and our future and is a force calling for accountability of those primarily responsible.

We are, after all, people who have danced through storms before. This time, let's dance our way to a better tomorrow."