

From Crisis to Crossroads: Montserrat as a Learning Model

Case Study

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About the Author

Debra C. Lewis is a Montserratian consultant, strategist, and writer who helps institutions become centers of excellence – with a pen, a plan, and precision. A former senior public servant with extensive experience across development planning, public administration, strategic communication, entrepreneurial development, diplomacy, external affairs, and corporate governance, she brings a rare synergy of lived experience, insight, and critical thinking.

She is the founder of The Solutionist, a strategic consultancy focused on post-crisis recovery, institutional strengthening, and community resilience in small island states. Her work is shaped by Montserrat's protracted recovery, a deep understanding of government systems and a clear-eyed, strategic perspective that enables bold thinking and grounded delivery.

About The Solutionist

The Solutionist is a strategic consultancy built for complexity. We help governments, public institutions, civil society, and mission-driven organizations in small, post-crisis, resource-constrained environments think boldly, plan smartly, and act effectively. From policy frameworks to hands-on implementation support, we specialize in bridging the gap between vision and delivery – so good ideas become real results.

What We Do - In Simple Terms

We help governments, institutions, organizations, and businesses unpack complex challenges, enabling them to take informed, confident action. We define “crisis” broadly: not just as natural disaster, but also economic shocks, institutional breakdown, or prolonged stagnation that stalls meaningful progress.

Whether it's fixing stalled initiatives, clarifying priorities, or building delivery systems that actually work, we help you move from plans to progress, and from vision to execution.

Our Goal: To help you get unstuck and deliver meaningful, sustainable results – no matter how complex the challenge.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“From Crisis to Crossroads: Montserrat as a Learning Model” examines Montserrat’s protracted recovery journey following the Soufrière Hills volcanic eruptions, unpacking the complex challenges that have shaped its path. More than a story of devastation, it is a study in resilience, recovery delays, and the persistent tension between aspiration and execution.

Nearly three decades after the initial crisis, Montserrat stands at a boiling point. The country is not just stalled – it is at a crossroads demanding transformation. The sense of responsibility to help shift the needle has never been more urgent. The island has received extensive technical assistance, donor support, and public sector reform recommendations, but real progress has been piecemeal, stymied by structural fragmentation, systemic fatigue, and misalignment between vision, capacity, and delivery mechanisms.

Montserrat’s current crossroads are further complicated by its impending graduation from Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2026. While classified as a high-income country by the World Bank, this designation is largely artificial – contrived by Gross National Income per capita – and does not reflect the island’s continued economic vulnerability, limited private sector, and deep reliance on UK aid for both capital and recurrent expenditures. The transition away from guaranteed aid will force Montserrat to compete for resources and rethink how essential services and infrastructure are funded, intensifying the urgency for effective institutional reform and strategic capacity-building.

Montserrat’s development did not stall simply because of disaster, but because the critical recovery phase was skipped. The island moved directly from emergency response into long-term planning without first rebuilding the systems and the infrastructure necessary to deliver on that vision. This missing step left key national institutions fragmented, under-resourced, and unable to sustain transformation.

The Solutionist emerged in response to this reality, recognizing that institutions like the Bank of Montserrat, Social Security, Montserrat Utilities Limited, and Montserrat Community College are not just service providers – they are the anchors of national resilience. In Montserrat’s context, they are “too big to fail.” Their strength or fragility determines the island’s trajectory.

A foundational gap in Montserrat’s recovery was the absence of a comprehensive Impact Assessment. Without a clear and shared understanding of the full extent of loss and damage, recovery planning lacked a solid foundation, making it difficult to prioritize interventions, allocate resources effectively, and build consensus on the path forward.

This story is not unique. Across Small Island Developing States and within under-resourced governments, skipping recovery leads to misalignment, institutional fatigue, and unrealized transformation. Sustainable recovery requires more than plans and funding – it demands deliberate, phased rebuilding of institutional capacity, infrastructure and resilience.

The Case Study reveals how Montserrat’s redevelopment has also been hampered by a structural imbalance between government, business, and civil society, and by a governance model where authority is high but local accountability is limited. It illustrates, too, that recovery is not merely about resources but about strategy, structure, and sustained momentum.

Through a methodical examination of what worked, what stalled, and why – it draws out key insights relevant to both local institutions and external partners. The island skipped recovery. Systems were never rebuilt. Progress has been piecemeal – but renewal is still possible if we act boldly now.

Notably, the island’s weakened private sector, diminished civil society, and narrow framing of aid as a government or infrastructure issue have distorted its ability to reset. Aid has been treated mainly as a government-to-government transaction and development is narrowly interpreted as physical infrastructure delivery – limiting their scope to public service apparatus and construction rather than encompassing the broader societal, civic, and institutional enablers of national progress and sustainable development. This has left little room for the social, civic, and institutional foundations needed to sustain growth and foster resilience. The result is an overloaded government system operating without the societal scaffolding needed to sustain progress.

The Structured Transition Model was created to address exactly this gap. It offers a phased, systemic approach to rebuild institutional coherence and delivery capacity as a foundation for sustainable development, embedding resilience and adaptive capacity so that future crises do not derail progress.

2. Why Montserrat Matters

There was a time when Montserrat was known as the “Cadillac of the West Indies,” a reputation earned through strong leadership and a thriving society during the late John Bassie Osborne’s term as Chief Minister. But a series of climatic events fundamentally altered the island’s path. Today, as we confront the legacy of these events and the resulting institutional fragility, we must also reclaim that spirit of ambition and possibility. The responsibility to act – to make the hard, transformative decisions – rests with all of us who care about Montserrat’s future.

Understanding Montserrat’s Context: Geography, Status, and Shifting Aid Realities

Montserrat is one of five remaining British Overseas Territories in the Caribbean. Situated in the inner arc of the Leeward Islands, it forms a geographic triangle with Antigua and Nevis—both visible from its coastlines. Known for its black sand beaches and sulphur springs, Montserrat’s volcanic nature shaped both its beauty and its tragedy.

A full member of CARICOM and the OECS, Montserrat is part of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union and shares the Eastern Caribbean Dollar (EC\$) with its OECS peers. Though constitutionally dependent, it once held strong regional and development standing. Before the eruptions, the island enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the Caribbean, and its dependent status did not prevent it from accession to global bilateral and multilateral development programmes.

This context matters. It reminds us that Montserrat’s current aid dependency is not historical inevitability — but the result of disruption, dislocation, and disrepair.

Montserrat is more than a case study – it is a living example of the complexities, contradictions, and opportunities that shape small island development in a post-crisis world. Its story offers a rare window into how natural disaster, institutional strain, and governance shaped by its status as an internally self-governing British Overseas Territory can intersect in ways that both hinder and enable transformation.

Additionally, Montserrat's experience underscores that sustainable recovery requires more than government action alone – it depends on the interplay of public institutions, private enterprise, and a vibrant civil society. Montserrat matters because it reveals the why, what, when and how of development in real time. It reminds us that meaningful recovery and transformation must be designed – not improvised.

3. The Eruption and Its Aftermath

Before the Soufrière Hills volcano erupted, Montserrat was a fully functioning country with modern, state-of-the-art infrastructure and financing its own recurrent budget.

The island's prosperity peaked during the 1980s under Chief Minister John Osborne, when economic growth reached 4.6% and Montserrat graduated early from grant-in-aid status. This era was characterized by high employment, quality healthcare and education, and widespread optimism. Even after the devastation of Hurricane Hugo in 1989, the island achieved a swift recovery, with the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) noting that Montserrat had "largely recovered from the impact." By the mid-1990s, Montserrat was considered a relatively prosperous "small place," with per capita incomes exceeding £2,000 and a robust standard of living.

The island was on a clear trajectory of economic growth and social development, boasting well-established public services, a vibrant community life, and a growing economy. Roads, schools, utilities, and government institutions were robust and capable, supporting a population that was optimistic about its future. However, when the Soufrière Hills volcano began erupting in the mid-1990s, Montserrat faced one of the most dramatic population and economic dislocations in Caribbean history. Over 60% of the island became uninhabitable, two-thirds of the population emigrated, and core government functions had to be re-established from scratch in the northern safe zone.

The eruption marked a turning point, plunging the island into a prolonged period of economic and social crisis. Montserrat's status as a British Overseas Territory meant that, post-1995, Her Majesty's Government became deeply involved in almost every aspect of the island's social and economic administration. This intervention, while essential, entrenched a pattern of donor dependency that persists today because of the approach.

In the immediate aftermath, Montserrat operated in survival mode. This emergency phase meant that conducting a comprehensive Impact Assessment – a detailed, holistic accounting of loss and damage across infrastructure, economy, society and institutions – was never prioritized or accomplished. Whilst understandable in the context of emergency response, this omission had profound consequences. Without a clear and shared understanding of the true scale of loss – physical, economic, social, and

psychological – recovery planning lacked a solid foundation, making it difficult to prioritize interventions, allocate resources effectively, and build consensus on the path forward.

4. Skipping the Recovery Phase: The Core Challenge

Montserrat's development trajectory highlights a critical systemic challenge: the recovery phase was skipped. Instead of dedicating time and resources to rebuilding government systems, restoring capacity, and aligning stakeholders, the island moved directly from emergency response into long-term development planning. This leapfrogging meant that the institutions responsible for delivering on ambitious plans were not ready – leading to stalled progress, fragmented efforts, and institutional fatigue.

This pattern is common across Small Island Developing States and under-resourced governments, where the urgency to respond quickly often sidelines the deliberate, structured recovery phase. Without this foundational step, systems remain misaligned, accountability weak, and transformation unrealized.

5. A Prolonged Transition

Nearly 30 years later, Montserrat remains in protracted recovery – receiving ongoing aid, operating under emergency-era legacies, and facing a persistent gap between its potential and its progress. Despite multiple public sector reform attempts, several development plans, and various strategic reviews, implementation has lagged behind ambition. This reality is not due to indifference or incompetence, but to the deeper constraints that face small, aid-dependent, and politically complex environments.

6. Enduring Constraints

The absence of a clearly defined recovery phase compounded Montserrat's institutional challenges. Fragmented mandates, overlapping roles, and limited local autonomy created a fragile governance culture. With neither a vibrant private sector nor an active civil society, government institutions were left to shoulder nearly all developmental responsibilities.

This over-concentration of duties distorted the broader development ecosystem. In healthy systems, responsibility is distributed across three core pillars: public, private, and civil. In Montserrat, this balance has never fully materialized – and with that, the risks of institutional overreach, inefficiency, and burnout persist.

That burnout is not hypothetical. Institutional fatigue has deepened with each reform cycle, as successive initiatives failed to build lasting capacity or coherence. Without embedded systems thinking and adaptive management mechanisms, progress has remained piecemeal and unsustainable.

Montserrat's reclassification as a high-income country is, in many ways, a technical artefact – driven by GNI per capita rather than real economic resilience. The reality is far more fragile: a small, aid-dependent

economy with limited private sector activity, high public employment and ongoing reliance on UK support to fund both capital development and recurrent expenditures, including salaries and essential services.

ODA graduation will not just reduce financial support – it will shift the rules entirely. Montserrat must now fundamentally rethink how it finances its future. That means stabilising institutions, diversifying the economy, and designing revenue strategies that go beyond import duties and taxation – tapping into local capital, unlocking diaspora wealth, incentivising value creation, and rewarding productive activity that builds the economy, not just bills it.

This transition requires more than ambition. It demands data-driven justifications for funding, improved programme design, and proactive resource mobilisation. Potential pathways include:

- special investment vehicles to capture and direct local capital;
- diaspora partnerships for remittance-backed investment and technical support;
- strategic foreign investment aligned with national priorities and the public interest; and
- access to international grants, climate finance and development support, tailored to small-state realities.

◆ Resourcing the Future: Beyond Taxation

Montserrat's path forward will require more than just increasing taxes, import duties and fees. Sustainable financing means:

- ✚ Reimagining revenue — not just raising it
- ✚ Mobilising untapped local capital
- ✚ Incentivising productivity and formalisation
- ✚ Engaging the diaspora in structured, contribution-based development
- ✚ Aligning private investment with national delivery goals

ODA graduation is not just a fiscal event.

It's a strategic shift – and only systems thinking can turn it into an opportunity.

Despite the challenges, Montserrat holds untapped potential. Its small size, close-knit society, and resilient culture offer fertile ground to test, adapt, and scale systems-based approaches to recovery and reform. With intentional support and structured delivery, Montserrat can become a learning model – not just for itself, but for other post-crisis, resource-limited jurisdictions seeking sustainable pathways forward.

7. Existential Threats: The Peril of Complacency and Marginalization

Despite clear and present risks, there is a troubling lack of urgency and intentionality in addressing Montserrat's most pressing institutional challenges in a progressive, forward-looking manner. Too often, the expertise of capable local practitioners and operators is marginalized, and our anchor institutions are left to struggle under mounting pressures that threaten the island's very survival.

The Bank of Montserrat (BOM), our sole domestic bank and a linchpin of the local economy, continues to struggle with securing strong correspondent banking relationships. The absence of an international ATM is not just a technical inconvenience; it limits cross-border transactions, stifles innovation, and places both businesses and individuals at a disadvantage. As the only bank, its struggles reverberate throughout the economy, affecting everything from remittances to investment.

Montserrat Utilities Limited (MUL) is grappling with aged infrastructure, leading to frequent power outages that disrupt daily life and economic activity. The urgent need to transition to renewable energy in a sustainable way remains unmet, leaving the island vulnerable to both service interruptions and the global shift away from fossil fuels.

The Social Security Fund is in steady decline, with the number of local contributors on island insufficient to sustain it. Without innovative reforms and new approaches to fund sustainability, there is a real risk of insolvency, which would jeopardize the social safety net for current and future generations.

Montserrat Community College (MCC), envisioned as a driver of workforce development, currently offers only academic subjects, with little to no budgetary allocation for vocational or technical training. This gap means MCC is unable to fulfill its mandate of preparing students for the full spectrum of economic opportunities, further constraining the island's capacity for innovation and self-reliance.

Institution	Key Challenge	Existential Consequence if Unaddressed
Bank of Montserrat	Weak correspondent banking, no international ATM	Economic isolation, limited investment
Montserrat Utilities Limited (MUL)	Aged infrastructure, lack of renewables	Frequent outages, unsustainable energy future
Social Security Fund	Declining contributions, risk of insolvency	Social safety net collapse
Montserrat Community College (MCC)	No vocational/technical programs	Skills gap, limited workforce readiness

It is essential to recognize that many of these institutions are not failing for lack of effort or commitment. Dedicated professionals within BOM, MCC, Social Security, and MUL are striving to deliver and innovate under extremely challenging circumstances. The core issue is not mediocrity, but a chronic lack of the right expertise and resources, outdated systems, and insufficient strategic investment. Without bold, systemic support and a willingness to co-opt local and diaspora expertise in solutions engineering and strategic planning, even the most committed teams will continue to struggle against overwhelming odds.

If we are to move beyond stagnation, we must cultivate a sense of urgency and a culture of excellence – one that values local expertise, demands accountability, and provides the resources and structural reforms our anchor institutions need to thrive. The time for incrementalism and complacency has passed. The stakes are existential, and the costs of inaction are mounting.

8. Development at a Crossroads

Montserrat is not simply at a crossroads in a figurative sense. After decades of cumulative shocks – from Hurricane Hugo in 1988 to the Soufrière Hills volcanic eruptions in the 1990s – the island now faces a boiling point. Many feel the country is stuck, with no clear way forward. But this is not the full story. The reality is that Montserrat stands at a pivotal moment where bold, decisive action can shift the trajectory. The choices made now – about leadership, institutional reform, and investment in anchor institutions – will determine whether the island moves from stagnation to renewal, or remains locked in a cycle of crisis and missed opportunity.

9. The Implementation Gap

Despite ambitious plans and repeated reform efforts, Montserrat continues to face a significant implementation gap. This disconnect between vision and execution stems from fragmented institutional mandates, limited capacity, and the absence of a coherent, system-wide delivery framework. Without addressing these root causes, development initiatives risk remaining aspirational rather than transformational.

10. System Fatigue, Low Morale and Institutional Fragmentation

Years of reform cycles, donor-driven initiatives, and shifting priorities have contributed to system fatigue and low morale within Montserrat's public service and partner institutions. Fragmented responsibilities and overlapping mandates have further eroded institutional coherence, making it difficult to sustain momentum or build lasting capacity.

Development is expected to happen in an ecosystem where non-governmental actors are few, private sector participation is limited, and civil society is weak or nonexistent – leaving public bodies to absorb the full weight of development expectations.

The cumulative effect is system fatigue: not just resource exhaustion, but cognitive and emotional exhaustion and low morale across institutions and stakeholders. Initiatives feel repetitive, consultations feel inconsequential, and ambition often turns into caution.

11. Donor Dependency and Constitutional Complexity

Montserrat's status as a British Overseas Territory adds layers of constitutional complexity that affect governance and development. The merger of DfID and FCO into the FCDO has further blurred accountability lines across administration, oversight, and finance, raising serious concerns about authority without counterbalance.

Donor dependency has, over time, diminished risk appetite, innovation, and local ownership of development pathways. External interventions have focused heavily on state apparatus and infrastructure, often ignoring the societal fabric – especially civil and economic recovery.

Constitutional complexities and reliance on donor funding have, unconsciously, led to fragmented support and short-term interventions that do not always align with local priorities or build sustainable capacity.

12. Structural Imbalance: The Three Pillars of Development

Montserrat's development challenges are not just governmental. They stem from a broader structural imbalance. The public sector is overloaded, the private sector remains weak due to economic shocks and underinvestment, and civil society is nearly invisible. This is not just a gap – it is a big distortion.

Without all three pillars functioning in concert, Montserrat's system is fragile. A healthy development ecosystem requires balance among government, private sector, and civil society. In Montserrat, this balance is skewed, with government bearing disproportionate responsibility. Revitalizing the private sector and civil society is essential to creating a sustainable and accountable development environment.

13. Healing as a Pillar of Recovery: Addressing the Invisible Wounds

While the physical and economic devastation of the volcanic crisis are well recognized, the psychological and emotional toll has been less visible but equally profound. Survivors have endured loss of loved ones, homes, livelihoods, and the very fabric of community life. The intertwining of grief and trauma has extended the duration of recovery for many, manifesting in anxiety, depression, and a pervasive sense of doubt and uncertainty.

The psychological and emotional toll of disaster is profound and long-lasting. True recovery therefore extends beyond just physical and economic rebuilding; it requires national healing. Healing involves acknowledging trauma, providing mental health support, fostering community-led initiatives, and restoring social cohesion. Without addressing these invisible wounds, resilience and progress remain fragile. Also, healing is not a linear process; it is shaped by personal and collective experiences, the scale of loss, and the ongoing challenges of adaptation.

Research and global frameworks emphasize that psychosocial recovery cannot be an afterthought or a “nice to have” – it must be integral to the overall disaster effort, from assessment and planning through to rebuilding and renewal.

14. Lessons from the Montserrat Experience

This case study is both a mirror and a model. Montserrat's recovery journey offers powerful lessons for everyone everywhere – not only about what went wrong, but also about what is possible when structure, clarity, and systems thinking are applied. These lessons extend well beyond Montserrat and speak to wider development practice, particularly in small, politically layered, and post-crisis contexts.

The Montserrat experience underscores the importance of deliberate recovery phases, institutional coherence, and systems thinking. It highlights the risks of skipping foundational steps and the necessity of embedding resilience into governance and development frameworks.

Lessons include:

i. Know What Was Lost

A foundational gap in Montserrat's recovery is the absence of a comprehensive Impact Assessment. Despite the magnitude of the volcanic crisis, no official, holistic documentation of loss and damage – across infrastructure, economy, society, and institutions – was ever undertaken. This missing foundation continues to shape recovery and planning, depriving both local and external actors of a full understanding and appreciation of the island's needs or the enduring effects of the disaster.

Without a rigorous baseline, it has been difficult to prioritize interventions, align resources, or measure progress over time. This gap has left Montserrat's recovery vulnerable to shifting priorities and external perceptions, rather than grounded in evidence and shared understanding.

ii. The Cost of Not Knowing

This absence of evidence has also shaped perceptions and attitudes in ways that have lasting consequences. In the early years of the crisis, the lack of clear data contributed to misunderstandings and, at times, dismissive attitudes from key UK decision-makers. One notable example is the widely cited remark by then-UK Secretary of State Clare Short, who suggested that Montserrat wanted “a golden elephant.” Although she later acknowledged the statement was unfortunate, it reflected a broader sentiment: in the absence of robust data, legitimate needs could be ridiculed and mischaracterized as excessive or unrealistic.

This dynamic has, in many ways, continued to influence the UK's treatment of Montserrat. When the scale of loss is undocumented, requests for support are easily questioned or minimized, and the case for sustained, needs-based investment is undermined. The lesson is clear: without a rigorous Impact Assessment, the narrative of recovery is vulnerable to distortion – leaving those most affected to justify their needs repeatedly, often against skepticism or fatigue.

In my view, this missing foundation piece has not only shaped the technical aspects of recovery, but has also colored the tone and tenor of partnership between Montserrat and the UK. It is a cautionary tale for all small island and post-crisis contexts: evidence matters – not just for planning, but for dignity, legitimacy, and the power to define one's own story.

iii. Plans Are Not Enough

Even the most well-written strategies fail without mechanisms for alignment, feedback, and delivery. Montserrat's experience illustrates that without built-in structures for execution, monitoring, and course correction, good plans become static documents rather than dynamic tools. Implementation and delivery systems must be designed into the DNA of any recovery or development effort.

iv. Systems Thinking Is a Missing Link

A lack of systems orientation has led to fragmented efforts, reactive policymaking, and personality-driven leadership. Institutions have not been consistently equipped – nor expected – to operate with joined-up thinking, causal logic, or long-term adaptation in mind. The absence of an integrated approach has compounded the challenges of resource constraints and institutional fatigue.

v. Institutional Fatigue Is Real

Development fatigue is not just emotional – it is operational. Over time, institutions wear down under the weight of repeated reform cycles, short-term fixes, and poorly sequenced interventions. Without structured support and visible wins, motivation erodes and risk appetite shrinks. This fatigue is exacerbated by the lack of independent civil society voices and the overburdening of government.

vi. Governance Culture Shapes Outcomes

In hybrid governance systems like Montserrat's, where authority is split between local political leadership and an externally appointed UK Governor, perceptions of legitimacy and capacity matter deeply. The 2020 merger of DfID and FCO into the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has further blurred lines of accountability and decision-making. The result is a governance environment where power is high but local accountability is low, creating both frustration and inertia.

vii. A Balanced Development Ecosystem Is Essential

Sustainable progress requires a healthy interplay between government, business, and civil society. Montserrat's experience shows that when any pillar is weak, the entire system is at risk. The absence of a vibrant civil sector and a resilient private sector has left government overextended and the development ecosystem fragile.

15. Decolonization as Development Reform

Montserrat's political status shapes its development trajectory. Meaningful reform must therefore engage with questions of autonomy, fuller self-government, devolved and reserved powers, local accountability, and self-determination to create governance structures that are responsive, empowered, and aligned with the island's aspirations.

Decolonization is not about rupture or hostility, but about reform and responsibility. For Montserrat, this means dismantling outdated governance structures and rebuilding systems that enable local leadership,

accountability, and innovation – even while forging a modern partnership with the UK that supports sustainable, self-determined development.

i. Redefining the Relationship

Decolonization should not be viewed as a threat to partnership. Instead, it is an opportunity to redefine the UK–Montserrat relationship for the 21st century. Sustainable development requires not just funding, but multi-faceted reform and a commitment to democratic standards. The FCDO can be an enabler of democratic development, not merely a manager of aid.

ii. Courage and Accountability

This is not a blame game. Local political leadership must also rise to the moment, embracing the need to evolve frameworks of partnership and oversight. Too often, weak systems are not just inherited – they are politically exploited. Out-dated structures left unreformed, not by accident but by design, enable inertia, opacity, and short-termism. Decolonization requires courage at every level, and a collective willingness to ask what kind of leadership, accountability, and ambition we are truly willing to stand for.

iii. A Path to Self-Determined Development

Decolonization is about how Montserrat – and other Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) – can build a future marked by dignity, coherence, and capacity. This process must be grounded in honest assessment, collaborative reform, and the rebuilding of all three pillars of development: public, private, and civil.

16. Building Resilience: Embedding Systems Beyond Recovery

Montserrat’s recovery journey reveals not only what was missed but also what must be done going forward. The absence of a comprehensive recovery phase and impact assessment left the island vulnerable and fragmented. To break this cycle, it is essential to build robust, clear, and well-resourced systems now – before a next disaster strikes – so that the response is swift, coordinated, and effective.

This means defining roles clearly, establishing protocols, and ensuring resources are accessible and ready to deploy. Embedding these systems is not just about disaster preparedness; it is about creating a culture of resilience and adaptive capacity that strengthens governance, service delivery, and community trust over the long term. When systems are designed with foresight and flexibility, governments and communities are empowered to anticipate shocks, absorb impacts, and recover more rapidly.

The Structured Transition Model offers a phased, systemic approach to rebuilding institutional coherence and delivery capacity. Embedding resilience and adaptive capacity ensures that future crises do not derail progress and that development is sustainable and inclusive.

In essence, building resilient systems today is an investment in a future where crises no longer disrupt development but are met with confidence, clarity, and coordinated action.

17. The Solutionist's Response

The Solutionist provides strategic consultancy that bridges the gap between vision and delivery. By co-opting local expertise, fostering systems thinking, and supporting phased implementation, it helps Montserrat and similar contexts move from crisis to sustainable progress.

Drawing on lived experience, deep cross-sector insight, and extensive expertise, The Solutionist offers practical tools and frameworks to help institutions move from paralysis to analysis and from analysis to action.

i. What We Offer

- **Diagnostic & Planning Support:** Rapid assessment and structured planning to clarify priorities and chart actionable paths forward.
- **Delivery Acceleration:** The Structured Transition Framework and Planning & Delivery Accelerator help institutions move from ideas to implementation, building momentum and accountability.
- **Strategic Storytelling:** We help clients craft and communicate their own stories – unpacking complex challenges, building buy-in, and mobilizing support.
- **Capacity Building:** Coaching and tools for leaders and teams to reconnect purpose with progress, and sustain results in challenging environments.

ii. Toolkit in Action

Imagine a government department struggling to deliver on a critical initiative. Or a key national institution stalled on a strategic priority. Using the Structured Transition Framework, we diagnose bottlenecks, realign priorities, and initiate a delivery “sprint” to achieve visible progress within weeks or months. This approach renews team energy and provides a clear story to share with partners and funders.

Our offering is not just advice – it includes partnership and practical tools, offering a new way to think about progress in small, complex, or post-crisis settings.

18. Recommendations

Given the imminent transition away from Official Development Assistance (ODA) – and the disconnect between Montserrat's high-income classification and its economic and institutional realities – a bold, systems-oriented approach is essential. The following recommendations aim to support a more resilient, self-directed development pathway:

i. Conduct a structured Impact and Transition Assessment

Launch a national-level assessment to document the full scale of loss and damage from the volcanic eruptions and quantify the cumulative effects of prolonged crisis, institutional strain, and ODA reliance.

This assessment will identify critical transition gaps and serve as the foundation for evidence-based funding proposals, reform sequencing, development planning, and strategic advocacy.

ii. Strengthen Data Systems

Build capacity to produce robust, evidence-based justifications for funding applications to the UK, regional bodies, and international partners. This shift from anecdotal advocacy to technical negotiation will enhance Montserrat's credibility and effectiveness in securing resources.

iii. Accelerate Private Sector Development

Incentivise entrepreneurship, value creation, and productive investment to reduce dependence on government employment and external aid. Expanding the private sector will broaden the tax base and increase economic participation, fostering sustainable growth.

iv. Diversify Funding Sources

Move beyond reliance on UK bilateral aid by actively pursuing regional and global grants, climate finance, strategic investments and development partnerships. These efforts should be tailored to Montserrat's unique small-state and post-crisis context.

v. Rebuild Institutional Scaffolding

Prioritise reform, stabilisation and restructuring within core public agencies and institutions to enhance delivery capacity, increase adaptability, and sustain services in a more competitive funding environment.

vi. Leverage Civic and Diaspora Capital

Deepen engagement with Montserratian citizens and the diaspora to broaden the development coalition, unlock technical expertise, and catalyse remittance-backed investments in public goods and services.

vii. Embed Systems Thinking Across Government

Shift from fragmented initiatives to coordinated, long-term delivery by adopting structured tools, feedback loops, and planning models. This approach will build clarity, coherence, and momentum across government programmes.

viii. Build resilience and Preparedness

Establish clear protocols, resource allocations, and institutional mandates not just for disaster response, but for sustained national resilience. This includes systems to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to a wide range of shocks – environmental, economic, social, and institutional. A resilience-oriented governance model will help safeguard service delivery, public trust, and national stability in an increasingly volatile and chaotic global context.

ix. Foster National Healing and Psychosocial Recovery

Acknowledge the long-term emotional and social impacts of crisis by integrating mental health and psychosocial support throughout all phases of recovery. Invest in public dialogue, community-led healing initiatives, and systems that rebuild social cohesion and belonging.

x. Catalyse Local Expertise

Create formal mechanisms for local and diaspora professionals, creatives, and technical experts to lead national problem-solving and innovation. Set measurable performance standards for essential services and introduce transparent, regular reporting to rebuild public confidence and accountability.

xi. Refresh Extra-Regional Partnerships for Strategic Advocacy

Establish a diplomatic carve-out that enables Montserrat to build or renew direct engagement with extra-regional development partners such as Canada, the United States, and international agencies. This expanded outreach will support the diversification of development assistance, technical cooperation, and diaspora mobilisation – strengthening Montserrat’s visibility, resilience, and capacity to shape its own development trajectory beyond the UK framework.

 Insight: Beyond Incrementalism

Incremental change is no longer enough. Montserrat must transition from survival strategies to structured delivery systems capable of withstanding funding shocks, mobilising national capacity, and delivering visible, sustainable results.

The island’s future hinges on decisive, coordinated action – what we do next will define the path forward.

19. Toolkit Appendix

This appendix offers practical tools drawn directly from the Montserrat case study and years of experience working in post-crisis, resource-constrained, and small-state environments. These tools are designed to help governments, institutions, and teams move from vision to execution – building clarity, structure, and momentum even in the most challenging contexts.

What’s Inside

- **Structured Transition Framework**
A strategic roadmap for moving from crisis to capability through clear, phased progression.
- **Planning & Delivery Accelerator**
A flexible toolset for aligning priorities, planning sprints and accelerating implementation.
- **Institutional Logic Map**
A systems-thinking tool that connects vision, policy, programmes, and measurable results.
- **Strategic Reset Checklist**
A structured guide for ministries and institutions undergoing change, realignment or reform.

- **Recovery Audit Tool**

A diagnostic to surface hidden constraints, assess institutional readiness, and enable fresh momentum.

- **Innovation Platforms**

Prototypes like Incubator Farms, Youth Labs, Land-to-Livelihood Corridors, and Entrepreneurial Extension Services for piloting and scaling real-world solutions.

How to Use This Toolkit

- **Start with a Diagnostic**

Use the Recovery Audit Tool and Strategic Reset Checklist to assess current conditions and clarify priorities.

- **Structure Your Transition**

Apply the Structured Transition Framework to bring coherence, sequence, and shared direction across sectors and teams.

- **Accelerate Delivery**

Use the Planning & Delivery Accelerator to move quickly from planning to action – focusing on visible progress and early wins.

Need Support?

The Solutionist offers hands-on consulting, facilitation, and capacity-building support for institutions ready to implement these tools. Services include:

- Customised tool adaptation
- Strategy workshops
- Delivery coaching
- Institutional storytelling and narrative change

20. Final Note

Montserrat's story is not just about crisis – it is about transition. A transition shaped by disruption, but not defined by it. As the island faces the end of guaranteed Official Development Assistance, the real question is not just *how much support remains* – but *what systems now stand in its place*.

This case study is both **a mirror and a model**. A mirror that reflects the high cost of fragmented recovery and unstructured delivery – and a model that shows what becomes possible when systems thinking, strategic alignment, and national ownership take centre stage.

The lessons here are not Montserrat's alone. They speak to every small island, post-crisis government, and resource-limited institution facing big expectations with constrained tools. This is a call to move from survival to structure, from dependence to delivery, and from crossroads to coordinated transformation.

As someone who has lived Montserrat's journey – from the pride of the “Cadillac of the West Indies” days to the quiet urgency of now – I feel a profound responsibility to help shift the needle. The road ahead will demand more than optimism. It will require decisive leadership, bold partnerships, and renewed investment in the institutions that hold our future together.

Call to Action

The crossroads at which Montserrat stands is not symbolic – it is structural. The island cannot afford to face another transition without strategy, without systems, or without full use of the talent and insight that already exists within our borders.

Better is not only possible – it is overdue.

And it begins with us.