

AIMS REGIONAL REVIEW MEETING

9-10 March 2010

Male, Maldives

FIVE-YEAR REVIEW OF THE MAURITIUS STRATEGY FOR THE FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION (MSI+5) OF THE BARBADOS PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

OUTCOME DOCUMENT

I. Introduction

1. As part of the process leading to the high-level five year review of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (MSI+5), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the AIMS region met for a regional review meeting in Male, Maldives on 9-10 March 2010. The meeting was generously hosted by the Government of Maldives. Participating countries and observer institutions at the meeting are indicated at Annex.

2. The meeting provided an opportunity for AIMS SIDS to review progress achieved in the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation (MSI) at the national level, highlight constraints encountered, share lessons learnt, identify recent trends and emerging issues of concern and consider priority actions to be taken to advance implementation of the MSI. This was undertaken on the basis of National Assessment Reports prepared by most SIDS of the AIMS region, on discussions held during the two-day meeting, on presentations made on the preliminary elements of a draft Regional Synthesis Analysis report and on other available information. The meeting also highlighted the unique circumstances of the AIMS region, in particular in terms of its wide geographical coverage, its socio-economic diversity, the fact that there is no single regional body representing all AIMS SIDS and the absence of an AIMS region-devoted UN body.

3. The outcome of this regional review meeting would contribute the AIMS national and regional perspectives into the preparatory inter-regional meeting on the MSI+5 followed by the SIDS Day during the UN Commission for Sustainable Development at its eighteenth session in May 2010, serving as a preparatory committee for the UN General Assembly high level meeting in September 2010.

4. Since the Mauritius Conference in 2005, the SIDS of the AIMS region have been confronted with unprecedented challenges in terms of the fuel, food and financial crises. Pandemics, global security, climate change, trade protectionist measures and piracy are exacerbating their existing vulnerabilities. The resilience built and measures taken by AIMS SIDS to implement the MSI, which also form part of efforts made to achieve the MDGs, are at stake of suffering from a sustainable development recession. This review meeting identified how individual countries of the region have planned to enhance the implementation of the MSI. The meeting also highlighted the need for a regional framework, with the renewed support of the international community, to accelerate the attainment of sustainable development goals in the region.

II National and Regional Enabling Environment

5. National sustainable development strategies (NSDS) or their equivalents provide an important framework for integrated and participatory planning processes. Countries recognized that NSDS is a dynamic process based on multistakeholder consultations, which need to be regularly updated and their implementation monitored in the light of emerging issues and their changing priorities.

6. Individual AIMS SIDS have adopted different approaches – some privileging national sustainable development strategies, while others are trying to mainstream sustainable development principles into sectoral strategies or to reflect them in poverty reduction strategies. Inter-agency or cross-sectoral coordination remains a challenge in most countries of the region.

7. Countries felt the need for an intra-regional mechanism to support AIMS-SIDS in their national pursuit of sustainable development and to facilitate the development of regional programmes, initiatives and partnerships.

III. Assessments of Implementation of the Mauritius Strategy in Addressing Vulnerability in the AIMS region

A. Progress Achieved

8. Notable advancements have been made to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the region, which provided a good indication of progress made by the countries in implementing the MSI. In some cases, however, the inadequacy and unavailability of consistent and reliable data have hindered the accurate assessment of progress made in this regard.

9. The political commitment within each country as well as public awareness have been enhanced on the importance of sustainable development issues including climate change, education, health, water and sanitation, waste management, transport, energy, trade and disaster management.

10. Several countries have embarked on economic reforms to enhance their resilience to the impacts of globalisation (e.g. Mauritius, Seychelles). Measures have been taken to improve natural resources management, early warning systems, and to address land-based sources of marine pollution. On climate change, LDC AIMS SIDS have prepared National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs), whilst non-LDC AIMS SIDS are planning adaptation measures and aiming to develop their long-term adaptation strategies – although their implementation and means of accessing the necessary financing remain as a challenge. These NAPAs focus on immediate and urgent adaptation needs. They also focus on development of critical infrastructures as part of the overall sustainable development of the concerned SIDS. Some countries have specifically focused their development pathways towards low-carbon development.

11. There have been some institutional and legal development and reforms in the region. For example, Guinea-Bissau has created the Secretary of State for Environment. In Seychelles : a Climate and Environment Services Division was created within the

Department of Environment in order to oversee the implementation of the new Climate Change Strategy; the Sea Level Rise Foundation was established and aims at providing a mechanism for leveraging global attention on the impacts of sea level rise on SIDS; the recent establishment of a university. In Maldives, a Climate Change and Energy Department and a Disaster Management Centre have been established under the Ministry of Environment to oversee and implement climate change and disaster related issues. Mauritius has set up a Climate Change Division and a Disaster Management scheme. Most countries are continuously improving systems and regulations. For example, strict guidelines for waste management for the hotel industries have been adopted (Maldives), and land use planning improved (Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles) to control the use of land for tourism development, construction and agriculture to ensure the conservation of natural resources. Comoros has set up the COSEP (Centre des operations de secours et de protection civile).

12. There are efforts to promote sustainable buildings and lifestyles through greening of the building codes, education for sustainable development, green procurement in the public sector, enhancing consumer awareness, all in relation to the concept of promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns. There is increased involvement of the private sector, NGOs and the population in decision-making and the implementation of sustainable development initiatives.

B. Challenges Encountered

13. Despite the multilaterally recognised economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities of SIDS since the Barbados Programme of Action (1994), no SIDS dedicated and effective response measures, such as financing and technology transfer mechanisms, have been established by the international community. The inherent vulnerabilities and priority concerns of AIMS SIDS, such as those related to small size and isolation which cannot be changed, have to be factored into the multilateral development agenda and work programmes.

14. All countries continue to face human resources, infrastructure, institutional, financial and technological constraints, which often reflect the special vulnerabilities of SIDS in terms of their small sizes, isolation, limited capacities, and lack of qualified personnel. The multiplicity of multilateral reporting requirements has been a burden on AIMS/SIDS although some countries are exploring integrated and simplified reporting approaches.

15. The global food, financial and energy crises have significantly affected the socio-economic fabric of the SIDS in the region, and have caused unexpected additional hurdles for achieving the MDGs and MSI goals.

16. The region has also encountered increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, tsunamis or droughts, some due to the effects of climate change. These phenomena highlighted the fragility of the ecosystems, the vulnerability of low-lying islands to sea level rise, the need to better manage coastal areas and to strengthen the early warning and rehabilitation measures. In addition, human-induced disasters related to chemicals management and poor land planning, were also

discussed. Pandemics, such as the H1N1, have also impacted negatively on the tourism and health services of the AIMS SIDS.

17. While countries recognize the need to reduce the heavy reliance on fossil fuels which share extremely high proportion of the import bills in many cases, the extent to which they could convert to renewable energy sources (such as wind, solar, hydro, biomass, geothermal energy and ocean technology) have been seriously constrained by limited financial resources, commercial viability, the issue of intellectual property rights that hinders access to cleaner technology, and the need for security and reliability in energy supply. Faced with these challenges for promoting renewable energy, some governments have focused on demand side management, enhanced sustainable buildings using natural lighting and ventilation and are addressing building codes, but require assistance to support those initiatives.

18. Most counties do not have appropriate capacity and infrastructure to sustainably manage solid wastes including hazardous wastes. Water quality and availability constitute serious constraints in most SIDS of the region. Although some countries are attempting to implement measures like demand side management, waste water treatment, enhancing water efficiency and increasing public awareness, these efforts are however hampered by financial and capacity constraints. Coastal and marine resources management remain challenges, such as requiring logistics for resource monitoring, utilisation and development.

19. Connectivity is critical for improving international competitiveness and for enhancing intra-regional cooperation, communication and trade. AIMS SIDS are at serious disadvantage in relation to the limited and costly air access, maritime and inland transport and telecommunications including ICT; this increases their risk of marginalization.

C. Lessons Learned

20. The countries in the region recognized the need to enhance the advocacy role of the SIDS in international scenes and to make special case for the SIDS based on their economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities. For this purpose, relevant information and data need to be collected on a systematic basis. Also needed is to establish and apply a set of relevant sustainable development indicators to improve informed planning, decision-making and monitoring of implementation.

21. SIDS of the region recalled that the combination of high export concentration, high dependency on food and oil imports, high exposure to price volatility on the international market, high transport cost, high connectivity cost, remoteness, sea-lockedness together with small economic size increases their economic vulnerabilities to exogenous shocks. Moreover, the SIDS ineligibility to concessional financing limits their capacity to either implement coping strategies or support their sustainable development policies. Some countries have intensified economic diversification strategies. Examples of diversification measures taken within the tourism sector include spa (e.g. Sao Tome and Principe) or medical tourism (e.g. high-specialization medical services, including treatment, surgery or hair grafting, in Mauritius), eco-tourism and cultural tourism.

22. While tourism represents a significant share of the GDP in most of the SIDS in the AIMS region, Singapore, for example, has successfully marketed itself also as a premier business destination, as well as serving as a health care and education hub, and Mauritius has also significantly diversified its economy, especially into the services sector.

23. The meeting emphasized the continuous need to mainstream sustainable development into sectoral policies and to enhance multistakeholder consultations. National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) need to be considered not just as a document but as a coherent policy framework to address sustainable development challenges of the respective countries. To optimize scarce financial resources, programme-based or result-oriented budgeting adopted by some countries, should be further promoted. Many countries faced with the constant and demanding reporting requirements by MEAs, CSD, MDGs and others, are exploring ways to optimize limited resources by streamlining and simplifying them.

24. Agricultural biodiversity was mentioned as a means of addressing food security, building on traditionally used and commercially developed food crops to satisfy the needs of the population. 2010 being the International Year of Biodiversity and the CBD COP-10 planned for October 2010 in Nagoya, Japan provide an opportunity for the SIDS to exchange knowledge and best practices in addressing the importance of biodiversity.

IV. Recent Trends and Emerging Issues

25. Since the Mauritius Conference in 2005, AIMS SIDS have been confronted with new challenges which have threatened the sustainability of the countries. These include: accelerated impacts of climate change that have resulted in sea level rise, coral bleaching, extreme weather events; food security problems; piracy; increased drug trafficking; maritime surveillance; new pandemics such as the swine flu H1N1, as well as vector-borne diseases like chikungunya. These have had negative impacts on SIDS' economies, particularly in the tourism and transport sectors.

26. The AIMS-SIDS are net food and energy importing countries due to the scarcity of land, water and soil, as well as rely heavily on fossil fuels. The global food crisis, volatility of food commodity prices, global trade distortions, the impacts of climate change and recently acts of piracy have further exacerbated the threat to food security and increased poverty among the most vulnerable segments of AIMS SIDS population. Food security in AIMS SIDS represents a significant concern for sustainable livelihood.

V. Way Forward

27. The meeting highlighted the need for the international community to conduct a thorough assessment of the progress made, lessons learned and constraints encountered in the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation and agree on what needs to be done to further address the vulnerabilities of SIDS, in accordance with GA resolution 64/199. The meeting also stressed on the need to link the MSI+5 review to other related ongoing or forthcoming processes, such as on the MDGs or the CSD.

28. The other issues highlighted under this section are those identified as of particular importance to the AIMS region.

29. Access to development financing has been extremely challenging for SIDS of the region despite SIDS being recognized as a special group in the context of UNCED and other fora, but not in ECOSOC. Despite the international commitment made on Goal 8 Target 8c of the MDG1 in recognition of SIDS' specific development challenges, SIDS are still not treated as a special country group category and no special provision is made to enable them to access dedicated financing or to benefit from special concessionary conditions. There is a need for the special circumstances of the SIDS to be considered in the international governance review processes, including in the context of the planned UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012. Such processes need to include a special grouping within the UN ECOSOC, in order to facilitate access to development financing by SIDS, as is currently the case for LDCs.

30. The criteria currently governing the international aid delivery system, that is, GDP or GNI per capita, disqualifies most SIDS from accessing concessionary financing. AIMS SIDS agreed that this criteria is misleading and does not reflect the multifaceted challenges associated to their economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities. Hence the criteria used for SIDS eligibility to soft loans are insufficient and should be reviewed so as to better reflect their structural handicaps. The meeting thus recommended the following:

- (i) Work to be urgently undertaken on the development of country vulnerability-resilience profiles. Such country specific vulnerability-resilience profiles should be based on joint efforts by relevant UN agencies, of which UNCTAD, and other intergovernmental bodies, reflecting their respective competencies and experiences;
- (ii) Each SIDS vulnerability-resilience profile should clearly document the sources and impacts of its economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities and be used as a document supporting SIDS' request for development assistance;
- (iii) A review of the UN system support to SIDS, accompanied by the integration of SIDS issues by all UN agencies into their respective work programmes;
- (iv) The Trends Report for the eighteenth session of the UNCSD to reflect the needs of the AIMS Region, especially as spelt out in this outcome document;
- (v) The UNDESA Technical Cooperation Facility to increase support to AIMS SIDS to develop sustainable development project proposals;

¹ "Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing States (through the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the outcome of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly)"

- (vi) The SIDS Unit to provide further support to AIMS SIDS to identify and secure funding for implementation of the MSI.

31. AIMS SIDS will pursue a more prominent role in climate change negotiations, in line with the AOSIS position on climate change, and will increase synergies with the G77 & China, within the ambit of the UNFCCC as the sole forum for climate change negotiations. In this regard, AIMS SIDS feel the need to develop a regional AIMS position on climate change negotiations to complement the general AOSIS position. Despite the fact that countries have developed or are developing national adaptation plans, funding to implement adaptation measures remains a challenge, and needs to be mainstreamed in global and regional programmes. In this context, an AIMS regional implementation programme on Climate Change and Development could be developed. The establishment of such a regional climate change and development programme for the AIMS participating States would be based on and benefit from the past and current climate change programmes that have been implemented in the Caribbean and the Pacific SIDS, and would primarily focus on:

- (i) The identification and establishment of an AIMS Regional Centre of Excellence for Climate Change and Development; and
- (ii) The implementation of pilot adaptation programs at the national and local levels;
- (iii) The implementation of pilot low carbon development programmes at national and local levels.

32. In the context of erosion of trade preferences, there is the need for urgent operationalisation of the Aid for Trade initiative, without awaiting the conclusion of the Doha Development Round.

33. Recognizing the special challenge of this region for not having a devoted AIMS region-based UN or non-UN organization, the meeting highlighted the need to establish regional support mechanisms for intra-regional cooperation, partnerships and exchange, as well as regional centres of excellence for research, training, advisory services and strategic planning and advocacy at the regional and international level. For example, Mauritius is formalising the Mauritius Development Initiative, with the Regional Multidisciplinary Centre of Excellence, to improve the overall investment climate in Africa, and its 'Maurice Ile Durable' concept could be replicated in other SIDS. Singapore has trained 6,200 SIDS officials in various sustainable development fields through their South-South cooperation programme, that is, the Singapore Small Island Developing States Technical Cooperation Programme (SIDSTEC). Such a centre or mechanism could be strengthened and established through one of these programmes, with the aim to establish an inter-regional centre of excellence for climate change and development.

34. To address the need for intra-regional mechanisms to support AIMS-SIDS in their regional and national pursuit of sustainable development, it is important to build on existing mechanisms such as the Nairobi and Abidjan Conventions which offer examples of appropriate regional frameworks and platforms.

35. Given the need for assessing progress in the implementation of the MSI in the region, the meeting welcomed the initiative of the Indian Ocean Commission and UN-DESA to work out a monitoring and evaluation mechanism. This mechanism will be extended to cover all SIDS.

36. The revitalization of the SIDSNet and the University Consortium of the Small Island States (the University of Mauritius is currently a member from the region and the University of Seychelles has expressed interest to join) being implemented by UNDESA are expected to help promote education for sustainable development and networking among SIDS.

37. The meeting concluded by making an appeal for the international community to fulfil its commitments under different international sustainable development instruments in the implementation of the MSI, especially focusing on the Monterrey Consensus, the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness, as well as new, additional and predictable financing under the UNFCCC for climate change adaptation.

Participating countries

1. Comoros
2. Guinea Bissau
3. Maldives
4. Mauritius
5. Sao Tome and Principe
6. Seychelles
7. Singapore

Observers

1. Commonwealth Secretariat
2. United Nations Environment Programme
3. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (SIDS Unit)
4. United Nations Development Programme