

Vulnerability-Resilience Country Profile (VRCP)

A country-owned analytical framework for assessment of sustainable development in Small Island Developing States



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An Overview

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DESA

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Foreword

The Vulnerability-Resilience Country Profile (VRCP) has been developed by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), in partnership with the Indian Ocean Commission under the European Union (EU) funded ISLAND project, as an analytical framework for monitoring and assessing progress in addressing the vulnerabilities of small island developing States (SIDS). The VRCP has been developed through expert and inter-agency consultations, and it has been introduced and piloted in selected SIDS since March 2013. This Vulnerability-Resilience Country Profile: An Overview is a companion to the “Guidelines for the Preparation of a Vulnerability Resilience Country Profile”¹ and

has now incorporated priorities outlined in the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. This VRCP Overview is a document for senior policy-makers and other key stakeholders and is aimed at helping to enhance their understanding and awareness of the value of a nationally owned VRCP approach for SIDS.

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¹ A more comprehensive and hands-on “Guidelines for the Preparation of a Vulnerability-Resilience Country Profile” will be provided separately for practitioners and experts who will be engaged in the VRCP process in the respective countries.

PHOTO: UN STAFF



1 | Background

The sustainable development of small island developing States (SIDS) came to the forefront of the policy debate at the United Nations with the adoption of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (BPoA) at the global conference in Barbados in 1994. The question of how to effectively address the development challenges of SIDS gained further prominence in the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (MSI), adopted at the second global conference on SIDS in 2005.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 (Rio+20) renewed the political commitment towards SIDS. On that occasion, member States reaffirmed that SIDS were a special case in light of their unique and particular vulnerabilities, demanded enhanced efforts to assist SIDS in implementation of BPoA and MSI and called for a strengthening of United Nations support to these countries. The Third International Conference on SIDS held in Samoa in September 2014 adopted the SIDS Accelerated

Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway which further re-affirmed that, pursuant to the various commitments made by the United Nations conferences and summits on sustainable development, there was still a need for a more integrated approach to the sustainable development of small island developing States, with the support of the international community.

Additionally, the SAMOA Pathway calls upon the United Nations, the specialized agencies and relevant intergovernmental organizations, in accordance with their respective mandates to, inter alia, elaborate appropriate indices for assessing the progress made in the sustainable development of small island developing States and to strengthen national disaggregated data and information systems as well as analytical capabilities for decision-making, the tracking of progress and the development of vulnerability-resilience country profiles.

The ongoing global process to define the post-2015 development agenda and related sustainable development goals (SDGs) provides an additional contextual relevance to the VRCP process which builds on earlier work undertaken on a vulnerability and resilience index.

PHOTO: UNDP-GEF-GOS PROGRAMME COORDINATING UNIT IN SEYCHELLES



2 | Introduction

The concept of vulnerability

Vulnerability is the inherent susceptibility of a country to harm from exposure to exogenous or endogenous risks. Some risks can be managed through appropriate policies and measures while others may be inherent or structural constraints that can best be managed through the adoption of appropriate policy measures or other government, private sector and/or community actions. Examples include: economic aspects such as the exogenous shocks resulting from the recent financial crisis; environmental aspects such as natural hazards or climate change; and social aspects that focus on the impacts of these shocks on people, their communities and society, and their ability to cope with the stress or change. For example, both the BPoA and the SAMOA Pathway identify vulnerabilities faced

by SIDS in each of the priority areas. SIDS have been recognized as a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities, including their small size, remoteness, narrow resource and export base, and exposure to global environmental challenges and external economic shocks, including to a large range of impacts from climate change and potentially more frequent and intense natural hazards.

Vulnerability is observed in connection with the incidence of external shocks of varying magnitudes, which negatively impact the geographic, economic, social and environment/ecological profiles of SIDS over time.

Figure 1 - Contributing factors to SIDS vulnerabilities



Table 1 - Illustrative factors contributing to vulnerabilities faced by SIDS

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES: GENDER, GOVERNANCE, CAPACITY-BUILDING, TECHNOLOGY, DATA AND STATISTICS		
ECONOMIC	SOCIAL	ENVIRONMENTAL
<p>Economic growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of poverty • High rates of unemployment and for some, underemployment <p>Trade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High transportation costs • Remoteness from global markets • Lack of diversity in exports <p>Financing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High debts • Lack of access to concessionary financing despite vulnerabilities <p>Tourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overdependence on tourism sector • High susceptibility to external shocks <p>Energy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependence on imported fossil fuels • Inadequate access to sustainable energy technology <p>Food security and nutrition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on food imports • Inadequate access to safe and nutritious food (also social issue) 	<p>Institutional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low institutional capacity including inadequate human resources • Lack of integrated planning, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation • Lack of data and science-policy interface to facilitate informed decision-making <p>Population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High population densities in urban areas • High rates of rural-urban and international migration • High proportion of youth <p>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to health care • High incidence of non-communicable diseases <p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to quality education • Inadequate investment in education and training <p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of traditional knowledge and know-how • Loss of cultural practices 	<p>Climate change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sea level rise • Ocean acidification and coral bleaching • Coastal erosion <p>Natural disasters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased intensity and frequency of natural disasters • Inadequate early warning systems <p>Oceans and seas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over exploitation of marine resources • Marine pollution <p>Biodiversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invasive alien species • Deforestation and desertification <p>Water</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over exploitation of surface ground and coastal water • Saline intrusion <p>Waste</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient waste treatments

Source: Compiled by DESA, based on MSI and SAMOA Pathway.

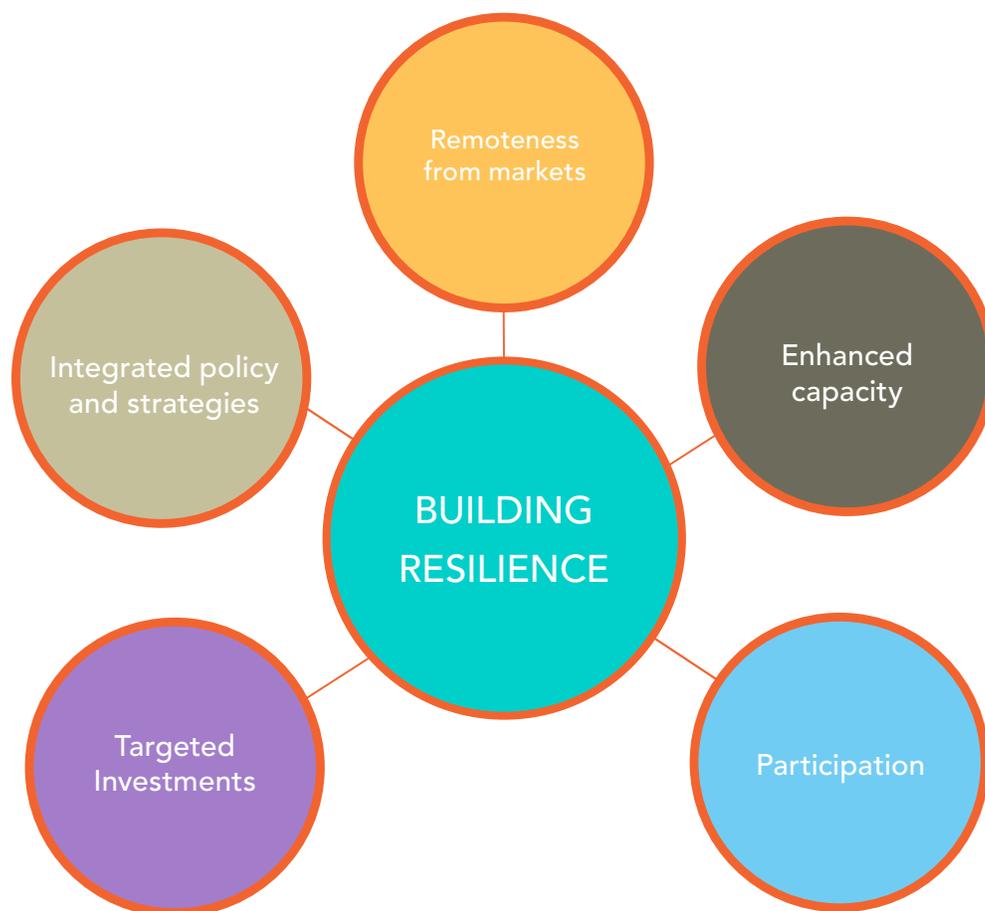
The concept of resilience

Resilience is the ability or capacity of a country or a population to withstand, adapt to, or recover from, exposure to the negative effects of shocks, and is often embedded within the concept of vulnerability. Though the BPoA only mentions resilience in terms of local communities and disaster risk management, the SAMOA Pathway sets out specific national, regional and international measures to build resilience of SIDS.

Resilience is a coping capacity and/or actions to address the identified vulnerabilities experienced by SIDS. Some of the strategies to strengthen resilience include:

- Strengthen higher education and training for youth, girls and the most vulnerable;
- Establish and maintain the governance and management structures that bring together responsibilities and expertise under the respective thematic areas;
- Raise awareness and communicate risks; design and implement participatory measures;
- Promote and foster an environment conducive to increased public and private sector investment and the creation of decent jobs and livelihoods;
- Design and implement preparedness and resilient, holistic and integrated policies and strategies.

Figure II - Elements for building resilience



3 THE VULNERABILITY-RESILIENCE COUNTRY PROFILE (VRCP)

What is the VRCP?

The VRCP addresses the vulnerability-resilience nexus and consists of an assessment of a country's vulnerabilities and its capacity to cope with these vulnerabilities.

The VRCP serves as a practical tool for policymakers in small island developing States for:

- Evidence-based policy formulation, planning and decision-making for sustainable development.
- Conducting periodic self-assessments of a country's progress in profiling vulnerabilities and resilience building efforts to address them.
- Contributing to the monitoring of the implementation of the MSI/SAMOA Pathway and other relevant international commitments at the national level.
- Contributing to preparing for and adapting the global post-2015 development agenda and related SDGs at the national level.

How does the VRCP add value?

The most important contribution of the VRCP is that it provides SIDS with a clear pictorial presentation of the vulnerability-resilience nexus that uses existing information and data and can aid decision-making. The VRCP, building on an evolution of work by different entities and individual experts,² is intended to complement ongoing local, national and international processes rather than to duplicate or replace these initiatives. It can, for instance, complement and contribute to the long-term development plans or goals set out by national entities.

² Recent and earlier works include: Commonwealth's "Building the Resilience of Small States" (2014) including a chapter by Lino Briguglio of the University of Malta on "A vulnerability and resilience framework for small states" and his earlier work on a economic vulnerability index, work on a social vulnerability index by Cutter et al. (2009); and R. Turvey's work on composite vulnerability index (2007).

Vulnerability assessment is based on both qualitative and quantitative indicators and indices that reflect a country's vulnerabilities to environmental, economic and social threats and challenges in the identified priority themes.

Resilience assessment addresses the extent to which policy initiatives, programmatic and other measures being undertaken are strengthening the country's capacity to prevent, adapt to or mitigate these exogenous and endogenous vulnerabilities identified under each of the priority themes.

The VRCP:

- Is flexible and can be tailored to countries' specific circumstances and priorities;
- Creates a visual presentation that makes it easy to understand the links between vulnerabilities and resilience;
- Is a systematic process of self-monitoring that can be used to monitor progress over time;
- Provides opportunity for capacity-building in data collection and management;
- Brings together existing indicators from a wide range of sources.

4 THE VRCP METHODOLOGY

The VRCP methodology:

- Builds on a baseline study conducted by national experts that assembles relevant disaggregated data from various sources;
- Is based on a five-step systematic and participatory process;
- Uses an inclusive process based on multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary consultations;
- Assesses country performance in strengthening resilience for achieving sustainable development;
- Provides a numerical score on a scale of 1 to 5 to assess the extent of vulnerabilities and resilience;
- Presents the scores graphically within a low to high range showing the vulnerability and associated resilience of each identified thematic area.

The steps are set out in figure III below.

Figure III - Steps in the VRCP process

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS	BASELINE DATA	1	SELECT PRIORITY THEMES AND MAJOR ISSUES FOR EACH THEME
		2	SELECT CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE FOR EACH THEME
		3	SELECT INDICATORS FOR EACH CRITERIA
	4	ASSESSMENT AND RATING	
	5	JUSTIFICATION AND MAPPING	

The VRCP process is completed with:

- Presentation of a table of vulnerable and resilience scores for each of the thematic areas that have been evaluated. Refer to table 2.
- The graphing of the vulnerability and resilience scores for each of the thematic areas in a VRCP map. Refer to figure IV.

PHOTO: UNDP-GEF-GOS PROGRAMME COORDINATING UNIT IN SEYCHELLES



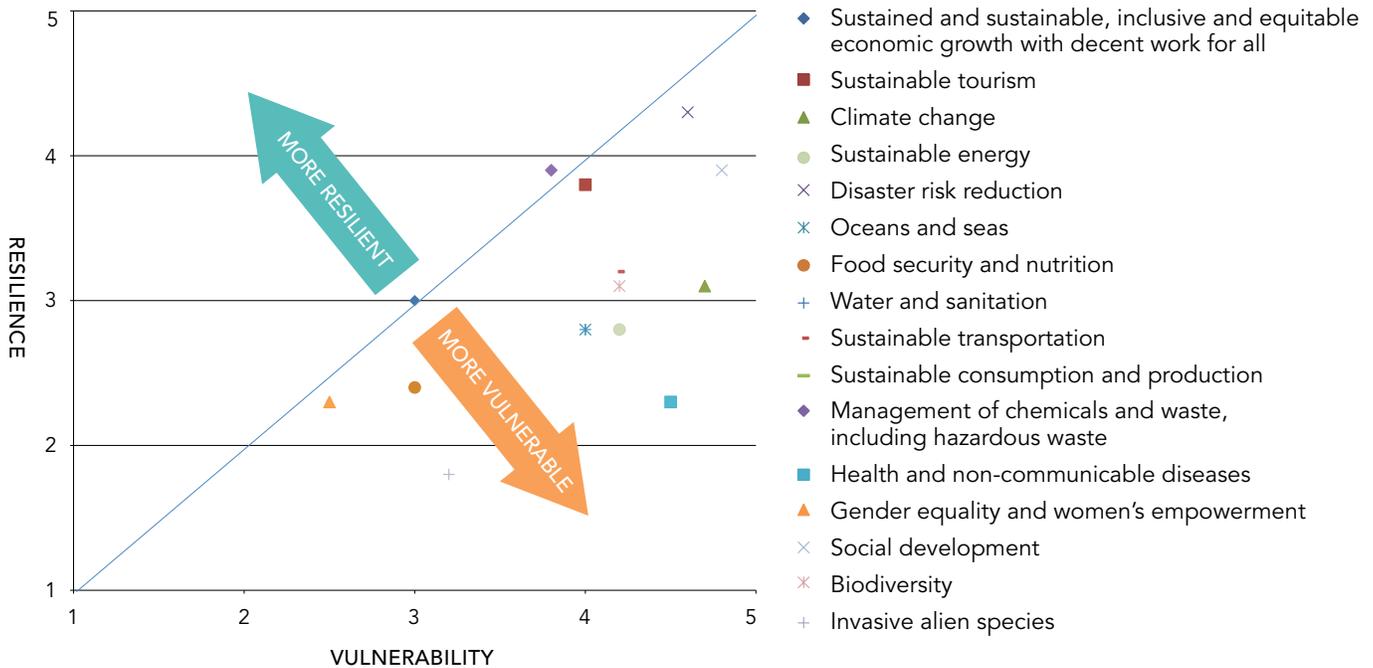
Table 2 - Sample composite scores for illustrative vulnerability and resilience country profile for each thematic area in the SAMOA Pathway

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES: GENDER, GOVERNANCE, CAPACITY-BUILDING, TECHNOLOGY, DATA AND STATISTICS		
THEMATIC AREAS IN THE SAMOA PATHWAY	VULNERABILITY SCORE	RESILIENCE SCORE
Sustained and sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth with decent work for all	3	3
Sustainable tourism (Subtheme of above)	4	3.8
Climate change	4.7	3.1
Sustainable energy	4.2	2.8
Disaster risk reduction	4.6	4.3
Oceans and seas	4	2.8
Food security and nutrition	3	2.4
Water and sanitation	4	2.8
Sustainable transportation	4.2	3.2
Sustainable consumption and production	3.8	3.9
Management of chemicals and waste, including hazardous waste	3.8	3.9
Health and non-communicable diseases	4.5	2.3
Gender equality and women's empowerment	2.5	2.3
Social development ³	4.8	3.9
Biodiversity ⁴	4.2	3.1
Invasive alien species	3.2	1.8

³ This thematic area has been broken down into Culture and sport; Promoting peaceful societies and safe communities; and Education.

⁴ This thematic area includes: desertification, land degradation and drought; and forests.

Figure IV - Hypothetical VRCP map



The scores in table 2 are based on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest score, for each of the thematic areas. The vulnerability score identifies the extent to which a country is vulnerable to a particular thematic area while the resilience score identifies the extent to which the country has put programmes and strategies in place to mitigate the level of vulnerability. The scores are a result of a comprehensive assessment and analysis of different indicators, and are decided through a multi-stakeholder process. The scores provided in table 2 above were used to create the VRCP map (the vulnerability scores are represented on the x-axis and those for resilience on the y-axis) in figure IV.

The point at which the mean scores for vulnerability and resilience intersect indicates the situation of a country in terms of its vulnerability and resilience for a particular thematic area. The figure is divided into two sections by a blue line that represents the

intersection of vulnerability and resilience. The further the score is from the line indicates higher vulnerability or higher resilience, depending on where it is positioned.

It is hoped that the scores and the map can assist decision-making for countries in prioritizing certain thematic areas in terms of resource allocation, requesting development assistance, etc. For instance, a country may choose to prioritize those areas which indicate a high vulnerability score and a low resilience score. In the example above, health and non-communicable diseases appears to have the highest vulnerability with lowest resilience, indicated by the distance of the marker from the intersection line. Likewise, due to its distance from the intersection, climate change can also be seen as an area of concern. Countries, therefore, may wish to consider prioritizing these thematic areas during the formulation of policies in order to build greater resilience.

5 | KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL VRCP PROCESS

Based on lessons learned from the pilot studies and from theoretical considerations, the success of the VRCP is dependent on a number of factors including, inter alia:

Political commitment at the highest level

- It is extremely important to have the political support and endorsement of the VRCP process at the highest level in the countries concerned.
- Also critical is the support and understanding of the heads of the governmental ministries, agencies and non-governmental entities concerned, allowing the commitment of high quality human resources to join the core team explained below.

Strengthening quality data

- Availability of relevant, good quality disaggregated (for example by sex, age group, income group, etc.) data and statistics is critical.

- The success of the VRCP will depend on the robust nature of the data used as the basis.
- It will therefore be paramount to ensure that there is an acceptable quality of reliable data determined by the thematic areas.
- It will be useful to engage the most competent national experts, working closely with the respective national statistical office and other institutions that collect data, including geospatial institutions, to compile the required data sets before the process begins, as well as to maintain and update them on a regular basis.
- Each expert in the core team must also compile relevant data to complement the baseline studies.
- It will be useful to undertake an assessment of statistical systems, data availability at the national level, and the opportunities for and challenges to accessing data from regional and international institutions. The assessment should also include an evaluation of data sharing between national agencies.

PHOTO: UN STAFF



Lead agency

- The agency that leads the process should ideally be involved in the overall sustainable development national planning and strategy formulation in the country. It would be useful if this lead agency had the legal mandate for intersectoral and inter-agency coordination.

Core team

- The core team that prepares the VRCP needs to be no more than ten (10) persons.
- The core team must be multisectoral and multi-agency, including representation from the private sector and civil society groups. Members of the team should be knowledgeable of sustainable development issues in their country and the suite of measures and programmes that have been implemented.
- It would be useful if persons have a good knowledge of the SAMOA Pathway and the MSI.
- It is imperative that members of the core team are enabled to be engaged over at least 3 months.

Periodic monitoring

- The VRCP needs to be updated every 2 to 5 years.
- Those thematic areas which are important to national development should be monitored more regularly.
- Where appropriate, the VRCP methodology could be used in relation to the SDGs when they are adopted.

Awareness and sensitization

- Responsible national experts in key agencies and sectors need to be sensitized to the VRCP.
- The sensitization should be part of the VRCP process.
- Once the VRCP is completed, it should be shared with the members who were involved in the sensitization. It should also be presented to the Cabinet of Ministers and shared with the general public.

PHOTO: UN STAFF



THIS VULNERABILITY-RESILIENCE COUNTRY PROFILE: AN OVERVIEW IS A COMPANION TO THE “GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION OF A VULNERABILITY RESILIENCE COUNTRY PROFILE” AND HAS NOW INCORPORATED PRIORITIES OUTLINED IN THE SIDS ACCELERATED MODALITIES OF ACTION (SAMOA) PATHWAY. THIS VRCP OVERVIEW IS A DOCUMENT FOR SENIOR POLICYMAKERS AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND IS AIMED AT HELPING TO ENHANCE THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS OF THE VALUE OF A NATIONALLY OWNED VRCP APPROACH FOR SIDS

