



# HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## *Thematic Review*

### *Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*

## **Perspectives of SIDS including main findings from mid-term review of the SAMOA Pathway**

*Wednesday, 10 July 2019, 9:00 AM–11:00 AM, Conference Room 4*

### **Background Note**

#### **Introduction**

The unique challenges faced by small island developing states (SIDS) both define them as vulnerable members of the global community and establish the vital importance of resilience-building to their very survival. Acutely aware of this imperative, SIDS are at regional, subregional and national levels pursuing policies and strategies intended to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen resilience. Despite their efforts, the consolidation, as well as the deepening and broadening of the progress that has been achieved, is now at risk. Critical challenges across all pillars of the sustainable development agenda — economic, social and environmental— threaten to undermine and potentially reverse earlier gains made in these countries.

SIDS, notwithstanding decades of progress on human development, face growing poverty and income inequality, a principal cause of social exclusion affecting vulnerable and marginalized groups and communities. These countries are losing momentum in the efforts to improve human and social development. Progress on people's well-being and enjoyment of their human rights are fundamental drivers of sustainable development. However, many SIDS, although generally ranked in the upper half of the Human Development Index prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have moved down several places on the Index in recent years. These countries must





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improve the quality of, and access to *inter alia* health and education, important goals in themselves, but vital to a resilient community.

Responding to the vulnerabilities of SIDS demands an integrative, holistic approach to addressing these interdependent challenges. SIDS have developed or are in the process of developing comprehensive frameworks towards achieving sustainable development, informed by their respective region's key goals and aspirations, which include improved human development and well-being for all, reduced gender inequalities, strengthened and diversified economies, sustainable management and use of natural resources, and improved governance. In addition, they also reflect the 2030 Agenda and the SAMOA Pathway.

## Highlighting the challenges

The social sphere in SIDS can be characterized *inter alia* by increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and by persistent challenges linked to poverty and inequality. These are heightened by rising citizen insecurity as well as the urgent need to build human capital for enhanced development opportunity. There is a real concern that the education systems in SIDS are failing to deliver the type of work force needed to promote strong knowledge-based economies. In many SIDS, the skills level in the workforce is low and that there is a mismatch between the output of the educational systems and the requirements of the labor market. Compounding this situation, is the fact that SIDS have some of the world's highest levels of emigration of tertiary-educated and skilled individuals.

Gender-based violence and youth unemployment continue to be matters of serious concern. In some SIDS, youth unemployment is among the highest in the world. This is a serious challenge, as it limits the full human potential of all men and women and their access to equal opportunities. Older persons are increasingly becoming marginalized in SIDS, and face challenges that are exacerbated by weak social protection systems, inadequate access to care services and patterns of migration which disrupt family structure. Social protection is an effective instrument for protecting against shocks,





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reducing inequality and promoting inclusive development. Its strengthening and expansion in the subregion is a priority.

For most SIDS, fiscal challenges have limited the capacity of governments to deliver social services. For many SIDS, debt servicing has diverted resources from social and capital investment. Social development through the promotion of inclusion, autonomy and empowerment, particularly among the most vulnerable, has thus been constrained by the inadequacy of resources for social investment in such critical areas as education, health care, the provision of safety nets and opportunities for regular income through decent work and the development of skills and competencies to reflect the future that SIDS wants. Still, social development is central to resilience-building and sustainable development with equality, not merely a contingent or derivative consideration.

## Considering the solutions

The resetting of development strategies in SIDS will need to reflect fully the important role of social development as a fundamental driver of inclusive development with equality. While it is recognized that sound policy choices among other actions are essential for progress, domestic resource constraints in most SIDS make the full and tangible support of bilateral partners and the multilateral community paramount. If SIDS are to meet the technical and financial requirements for implementing a new generation of integrated global, subregional and national development frameworks, the critical role of development finance, partnership and cooperation in meeting the fundamental challenge of structural change in an uncertain world economy cannot be overstated. In this regard SIDS will need to strengthen well-established relationships with traditional partners, and nurture new relationships and partnerships, in the context of South-South and triangular cooperation, as important vehicles through which development support might be secured.

## Guiding questions

- How can SIDS best respond to their challenges regarding social development, particularly in light of the ongoing changes in the global community and declining support from bilateral and multilateral partners?





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- What types policies and programmes are needed at national and regional levels to address social exclusion, reduce inequality and promote inclusive development? What are priority sectors?
- In order to meet the technical and financial requirements for implementing a new generation of integrated regional and national and sector development strategies and frameworks, SIDS will have to strengthen traditional partnerships and develop and consolidate new ones. What role can development partners play in this regard?

