



Major Groups and other Stakeholders Questions and Answers as part of the Voluntary National Review of Seychelles at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council

New York, 15 July 2020

Question 1 – In your VNR you refer to the high education and health standards and a people centered development model. What are the specific actions you are undertaking to reduce inequality gaps in these areas?

Answer – In Seychelles, concerted efforts have been made towards the provision of equal opportunities, regardless of age, gender, religion and other considerations. These efforts span across various sectors and reflect the country's steadfast commitment to people-centred development as articulated in the National Development Strategy 2019-2023.

The country has achieved Universal Health Coverage (UHC), meaning all citizens have access to a comprehensive package of health services, free at the point of use, within the public sector. In ensuring that there are no inequality gaps for health services, the Government works in close collaboration with the private sector and civil society to reach all segments of the population, especially the most vulnerable. One such example is the use of targeted interventions, example the Methadone Maintenance Programme, for key populations such as women who use drugs. These women are identified and provided with the necessary health care.

Seychelles has a system of free education in place which is compulsory up to the age of 16. The Government's vision is to give all children opportunities to develop and succeed, with particular attention given to those with special educational needs. In particular, the School for the Exceptional Child (SEC) caters for students with special needs and has a ratio of four students per teacher. Moreover, the government provides financial assistance to all Seychellois parents for early childhood which ensures that all children, regardless of their backgrounds, receive quality early care and education. In addition, great importance is placed on the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector. With the development of a new Technical and Vocational School, this will ensure that all students of different skills and learning abilities, will be given the opportunity to develop skills and contribute to the economy.

Question 2 – What are the initiatives taken to focus on the social groups that are often discriminated?

Answer – Generally, the preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Seychelles reflects the aspirations of the people and proclaims the ‘inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation for freedom, justice, welfare, fraternity, peace and unity’. It reaffirms that these rights include the ‘rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness free from all types of discrimination’.

The Seychelles Constitution guarantees that “Every person has a right to equal protection of the law including the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set out in this Charter without discrimination on any ground except as is necessary in a democratic society”.

Elderly policies and programmes include:

- Social Security Act: A universal system whereby upon reaching 63 years of age all citizens of Seychelles who has resided in the country for at least 5 years immediately before of retirement. The pension currently stands at SR5,050.00
- Seychelles Pension Scheme Act: This benefit covers all full time and part time employees in the public, private and self-employed persons.
- Subsidized Travel: The elderly benefits from subsidized travel on public transports and most recently a domestic airfares which the cost is incurred by the Agency for Social Protection
- North East Point Regional Home for the Elderly: The North East Point Regional Home for the Elderly Houses most of the elderly of the Ex-Fiennes Institute that was located at Plaisance. The home opened its doors in June 2006 accommodating both independent and dependent elderly people.
- Home Care Scheme: The elderly is provided with a carer who provides personal help and assist with daily living such as housekeeping, laundry and meal preparation for the elderly.
- Literacy programme: The programme has played a vital role in reducing illiteracy especially among the elderly population.
- Other initiatives include the district homes for the elderly, national council for the elderly, association of the senior citizens of Seychelles, senior citizens community clubs, senior citizens activities and fundraising sub-committee, neighbourhood recreational activities and celebration of the international day of the elderly.

The National Gender Policy (NGP) was launched in 2016 with the aim of providing national guidelines for institutionalizing and operationalizing gender as an integral component of sustainable development.

Objectives highlighted in the NGP includes:

- Raising awareness on gender-based issues
- Establishment of a gender secretariat to coordinate the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Gender Policy at the National level and to act as the lead gender advocate on gender issues at different levels.

Moreover, the country has a National Disability Policy, which aims at addressing the barriers that have been preventing persons with disabilities from reaching their full potential. It recognizes that whilst a lot has been done to give persons with disabilities opportunities a lot still remains to be done to meet the aspirations of the Seychellois disabled population and attain full compliance to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Question 3 – What accountability mechanisms have you put in place to progressively guarantee, respect, protect and fulfil all human rights for all persons.

Answer - Human rights are enshrined in the Seychelles Constitution. The Preamble of the Constitution asserts Seychelles' commitment to "uphold the rule of law based on the recognition of the fundamental human rights and freedoms enshrined in this Constitution and on respect for the equality and dignity of human beings". Furthermore, the Constitution stipulates the "Seychellois charter of fundamental Human Rights and freedoms".

Seychelles Human Rights Act was enacted in 2018, and the Seychelles Human Rights Commission (SHRC) was set up under the Act. The function of SHRC consists of implementing the country's national and international obligations, providing human rights education and raising public awareness, monitoring behaviour and ensuring compliance to human rights, reviewing laws and policies and investigating human rights issues and complaints.

The Office of the Ombudsman is another institution that provides Seychellois citizens with a platform to address issues of maladministration, good governance, human rights violations, fraud and corruption within the civil service.

Question 4 – You also mention a lack of awareness on SDG's in the Seychelles: Thus we are wondering what strategies do you have in your country to promote awareness, education and opportunities to contribute to and about the SDGs?

Answer - The country's long-term vision, Vision 2033 and the National Development Strategy 2019 – 2023 (NDS), present the medium- to long-term pathway to sustainable development based on the national priorities. Synergetic efforts are being made to raise public awareness of the country's long-term strategies and priorities, in line with the SDGs. The ongoing Vision, NDS and SDG communication strategies target the general public, encompassing different age groups, social and educational backgrounds, race, Income status, religion and gender. The main objective is to ensure that transparency, accountability, wide ownership and engagement are achieved.

With the global pandemic, the majority of the awareness campaign has moved to social media and some forms of traditional media, such as newspapers. This includes educating the public at large about the SDGs and keeping them informed of the country's progress in implementation. Moreover, civil society is an active partner in this process. There also exists opportunities to include the SDGs in the curriculum as part of the formal education system.

Question 5 – Further, in your VNR you underline the importance of partnership when achieving the SDGs. How has your government worked to promote a collaborative approach across all ministries, agencies, sectors and country border in order to break down silos in implementing the SDGs.

Answer - During the consultation process for the country's long-term vision, Vision 2033 and the National Development Strategy (NDS 2019-2023), the SDGs were discussed and were later mainstreamed within the two documents. The SDGs are mapped onto each pillar and each goal. In turn, the goals are mapped to the respective government organization which has monitoring responsibility. This promotes the collaborative approach that there should be coordinating efforts for both the country's priorities and the SDGs. Additionally, when drafting their sector and institutional plans, all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies are encouraged to highlight the SDG relevant to their organization and how they are contributing to its implementation. Moreover, the technical working groups established during the VNR process, have been instrumental in ensuring the collective participation of ministries, department and agencies as well as the organized private sector and civil society. At the highest levels of government, the 'National Oversight Strategic Committee for the Implementation of Seychelles' Regional and Global Commitments (NOSCIS) brings together key partners for the implementation of SDGs.

Question 6 – What modalities did your government adopt to ensure meaningful participation of rightsholder groups, particularly those most affected by development challenges, when implementing the SDGS?

Answer – The Government ensures meaningful participation by adopting a transparent, participatory approach where all stakeholders are given the chance to voice out on different aspects of the SDGs. There is ongoing engagement with stakeholders where sensitization on the SDGs is a key priority to ensure the 2030 Agenda is understood by all. In addition, there is active dialogue with all stakeholder groups for the implementation of the SDGs. Government follows a consultative process when formulating policies and is open to public feedback for projects, including SDG-related ones.

Question 7 – Which mechanisms are you putting in place for monitoring progress in SDG implementation and how is civil society represented in this process?

Answer – As the national SDG focal point, the Department of Economic Planning is responsible for monitoring progress in SDG implementation. The Department's work is further guided and supported by the 'National Oversight Strategic Committee for the Implementation of Seychelles' Regional and Global Commitments (NOSCIS). The establishment of a coordinating body and other such mechanisms to ensure implementation of international commitments have facilitated a more structured monitoring and coordinating framework for Agenda 2030.

A SDG baseline assessment was conducted in 2019 to ascertain the gaps that exist in data collection and dissemination. This was followed by the finalization of the VNR report which provides the progress in SDG implementation. Going forward, the Department will continue working closely with the National Bureau of Statistics to ensure more robust data collection, processing and dissemination efforts. Moreover, the Department is working on harmonizing the reporting of Agenda 2030 with the national priorities and other international commitments.

Additionally, the results framework of the NDS is a tool which is used to monitor the progress of the SDGs. Moreover, the civil society is also represented on the NOSCIS Committee where discussion on SDG monitoring, implementation and reporting takes place. The Technical Working Groups (TWG), which was set up for the VNR exercise, will assist with monitoring progress on SDG implementation. The TWG comprises of stakeholders from different ministries, departments and agencies, civil society and private sector and other groups.

Moreover, all partners will continue to play an active role in validating the SDG implementation statistics, providing information on their own efforts and initiatives towards the achievement of Agenda 2030. Also, they will give their inputs on how to overcome challenges and what the next steps should be.

Question 8 – Your National Development Strategy 2019 – 2023 was developed by means of broad public consultations. What citizen-led engagement strategies have occurred to contribute to this process?

Answer – Many stakeholder groupings, especially the youth and civil society, have taken the lead during the process. This includes acting as facilitators during nationwide workshops aimed at gathering solid views for the development of the country's goals and strategies. They also assisted in finalizing and validating the National Development Strategy 2019 – 2023.

Question 9 – What plans does your government have to follow-up the presentation of the VNR at national and subnational levels after the HLPF?

Answer – A VNR action plan will be developed. The challenges and gaps highlighted in the report will be addressed to ensure full implementation of the SDGs. Additionally, with the Covid-19 situation, many changes and adjustments will be done to take into account the impacts on development plans, both nationally and globally. Further collaboration with different partners and broader sensitization will continue to ensure the Agenda 2030 is understood by all and achieved. Also, as part of the VNR action plan, there will be dissemination workshops for the report and an active communication campaign for this.

Question 10 - The Seychelles is a world-leader in promoting 'blue economies' – that is, sustainably using ocean resources for economic growth, while protecting marine health and biodiversity – and we welcome the government's ground-breaking launch of the world's first sovereign blue bond at the London Stock Exchange in 2018. Could the Seychelles share an update on progress in investing the 15 million USD raised, and best practices to share with other governments? We are aware that investment in the blue economy is dominated by ODA and philanthropic organisations. What more could governments do to bring private finance to the table, including bundling projects, addressing risk and creating enabling environments?

Answer – The proceeds of the blue bond are disbursing to local initiatives that support our goals of strengthening marine conservation and securing sustainable fisheries. Around 16

projects have been funded to date, driven mainly by locally-based non-governmental and civil society organisations. Many of these projects contribute significantly to the implementation of the marine spatial plan, including the management of the 30% of marine areas that we have now protected, while others are providing opportunities for stakeholders and communities to pilot local solutions for rebuilding fisheries and restoring marine habitats. The Blue Economy is a key theme with the blue bond proceeds providing an opportunity to build capacity, including the local business community who are seeking to innovate and plan for triple bottom line returns.

On the issue of ODA, it is good to acknowledge that an advantage that we certainly have is that we have a general outline of our target group or benefactors. Knowing who they are, what they represent and what they are passionate about is crucial information to have if we want to increase our chances of securing external finances. In other words, as Governments we need to be increasingly astute and perceptive, and continuously strive to strategize on means to align our goals with those of the benefactors. Broadly speaking, our primary objective needs to be the holistic optimization of pull factors and minimization of push factors. Some of the ways that this could be achieved are:

a) Through the proper management of our public image:

We have to maintain a good degree of consistency and try to ensure that our reputation is infallible. To achieve this, we need to walk the talk and maintain a good track record with our current and past projects and initiatives. We therefore need to showcase efficiency, and to facilitate this we need to create enabling environments that will enhance the likelihood of project success, for example by ensuring proper coordination, governance, and periodic review of work guidelines, procedures and law to ensure that they are valid and conducive at all times.

Moreover communication is an essential tool to maintaining a good public image. As such, we need to utilize existing platforms and mediums, as well as create opportunities to publicize our success stories and use them as pull factors.

b) By maintaining a good level of attractiveness:

We need to ensure that as a country, we remain attractive to benefactors. This could be achieved by being more resourceful through the conduct of research on our benefactors, such that our strategies and endeavours are reflective of their values and ideals. For instance, it would be good to know if specific benefactors are more inclined to finance projects that are country specific, or those which have a regional perspective and rally behind regional goals.

Additionally, we need to continuously demonstrate a good level of stability across the board, i.e. in the political and socio-economic sense such that risk factors are minimized and benefactors feel more secure about investing, especially where it relates to loans.

c) By being more proactive:

Governments could consider having dedicated units or personnel for resource mobilization across their Departments and ensure that strategies and decisions are data based.

d) By exercising good links:

Governments need to maintain good relations, and strong links. Exercising a good degree of diplomacy and the fostering of negotiation skills would equally prove useful.