

Report of the Expert Group Meeting
on
Small Island Developing States and the Post-2015 Agenda

United Nations Headquarters, New York

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Introduction

The Rio+20 outcome document “The Future We Want” and the subsequent UN General Assembly resolution on the follow-up to and implementation of the Mauritius Strategy both reaffirmed that SIDS remain a special case for sustainable development given their unique and particular vulnerabilities.

Rio+20 called for a third international conference on small island developing states in 2014 to build on the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation, and in recognition of the importance of coordinated, balanced and integrated actions to address SIDS’s sustainable development challenges. The SIDS Conference will be held in the Independent State of Samoa, and the preparations for the Conference provide an opportunity for countries to crystallize thinking within the three regions of SIDS, define their priorities, and position themselves for the Conference itself but also for the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda

The SIDS have been very clear that they want the Conference preparations and outcomes to have relevance for the post-2015 process, and this desire is reflected in the fourth objective in the modalities resolution: “identify priorities for the sustainable development of small island developing States for consideration, as appropriate, in the elaboration of the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.”

The present expert group meeting is intended to be a substantive input into the preparatory process of the SIDS Conference, particularly in addressing the fourth objective mentioned above.

I. Summary of Discussion

His Excellency Mr. Ronald Jean Jumeau, Ambassador for Climate Change and SIDS for the Seychelles, delivered the keynote address, reminding the group that the idea of sustainable development was not new to SIDS, because of their unique situation and vulnerabilities including remoteness, size and dependence on natural resources. Reiterating that SIDS remain economically and ecologically fragile, Ambassador Jumeau focused on the two specific vulnerabilities of SIDS: high indebtedness and the vulnerability to extreme weather.

Session 1: Critical Issues and Priorities for SIDS

The following social, economic and environmental priorities were highlighted as central to any successful sustainable development for SIDS:

- Social issues have not been given adequate attention in the development agenda, including through the MDGs. These issues include: social aspects of poverty, the importance of women's issues including domestic violence and reproductive health and rights, social inclusion for all including youth and the disabled, decent employment, and quality education.
- There was consensus that economic growth will be central to any post-2015 agenda, and that it must be thought of in new and inclusive ways so that inequality does not become ingrained. Opportunities must be expanded, creating opportunities for youth, women and others and stimulating the local economy and small enterprises for sustainable progress. In addition, the problem of high sovereign debt has been noted as well as the international financial architecture that in some cases exacerbates it.
- Many highlighted the crisis of climate change and the devastating severe weather that is one of its consequences, with some pointing out that if climate change is not addressed, no other aspects of development will be possible. The problem of the global commons is especially apparent in the context of climate change. Linkages were drawn throughout the discussion between environmental concerns and social and economic development—this was especially apparent in the discussions of fisheries and of the Caribbean Sea as a Special Area for sustainable development.
- Underpinning all the priority areas for SIDS is the issue of governance. There is distance between international commitments and documents and the political reality of national leaders needing to focus on their daily stresses and priorities. Partnerships are critical, but they must be smart and flexible and not just a series of discrete projects. At the national and international level, good governance is key.

Session 2: Beyond 2015: Entry points for SIDS

The post-2015 development agenda includes an intergovernmental process and a UN system process.

- The agenda will be based on three overarching objectives of sustainable development: eradication of poverty, changing production and consumption patterns, and protecting and managing natural resources. There will be a focus on the sound management of the global commons.
- The SDGs will be at the core of these objectives. The MDGs continue to play a central role, and they will serve as the *starting point*. The SDGs represent the *goal*, and the Open Working Group is intergovernmental body responsible for the dialogue on shaping them.

- The sustainability of investments and a shift in the traditional donor-recipient paradigm—these are central to the post-2015 approach.
- In particular, SIDS can emphasize support for capacity building, deepened understanding and management of complex socio-ecological systems, and sound management of the global commons (including oceans and the climate, both of which are critical to SIDS survival).

Session 3: Monitoring and Accountability Framework and Mechanisms

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks are central to sustainable development planning and implementation. Credible data and indicators will bolster efforts to develop the “beyond-GDP” measures that are important to so many SIDS. Ideally, M&E frameworks will realistically assess the extent of SIDS vulnerabilities as well as the progress they are making in building resilience. Additional points included:

- National monitoring frameworks have a role in ensuring accountability and policy coherence, but the lack of resources and varying degrees of commitment to *carrying out* the monitoring have posed challenges. Capacity-building in data collection, analysis and management skills is imperative, as is the development of a manageable set of indicators. Follow-up actions through inter-ministerial coordination are also important.
- Examples of indicators work include the EU’s “Beyond GDP initiative,” focused on developing indicators more inclusive of environmental and social aspects; the World Bank’s “Wealth Accounting and the Valuation of Ecosystem Services;” and the UN Statistics Division’s “System for Environmental-Economic Accounts”.
- There has been an evolution of monitoring tools specific to SIDS, including the economic vulnerability index (based on Lino Briguglio’s work), subsequent work by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) related to composite economic vulnerability index, and the Vulnerability-Resilience Country Assessment Framework by SIDS Unit/DESA.
- This evolution has been based on lessons learned that an M&E framework needs to be user-friendly, developed through a bottom-up and consultative manner in a series of consultations involving national experts and agencies and then pilot testing at the national level.

Session 4: Role of Partnerships as Engagement Mechanisms

Partnerships help promote sustainable development of SIDS through concrete implementation measures, engaging various stakeholders and mobilizing resources towards specific deliverables while holding each partner accountable.

- Partnerships, with specific, well-defined goals and target areas, can be the mechanism for implementing development. They can be more nimble and responsive than processes tied to intergovernmental frameworks.
- By involving a range of stakeholders, partnerships represent the opportunity to move beyond the traditional donor-recipient relationship.

II. Key Issues and Recommendations

1. Social Dimension of Sustainable Development

For development in SIDS to be truly sustainable, **social issues must be given a new prominence in the post-2015 development agenda.** Inequality itself can inhibit growth, and those involved in setting the post-2015 development agenda are urged to work toward social inclusion by addressing a range of social development issues, including:

- (i) **Supporting and creating opportunities for employment**, for all demographic groups, always considering the importance of *decent* work. Creative industries, local and “home-grown” enterprise, and green jobs should be promoted.
- (ii) Attention to **women’s empowerment** and to issues of importance which has not previously been specified in MDGs, such as **domestic violence**.
- (iii) Strengthening the **quality of education and health services**, rather than focusing only on quantity of services, and the expansion of tertiary and vocational education

2. Addressing debt and access to global capital markets

The economic challenges of SIDS are urgent, especially those Caribbean countries with high debt burdens, those lacking access to global capital markets, and those barred from access to concessional financing due to their being categorized as “middle income countries” on the basis of GDP. To address these challenges, the international community must consider **reforms to the global financial architecture**, to create an environment that encourages “investment in the resiliency of SIDS. **SIDS also need differentiated treatment and access to concessional financing based on fair assessment of their respective vulnerabilities and resilience to global impacts** such as climate change, natural disasters, and financial and economic crises, in addition to their structural challenges of smallness, remoteness, and distance from global markets.

3. Addressing the existential threat of climate change

Climate change remains the central threat for many SIDS, not least because sea level rise may undermine their territorial integrity. The developed world holds the responsibility for climate change mitigation through the reduction of carbon emissions. In addition, SIDS are calling for **financing for adaptation and the development of a loss and damage mechanism**.

4. Strengthening monitoring systems and the data underpinning them

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are a cornerstone of development progress, and for the systems to be effective, they must be based on strong and accurate data. With a solid data foundation, monitoring and evaluation systems can promote accountability and policy coherence. And with credible data and monitoring systems, alternatives to GDP as a basis for classifying countries will gain traction. The capacity of SIDS to gather and analyse data should be strengthened, with an eye to bolstering knowledge management systems and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. M&E frameworks should be piloted at the national level and then rolled out to a regional and then global scale. It is crucial that **data collection methodologies and M&E frameworks are user-friendly, and based on bottom-up, consultative processes**. With this approach, an M&E framework will accurately reflect the vulnerability and resilience of SIDS as well as the heterogeneity within and among the three SIDS regions.

5. Advancing high quality partnerships

Partnerships are critical mechanisms for advancing the development of SIDS. In the post-2015 development landscape, partnerships have the potential to advance a new paradigm in development cooperation, moving beyond the traditional donor-

recipient relationships. The 2014 SIDS Conference may provide a unique opportunity to develop and enhance a range of partnerships including public-private, SIDS-SIDS and other South-South partnerships, tripartite partnerships, and the active engagement of the international community at large.

III. Conclusion

In order to achieve its objectives, the post-2015 development agenda will need to reflect the reality of a diverse and complex global community. Within that global community, the SIDS remain a special case for sustainable development by reason of their vulnerabilities.

The counterpoint to vulnerability, however, is the very real resilience that is developing in the SIDS. This resilience must be recognized and nurtured, by the SIDS themselves and by the world at large. Financial structures must be designed to encourage investment in that resilience. M&E frameworks, responsive to reality on the ground and user-friendly, must find ways to account for this resilience while at the same time quantifying the vulnerabilities and challenges that go beyond a simple measure of GDP. The post-2015 development agenda must prioritize social development and inclusion, for inequality is an insidious enemy of resilience. The protection of the environment is fundamental, of course, to any economic and social development, and the post-2015 agenda must include the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change as a linchpin.

None of these objectives will be achieved without robust and responsive partnerships—between and among SIDS and with the international community, including the private sector. It will be imperative that the post-2015 development framework moves beyond the mixed results of the eighth MDG to create an enabling environment that unlocks the transformational potential of partnership.