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SMALL ISLANDS, GENUINE PARTNERSHIPS



**PARTNERSHIP
ACCELERATOR
2030 AGENDA**
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

GUIDANCE TO GENUINE
PARTNERING IN SMALL
ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

ANNEX TO THE SDG PARTNERSHIP GUIDEBOOK



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2030 AGENDA PARTNERSHIP ACCELERATOR



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This document has been produced as part of an ongoing programme of work to support effective partnerships in SIDS by the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator - a collaborative initiative between United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and The Partnering Initiative, working closely with the UN Development Coordination Office, the UN Office of Partnership, and the UN Global Compact. The initiative aims to significantly accelerate and scale up effective partnerships in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in all countries.

The Partnership Accelerator is supporting partnership effectiveness in several countries, including Samoa, Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles. In addition, efforts are underway to advance effective partnerships in Caribbean through a collaboration with the Caribbean Public Health Agency and the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean.

Two publications in particular guide the work of the Partnership Accelerator:

- **The SDG Partnership Guidebook** – a practical guide for developing effective high-impact multi-stakeholder partnerships for the SDGs.
- **Partnership Platforms for the SDGs** – a research report that draws out practices from existing and emerging platforms that catalyze new partnerships to drive implementation of the SDGs.

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic has limited the possibilities for in-person gatherings, an interactive online library is currently under development (to be launched September 2021) in order to increase the accessibility of tools, examples and key partnering concepts to all stakeholders.

The online library will include various partnership modules, guided tours, and special issues – providing stakeholders with different access points based on their needs to relevant knowledge on developing and managing multi-stakeholder partnerships.

The present document extends the available material to the context of SIDS. The material in this current document will also be used as part of a special issue on partnering in SIDS.

More information

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Purpose and audience

Over the past two decades, as the field of multi-stakeholder partnering has matured as a professional discipline and field of practice, certain success factors have emerged, regardless of context. In the SDG Partnership Guidebook, these factors are referred to as ‘building blocks’.

These partnership building blocks also hold true when it comes to setting up and managing multi-stakeholder partnerships in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Due to its peculiar vulnerabilities and characteristics, there are additional aspects to consider when developing multi-stakeholder partnerships in SIDS.

The document is intended to provide insights to these special considerations. It serves as a starting point for anyone seeking to understand the challenges and opportunities of partnering in SIDS, and is intended to be used together with the **SDG Partnership Guidebook**. The material is illustrated by interesting examples of partnerships in practice, followed by actionable guidance.

This document is intended to be useful for two audiences:

1. For **individuals and organizations** based in SIDS: governments, private sector, civil society;
2. For **representatives of the international development system collaborating with SIDS**: international organizations, including parts of the UN system, bilateral donor agencies, some international foundations, large NGOs, and multinational corporations.

Wherever possible, indication is made when material in this document is relevant for both audiences, and when it is specifically relevant for a specific audience type.

As we rebuild our economies from the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic, climate investments present a unique opportunity for Pacific economies to build back better and ensure a green, blue, and inclusive recovery - this will require policy ingenuity, as well as genuine partnerships that translates these policies into action.

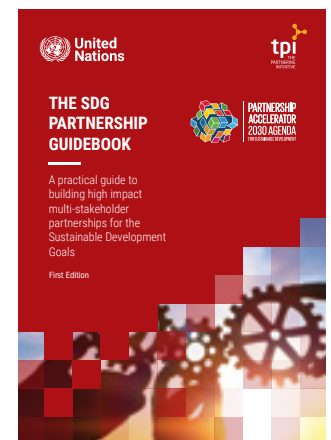
Chair of the Pacific Small Island Developing States, and Fijian Prime Minister Hon Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, April 2021

Methodology and structure

The production of this document involved desk research, interviews and focus group sessions with SIDS stakeholders.

A review of entries from the UN SIDS Partnerships database was also conducted.

Further insights were obtained from the [Maldives](#) and [Samoa](#) partnership landscape assessments, including two specially convened virtual workshops with partnership experts and stakeholders from those countries.



The present guide is intended to be used together with the **SDG Partnership Guidebook**

PARTNERSHIPS FOR SIDS

This document assumes the following definition of partnership, drawn from the SDG Partnership Guidebook:

An **ongoing collaborative relationship** between or among organizations from **different stakeholder types** aligning their **interests** around a **common vision**, combining their **complementary resources** and **competencies** and **sharing risk**, to **maximize value creation** towards the Sustainable Development Goals and **deliver benefit** to each of the partners.”

This broad definition encompasses a multitude of types of collaborative arrangement with quite different qualities. The term ‘multi-stakeholder partnership’ can refer to significant range of structures including networks made up of hundreds of organizations through to joint ventures between two or three organizations; highly localized initiatives through to major global endeavors; single-issue arrangements or complex, multi-issue initiatives.

Partnerships are more than a quick one-off project - they require considerable time and effort to develop. The focus of the guide is thus on partnerships that align and combine the interests and resources of multiple national stakeholders – government, business, NGOs, communities, academia, media etc. – to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SAMOA Pathway in SIDS more effectively.

Why developing multi-stakeholder partnerships is different in SIDS

With the pandemic directly affecting our food security, international trade and climate resilience of the Small Island Developing States, among other important issues, durable and genuine partnerships are important.

Yogesh Karan, Permanent Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister, Fiji, July 2020

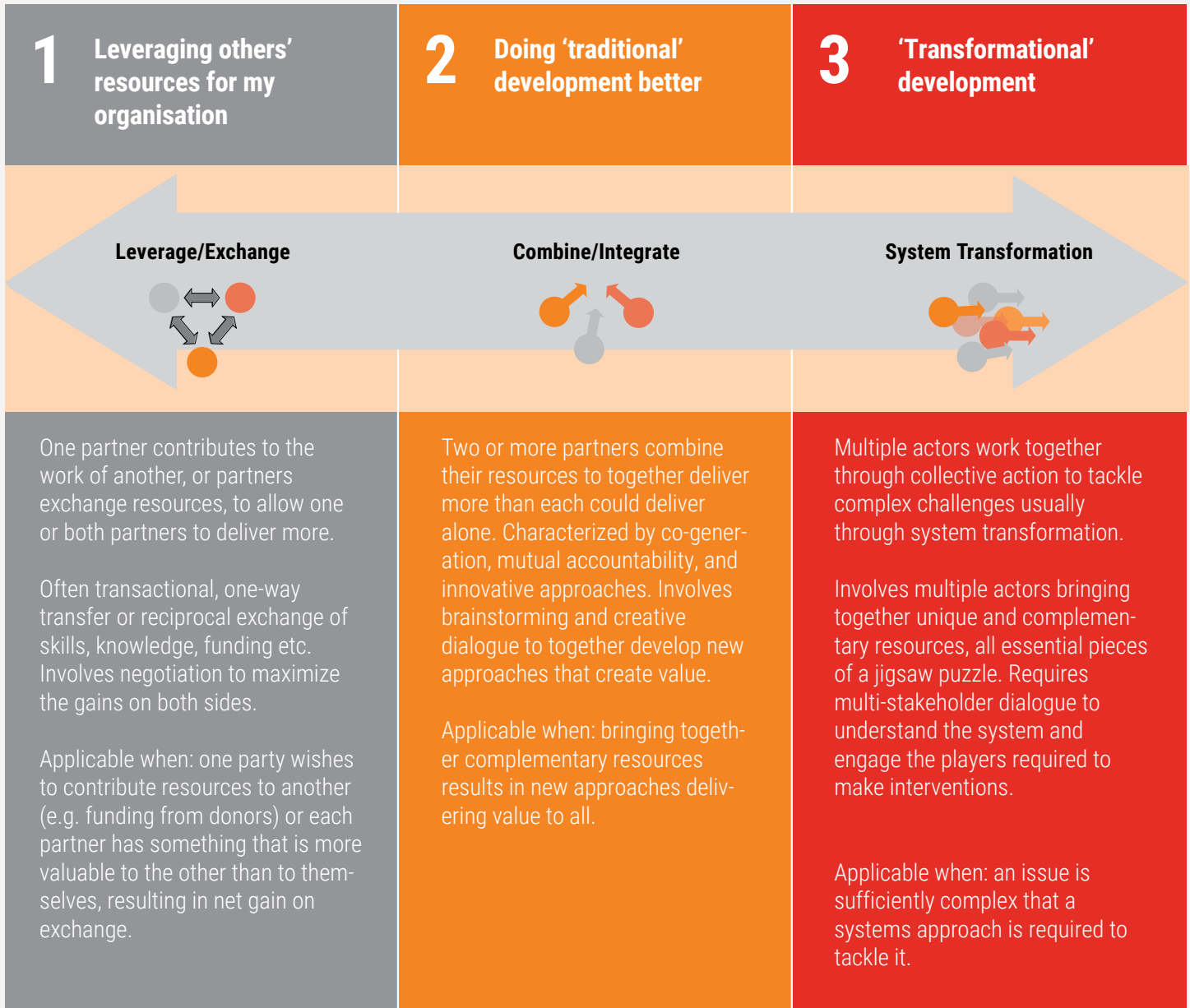
Effective partnering is about leveraging and optimizing the combination of available resources. This is particularly challenging in SIDS, where a severely limited resource base and formidable pressures are the norm. Due in large measure to small landmass and small populations, SIDS are almost unique in the scale of the gap faced between available resources (natural, human, and financial) and the population’s needs.

With limited natural capital, there are limits to the degree to which SIDS can grow sufficient food, provide sufficient drinking water, or generate sufficient energy for self-sufficiency, and they must rely on imports.

Further, many SIDS have insufficient domestic resource bases to be financial self-sufficient to purchase the above and provide public services and must rely on funding from international donors.

Partnership Spectrum

As elsewhere, partnerships in SIDS can be sorted into three overall types according to a 'partnership spectrum'.



Meeting SIDS sustainable development priorities through partnerships

Multi-stakeholder partnerships can provide an efficient and effective mechanism for meeting a whole range of sustainable development priorities, including those set out in the SAMOA Pathway

Climate Change

Climate change resilience will demand that social, economic, and ecological systems become capable of reorganizing so as to maintain their essential functions, identity and structure, while also maintaining their capacity for adaptation, learning and transformation. – **from the UN's 2016 World Economic and Social Survey**

SIDS are among the most vulnerable countries in the world to adverse impacts of climate change, given that they are often geographically isolated, prone to natural hazards, and low-lying. Development tends to be concentrated along the coast, and dependent on climate-sensitive sectors such as fisheries, tourism, water resources, and agriculture. Partnerships between these sectors are an essential mechanism for combatting climate change.

Sustainable Energy

In the Sustainable Development Goals, the world committed to ensuring access to affordable, reliable and modern energy for all. Many Small Island Developing States are emerging as frontrunners in the pursuit of renewable energy, with solar power leading the way. International support in the form of access to finance, investments and technology will be critical to accelerate their transition—and their resilience. – **Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, high representative for the UN-OHRLLS, July 2020**

High import costs for fossil fuels, combined with the climate resilience offered by renewable energy and energy efficiency, make this a priority area for SIDS. Promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency can strengthen national energy security, catalyze private investment, and unlock agricultural, urban and rural development potential, with co-benefits for health, education and poverty reduction.

Renewable energy requires the mobilization of financial, knowledge, technological and political resources, both those of SIDS and of regional and international partners. Effective partnering can ensure these resources are marshalled and combined optimally, with minimal inefficiency and duplication (see the SIDS Lighthouses Initiative, below).

**Sustainable,
inclusive, and
equitable economic
growth**

A Caribbean or Pacific small island state can go from middling prosperity to poverty in the course of one natural disaster. - **Trinidad Express**

Partnerships are about combining resources in creative ways towards a social good. As such they can help to build the economic resilience required by SIDS in the face of natural (or non-natural) disasters.

The Virtual Market / Maua App example described below demonstrates how a flexible, informal, rapidly developed partnership helped to rebuild Samoa's economy in response to the loss of tourism income following COVID-19 outbreak.

Oceans and seas

The term 'SIDS' is so limiting! What about 'large ocean states' instead? - **interviewee for this report**

New areas of opportunity include marine bioprospecting, ocean science, sustainable aquaculture, renewable energy, low-carbon shipping, blue finance as well as ecotourism and blue carbon. The total "asset" base of the ocean is estimated at \$24 trillion, excluding intangible assets such as the ocean's role in climate regulation, the production of oxygen, temperature stabilization of our planet, or the spiritual and cultural services the ocean provides. - **Mukhisa Kituyi, UNCTAD Secretary-General and Dona Bertarelli, UNCTAD Special Adviser for the Blue Economy, July 2020**

More than 95% of SIDS territory are ocean waters. What they lack in land, they more than compensate for in terms of ocean. This means that the blue economy represents a unique comparative advantage for SIDS and, as such, a source of considerable potential power in any partnership. As a whole, the planet's oceans represent the world's seventh largest economy, supporting the livelihoods of more than 3 billion people and amounting to a GDP of around \$3 trillion annually. SIDS have demonstrated significant leadership in combining greater protection of marine resources with national economic development and growth. Sustainable fishing represents on average 1.5 per cent of GDP in SIDS, ten times the global average.

Partnership opportunities are significant in this space. For example, SeyCCAT (Seychelles' Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust) is a partnership platform in the Seychelles that makes grants to support blue economy partnerships.

PARTNERSHIP EXAMPLES

SIDS Lighthouses Initiative

Example of Combine / Integrate

Problem statement

In addition to being uniquely vulnerable to climate change, most SIDS rely heavily on imported fossil fuels. In addition, their energy costs are high due to their small market size and geographic isolation, making them vulnerable to economic fluctuations and shocks.

How stakeholders tackled the problem

Launched in 2014, the SIDS Lighthouses Initiative (LHI), offers a framework of action around energy transition and transformation in SIDS, principally by mobilizing international funding, political commitment, and technical support. LHI addresses all facets of energy transition, from policy making and markets to technology and capacity building.

LHI brings together 36 SIDS and 22 other partners including regional and international organizations, development partners, private companies, research institutes and non-profit organizations. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) acts as the Initiative's coordinator.

Why it is a 'combine / integrate' partnership

The partnership combines a range of financial and technical resources to deliver results more efficiently and effectively than had been the case previously, beyond what any single organization would be able to achieve.

Results

Since its launch, LHI mobilized more than \$500 million towards renewable energy transformation in SIDS. LHI exceeded its targets for capacity installation and funding mobilization three years ahead of schedule, leading to the launch of a follow-up SIDS Lighthouse 2.0.

Another key LHI objective was the development of renewable energy roadmaps for SIDS. Renewable energy featured prominently in the energy strategies or national policy frameworks of almost all SIDS partners.

Benefits to partners

Greater energy resilience in SIDS; Capacity building in SIDS; Strengthening transition towards sustainable SIDS economies; Fuller integration of renewable energy in SIDS partners' national development policy frameworks.

Why a partnership approach was the best solution

The SIDS Lighthouse initiative relies on bringing together significant financial and technical resources but also genuine buy-in and delivery capacities at the local level. Only a partnering approach could have allowed for the resources to be combined in this way, and this resulted in delivery targets being amply met.

Regional Tourism and Health Programme, Caribbean

Example of Combine / Integrate

Problem statement

The impact of threats to public health, safety and environmental sanitation (HSE) on the quality, reputation and sustainability of Caribbean tourism is a serious concern for Caribbean nations.

How stakeholders tackled the problem

The programme has developed a multisectoral solution, centered around a real-time early warning and response tourism and health information system (THiS), using data from the Caribbean Travel health Network (CATHNET). The programme also involves the development of regional guidelines for responses to traveler health issues in accommodation and passenger ship settings, capacity building in food safety capacity, hospitality health safety and environmental standards.

Why it is a 'combine / integrate' partnership

The partnership combines the resources of each of the sectors and delivers something new, including changing how each operates. For example, the tourism sector is now integrating health monitoring as part of its operations, as well as working with the public health agencies for early warning etc.

Results

By equipping them with tailored tools that support preparedness and response to public health threats, including COVID -19, the programme has increased Caribbean member countries' capacity to face public health threats to tourism.

Benefits to partners

A system delivering faster, more coordinated, and thus more effective, responses to public health threats; Economies of scale in the cost of deployment. One seamless regional technical solution vs several disparate/disconnected national ones.

Why a partnership approach was the best solution

As a large, multi-country system which depends on swift data collection, analysis and cross-sectoral exchange, as well as the efficient mobilization of multi-sectoral multi-country resources to deal with needs in a dynamic and highly responsive way, partnering approach was the only serious option for building an effective and resilient system at a regional scale.

WIBDI/Maua App monthly Virtual Market partnership, Samoa

Example of Transformation

Problem statement

The COVID pandemic led to a complete shut-down in Samoa's tourism industry. This had multiple economic impacts, including a significant loss of income for farmers who lost a major market for their products. Moreover, like most other Pacific SIDS, Samoa faces significant logistical infrastructure challenges due to its lack of a national addressing system, which makes it difficult for small businesses to market themselves or to use e-commerce to grow their trade.

How stakeholders tackled the problem

Drawing on a long-standing relationship, Samoan NGO Women In Business Development (WIBDI) and Samoan tech company Skyeeye Pacific teamed up to use the 'Maua App' – an e-commerce platform which Skyeeye developed – to ensure that rural village farmers, fishermen and women and artisans were still able to generate income during national economic slowdown and within national restrictions of movement.

Through this partnership, WIBDI liaised with and identified produce and products from their network of producers and Skyeeye uploads the description, images and costs on the Maua app.

The buyers (who mostly reside in the urban areas) were encouraged and supported by Skyeeye and WIBDI to pre-order and pre-pay on the Maua App using 'mobile money' - either Vodafone and Digicel digital money wallets, credit cards or through cash payment on delivery.

Why it is a 'combine / integrate' partnership

The partnership combined the resources, skills, technology, networks of multiple partner organizations (including WIBDI, Skyeeye, Care Australia, Yazaki Foundation, Visa, Mastercard, Australian Aid, UNDP and Pacific Farmer Organizations). Because of the high levels of trust between Skyeeye and WIBDI, the two organizations were able to mobilize these multiple partner resources quickly and informally to deliver a partnership with transformational impact on people's lives, and which could not have been delivered through existing mechanisms. Considering 78% of Samoans have access to mobile phones and mobile money, while only 39% have a bank account, the partnership harnessed the available resources – in this case, Samoa's fairly established mobile phone network – to overcome limitations on other fronts, such as banking access and facilities.

Results

As of March 2021, there have been six monthly virtual markets which have generated income for the farmers. Training has also taken place: WIBDI worked collaboratively with Skyeeye and another network of Pacific leaders to train farmers in using mobile money, in order to bring them up to speed on how the technology could help them. This should help to build farmer resilience in the event of future waves of Covid and other emergency situations.

WIBDI/Maua App monthly Virtual Market partnership, Samoa

Example of Transformation

Benefits to partners

Income, new markets, access to technology and greater resilience for farmers; Access to fresh produce for local Samoans; Greater uptake of Maua app for Skyeye; Delivery of core objective of protecting vulnerable populations for WIBDI.

Why a partnership approach was the best solution

The Maua App had been developed by Skyeye specifically for Samoa, in response to the fact that mainstream mobile networks were not optimized to provide services to Samoa and other pacific SIDS. This highly context-specific technology was combined with WIBDI's long-standing networks of relationships with local farmers in order to generate income for rural villagers which would otherwise have been difficult if not impossible to generate.

TOWARDS A STRONGER SIDS PARTNERSHIP ECOSYSTEM

Real partnerships happen where the cooperative spirit of SIDS is brought together with the collaborative technologies and ways of working of the international system. The partnership examples shown above demonstrate this blend of the 'best of both worlds'. But for such examples to become the norm, and for partnerships to be built wherever value can be created, it is necessary to strengthen the SIDS partnership ecosystem. The following section provides some insights into what this could look like in practice.

1

Creating spaces to navigate the complex dynamic among stakeholders within SIDS

As in most contexts, the relationship between different societal sectors (government, business, and civil society) in SIDS is a complex one. This relationship can often suffer from long-running distrust, misconceptions, and misunderstanding.

All too often, the issue is rooted in miscommunication and, accordingly, the best way to overcome it is through dialogue and openness, yet the spaces for such dialogue are often absent or inadequate. As an interviewee points out, "a regular forum bringing together the private sector, civil society and the government is essential, yet we don't have one". By creating the necessary spaces, structures, and processes for ongoing, regular dialogue among stakeholders, the opportunity to address misunderstandings and identify areas of agreement and convergence is much greater.

Building such spaces can benefit from the presence of trusted mediators, and the process might require capacity building efforts to enhance the capacities of various sectors – the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders to engage with the public sector and international partners.

These are many small island developing states that can't afford for us to get it wrong. We need to be more serious than in the past about showing up as real partners.

Mark Zimring, director of the Nature Conservancy's Indo-Pacific Tuna team, March

Example: the Healthy Caribbean Coalition has created 'dialogue spaces' which enable open and effective communication between stakeholders.

2

Building capacity to partner effectively

Multi-stakeholder partnering has evolved over the past 20 years as a professional discipline. Partnerships do not just happen - individuals need the right mindset and skillset; and organizations need to be set up to enable and catalyze partnerships. There is a lot of freely available guidance, tools, templates, and advice through the Partnership Accelerator and elsewhere.

Strengthening capacity to partner through self-guided learning, direct experience and formal capacity building can help to break down silos between business, government, and civil society. It increases empathy for and understanding of other sectors, which is important for those who have only ever worked in one sector – as a government employee or a business manager, for example.

Example: managing the balance of power between partners is a really important element of partnering in SIDS. Those in the international system may have much more power than those based in SIDS themselves – or at least, this is a common perception. Systematically assessing the sources of power of different partners, including resources beyond money, helps to balance power more effectively.

3

Recognize that all stakeholders have a stake in strengthening the fabric of SIDS society

The job of strengthening the social fabric can be seen as the exclusive work of government. If stakeholders have at least some familiarities with the SAMOA Pathway or the SDGs, it can broaden understanding of their contribution as well as bring access to new sources of value.

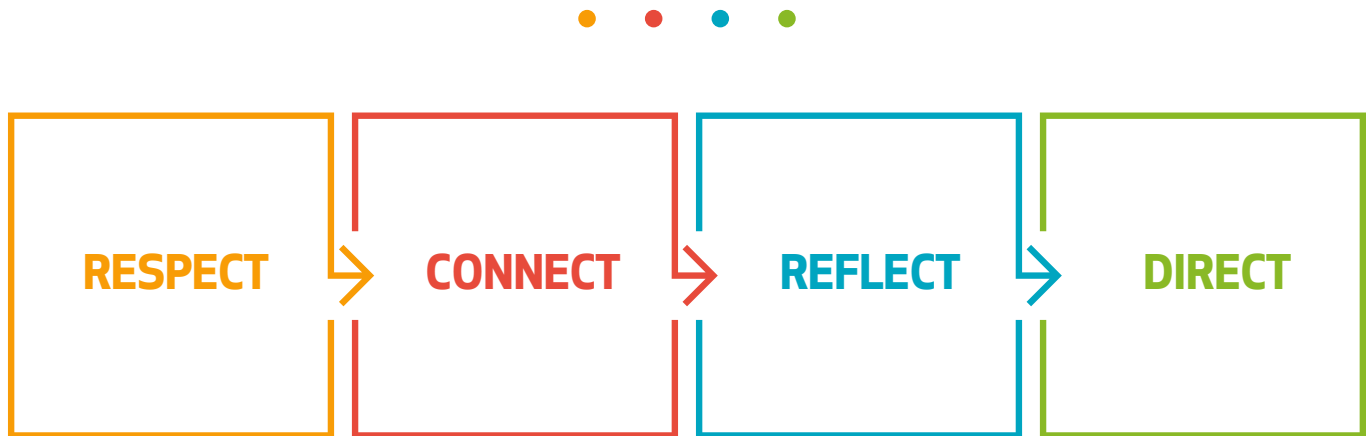
As an example, a hotel chain based in a SIDS may recognize that there is a need to shift from diesel power to solar power. If they knew that such a shift was also a priority for the government and for the international system, it may enable that hotel to make the shift more efficiently and effectively. Access to technical assistance, financial support, technology may become available.

Example: engaging in progressive business networks can be helpful here. Many SIDS have these networks and membership bodies. WIBDI in Samoa has been operating since 1993 and has a well-established network of local, regional, and international partners. The Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the island's oldest non-profit institution representing the private sector. It operates in close collaboration with the government, including on national development issues, as well as with international intergovernmental organizations.

A FRAMEWORK FOR PARTNERING IN SIDS

Many SIDS CSOs and local community initiatives are excluded from the SIDS partnering space because nobody could tick the boxes, they're invisible to society, to funders. But they are there, they can be found, they're often doing more than those with the website, logos and reports.

The following simple framework provides a sequenced approach to partnering in SIDS. It is applicable at all levels: local, national, regional, and global:



Adapted from: Sand Talk, Tyson Yunkaporta (2019)

Respect

Bottom line: Understand the context; learn from and, where relevant, build on the array of partnerships that might be under your usual radar

Investing time in understanding the context, having informal conversations, and being curious and proactive, are all good disciplines in SIDS. Seek out those individuals who have taken the time to understand the context – those that can give an insight into what is 'really going on', outside of official reports and documents, who the key influencers are and where the most important relationships lie.

Conventional paradigms, solutions, and tools are difficult to apply effectively in a SIDS context, and partnerships are no exception. A different approach is needed based on understanding the context and respecting – however different from conventional approaches.

Partnership landscape assessments can provide a useful insight into a the range of 'official' partnerships being undertaken. However, much partnering activity in SIDS appears to take place through dynamic informal networks, relationships, and arrangements.

Connect

Bottom line: SIDS lead the way, but non-SIDS partners are crucial

One of the most effective ways for international partners to add value in their interactions with SIDS is to better connect with one another, through formal coordination mechanisms, or informally. If there is pre-existing activity that is already effective, it is crucial to consider supporting or scaling that up, rather than establishing a new and often competing initiative. Especially for large donors, whose political priorities may require support and setting-up of something new, this is easier said than done.

Better coordination among international partners makes it easier for SIDS to engage in a mutually useful way. The section below, 'Overview of SIDS stakeholders', is intended to provide a useful starting point for assessing where to focus coordination efforts within and across stakeholder types.

Local SIDS partners may not have the means, motivation, or opportunity to engage in international partnership efforts. Connecting with inter-SIDS coordinating bodies can provide these insights – multiple regional coordination mechanisms are shown in the section below.

Reflect

Bottom line: Create adaptable, flexible strategy

.. some of the constraints of resources that have often been cited for delaying climate action are really constraints of the imagination.

H.E. Ms. Ngedikes Olai Uludong - Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Palau to the United Nations, July 2020

It's usually far easier for international partners to adapt to SIDS' circumstances than the other way around. Consider developing dedicated strategies, systems and processes that offer the necessary flexibility, responsiveness, and solution-focused approaches. Tailor mechanisms and platforms towards the modalities for partnering that are most relevant to SIDS (e.g. prioritizing mechanisms and platforms that accommodate the need for simplicity, lower barriers to access and heavy reliance on remote partnering).

When designing a partnership, give greater attention to robust contingency protocols for exceptional circumstances and events (natural or otherwise) than would be the case for partnering in a non-SIDS context. Accept higher risk in terms of getting things wrong, funding work that doesn't pay off, or supporting initiatives that end up not working out as planned. This is where willingness to seek out and trust local actors who might not tick all (or any) of the boxes really matters.

Part of doing the due diligence includes willingness to engage with local actors who might not pass usual tests, and this can itself be a trust-building process. This does not mean giving a farmer a million dollars after a ten-minute chat, but it does mean listening to hunches and finding creative ways to support and help, with no guarantee of what the return will be.

Approaches that seem highly beneficial on paper can have significant unforeseen, negative knock-on effects far from the initial point of impact. For instance, will a proposed partnership result in a brain drain within/between the SIDS nation or region? Will the financial impact of the partnership distort or unsettle existing balances within the local economy? How will a partnership strengthen SIDS resilience?

These questions are important in any context, but in SIDS the combination of interconnectedness, resource scarcity and chronic vulnerability make them more urgent.

Direct

Bottom line: Build or strengthen partnerships based on a clearly defined need

The Government of Samoa is not short of plans, strategies and policies. The challenge is rather that there are too many projects and partnerships competing for attention of limited government and non-state actors.

Samoa Partnership Landscape Assessment

When it comes to partnership-building in SIDS, it is likely best to support, enhance, strengthen, or enable better coordination of existing efforts. This may include investment in pre-existing coordination infrastructure and communication channels (such as those inter-SIDS coordination structures that are listed in the section below); or support to create additional coordinating infrastructure and communication channels in cases where there is duplication of effort.

Useful support may also include conducting light touch reviews or health checks of existing promising partnerships to better understand what is working and why, and to explore opportunities to extend or scale up the impact. The motivation for partnership review should come from partners themselves, not from donors or other external actors, and the main purpose of review should be to increase the value being created by the partnership – not to provide an objective external judgement about how well a partnership is performing.

Government

Private sector

**Regional and
SIDS-wide political
alliances, networks
and bodies**

Overview of SIDS stakeholders

This section provides an overview of the main stakeholders in SIDS. This section will be of most relevance to international stakeholders engaging with SIDS. It can help provide an insight into the sheer complexity of the landscape in SIDS. It can also provide a way to better coordinate within and across stakeholder types. This mapping is necessarily generic: each SIDS has its own unique context, and the landscape of stakeholders changes rapidly.

Academia

**Regional
powers/major
neighbors**

**Local and grassroots
communities, NGOs
and CSOs**

**United Nations
System**

**Development
Cooperation**

Local and grassroots communities, NGOs and CSOs



Roles and interests

- Promoting community and civil society's agency and participation in shaping national development and resilience efforts.
- Promotion of rights, equity, social and environmental development.
- Providing support and services for those in need and/or excluded from mainstream of society, especially where public sector provision of basic services is very limited.
- Acting as guardians of the public good including holding government to account and ensuring the proper representation and upholding of rights of the underprivileged.

Resources brought to the table



- Access to local/traditional knowledge and resources
- Delivery capacity (in some contexts)
- Deep knowledge of, and reach and access to, communities and people
- Legitimacy / social capital / influence (can be particularly strong in faith-based organizations)
- Ability to organize and engage people (e.g. around advocacy)

Structure

As with most countries, civil society in SIDS operates at multiple levels, including local Community-Based Organizations, tribes, faith-based organizations, local and national NGOs operating in-country (International NGOs are presented in a separate section further down). The catch-all term also includes a huge variety of types of organization which represent or bring together women, youth, disabled, elderly, professional associations, trades unions and more.

Most civil society is self-organized, with different levels of formalization, different levels of capacity/resources, and with funding (where required) from a variety of means: philanthropy, member contributions, government, or donor grants.

Civil society's involvement in national policy making often takes place through nationwide bodies representing NGOs and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). For example, the Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organizations (SUNGO), established in 1997 and boasting a membership of more than 200 local NGOs and CBOs, coordinates the country's civil society's sector participation in national policy making, as well as representing the sector's views and interests in regional and international fora.



Considerations

Involvement and agency of grassroots communities in national development strategies varies across SIDS. A significant segment of the CSO landscape in SIDS remains invisible to, and unexplored by, international development partners, in part due to barriers to access to the international system (governance, monitoring and reporting requirements etc.) which can favor more established, state-backed local partners.

It is important to be aware of informal power networks and systems, many of which are extremely intertwined into the sociocultural fabrics of SIDS societies. For instance, the Wantok system of political and cultural cooperation is an important feature of Melanesian societies, including most Western Pacific SIDS, and understanding its history and modalities is important to the success of partnering efforts at the grassroots level. Another example is the centrality in Samoan culture of the notion of 'aiga', family and community networks, which calls for prioritizing the collective good over individual interests and underpins the collaborative and partnership-minded character of Samoan society and is reflected in the Samoan government's approach to its national development priorities.

The strength of civil society – including the capacity to organize, mobilize and implement – is highly country-specific, including within SIDS. In some cases, the most vulnerable or affected populations are not really part of "civil society".

In certain contexts, there may be very limited numbers of community-based organizations (CBOs) and NGOs, and those that are there may lack sufficient delivery capacity or operate in ways that make it difficult to fulfil the accountability requirements of donors (for example, non-compliant financial systems). This may mean that to partner it may be necessary to build the capacity of such organizations, including potentially providing funding early on to support their inclusion in partnership development. Working with smaller informal groups may also require an acceptance that they won't be able to comply with international due diligence standards and accept the slight risk on the basis that the potential benefits of engaging these groups are potentially disproportionately large.

NGOs in general have very little non-dedicated funding. This means that to partner with an NGO will likely mean aligning with an existing funded programme or providing core funding to that NGO to allow it to bring its resources to the table in a new partnership.

How to connect

Established NGOs will usually be relatively accessible via contact information that can be found on their websites. However, personal introductions to specific contacts are usually the most effective. For a large or complex organization, it is helpful to engage a staff person to help to navigate the internal system. Other forms of civil society – community groups, tribes, faith groups, trades union – will range greatly in terms of public accessibility, anywhere from having a website with easy contact information, to needing to make a personal visit to find the right person.

Private sector



Most SIDS economies suffer from a severe lack of economic diversification, often relying on one or two sectors for a sizable proportion of their economic revenue/activity. Some of the most dominant sectors/industries in SIDS are tourism, fishing, agriculture, and oil and gas. In many SIDS, the local private sector is often dominated by small businesses (SMEs in larger SIDS), though the owners or investors may or may not be locally based.

Roles and interests

- Tend to be locally owned
- Provide a source of local livelihoods

Resources brought to the table



- A market-based / value creation approach
- Local knowledge and communications expertise
- Direct access to, and influence with, customer base and employees
- A 'solutions' mindset and a focus on results

Structure

In some SIDS, particularly lower-income ones (e.g. Papua New Guinea), informal businesses (unregistered, not paying tax, typically individuals or microenterprises market trading or very small scale production) are dominant, whereas in wealthier SIDS (e.g. Singapore) formal (registered) business is more prevalent.

Some economies have high levels of informal business, some of which may be organized locally, for example, through market trader associations or farmers cooperatives.

The formal business sector includes every size of company from registered micro-enterprises up to multinational companies.

Business may be organized through SIDS-wide networks like the SIDS Global Business Network, industry associations or chambers of commerce which advocate for their interests with government, as well as helping to improve industry standards or tackle issues affecting the industry. The engagement of the private sector in national policy often takes place through umbrella bodies representing the national private sector. For instance, the Samoa Chamber of Commerce, which groups most of the nation's small, medium, and large private

Private sector



businesses, is represented on many of the country's national steering and advisory committees, especially those for the Trade, Commerce and Manufacturing sectors.

Another example is the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), which is the island's oldest non-profit institution representing the private sector. The MCCI operates in close collaboration with the government, including on national development issues, as well as with international inter-governmental and private organizations.

Considerations

Given its significant footprint on people (employees, customers), on the environment, on society (including through taxes), the way business operates inevitably has a significant impact on sustainable development. In some SIDS, business activities like industrial fishing and mass tourism have had a destructive impact on the environmental and social balance.

Further, the greatest value of engagement can be through unleashing the power of business's resources (its technical innovation, reach and brand value) alongside its investment and value creation approach – finding commercially viable solutions that are scalable, products and services that are affordable, value chains that are sustainable.

How to connect

In general, because they are small and less organized, it is usually challenging to engage with informal business, except where there are strong associations or membership bodies to go through. Business organizations and initiatives like the SIDS Global Business Network are intended to promote SIDS business interests and can be an invaluable resource for making connections into companies, as well as to engage as partners themselves potentially. Some organizations, such as the UN Global Compact local networks, are specifically designed to help make connections with companies and with the UN system.



Roles and interests

- Playing a trusted convening role early on and/or hosting the partnership or providing the secretariat
- Playing a principal role in providing the technical and data analysis resources and solutions for SIDS governance frameworks
- A principal site for the delivery of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Resources brought to the table



- Repository of local, regional, and SIDS-context knowledge and expertise
- Strong regional and global networks, especially with other SIDS
- Undertaking context analysis, providing key information and essential data, or partnering

Considerations

SIDS academic institutions are often under-resourced and significantly constrained by the logistical and financial impact of isolation and distance, particularly in Pacific and Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS). However, the sector is one of the most promising avenues for SIDS partnering, especially around conservation cooperation and data collection and analysis. SIDS Academic institutions have been at the forefront of the global drive for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), notably as part of major initiatives such as the Pacific Regional Education Framework (2018-2030). SIDS have also established the SIDS University Consortium whose expertise could also be drawn upon.

How to connect

Most SIDS academic institutions can be easily approached directly or via academic partners within their extensive networks of contacts and cooperation, either within their immediate region or globally, which can offer avenues for access (for instance, Western Pacific universities have strong links with the Australian academic sector.)



Roles and interests

- Plan, coordinate and deliver national development strategies, including tackling the challenges of climate change
- Plan, coordinate and deliver disaster resilience, disaster relief and disaster recovery operations.
- Ensure national development strategies and priorities are aligned with relevant regional and global agendas and commitments, notably the SDGs, the Paris Climate Agreement and the Samoa Pathway.
- Oversee the protection and management of national resources, from fish stocks to coral reef.
- Act as the principal interface through which the international system engages with, and operates within, the country.
- Represent national concerns and priorities, particularly around the challenges of climate change, at regional and global forums.
- Ensure democratic representation of the people
- Deliver national defense
- Maintain law and order
- Provide a stable, regulated environment for trade
- Collect taxes
- Provide public services
- Provide public infrastructure



Resources brought to the table



- Understanding of the local SIDS context, including local knowledge, and social/cultural particularities
- Convening ability, through standard democratic channels or more traditional modalities (e.g. tribal and community networks)
- Mandate for long term development planning
- Public budget spending (though this can be quite limited for many SIDS)
- Public services delivery infrastructure: although in many SIDS, infrastructure such as public health services, can be very limited in rural communities
- National 'hard' infrastructure (roads, rail, water, power etc.), though this is often undertaken in conjunction with the support of the international system
- Policy, taxation, and regulatory framework
- Education / skills and capacity building (e.g. agricultural extension services)
- Provision of land
- Ability to operate at scale and integrate approaches to deliver sustainably

Structure

At the top, an elected national government, led by a prime minister or president, and with a cabinet made up of ministers heading departments (ministries) across every area of government responsibility.

Depending on the size of the country, a similar structure, with separately elected officials, may be repeated at geographic levels (e.g., State and County) or within major cities. There is a fair degree of variety across SIDS in this regard, and political governance structures can range from an independent, democratic, parliamentary, state or republic, to city state (Singapore), to constitutional monarchy such as Commonwealth countries including the Solomon Islands and the Kingdom of Tonga.

Some SIDS have three tiers of government: national, provincial and local. In general, however, most SIDS tend to have a much smaller governmental apparatus than average, which translates in national government being the main (sometimes only) layer of executive governance.

Depending on the level of decentralization there will be different levels of autonomy and responsibility for collecting and spending budget at each geographic level.

Each department is staffed by civil servants, with the top layer or layers usually being political appointees. In many SIDS, there is a single layer of the civil service – technocratic, bureaucratic personnel – which tends to be drawn from a relatively small pool.



Considerations

Many SIDS have highly centralized political systems, where the government is the main (often only) significant stakeholder with any voice or leverage in shaping the partnering landscape.

As in most countries, if you don't engage SIDS governments and secure their buy-in, it will be difficult to create a scalable partnership. Their 'sanction' or implicit endorsement is required since ultimately, they are responsible for all their citizens. When a small level partnership or pilot works well and government embraces it, the partnership can be massively scaled in a short amount of time - and therefore generate huge impact.

Governments are generally risk averse and necessarily have bureaucracy and regulation in place which might stifle (or even prevent) innovation or slow down decision-making and implementation, and SIDS, broadly speaking, are no exception. The role of high-level champions can make a major difference in helping to drive non-traditional approaches. However, SIDS Governments are sometimes uncomfortable with ceding their authority, and this needs to be considered when engaging with them.

Governments generally have a 'macro' outlook on the country and will have trouble dealing with 'niche' social issues. The public sector's ability to develop and commit to partnerships is strongly affected by both political and public spending cycles. In the case of SIDS, this is significantly tied to international funding and investment patterns. It is therefore important to be aware of, and sensitive to, such cycles and, wherever possible, use them to best effect.

Much of the public sector around the world has limited resources, and this is even more so in the case of SIDS. This often leads to a state of over-committed capacity, making it challenging for the government both to engage and, in some cases, to fully deliver the resources it might commit to a project.

Also, depending on the country, political circumstances, and levels of concentration of power may all cause significant challenges to partnership development. For instance, in some SIDS, political power is divided-up along family or tribal lines, and this can give rise to the emergence of intricate political balances, and potential tensions, within the government.

Regional and SIDS-wide political alliances, networks and bodies



- The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) has a membership of 44 Small Island states, 39 of which are UN members (5 observers).
- The Pacific Islands Forum, founded in 1971, comprises 16 members: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. CARICOM groups 20 Caribbean nations considered developing countries, all are island states except for Belize, Guyana and Suriname.
- The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) groups eleven islands of the Eastern Caribbean.
- Other important regional organizations are the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), and the Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF).
- Global and regional bodies such as the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA) and the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organizations (PIANGO) assist islands on many matters including in conserving and suitably using island natural resources.

Roles and interests

- Representing the interests, concerns and needs of SIDS nations in regional and global forums and contexts
- Articulating and coordinating regional or SIDS-wide strategic priorities and action
- Active advocacy to secure international funding on behalf of SIDS members
- Act as support network in emergency/disaster relief contexts

Resources

- Political legitimacy and collective bargaining leverage
- Ability to mobilize regional and SIDS-wide buy-in and political commitments



Regional and SIDS-wide political alliances, networks and bodies



Considerations

SIDS-wide or SIDS-related regional alliances and bodies sometimes operate along overlapping geographies, scopes, and remits and with complex sets of interlinked priorities and agendas.

How to connect

Most of these bodies can be approached directly, or via UN intermediaries such as the office of the UN resident coordinators, the regional commissions (UNECLAC, UNESCAP and UNECA), UNDP, UN DESA and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS).



Roles and interests

- The pursuit of national interests and strategies
- A major trade partner for SIDS
- A key support base for SIDS neighbors, especially in the context of emergency or disaster relief
- A key job market for neighboring SIDS diaspora

Considerations

In most SIDS contexts, one or two regional powers exert significant presence and weight within their region, including on their SIDS neighbors, across the political, economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions. This degree of influence and leverage can be mobilized in positive ways. For instance, geographical and political ties and proximity have meant that Australia and New Zealand are always the first countries to aid Samoa during national disasters and emergencies, including the 2019 Measles epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, strong ties to powerful neighbors can also result in political influence which may prove disruptive to SIDS' own development needs, strategies and national interests.

This can also manifest itself in greater economic dependency. For instance, Australians made up 42% of tourists to Fiji in 2019, but the sudden collapse of visits from Australia in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic dealt a severe blow to the Fijian economy.



Roles and interests

- To support SIDS governments in building and strengthening national capacities and delivering their national development agendas and international commitments such as the SDGs and the SAMOA Pathway
- Promoting sustainable development
- Delivering humanitarian aid and disaster relief
- Upholding human rights
- Upholding international law and maintaining peace and security

Resources brought to the table



- Legitimacy and independence
- Extensive technical support, knowledge, and capacity
- Global network and access to knowledge and solutions from around the world
- Norms and standards-setting
- Convening power
- (In certain cases) funding

Structure

The UN works through a range (10 to 20 in any one country) of different specialized agencies and programmes (e.g. UNICEF, World Food Programme, UNDP) to build capacity and deliver tangible results in support of the national development agenda*.

The work of the UN is coordinated by the UN Country Team (UNCT), led by the UN Resident Coordinator, the designated representative of the UN Secretary General in the country. One UN Resident Coordinator may be responsible for several SIDS.

While each UN entity has its own set of activities, programmes and relationships with ministries, donors, and other stakeholders, the UNCT aims to ensure the UN works as a team, formulating common positions on strategic issues, ensuring coherence in action and advocacy. In each country, the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (“Cooperation Framework”) aims to align with a country’s development plan and brings together all the UN activities into one overarching document. It is signed by the government and the UN agency heads.



In most countries, achieving this more cohesive approach is still a work in progress, although the UN is investing significantly in this area, including through efforts to ensure each UNCT has a partnership specialist on staff.

Global level coordination between UN and non-UN agencies focused on SIDS is undertaken by the Inter-Agency Consultative Group (IACG) on SIDS.

A key request from the outcome of the 2014 Third International Conference on SIDS - the SAMOA Pathway - was the establishment of the SIDS Partnership Framework, designed to monitor progress of existing, and stimulate the launch of new, genuine, and durable partnerships for the sustainable development of SIDS. Guided by a Member States-driven Steering Committee, the framework has since its launch ensured that SIDS partnerships, both at national and regional levels, have remained high on the UN's agenda, providing a multi-stakeholder platform for reviewing progress made by SIDS partnerships, and for sharing of good practices and lessons learned among all stakeholders, on an annual basis.

Considerations

At country level, there are often significant overlaps in mandate and even competition across UN entities. This has in the past made it challenging to identify the best UN entity to engage with.

It is important to appreciate that the UN is limited in the partnerships it is able to engage in: not only must the partnership contribute to the country's development plans, the UN has rules about the organizations, particularly companies, it can engage with. The UN system itself has in general very little unallocated funding or resources it can put towards new programmes and may need funding – either through donors or from other partners – to engage fully.

How to connect

The UN Resident Coordinator Office in country should be able to help make the connections into the right entities. Further, if there is a UN Global Compact local network, they may well also be able to make direct connections within the UN system.

Development Cooperation



Roles and interests

- Providing funding to a country: directly to government; through financing (usually) NGO or UN-delivered programmes; or through co-investments with the private sector

Resources brought to the table



- Funding
- Political connections and influence
- Technical assistance
- Convening and facilitation (due to networks with government, civil society and private sector), especially in early stages of partnership formation

Considerations

Donor support to SIDS includes both bi-lateral donors (often former colonial powers, or major regional players) and multi-lateral donors (including the World Bank and, extensively for SIDS, the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund).

While power imbalances inherent in the donor-recipient relationship are often at their most acute in remote contexts such as SIDS, most, bi-lateral and multilateral donors have signed up to 'aid effectiveness' principles which include both a commitment to country ownership and to coordination among themselves. Each donor develops (usually) annual plans with each partner country, setting out agreed areas of cooperation towards delivering the country development plan.

These plans will usually define the envelope of the focus of activities they are able to fund. Certain funding programmes include grant or innovation etc.

Different donors will have quite different levels of flexibility in their funding. Some can only fund through specific modalities defined globally. Others may have

higher appetites for risk and innovation, particularly when it comes to smaller grants.

Donor support often takes the form of pooled funding mechanisms that bring together the national government and external donors, such as the joint Government of Samoa and development partners' Private Sector Support Facility (PSSF), which offers a pooled funding platform bringing together several external donors with a view to support the growth of the Samoan private sector.

How to connect

Bi-lateral donors at country level may usually be contacted through their embassies or through their implementing agencies. An introduction from the home country can be helpful. Multilateral donors may be contacted through their country or regional offices. In both cases, it is important to be aware of existing funding modalities, particularly where larger sums of money are desired.

Key resources

[SIDS Partnership Framework](#)

A global framework designed to monitor progress of existing, and stimulate the launch of new, genuine, and durable partnerships for the sustainable development of SIDS. It is useful for understanding the principal issues, arguments and efforts shaping official international engagement around SIDS partnerships over the past 5 years.

[SIDS Partnership Analysis](#)

A comprehensive survey of Partnerships in SIDS, from the macro socio-economic context to specific challenges of SIDS partnerships..

[SIDS Partnership Toolbox](#)

A comprehensive repository for key tools and processes for identifying, launching and growing partnerships in SIDS

[SMART criteria](#)

A set of five criteria for genuine and durable partnerships developed as part of the SIDS Partnership Framework. It reflects some of the key challenges facing partnerships in SIDS

[Database of SIDS partnerships](#)

A database of 500+ registered partnerships. The database is be useful for exploring existing partnering initiatives or opportunities in a particular SIDS/region/sector

[SAMOA Pathway Mid-term Review](#)

The outcome of an extensive consultative process, it is especially useful on what makes SIDS, and the challenges they face, so unique

[2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator](#)

Guidance, tools and and national partnership landscape assessments

[SDG Knowledge Platform on SIDS](#)

Repository of key resources relating to the UN SDG agenda in the context of SIDS, including key decisions, statements, and publications

[SIDS Global Business Network Online Platform](#)

An online platform and resource hub which shares best practices and lessons learned in private sector partnerships for SIDS



**PARTNERSHIP
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