

**AIS SIDS Regional Preparatory Meeting  
24-26 July 2023  
Balaclava, Mauritius**

**Session 5: Governance and Effective Public Institutions**

**Enhancing Statistical Capacity, Building Effective Public Institutions in Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) Small Island Developing States (SIDS)**

**25 July 2023, 1:15 – 2:45pm**

**Background Note**

**Introduction**

Effective governance and public administration are critical in delivering basic services to and ensuring the well-being of citizens, and in responding quickly to multiple crisis and external shocks. Like many others, SIDS in the AIS group have to contend with limited institutional capacities and weak public sector capabilities. This capacity gap is also seen increasingly in the data and statistics fields where most SIDS lack comprehensive data sets that allow for effective and meaningful monitoring and measurement of AIS SIDS in the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the SDGs.

Data is important for systematic follow-up and review of progress and to provide evidence for decision-making at all levels. Data still constitutes a tremendous challenge for the AIS SIDS, as evidenced by the extensive data gaps across most thematic areas of the SDGs and the Samoa Pathway, as well as the lack of recent data. Even analysis of progress in the AIS region is restricted to just SDG Indicators show that there are still significant data gaps with a number of indicators spread across the priority areas not having data for any of the AIS SIDS.

Many AIS SIDS have yet to put in place regulatory frameworks and human capacity for managing and regulating rapid generations of digital data. Data-driven decision-making as well as monitoring and evaluation of public policies in many AIS SIDS is also lagging behind.

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This session will examine some of the main challenges at the level of governance, data and capacity building in public institutions in the AIS region and explore the way forward, including strategies and measures for transformational change to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **Governance and Data Challenges in AIS SIDS**

The 2030 Agenda highlights the need to build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels, in line with Goal 16. Without effective, accountable, and inclusive public service delivery, there will be little progress in realizing the SDGs and ensuring that no one is left behind.

While public institutions have a lead role in implementing the SDGs through the policies they make and public services they deliver, several SIDS are not well equipped to address the challenges related to SDG implementation and the multiple intersecting crises they face. A governance system characterized by weak public institutions that do not ensure equitable, fair, resilient, and just access to and delivery of quality education, health, nutrition, social and care services characterize many of the AIS SIDS. They also have weak infrastructure, especially ICT infrastructure, which hampers accessibility and affordability of ICT services. The public sector in SIDS appears to be facing a capacity challenge in delivering change and transformation, with challenges being experienced in relation to mindsets, capacity, processes, and right skillsets. Education and training programmes to enhance the digital skills of the youth and women are especially important.

But there is diversity among AIS SIDS and this potentially offer opportunities for SIDS-SIDS collaboration. Countries like Singapore, Mauritius, Seychelles, Cabo Verde are long-standing high performers in good governance, and have strong institutional frameworks, credible administrations, and relatively well-functioning checks and balance systems in place and high human development. These countries also have relatively strong legal and policy systems.

Some challenges, however, remain mainly related to law enforcement and the perception of security amongst the population. Since 2019, some AIS SIDS have also experienced several governance challenges, including declining public trust in certain institutions like security, as well as weak accountable governance and increasing corruption perception.

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However, Seychelles, among others, is experiencing a rather positive trend in its governance measurements as compared to its peers in the region<sup>1</sup> (for example it had a 78% participation in its 2020 presidential elections which is very high). The institutional strength of Cabo Verde originated in State reforms introduced from the 1980s until 2010. Those reforms included increasing the focus on maintaining a stable macroeconomic environment; promoting transparency; encouraging and coordinating with civil society organizations; and creating a favourable business environment. In addition, the Government invested in human capital and civil service training, and carefully managed foreign aid and remittances.

Youth participation seems to be an issue in many of the AIS SIDS which can have an impact in the future on elections, the education system and on citizenship as a whole. In 2020 Cabo Verde established the Corruption Prevention Council, an administrative independent authority tasked with leading corruption prevention efforts in the country. Cabo Verde ranks among the best performing African countries in terms of corruption perception among its population (3<sup>rd</sup>, behind Seychelles and Botswana)<sup>124</sup>.

With AIS SIDS relying extensively on the perception of effective governance and credibility, needed to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), **the Seychelles** has reinforced its legal framework for an enhanced rule of law. It made significant improvements following the adoption of the Anti-corruption Act in 2016 and the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission of Seychelles (ACCS) with the mandate is to investigate, detect and prevent corrupt practices.

By introducing the Public Sector Business Transformation Strategy (PSBTS)<sup>[2]</sup> in Mauritius in 2017, the public sector aims to address the need for innovation, transformation in order to respond to and anticipate the needs of each citizen, as well as local and global clients and improve public service delivery. It also creates the momentum required to create a dynamic and innovative public sector, whereby quality service is delivered in an efficient, transparent, fair, equitable and affordable manner. While the quality of the policy framework is high, technological and capacity restrictions demonstrate a clear implementation gap. It should be noted, however, that despite the existence of the necessary legal framework, including specialized institutions, laws and regulations, the enforcement level remains inefficient in the absence of performance obligations<sup>2</sup>.

### Statistical capacity

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<sup>1</sup> Common country analysis Seychelles, November 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Common country analysis Cabo Verde, Mauritius, Seychelles and Guinee Bissau, 2022.

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AIS SIDS also need to strengthen their statistical capacity with a particular focus on collecting disaggregated data. Limited data availability, robustness, transparency, and challenges related to privacy in the dissemination when disaggregating data continue to be common challenges to measuring progress in SIDS and to focusing social policies on the most vulnerable. This poses major challenges for building inclusive societies through evidence-based planning. Though significant progress has been made in data collection and collation at national level, notably reflected in the completion of Voluntary National Reviews of SDG progress in some countries, data gaps are extensive. The absence of high-quality and timely data effectively precludes evidence-based policy and decision making at the government level and makes it harder for development partners, including the United Nations, to provide relevant and specific support to those who need it most.

### **Strengthening Capacities for Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions in AIS SIDS**

The 2030 Agenda calls for an ambitious integrated framework, which requires whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, including for public service delivery and public participation in decision-making. Building trust in government is one of the key actions to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, with a special focus on improving people's experiences with public institutions and basic services.

In its seventeenth session in 2018, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) adopted 11 principles of effective governance. The principles, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2018/12, highlight the need for pragmatic and ongoing improvements in national and local governance capabilities to achieve the Sustainable Development. CEPA has developed a wide range of commonly used strategies for operationalization of the principles.

One of the principles is on competence which stresses that, to perform their functions effectively, institutions are to have sufficient expertise, resources, and tools to deal adequately with the mandates under their authority. Commonly used strategies to operationalize this principle include the promotion of a professional public sector workforce, strategic human resources management, leadership development and training of civil servants, performance management, results-based management, financial management and control, efficient and fair revenue administration and investment in e-government.

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SIDS, including the AIS SIDS, are on the forefront of multiple crises, and require, perhaps more than ever, renewed efforts to embark on a collective journey of transformational change, built on strong institutions and concerted action with people at the center. An examination of methods being utilized by some SIDS reveals a series of approaches that can guide others in accelerating the achievement of the SDGs. These measures are occurring even as these countries grapple with public institutions that are weak and disparate in their approaches; a consolidation of efforts is vital for success.

Six measures could help to direct the process of transformational change in the public sector in SIDS:

- 1. Agile, anticipatory, adaptive and risk-informed governance is advised** – in an environment of growing complexity and uncertainty, public institutions need to be flexible and responsive, and leverage strategic foresight approaches, including by establishing a strategic foresight centre of excellence to build an anticipatory governance ecosystem across the executive, parliament, audit bodies, government agencies, and municipal bodies.
- 2. Evidence-based and sound policymaking needs to be strengthened**– data is essential to make informed decisions, and collaboration among public institutions is critical to advance a holistic implementation of the SDGs through policy coherence. Partnerships with academia and think tanks are also essential to promote the policy-science interface.
- 3. Action needs to be prioritized and integrated recovery planning pursued**– there are no ready fixes, no linear approaches to action. Countries will need to decide on the future they want, map possible avenues and conflicting goals. This is a conversation that should be had widely, and decisively. Trade-offs are inevitable.
- 4. A concert of actors is needed** – stakeholder involvement should be wide and deep, including through a “National Listening Exercise”. Decisions about the future of people should involve them, in design, in implementation and in retooling. Vulnerable groups bear an unequal burden and enhanced support should be provided to ensure their effective representation.
- 5. Action needs to be monitored** – Imperfect information cannot be an excuse for inaction. Actions should be monitored, reviewed, and made better. Policy implementation and programmed activities need to be monitored. As such, strengthening data capacities is critical. This also helps to decipher appropriate medium- to long-term actions.

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- 6. Capacities for transformational change by promoting new mindsets in public service, fostering innovation, and leveraging digital technologies are critical for SDG implementation** –Capacities for new mindsets, innovation and digital transformation are critical to ensure better services and to promote resilience, helping to mitigate geographical remoteness. Providing people, including people living in vulnerable situations, with reliable, fast, and affordable connectivity and better access to services, such as health and education, requires capacities for innovation and digital transformation at the institutional, organizational and individual levels and at all levels of government.

Partnerships among government agencies and the academic world, the private sector, and civil society organizations and vulnerable people can greatly help in the implementation of the above measures. In this respect, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, is supporting several AIS SIDS, including Mauritius, Seychelles and Guinee-Bissau, in strengthening their capacities to promote institutional arrangements and integrated recovery planning to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through the use of systems thinking to analyze SDGs interactions.

### **Proposed questions for discussion**

- What caused deteriorating governance measures since 2019 in some of the AIS SIDS?
- What governance capacities are most needed in the AIS SIDS to ensure a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery and effective SDG implementation?
- What strategies can AIS SIDS adopt in the immediate future to strengthen governance and data capacity and implement the measures needed to promote transformational change?
- How can regional cooperation and the international community best support AIS SIDS' efforts to promote transformational change in the public sector and in what key areas?



**United Nations**

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