

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

Plenary: Regional coordinating mechanism for the AIS region

25 July 2023, 4:30 PM –6:00 PM

Background Note

Introduction

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) consist of three sub-groups: the Caribbean SIDS, the Pacific SIDS, and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea (AIS) SIDS. The Caribbean and the Pacific are geographic regions, where the countries share strong regional identities, historical and cultural affinities, development experiences. They also have ongoing regional integration initiatives, such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), which are the two key intergovernmental organisations, serving the interests of SIDS in these two regions.

The Caribbean and the Pacific SIDS are further supported by dedicated sub-regional offices of the United Nations Regional Commissions. ECLAC Caribbean, located in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, and ESCAP Subregional Office for the Pacific, based in Suva, Fiji, play crucial roles in providing targeted assistance to SIDS in implementing the SAMOA Pathway and in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The sub-regional offices and the regional organizations have jointly established coordination mechanisms, which facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and capacity building among SIDS, ensuring a focused and coordinated approach in supporting the countries in the two regions. These mechanisms also serve as platforms for political leaders from SIDS to

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convene and collectively set strategic agendas, address shared challenges, and foster coherence and alignment in their collective actions.

The AIS SIDS, in contrast, lack a dedicated coordinating mechanism to effectively address their unique challenges and priorities. Instead, the eight SIDS in the AIS Group rely on the support of seven regional cooperation/integration organisations and six UN agencies. There is a recognition that the support these institutions provide to SIDS can be better targeted, with greater level of coordination to maximise impact and help accelerate progress towards achieving SAMOA Pathway priorities and the SDGs, as well as the new SIDS Programme of Action to be adopted in 2024 . A significant gap that exists in the institutional architecture is the lack of a unified platform which can generate a collective voice, advocating for the AIS SIDS, mobilising support, and fostering a shared strategy for the effective implementation of the PoA. Although this gap has long been recognised, the institutional arrangements that serve AIS SIDS are structurally too fragmented and the geographically too diverse for a centralized coordinating mechanism to emerge thus far.

There have been suggestions that a regional organisation that is already well established, such as the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) be designated as the Coordinating Mechanism for the AIS Group. There is merit in that idea. Three out of the five member-states of the IOC (Comoros, Mauritius, and Seychelles) are in the AIS Group. It has considerable experience in coordinating policy, exchanging information, and in supporting SIDS achieve their development priorities. Moreover, it also has a strong institutional architecture, with predictable resources, and expertise to support a coordinating mechanism.

A key concern, however, is that not all AIS SIDS belong to the IOC. Therefore, if the proposed mechanism were to be located in the IOC, it would necessitate bringing significant changes to the organisation, requiring highest level political

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decisions. The changes would require amending the Commission's founding document to empower its leadership undertake a prominent diplomatic advocacy role on behalf of countries, which might include those that are not member-states.

In view of the foregoing, it would be useful to consider potential solutions that allow for universal coverage of the AIS SIDS, and that attend to the range of global sustainable development frameworks of relevance to the SIDS, including the SIDS Programmes of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Recommendations for Action

One potential solution that could be considered to fill the gap is that the country which represents AIS SIDS on AOSIS Bureau could manage a Coordinating Mechanism, to be established at its Permanent Mission in New York. For that to happen, however, the AIS representative would require significant level of support from UNOHRLLS and UNDESA, as well as from the development partners of SIDS, in organising and in carrying out the coordinating function. The key role of such a Mechanism in New York would be diplomatic advocacy that can yield more immediate results. It can convene high-level diplomatic events attended by political principals, which will generate greater level of visibility and carry significant diplomatic weight. It can also make representation at multilateral negotiations, especially those convened by the United Nations to ensure that the perspectives of AIS SIDS are heard and considered.

A second proposal to consider might be to further enhance coordination between the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to support the AIS SIDS at regional-level. Strengthened coordination could facilitate in establishing and managing

**AIS SIDS Regional Preparatory Meeting
24-26 July 2023
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knowledge sharing platforms, exchange of information and technical expertise, and providing peer-to-peer support. This could potentially be an area in which the Regional Commissions could partner with the other intergovernmental organisations like the IOC, in facilitating greater level of support for AIS SIDS. The technical level collaboration could complement and support the AIS Coordinating Mechanism's diplomatic advocacy and resource mobilisation efforts.

A third proposal that can be considered in further strengthening the existing mechanisms is leveraging the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) with a clear mandate for integrating the goals and targets of the PoA into the Cooperation Framework. That would allow the RC to take the lead in establishing a collaborative partnership with the government and in developing an integrated monitoring and reporting platform that would serve as a centralised hub where data from different sources can be collected, analysed, and utilised to track progress, identify challenges, and inform evidence-based decision-making.

Proposed Guiding Questions for the Discussions

- What would be key elements of an effective strategy for implementing the next Programme of Action for the AIS SIDS?
- What are the key advantages and potential drawbacks if a Coordinating Mechanism were to be established at the Permanent Mission of the country that represents AIS SIDS on AOSIS Bureau?
- How could strengthened coordination between ECA and ESCAP in partnership with other intergovernmental organisations like the IOC, more effectively support the AIS SIDS at the regional level, and what benefits would it bring? What could be some of the key challenges for such platform to complement the work of the AIS Mechanism?

**AIS SIDS Regional Preparatory Meeting
24-26 July 2023
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- What are some of the key steps required to allow the Resident Coordinator to integrate the goals and targets of the next Programme of Action into the Cooperation Framework and in establishing an integrated monitoring and reporting platform?