



Preparatory Meeting of the 4th International Conference on SIDS for the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) Region, 24-26 July 2023

Outcome Document

A. Reaffirming the AIS SIDS Case

1. We, the representatives of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) Region, convened in Balaclava, Mauritius from 24 to 26 July 2023, in preparation for the Fourth International Conference for SIDS scheduled to be held in Antigua and Barbuda in 2024, as mandated by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 77/245, agree on the following,

- (i) This Outcome Document represents our agreed priorities and recommendations and will serve as the basis of the AIS Region's positions to the SIDS inter-regional preparatory meeting to be held in Cabo Verde from 30 August to 1 September 2023.
- (ii) The new SIDS development agenda will serve to enhance our efforts in implementing the internationally agreed sustainable development priorities of SIDS building on the Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA), the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation (MSI), and the SAMOA Pathway. It should also serve to further accelerate our efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals;
- (iii) All previous internationally agreed sustainable development agendas of SIDS are stand-alone, comprehensive frameworks that articulate the sustainable development priorities of SIDS. These agendas are consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the New Urban Agenda, and the Paris Agreement, adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

2. We will continue to be guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, with full respect for international law. We stress the need to strengthen multilateralism and exploring innovative approaches to address the unique challenges faced by SIDS, in accordance with our commitment to leave no one behind.

3. We stand united in our pursuit of sustainable development and resilient futures of our countries and peoples. Through cooperative efforts and collective action, we aim to forge a path that empowers and uplifts all, leaving a positive impact on our environment, societies, and economies.

B. Where do AIS SIDS find themselves today

4. *We note* with appreciation the presentations made during our meeting, highlighting the progress, the gaps and challenges in the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and suggested priorities for the next SIDS development agenda.

5. *We acknowledge* that our region is the most diverse amongst the three regions of SIDS in terms of, language, geography, development, and income level, posing challenges for regional coordination. We are collectively impacted by natural hazards and climate related disasters, ranging from hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons, drought, and sea-level rise. Additionally, some of our countries are susceptible to seismic movements and volcanic eruptions. These events have resulted in significant economic and infrastructure damage, loss of lives, and the diversion of resources towards emergency response and recovery efforts, impacting the implementation of long-term sustainable development plans.

6. *We confirm* that we encounter significant limitations in terms of financial resources and access to finance, posing challenges to our ability to effectively implement our development priorities including the SAMOA Pathway. Difficulties in accessing sufficient financial support including concessional finance have been further compounded by our restricted access to international financing mechanisms and the burden of high levels of debt. These factors limit our ability to allocate the necessary funds for crucial development activities. Additionally, the conventional reliance on GDP/GNI per capita as the sole measure of development has substantially restricted access to international finance sources, particularly affecting SIDS in the AIS region that have graduated from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) status.

7. *We confirm* that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact also on SIDS in the AIS region, disrupting economies, health systems, and social development efforts. The pandemic has strained resources, diverted attention and funding, and created additional barriers to achieving the goals of the SAMOA Pathway, including sustainable development, poverty reduction, and resilience building. We also note that the present multiple crisis is further exacerbating our ability to address our challenges and making it more difficult for us to achieve our goals.

8. We affirm that peace and security are at the core of global stability and sustainable development, and that in a world as interconnected as ours, conflict and insecurity also render countries vulnerable.

9. *We agree* that in taking stock of our collective implementation, in which there has been progress in several areas, and we noted that:

- (i) The SAMOA Pathway has been mainstreamed into national policies, plans and strategies of countries in the AIS region which for some, are aligned to international commitments such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the Moroni Declaration for Ocean and Climate Action in Africa.
- (ii) The adverse impacts of climate change, including those related to sea level rise and extreme weather events continue to pose significant risk to SIDS in the AIS region and their efforts to achieve sustainable development and, for many, represent the gravest of threats to their survival and viability, including, for some, loss of territory, as well as through threats to water availability and food security and nutrition.
- (iii) The COVID-19 pandemic also has resulted in profound disruptions to our economies, health systems, and social development efforts and even though some recovered comparatively quickly from the COVID-19 pandemic, they remain vulnerable to external shocks which pose serious threats to its sustainable development.

- (iv) Accessing sufficient, quality and predictable finance for priorities and needs remains a challenge.
- (v) Countries in the AIS region recognized the inextricable link between their economies and the oceans and are working diligently to address the ongoing challenges such as biodiversity loss of maritime security, IUU fishing, coral bleaching, ocean acidification and beach erosion. including through measures such as the establishment of MPAs.
- (vi) AIS SIDS countries are addressing their water scarcity challenges and stress and drive to transform from water crises to a water secure world.
- (vii) SIDS in the AIS region are still struggling to access affordable, reliable, sustainable, modern and renewable energy and require enhanced international cooperation and support, sustainable investments and promote investment in energy infrastructure and renewable energy technology.
- (viii) Transportation, including for inter-island connectivity remains a challenge in the AIS region and some are developing viable national, regional and international transportation arrangements, including improved air, land and sea transport policies that take a life-cycle approach to the development and management of transport infrastructure.
- (ix) Several AIS SIDS countries are experiencing rapid ageing and negative population growth. There is an urgent need to address their special needs of the aged, including the designing of appropriate services.
- (x) SIDS in the AIS region continues to experience the loss of its skilled labours and professionals and recognize that we need to find solution.

C. Revitalizing SIDS Economies: Strategies for Dynamic and Inclusive Growth

10. We, reaffirm that AIS SIDS are a diverse group scattered over different oceans and seas with disparate levels of development. We also acknowledge and deeply understand the structural vulnerabilities that we share, as mentioned in the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, the elaboration of which is being finalized.

11. Given the profound paradigm shifts and related uncertainty characterizing the global economy in this Decade and considering the higher-than-average impact of multiple crises on SIDS, we prioritise building economic resilience in all AIS SIDS.

12. We acknowledge the need to develop a shared, long-term vision of the future of our societies, promoting resilient prosperity and engaging all development stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, the academia, and youth. Such collaboration will facilitate partnerships and investments for economic transformation and collective foresight on future needs in terms of investments, skills, equipment and infrastructure.

13. We commit to consistently design and implement policies while ensuring public investments and incentives to foster economic diversification, harnessing the potential of the blue, green, circular and digital economies, with a strong emphasis on creating decent work opportunities.

14. Despite advancements in economic development and domestic resource mobilisation, we recognise that AIS SIDS remain highly dependent on external trade and Official Development Assistance due to structural constraints such as limited economies of scale and small domestic markets and fiscal bases. It is

therefore fundamental to secure preferential access to markets, finance and address all forms of debt by the establishment of a dedicated debt relief mechanism for SIDS,

15. We recognize that in order to achieve economic sustainability, reform of the international financial architecture is crucial for AIS SIDS, including through enhancing governance structures of the IFIs and creating greater access to necessary and affordable finance.

16. We call for the early operationalization of the MVI. For future iterations, we support better data collection to allow its refinement and we also recognize the need for establishing an interim secretariat. We call for a review provision to be embedded in the report.

17. We welcome the MDB's announcement to explore eligibility to concessional finance for the most vulnerable countries with a multidimensional approach to vulnerability, encompassing economic, environmental and social dimensions and that to facilitate cooperation, MDBs could explore a common definition of vulnerability, taking into account the United Nations workstream in that regard, and could develop common guidelines for the targeted use of concessional finance to address vulnerabilities.

18. Improving access and the mobilization of climate finance and sustainable private finance is also a key priority, including through building the necessary capacity to build adapted and/or bankable project pipelines at scale.

19. Boosting strategic partnerships both among SIDS and leveraging North-South and South-South partnerships, including SIDS to SIDS, is essential to access finance technology transfer, and improve trade relationships, in a context of a profound shifts in global and regional supply chains and related opportunities for SIDS.

20. We reiterate the need to enhance the adaptive capacity of public infrastructure and ecosystems to be more climate resilient and to strengthen water and food security. It will be essential to provide assistance to SIDS in developing Natural Capital Accounting Framework which can be used to assess the contribution of natural ecosystems to their economies.

21. We reaffirm our commitment to making fundamental changes in our consumption and production patterns, including by transitioning to sustainable economic and business models, the implementation of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, and by providing appropriate support to SIDS to strengthen their scientific, technological and innovation capacity.

22. We recognize also that effective and coordinated international cooperation is needed to strengthen the complementarity of actions and programs relating to water and sanitation (new language)

23. We reaffirm the need to

(i) develop and implement adaptation strategies that consider the water-energy nexus, such as integrating climate-resilient infrastructure and promoting climate-smart agricultural practices.

(ii) adopt a holistic approach that considers the water, energy, and food nexus.

(iii) develop integrated solutions that optimize resource use and promote circular economy principles.

24. We recognize that science, technology and innovation, including environmentally sound information and communications technologies, are critical in the pursuit of sustainable development. We will spur innovation in our region to increasingly design our own solutions,

tailored to our own problems, and to harness the power of science and technology to improve social services, economic opportunities, and environmental protection, and to advance digital transformation.

25. We acknowledge global and regional cooperation initiatives such as the Digital FOSS, which provide platforms for small states to support one another on their digital transformation paths. We call for enhanced joint programmes including, pooled procurement of digital solutions among AIS SIDS.

26. We stress the need to provide universal, meaningful and affordable access to the Internet by 2030, particularly in AIS SIDS with special focus on inclusive policies that support youth in acquiring the necessary skills and accessing the resources needed to participate in, and drive sustainable industrialization, build resilient infrastructure, and grow innovation markets.

27. We call upon all stakeholders, including the international community, to support further actions, including investment, to improve broadband access and connectivity and the establishment of a platform that will provide learning opportunities, exchange experiences, and support innovation, so as to enhance capacity building and narrow the digital divide affecting SIDS.

28. We call upon the private sector, international community and relevant bodies of the United Nations system to take urgent action to reduce the price of information and communications technologies and broadband access to our region in order to capture the benefits of digital technologies for inclusive, equitable and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for our region.

29. We will continue investing in the digital economy, including through building the enabling environment to boost digital transformation, and to develop solutions to boost e-commerce to overcome our remoteness and other structural constraints and will work closely with our international partners to create and expand our digital and economic space and call for a special focus on our region including through the United Nations' Partner2Connect, and other appropriate initiatives from development partners.

30. We will strengthen and foster investment in Research and Development for environmentally sound technologies and to promote the involvement of the business and financial sectors in the development of those technologies and invite the international community to support those efforts. We will invest in research and infrastructure that support economic and social development in AIS SIDS.

D. Transformative actions to enhance environmental resilience

31. We reaffirm that the ocean is fundamental to the culture, identity, prosperity, and resilience to AIS SIDS. As such, we commit to protecting the ocean and building capacity and infrastructure to further benefit from AIS oceanic resources. We will enhance our Blue economy, including by developing frameworks and enabling structures. We also commit to conserve coastal and marine ecosystems, strengthen ocean governance, and maintain carbon sinks. We acknowledge, the promising work of the Ocean Decade Alliance.

32. We welcome the adoption of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction.

33. We also welcome the recognition of the special circumstances of SIDS, and the common heritage of mankind, as part of the guiding principles and approaches under the treaty, and express our commitment to equity, sustainability, and international cooperation. We also emphasise the value in prioritising the areas of the Agreement which will accelerate implementation, such as the provisions on capacity building and transfer of marine technology for SIDS.

34. We call on members to sign the agreement when it opens for signature on 20 September 2023 and ratify, approve or accept the Agreement at the earliest possible date to allow its entry into force.

35. We look forward to the finalisation of a mining code by the International Seabed Authority to ensure that deep-sea mining activities are conducted with utmost responsibility, sustainability and respect to our delicate marine ecosystem.

36. We support the global efforts to address plastic pollution and the work of the Inter-Governmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment by 2024.

37. We welcome the requests for Advisory Opinions on Climate Change by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) respectively and look forward to the ruling of the ITLOS expected early next year. We encourage Member States to participate in the Advisory Opinion process at the ICJ.

38. We recognise the initiatives such as the SIDS Coalition for Nature and the SIDS Ecosystem Restoration Flagship to advance the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in AIS SIDS. We emphasize the need for increased levels of financial resources in a timely and easily accessible manner, and through international, public and private sources to implement SIDS' national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

39. We note the ambitious targets related to renewable energy transition included in the nationally determined contributions of many AIS SIDS. However, we note with concern that the lack of fiscal space to adequately invest in the infrastructure, equipment and knowledge needed to reach these targets significantly hampers progress, and therefore call for timely support to meet these commitments with a view to achieve the goals in accordance with the Paris Agreement.

40. Due to the accelerating impact of climate change, both through extreme weather events and slow onset climate-induced events, as well as human-induced environmental disasters such as oil spills, disaster risk reduction is more than ever, a key aspect of resilience. We will pursue our efforts to build capacities and networks at local, national and regional levels to apply an integrated approach to the triple planetary crisis and its impacts on water, food and human security.

41. We stress the urgency of enhancing ambition for climate action in the implementation of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement in relation to climate mitigation and adaptation, and provision of the means of implementation, especially finance by developed countries and the mobilization of private finance and innovative financing instruments.

42. We commit to, inter alia, fostering partnerships and mobilize resources that will enable AIS SIDS to develop and scale-up innovative financing mechanisms, such as the debt-for-nature swap and blue investment bonds, carbon credit and encouraging collaboration among AIS SIDS, international organizations, and development agencies to share best practices, experiences, and knowledge related to the water-energy nexus.

43. We call on the UN system and other international partners to facilitate capacity-building initiatives, training programs, and technical exchanges to strengthen local expertise. We appeal for the world to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C, above pre-industrial levels, with no overshoot to avoid crossing multiple tipping points. We call for the urgent implementation of the decisions adopted at COP27 in *Sharm-El-Sheikh* for concrete steps towards the operationalisation of the new funding arrangements for responding to loss and damage by COP28.

E. Forging a Path to Empowerment, Equity, Inclusion, and Human Security

44. We believe our human and social capital is one of our most precious wealth, and we commit to cherish, preserve and leverage it to further progress towards resilience and sustainable development, including using the full potential of women, youth and vulnerable populations while ensuring the full enjoyment of their rights.

45. To strengthen the resilience of our social and human capital and the ability of our population to cope with increased social, environmental and economic shocks, we will continue to support sustainable social protection systems, reduce poverty and address inequalities.

46. Due to our structural and inherent constraints, we rely heavily on imports to respond to our food and energy needs. In a context of multiple global crises, achieving food and energy security remains a major challenge. We aim to address these issues by promoting local production of both food and energy, and foster consumption patterns better aligned with local capacities.

47. We commit to ensuring universal access to quality primary healthcare, while improving health preparedness to better cope with future epidemics, pandemics and non-communicable diseases by promoting healthy lifestyles and preventive care. We need assistance in capacity building and upgrading infrastructure and equipment, including in establishing AIS regional pharmaceutical procurement centre.

48. We acknowledge that access to quality education, vocational training, and lifelong learning is critical to meeting the 2030 Agenda and beyond. Recognizing the pivotal role of youth in shaping the future of (SIDS) and their unique potential as catalysts for sustainable development, we, hereby encourage to establish a University Academy and Program for Youth in alignment with the SAMOA Pathway. This dedicated initiative seeks to empower young people in SIDS to become active agents of change by providing them with enhanced educational opportunities, skill-building, and leadership training. We call for revitalisation of the University Consortium for Small Island Developing States to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by these vulnerable nations and to pool their expertise, research capabilities and resources. This collective effort that would enable the development and implementation of targeted the University Consortium for SIDS would strengthen the global response to responses to the challenges faced by nations, promoting their sustainable development, and enhancing their resilience. in the face of a rapidly changing world, through trans-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research. We encourage mobility of scholars among SIDS universities and mutual recognition of certificates.

49. We commit to leave no one behind, by consistently investing in women and youth empowerment, ensuring inclusion of the most vulnerable groups, including persons living in extreme poverty, the disabled, children, elderly, especially in a context of ageing population in most SIDS, through specific, targeted, well-funded policies and programs.

50. We reaffirm our determination to address public health, safety and social problems resulting from substance abuse and commit to safeguard our communities, especially children and youth. We commit to implementing effective and practical primary prevention measures such as the setting up of a dedicated observatory on substance abuse and provide accurate information about the risks associated with substance abuse and promoting skills and opportunities for healthy lifestyles,

51. We recognise that most SIDS are experiencing worsening freshwater scarcity as a result of various anthropogenic pressures and the effects of climate change which will have far-reaching consequences for the sustainable development of SIDS.

52. Our special circumstances as SIDS have shaped unique cultures, profoundly anchored in each of us islanders. In the AIS region, culture has proven a strategic sector for countries to foster economic diversification, promote livelihoods and decent work for all. We will improve the professionalization of the cultural sector through education and training in cultural and heritage management and in specific domains of the creative industries. We call for support for the establishment for a SIDS repository of cultural identity, knowledge and traditions that reinforce regional collaboration and mutual understanding.

53. We recognize that to ensure no one is left behind, we should focus on creating an inclusive digital society, and the need for AIS SIDS to implement initiatives at all levels for the preparation of human resources in this field of science and technology, and to promote the interest of young people in scientific studies. We call for Governments and the international community to provide digital access for all, and promote equal access to digital connectivity and devices. We will also ensure digital literacy for all, including by rallying the digitally enabled to help the digitally less-abled by developing and strengthening their national science, technology and innovation systems.

54. We call upon the international community and the United Nations System and International Financial Institutions to support the efforts of the countries of the AIS SIDS to transfer, capacity building and financing through new, additional and predictable resources in relation to the needs of our region, in accordance with national legislation.

55. We understand the importance of harnessing the potential of Artificial Intelligence, as well as the risks attached to it. Given its importance for the future of humanity, we demand to be part of the debate on the future of Artificial Intelligence, and to benefit from its potential through technology transfer and strategic partnership, as a matter of global justice.

56. We note the potential risk of the misuse of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, while recognizing their potential in preventing and combating the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes, and we stress the need to enhance coordination and cooperation among States in combating the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes, including by providing technical assistance to AIS SIDS to improve national legislation and frameworks and build the capacity of national authorities to deal with such use in all its forms, including its prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution.

F. Strengthening Institutional and Statistical Capacity

57. We recognize that the collection of robust and disaggregated data can strengthen the provision of basic services to AIS SIDS and support effective governance and decision-making processes. Notwithstanding, we note with concern that AIS SIDS face significant challenges in data collection and analysis, in terms of human, technological and institutional capacity. In this regard, we stress the need to foster better data understanding, use and generation through, *inter alia*, the exchange of best practices and expertise, technology transfer, educational and training programmes for disaster risk reduction, economic growth, sustainable development, and climate change adaptation.

58. We note that enhanced policy coherence across sustainable development, climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction, resilience building can accelerate implementation of the programme of action for SIDS. We express concern that gaps in the collection of disaster loss and risk data, including data disaggregated by income, sex, age and disability, are barriers to the development of inclusive multi-sectoral development strategies.

59. We recognize the need to sharing best practices data in order to facilitate SIDS peer-to-peer learning, and better monitoring and evaluation of implementation.

60. We note that artificial intelligence and other technological developments present opportunities to fill critical data gaps. We recognize that artificial intelligence models must be trained on adequate amounts of SIDS-specific data to produce credible and reliable statistics.

61. We call on the UN system and other international partners to consolidate and coordinate various data platforms and data-related initiatives in order to facilitate ease of use and access for AIS SIDS, and the need to establish a mechanism to address the data challenges of our region. We welcome the proposal to establish a SIDS data hub at the 4th SIDS Conference that would include capacity building at national and regional level. In this regard, we acknowledge the data platform created by UNDP.

G. From Vulnerability to a more Resilient Future

62. We recall the SIDS Partnerships Framework and the work of the United Nations Steering Committee on SIDS Partnerships, including in monitoring the progress of existing partnerships and encouraging the launch of new, genuine, and durable partnerships. We acknowledge that there have been some positive impacts of partnerships on beneficiaries such as governments and communities, on human resource, capacity building, the environment and enhanced knowledge sharing, including information, data and improved coordination.

63. We welcome the SIDS Partnerships Award, which recognises and rewards the most noteworthy partnerships with SIDS.

64. We recognize that the Mid-term review of the SAMOA Pathway in 2019, revealed some partnership challenges faced by SIDS in the AIS region including *inter alia* inadequate data and statistics for monitoring and evaluation, digital information and infrastructure, sustainable and predictable financing, and capacity building. We acknowledge that governments should have clear articulation of national priorities to enable north- south, south- south, triangular and SIDS- SIDS partnerships at global, regional and national levels including with the private sector and other stakeholder engagement are needed to address these challenges, and call for scaled up approaches for our region.

65. We will support the digitalization of governance and public services, e-administration, e-Government, e-health, distance learning, among others, to improve efficiency, quality, and accessibility of these services, by investing in infrastructure, equipment and skills, and building strategic partnerships with SIDS and other partners, including to jointly create or procure digital solutions, and build capacities for the optimal use of open source digital tools.

66. We commit to strengthening the intra-SIDS cooperation to leverage the benefits of STI. We will explore the establishment of a Technology Bank for AIS SIDS to foster SIDS-SIDS cooperation.

67. We look forward to the elaboration of a global digital compact, which should outline concrete actions to harness digital technologies to bridge the digital divides and accelerate the achievements of the SDGs.

H. AIS Coordination Mechanism

68. The meeting agreed that a coordination mechanism is crucial to support the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway in the AIS region. We recommend the holding of a high-level meeting of the AIS region to discuss the modalities for such a mechanism and we request the Permanent Representatives of the AIS region in New York to prepare for the meeting and exchange views on promoting regional cooperation among AIS members.