Pacific SIDS Regional Preparatory Meeting
16 - 18 August 2023
Nuku'alofa, Tonga

Roundtable 6: Improving Partnerships around technology and digital economy in Pacific SIDS

17 August 2023, 16:15-18:00 hrs

Background note

Introduction

The SAMOA Pathway further noted that empowered, genuine, and durable partnerships are based on mutual collaboration and ownership, trust, alignment, harmonization, respect, results orientation, accountability and transparency and that political will is required to undertake and implement long-term, predictable commitments. Partnerships in all their forms, regardless of size and economic value, should be utilized, enhanced and strengthened to ensure the meaningful engagement of various actors (including local authorities, civil society and non-governmental organizations, foundations, the private sector and international financial institutions) and should work to achieve the SIDS vision of self-reliance and to cooperate in the implementation of national policies and to monitor and ensure the full implementation of pledges and commitments through partnerships.

The SIDS Partnership Framework was formally established in December 2015 by General Assembly resolution 70/202. Guided by a member States driven Steering Committee, the framework has ensured that SIDS partnerships have remained high on the UN's agenda and provided a multi-stakeholder platform for reviewing progress made by SIDS partnerships, the launch of new partnerships, and for sharing of good practices and lessons learned among all stakeholders, on an annual basis. Partnerships become much more effective when there is an enabling environment that can foster collaboration across all societal sectors, including policies to incentivize and support multi-stakeholder partnerships, capacity building efforts, financing to drive incentives for cross sectorial partnering, and platforms for brokering partnerships and engagement of all stakeholders.

There are a number of innovative partnerships established at the Pacific regional level to address some of the challenges Pacific SIDS face. For example, the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) was established by the Pacific Island Forum Leaders in 2017, a multi-stakeholder platform that coordinates and implements actions to enhance resilience to climate change and to address disaster risk reduction in line with the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP); the Pacific Climate Change Centre (PCCC),[1] the regional centre of excellence for climate change information, research and innovation hosted at SPREP, which is a partnership between Japan and Samoa; the Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility (PRIF), an initiative to address challenges on infrastructure

---

[1] Pacific Climate Change Centre, https://www.sprep.org/pacific-climate-change-centre

which is supported by the international partners; [2] the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus, entered into force in 2020, a landmark trade and development agreement that will raise living standards, create jobs and increase exports from Pacific Island countries, while lowering barriers and providing greater certainty for businesses operating in the Pacific; and the Pacific E-Commerce Initiative by Pacific Islands Forum, a multi-stakeholder partnership that supports Forum Island Countries to engage in digital trade.

This roundtable will examine how the Pacific region can remain competitive in a market that is focusing more on technology and digitalization, including opportunities for enhancing partnerships to meaningfully address common challenges in the digital economy sector as well to stimulate novel solutions to local challenges, encourage start-ups, and boost private sector engagement in sustainable development. The session will also explore how we can nurture an enabling environment that is supportive of partnership building, as well as how the SIDS Partnership Framework can be strengthened to support meaningful and effective partnerships in the Pacific. [3]

Challenges and perspectives

Effective partnering is about leveraging and optimizing the combination of available resources to achieve mutually agreed objectives and goals. 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, geographic distances and small populations, SIDS face an extraordinary gap between available resources (natural, human, and financial) and the needs of their populations.

An analysis on partnerships conducted for the Mid-Term Review of the SAMOA Pathway, identified several challenges around the development of partnerships in the Pacific region, including lack of sustainable financing, limited capacity (human and institutional), weak institutional, legal and governance structures, absence of enabling environment dictated by the national social and political context, lack of enabling conditions for the participation of all stakeholders in partnerships, difficulties in ensuring that the right people with the right expertise are involved in each partnership, and lack of trust between partners.[4]

Digital technologies and e-commerce have significant potential to facilitate the participation of SIDS in global and regional markets. They play a pivotal role in enhancing resilience and facilitating robust post-disaster recovery. However, the progress of the digital economy within SIDS is in its early stages

---

[2] Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, https://www.theprif.org/our-partners

[3] Member states have decided, through General Assembly resolution 77/245, that the 4th International Conference on SIDS will assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps and challenges in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the SAMOA Pathway, including the Small Island Developing States Partnership Framework.

[4] UNDESA 2019, *Partnerships for SIDS*, https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/24591SIDS_Partnerships_May_2019_web.pdf

of development, as they face challenges to digital transformation such as lack of access to affordable infrastructure and information and communication technology (ICT). The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing limitations within the e-commerce ecosystem of SIDS, such as inadequate legal framework on digital economy and lack of capacity of governments in regulating it.

The Pacific SIDS have experienced a concerning decline in aid compared to other SIDS regions. The decline in funding for technology has made it more difficult for these countries to develop and implement ICT-enabled solutions to their structural challenges, as well as to connect to the global economy and participate in the digital revolution. It could be vital to engage in discussions with key development partners to gain deeper insights into the underlying reasons and reevaluate future expectations for sustainable support. The Pacific region also has witnessed substantial stagnation in terms of public-private partnerships for infrastructure. To address this issue, strengthening of intra-SIDS partnerships in the areas of aid, investment, trade, knowledge exchange, and technology transfers could hold the key to progress. Several initiatives are currently underway to promote climate-smart trade and investment within the Pacific SIDS, such as:

- The Pacific Roadmap for Economic Development (PRED), a regional development strategy that aims to promote economic growth and development in the Pacific Islands. PRED includes several technology and trade-related initiatives.
- Technical assistance to countries in Asia and the Pacific provided by the United Nations system including programs that promote technology, e-commerce across SIDS, such as the Trade Facilitation Pro-gramme for the Pacific Islands.

Recommendations for action

The Pacific region is in a position to facilitating extensive discussions and fostering heightened collective action that are essential to harnessing the potential of governmental, non-governmental, and private sector partnerships, driving forward sustainable and inclusive growth.

- Create policy frameworks that build an enabling environment to initiate and sustain partnerships in the areas of digital economy and technology innovation, including through directives and circulars that guide and encourage collaboration with stakeholders, to ensure that such collaboration is institutionalized and consistently practiced.
- Establish platforms that convene stakeholders around sustainable development priority areas and foster dialogue, knowledge exchange, and support the creation and implementation of partnerships for the Pacific region, with a view of facilitating aid, investment, trade and technology transfers.
- Create inclusive mechanisms for multi-sector engagement through round tables, commissions, or expert panels to address specific challenges and to inform decision-making processes.

- Provide funding and financial instruments to support collaboration and partnership initiatives that incentivize collaboration and help stakeholders implement their ideas and projects.
- Foster collaboration through public-private partnerships, where government entities, multi-lateral development banks and private sector organizations work together to achieve common goals, including fostering the innovation and digitalization.
- Consistent capacity building efforts are required, especially within governments, to address turnover of staff and ensure continuous knowledge transfer.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation framework on partnerships at the regional level.

Guiding questions

- How can we effectively leverage governmental, non-governmental, and private sector partnerships to advance digital transformation in the Pacific region?
- What are the enabling factors and policies that will help scale up collaborations on digitalization and technology transfer through regional frameworks at the national level?
- What capacity development efforts are needed to develop, implement, and sustain effective multi-stakeholder partnerships, including monitoring and evaluation?
- How can we support and sustain inclusive multi-stakeholder engagement to meaningfully inform decision making processes, including on digitalization and digital economies in the Pacific region?