## Caribbean SIDS Regional Preparatory Meeting
## 8-10 August 2023
## Kingstown, St. Vincent & The Grenadines

### Session 4:

### Building institutional and statistical capacity to support informed decision-making in Caribbean SIDS

### 9 August 2023, 11:00 AM-12.45 PM

## Background Note

### Introduction

The SAMOA Pathway and the 2030 Agenda highlights the need to build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Without effective, accountable, and inclusive public service delivery, there will be little progress in realizing the SDGs or in mitigating the impacts of external shocks and stressors . Public institutions therefore have a lead role in ensuring that a country's development goals are realized..

Data plays a crucial role in supporting public institutions to systematically monitor and review progress, and in supporting planning and decision-making at all levels.. The SAMOA Pathway called for strengthening availability and accessibility of data and statistical systems in SIDS in accordance with national priorities and circumstances. It also called for enhancing the management of complex data systems, including geospatial data platforms, by launching new partnership initiatives or scaling up existing initiatives.

To date, it is evident that: -
- public institutions in Caribbean SIDS are still not well equipped to address the challenges related to SDG implementation or the multiple intersecting crises they face. The Caribbean public sector faces persistent challenges in delivering change and transformation. Challenges are also experienced *inter alia* in changing mindsets,

maintaining a professional public sector work force, developing efficient processes, and in ensuring the right skillsets are in place to deliver. Weak infrastructure, especially ICT infrastructure continues to plague many Caribbean SIDS.

- National statistical systems in Caribbean SIDS remain persistently under-resourced, leading to ongoing challenges in data collection and management. Limited capacity and resources pose significant barriers, impeding the development of robust data management systems. Weak institutional frameworks exacerbate data fragmentation across government agencies and sectors, hindering comprehensive insights. Additionally, small populations in SIDS make meaningful data disaggregation difficult, limiting the effectiveness of targeted policies, and the lack of standardization in data collection methodologies and standards across sectors reduces comparability and trend analysis.

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. Indeed, reducing vulnerability and building resilience to external shocks also requires competent public institutions that are backed by comprehensive data systems and are equipped with sufficient expertise, resources, and tools to deal adequately with the mandates under their authority.

Addressing these governance and data challenges requires commitment and collaboration between governments, regional organizations, development partners, and civil society. Efforts should be directed towards building robust governance structures, investing in data infrastructure, and enhancing the capacity of institutions and individuals to effectively manage, analyze, and utilize data for sustainable development in Caribbean SIDS.

## Paradigm Shifts Are Necessary

In the decade since the adoption of the SAMOA Pathway, several significant developments have highlighted the urgent need for transformative changes. Some of these developments include:

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1. The 2030 Agenda which emphasizes the need to build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels, in line with Goal 16 and has placed in sharp focus, the need for evidence-based decision which requires more, better and faster data, the magnitude of which exceeds the capacity of most national statistical offices (NSOs) in the Caribbean sub-region.

2. The rapidly accelerating development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

3. The significant progress made within the UN System to advance a Multi-dimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI), under the aegis of High-Level Panel on the Development of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index. Caribbean SIDS will need to significantly improve their statistical systems in order to meet the data demands of the MVI. The Interim Report of the High-Level Panel on the MVI noted that Member States should reflect further on how to address the data challenges and needs of developing countries that will be required to ensure the proper use of the MVI. Additionally, the Voluntary Country Resilience Profile (VCRP) elements of the MVI framework will be heavily data intensive and will require dedicated capacity support.

4. The issue of improved access to climate finance in part depends on the ability of SIDS to have robust data systems which will make the case for the need for financing from the Green Climate Fund and other funding entities, to address the impacts of global climate change that are experienced on a magnified level in SIDS.

5. The emergence of big data and AI developments offers significant opportunities to address the limited statistical capacities in SIDS. These technologies hold the potential to revolutionize data collection and analysis, leading to more informed decision-making. However, a pressing concern persists regarding the absence of comprehensive policies, governance structures, and regulations governing these areas in SIDS. Addressing this gap is essential to ensure responsible and ethical use of these technologies, safeguarding data privacy, and maximizing the benefits they can bring to support sustainable development in the region.

## Recommendations for Action: What's Needed to accelerate action and progress

The following measures could help to direct the process of transformational change in the public sector in Caribbean SIDS:

- **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

- **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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **Capacities for transformational change by promoting new mindsets in public service, fostering innovation, and leveraging digital technologies are critical for policy 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.

With respect to strengthened statistical systems, in the short to medium term, it is crucial to prioritize a set of actions to drive meaningful progress forward. These include:

1. Prioritize indicator development based on local realities, while proactively seeking efficiency improvements through exploring new partnerships, adopting emerging methodologies, and leveraging new data sources.
2. Foster collaboration and coordination with academia, civil society and other partners to promote harmonisation of standards, concepts and definitions, and to improve the periodicity and scope of official statistics.
3. Expand use of spatial data and satellite imagery, and the exploration of big data and data mining which may require restructuring of NSOs to respond to new reality. This will have to be accompanied by review of necessary skill sets, expanded recruitment, and staffing to accommodate change.

4. Scale up use of ICTs as a tool for strengthening capacity-building opportunities, improve accessibility to information to drive policy development taking into account SIDS local content, vulnerability to cyberattacks and the need to respect size and cultural diversity in cyberspace[1].
5. Enhance intra-regional, inter-regional and international collaboration between academic research institutions and think tanks, including establishment of new research chairs for SIDS priority issues focusing on strengthening information for decision-making in SIDS.

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[1] UNESCO

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**Proposed Guiding Questions for the Discussions**

1. What are the key institutional capacity gaps and challenges experienced by Caribbean SIDS in collecting and producing data and information to support Caribbean SIDS development?
2. What are the best practices at the national/regional level to address some of these gaps and challenges and what enabling conditions would be required to scale up these initiatives at the broader SIDS level?
3. What are some of possible transformative interventions that could yield positive returns to Caribbean SIDS in addressing their challenges, and who could be the key partners and stakeholders who could help drive success in the short to medium term?
4. What can be done to enable SIDS-SIDS cooperation to address this issue in Caribbean?