

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

Session 5

**Innovative actions to stimulate transformative development in
Caribbean SIDS**

9 August 2023, 1:15 PM – 2:45 PM

Background Note

Executive Summary

This session will discuss opportunities in Caribbean SIDS to maximize sustainable economic growth, by fostering scientific knowledge and technological innovation and by capitalizing on the renowned cultural creativity and artistic excellence of the region. The session will offer perspectives from a diverse range of experts in digitalization, innovation, entrepreneurship, and the creative industries. Though it will take a clear-eyed look at the Caribbean’s structural vulnerabilities and ongoing challenges, the roundtable will focus on solutions—the ways to build human and institutional capacity in science, technology, and innovation, and to maximize the impact and reach of the region’s rich creative culture.

Introduction:

As highlighted by the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, science, technology, and innovation (STI) are essential enablers and drivers of sustainable development in SIDS. Building capacity in STI in Caribbean SIDS will empower citizens, particularly youth, to generate economic growth and livelihoods, improve social wellbeing, and address environmental challenges. The impact of STI will be maximized when the

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knowledge and technologies are locally relevant and undergirded with supportive policies, partnerships, and infrastructure.

The SAMOA Pathway also recognizes culture and sport as key drivers of sustainable development and calls on governments and others to “develop cultural and creative industries, including tourism.” It is worth noting that while tourism remains a pillar of Caribbean economies, the Covid-19 pandemic and the worsening impact of climate change highlight the need to diversify, across the economy in general and within the creative industries specifically. In this regard, other aspects of the cultural and creative industries, including music, film, fashion, gaming, and others are promising areas of growth.

To achieve the 2030 Agenda and the objectives outlined in the SAMOA Pathway and its antecedents, governments, development partners and other stakeholders must invest in and foster STI capacity and digital infrastructure and related industries as well as the creative economy.

Paradigm Shifts Are Necessary: Interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs

“Science, innovation and new technologies are crucial for the development of the economy and society: they have become fundamental tools for transformation of productive structures, rational use of natural resources, health care, food, education and other social needs”. The Caribbean has prided itself on being a knowledge-based society, investing heavily in education as a pathway for modernization, social cohesion and fulfilment. This pathway is all the more important in a knowledge based global economy and in the wake of the increasingly frequent and everchanging polycrises characterizing the world today with their impacts on SIDs in particular.

Currently, the economies of the Caribbean SIDS are anchored in tourism, agriculture, light manufacturing, and mineral extraction, and these industries will likely continue to dominate in many countries in the coming decades. With worsening climate change impacts, the need to safeguard rich but fragile Caribbean environmental ecosystems, and the lingering effect of the Covid-19 pandemic (and threat of future pandemics), Caribbean governments and

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societies recognize that innovation and digitization are imperative to safeguard development gains.

Notwithstanding the importance of STI, Latin America and the Caribbean lag in their investments in science, technology and innovation. And SIDS in particular remain among the most disadvantaged countries in terms of the digital divide, limited financial and human resources, inadequate research infrastructure, and weak STI systems. Caribbean SIDS, like other SIDS, also face significant lack of STI data and indicators, which affects implementation of national development strategies and plans, with additional negative impacts on effective STI policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Increasing connectivity and knowledge sharing through digitalization could be key for sustainable development, and this can be accelerated through partnerships, international and regional cooperation, increased investment, and capacity-building initiatives. The United Nations Secretary-General reiterates this in his recent *Secretary-General's Report on Progress Toward the SDGs: Special Edition*. The report calls on the international community to build a global enabling environment for the SDGs, including by revolutionizing science, technology, and innovation capacities and exchanges. Additionally, the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report underscores that transformation to sustainable pathways should be rooted in science that is multidisciplinary, equitably and inclusively produced, openly shared, widely trusted and embraced, and 'socially robust' – relevant to the society where it is being used.

To achieve this vision, greater investments in science, technology and innovation and the establishment of an enabling policy and regulatory framework are needed. This requires integrating science, technology and innovation into productive and social development policies and budgets, and creating incentives for the private sector to enhance investments in applied science and experimental development and investments in digital development. STI has the potential to bring solutions, whether in health, social cohesion, disaster

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preparedness and response, protecting ecosystems, or elsewhere. STI can also support productivity in adjacent key economic sectors, such as the tourism, agriculture and fishery sectors.

Economic development rooted in STI and the creative industries such as large-scale literary, art and music festivals as well as film and game production will have multiple co-benefits for social wellbeing and environmental sustainability, giving rise to meaningful livelihoods that are financially lucrative and that can nourish the sense of self and connection to place and identity. By building capacity in STI, SIDS governments will give citizens and businesses the tools needed to find solutions to ecological challenges and to decouple economic development from environmental degradation. It can inspire entrepreneurship and can have a particularly significant impact on the youth of the Caribbean region.

Regional and global resources can help to promote strategic and sustainable growth. For example, the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) established by the 2030 Agenda aims to enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation for access to STI. The Saint Augustine Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (STACIE) at the University of the West Indies funds research and offers a range of services and support to young people in STI related fields. And the Cultural and Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF), of the Caribbean Development Bank, was established in 2017 to support businesses and initiatives rooted in the creativity that helps to define the Caribbean region.

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

Stimulating investments in STI and facilitating technology transfer are essential for catalysing technological advancements that address local needs and strengthen countries' resilience. Investing in the creative economy is another key component of a sustainable Caribbean future. Recommendations include the following.

- Promote collaborations, partnerships, knowledge sharing and networking for STI-based solutions and sustainable technologies tailored to local contexts and needs.

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- Increase investment in STI and support the development of human capabilities, by strengthening research institutions, providing training opportunities for scientists and innovators, and fostering entrepreneurship and innovation, with focus on gender and youth.
- Adopt inclusive STI strategies that address Caribbean SIDS challenges, and build capacities to design, monitor, and implement STI policies and plans.
- Foster Open Science by promoting Open Science policies and platforms and encouraging information-sharing and collaborations, in line with UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science.
- Ensure multi-stakeholder engagement and participation in STI activities, including young researchers, entrepreneurs, associations and networks, civil society, and non-governmental actors.
- Support women and local and indigenous knowledge communities and promote gender equality in STI, particularly in STEM education, entrepreneurship, funding research and innovation grants and schemes.
- Consider the role of the Diaspora in providing support for research and development and in encouraging business innovations.
- Assess the impact of artificial intelligence on Caribbean societies.
- Invest in creative industries, including by funding the Cultural and Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF) of the Caribbean Development Bank.
- Promote cross-pollination across sectors, such as festival tourism, artisanal agriculture and food tourism, STI for sustainable fisheries, STI for creative industries like film and game production, and others.

Proposed Guiding Questions for the Discussions

What should priority STI investments be for the region and what actions can be taken to incentivize increased private sector investments in research and development.

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- How do we build a workforce able to participate in the technology based global economy?
- Is our education system fit for building an innovative, science-based workforce of the future. What examples are out there and where is reform most required.
- What role should regional cooperation play in the promotion of STI, and in building regional digital technology and regulating it?
- Cultural creativity – How do we strengthen our cultural economies and industries in an increasingly globalized community?
- How can we capitalize on our cultural monuments and cultural identity? How do we market our national products for the local, regional and international markets?