ECOSOC Partnership Forum 2024

SIDE EVENT SUMMARY

Summary of Side Event "Resilient prosperity: Strategic Partnerships to Advancing Science, Technology, and Innovation in Small Island Developing States"

30 Jan 2024, 1:15pm-2:30pm

Background on the event

Stimulating Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) sectors within SIDS is crucial to drive a transformative shift in their technological development and is critical in achieving their overall sustainable development objectives. The technological advancements are vital for equipping SIDS with the necessary tools to address the challenges posed by climate change in sectors like tourism and agriculture-fishery. The fourth International Conference on SIDS (SIDS4) will be held in May 2024 in Antigua and Barbuda under the theme "Charting a Course to Resilient Prosperity." In the outcome document of their inter-regional preparatory meeting for SIDS4 (the "Praia Declaration"), SIDS recognized that science, technology and innovation are essential enablers and drivers for sustainable development. SIDS have called on the international community and the United Nations system to (i) assist them in developing national roadmaps for STI and to support the building of their national capacities for developing and utilizing the state-of-the-art technologies; and (ii) support them in leveraging emerging science and technology, including artificial intelligence, for their national sustainable development. Ensuring universal and meaningful connectivity is critical in this regard. In addition, promoting home-grown innovation and fostering entrepreneurship will help to provide sustainable livelihoods, especially for young people.

Key Issues discussed

- Advancing Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) in SIDS is a key enabler to achieve sustainable development. However, there is a need to address technology gap and digital divide to ensure universal and meaningful connectivity and tackle inequality.
- STI, particularly Artificial Intelligence, can address SIDS' challenges, but there are risks associated with the state-of-the-art technologies, such as lack of control, requiring policy framework for safe use. Some SIDS have taken steps to develop STI policies. For example, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines moved forward in the final stages of the development of a National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy with the assistance of ECLAC; Singapore developed the National AI Strategy; and Jamaica established a new ministry responsible for digital transformation and skills, and formed an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Task Force for the development of a National AI Policy.
- Key SIDS partnerships were highlighted, such as: at the global level, ITU's Partner2Connect Digital Coalition and the Smart Islands Initiative which foster meaningful connectivity and digital transformation; the Digital Public Goods Alliance that facilitate use of and investment in digital public goods; the Global Centre for Technology,

Innovation and Sustainable Development (a joint initiative by Singapore and UNDP) aimed at identifying and co-creating technological solutions for sustainable development; and Ireland's second Strategy for Partnerships with SIDS which provides a framework for long-term engagement with SIDS. At the regional level, CARICOM Single ICT Space promotes collaboration, innovation, and economic development through ICT within the Caribbean region. At the national level, SkyEye Pacific Limited developed the Maua app in partnership with organizations for persons with disabilities and women in business. It is a tool for local artisans and farmers to participate in the global market, which was pivotal during the COVID-19 pandemic; and Barbados with International Finance Corporation implement a project on Hypervisor, a tool that aggregates data from range of sources on potential climate-related hazards across Barbados, and informs policy, planning, and investment needs for future development.

- Some platforms that promote partnerships in SIDS were noted: the SIDS Partnership Framework, the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (UN IGF), and the Caribbean Internet Governance Forum (CIGF).
- Financing and investment in energy and digital infrastructure and early warning systems are key for SIDS' resilient future, and to this end, public-private partnership is essential.
- The Global Digital Compact is a critical process to ensure that AI governance is developed at the multilateral level and with inputs from a diverse membership. This process should be in line with the SIDS4 process.
- Promotion of digital public goods initiatives such as open-source software, open data, open AI models, open standards, and open content that adhere to privacy and other applicable laws and best practices help attain the Sustainable Development Goals. Digital public goods are essential in unlocking the full potential of digital technologies and data to attain the SDGs, particularly in low and middle-income countries.

Key recommendations for action

- Provide capacity building and training, STEM education, and skills development programs to enhance the digital skills required for technology sustainability, with a special emphasis on gender equality and youth inclusion.
- Build strategic partnerships to provide innovative financing for digital and energy infrastructure, facilitate trade and connectivity, and strengthen institutional capacity. These partnerships need to be operationalized domestically, regionally, and globally, engaging communities, civil society organizations, academia, and the private sector.
- Facilitate technology transfer and knowledge sharing between SIDS and other countries, regions, and international organizations, and establish partnerships for the exchange of best practices, research findings, and innovative solutions in areas relevant to sustainable development, such as renewable energy technologies, climate-smart agriculture, and marine conservation.
- Establish robust policy frameworks to incentivize innovation and support the private sector.