

Concept Note for development of a SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap (2024-2034)

Draft of 21 April 2024

1. Background

Governments of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and their development partners have developed a new joint 10-year agenda for sustainable development - The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS): A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity - which will be launched at the Fourth International Conference on SIDS (SIDS4) to be held May 27-30, 2024, in Antigua and Barbuda. The theme of the SIDS4 conference will be “Charting the course towards resilient prosperity” which will launch the inter-governmentally agreed, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented political Agenda. It is critical that the perspectives and priorities of civil society in SIDS and their role in implementation are fully considered in implementing the new SIDS Agenda to deliver an inclusive whole of society approach to sustainable development in SIDS.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) across the various SIDS regions contributed statements and positions during the process of development of the ABAS, including through contributing to online consultations, participating in regional preparatory meetings, and making statements at the two meetings of the Preparatory Committee. CSOs will also be engaging at SIDS4 to continue to contribute to discussions on critical sustainable development issues and position themselves as partners to deliver the new 10-year SIDS sustainable development agenda.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and other global agreements to which SIDS are signatories, as well as in regional and national agreements, policies and plans reflect the importance of, commitment to and requirement for meaningful engagement of civil society to deliver sustainable development in SIDS. Despite this, the potential of SIDS civil society to contribute to sustainable development is not being fully leveraged in response to the complex and pressing issues facing SIDS. CSOs are seldom viewed as legitimate partners and expressly or meaningfully involved in decision-making or development and implementation of policies, programmes and initiatives. The roles they are already playing in delivering sustainable development are not fully recognised nor valued. Gaps also remain in institutional frameworks and practices which need to be enhanced to better enable operation of and action by the civil society sector. There is also an urgent need to provide tailored capacity building and financing to more effectively support outputs from civil society.

Section II of the ABAS on What SIDS Want, 25(ii) commits to, “Increasing public participation and consultation, promoting civic education and engaging civil society organizations to actively and meaningfully participate in policy and budget decisions, including by establishing citizen participation mechanisms and creating spaces for inclusive dialogue.” In Section J(i) the international community commits to supporting SIDS Partnerships with, “New, innovative and bold approaches to partnership based on mutual collaboration and ownership, trust, alignment, harmonization, respect, results orientation, accountability, transparency, including with relevant stakeholders, and cooperation that leverages a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach,” including by, “Expanding and diversifying partnerships with local authorities, civil society and non-governmental organizations, foundations, the private sector, academia and international financial institutions to implement the ABAS.”

Implementation of the ABAS, therefore, must include a strong commitment to inclusive and effective partnerships with civil society and provide clear pathways to deliver a whole of society approach. Implementation of the ABAS must also recognise the important roles played by civil society to deliver on specific sustainable development priorities in SIDS, and deliver key actions needed to better enable and support civil society to effectively accomplish these roles.

As host of SIDS4, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda has invited development of a complementary SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap which will help guide civil society engagement in a whole of society approach to deliver the ABAS. This provides an important opportunity for civil society in SIDS to mobilise and shape a comprehensive framework to support their work.

2. Purpose of Action Plan and Roadmap

The SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap will outline a strategic framework to support civil society's role in delivering the ABAS. The SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap will be aligned with and complementary to the politically agreed inter-governmental document. It will:

- Outline essential roles which civil society is already carrying out, can and should undertake in delivering the ABAS
- Identify key sustainable development priorities which civil society can help to deliver
- Recommend priorities for governments, the UN system and development partners to strengthen enabling institutional frameworks, practices and partnerships and better support civil society in SIDS to play meaningful and effective roles in delivering sustainable development

The SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap will therefore provide a framework and concrete recommendations for action by civil society in SIDS, as well as action by SIDS governments, the UN system and development partners to better enable and support civil society to deliver on this ambition.

3. Scope of Action Plan and Roadmap

The SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap will encompass all SIDS and will focus on supporting civil society in SIDS.

This is distinct from important roles played by international non-governmental and non-profit actors outside of SIDS which also support SIDS' sustainable development and, along with SIDS governments and development partners, need to enable and support civil society in SIDS.

Broadly, civil society can be understood as any collective of citizens operating outside of the public (governmental) or private (business) sector which share some common vision, values, mission, purpose, commitment, or collaboration to achieve specific shared goals. This, therefore, encompasses diverse groupings of organisations and individuals (see Box 1) which can be formal or informal; structured organisations, loose groups or organic and evolving movements; of different forms, sizes, and functions; and working at different levels from local to global.¹

¹ VanDyck, C. K., 2017. *Concept and definition of civil society sustainability*. Washington, D.C.: Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS). Available at: https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/170630_VanDyck_CivilSocietySustainability_Web.pdf.

This full range of civil society in SIDS is vital to the whole of society of approach, playing key roles in sustainable development, including in:

- Raising awareness, understanding and knowledge
- Building capacity
- Representing and amplifying the voices and needs of vulnerable, minorities and marginalised stakeholders (e.g., women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities)
- Contributing expertise and scientific, local and traditional knowledge, time and resources to development and implementation of policies, plans and initiatives
- Leveraging additional resources and implementing practical initiatives, including work on the ground supporting vulnerable and marginalised stakeholders
- Conducting research and developing innovations
- Advocating to influence change in policies and practices, including as allies to SIDS governments in global negotiations (e.g., the '1.5 to Stay Alive' campaign)
- Serving as 'watchdogs' to hold governments, private sector and others accountable

Civil society actors are central to advancing the sustainable development agenda and to supporting good governance within societies. A whole of society approach recognises meaningful engagement with civil society as fundamental to setting priorities, developing agreed paths and enabling collective action across sectors. A whole of society approach therefore embraces both formal and informal institutions in seeking agreement across society about policy goals and the means to achieve them.²

Box 1: Civil society types

- Non-profit organisations that are registered and have a clear structure and mission (membership-based or not)
- Informal groups, which are largely voluntary but come together around a common purpose (e.g., community groups)
- Professional and business associations (e.g., association of engineers, small business associations)
- Charities and foundations
- Faith-based, sports and cultural organisations
- Cooperatives and community based organizations
- Consumer organisations
- Social movements, including online communities with common interest, which can be organised or may be without formal structures
- Citizen activists
- Media associations and journalists networks
- Unions
- Academic and research institutes (e.g., universities)

4. Process for development of Action Plan and Roadmap

For credibility and relevance, development of the SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap must be led and owned by civil society in SIDS. Given the diversity of civil society across SIDS, and the absence of a formal representative network or structure across the SIDS regions to facilitate coordination, engagement of civil society in development of the Action Plan and Roadmap, the process will be facilitated by a few leading organisations and networks from each region. Representation across regions

² UNESCO, 2023. *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023: Partnerships and Cooperation for Water*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384655>

and the sectors and diversity across civil society is essential, bringing together existing networks and coalitions, including networks and coalitions engaging in SIDS4.

They will form a coordinating group and engage CSOs from their respective regions and coordinate regional input into a shared document.

Development of the document will draw on previous input submitted by SIDS civil society via SIDS4 UN platforms, the SIDS4 preparatory process, priorities documented in existing reports from the regions, and current consultative initiatives in SIDS regions, for example consultations in April 2024 by PIANGO to facilitate civil society input into the *Pacific 2050 Strategy* and *The Caribbean We Want* dialogues facilitated by CANARI over January-February 2024 as input into SIDS4.

Recognising the limited resources and timeframe available to develop a shared document, the proposed process and timeline are outlined below.

- **April 1-26:** Draft SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap developed based on existing documents outlining sustainable development priorities of civil society from the SIDS regions, including statements and comments submitted by civil society at Regional Preparatory Meetings, Preparatory Committee meetings and via the online consultations and considering the Outcome Document (Final): The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) - A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity
- **April 27:** Draft SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap circulated for review and input from civil society across the SIDS regions
- **April 28-May 12:** Meetings (virtual or in person) convened by various civil society partners with civil society in each region to facilitate discussion and input on the SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap
- **May 12:** Deadline for all civil society submissions
- **May 13-18:** Final draft document prepared to reflect civil society input and shared with CSOs
- **May 23-26:** Civil society discussions held on final draft at SIDS4 Special Events (SIDS Children and Youth Action Summit, SIDS Gender Equality Forum), other pre-events (e.g., Caribbean Civil Society Summit) and other meetings and informal gatherings
- **May 27:** Document finalised
- **May 29:** SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap launched at the [Civil Society Forum](#)
- **May 30:** Civil society representative/s present/s the SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap (2024-2034) in a Civil Society Declaration to the SIDS plenary on the final day of SIDS4, facilitated by the Government of Antigua and Barbuda

5. Proposed outline of Action Plan and Roadmap

- Introduction: background, purpose of the Action Plan and Roadmap and how it should be used and by whom, process for development
- Vision, goal, objectives
- Defining SIDS civil society and their roles
- Actions to better enable and support civil society's role in sustainable development in SIDS
- Priority areas for action by SIDS civil society (aligned as far as feasible to the 10-year agenda of the ABAS)
- Roadmap for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning

- High level recommendations on financing the Action Plan and Roadmap

A succinct document of 8-12 pages will be produced.

6. For more information

The SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap will be developed by SIDS civil society for SIDS civil society. For credibility and relevance, development of the SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap will be led and owned by civil society in SIDS. Given the diversity of civil society across SIDS, and the absence of a formal representative network of structure to facilitate coordination, engagement of civil society across the SIDS regions in development of the SIDS Civil Society Action Plan and Roadmap will be facilitated by a few leading organisations and networks from each region.

They will form a coordinating group and engage CSOs from their respective regions and coordinate regional input into a shared document. They invite participation from civil society colleagues across the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Seas (AIMS), Caribbean and Pacific regions. Support to this civil society-led and bottom-up initiative will be provided by SIDS governments and the UN system.

For more information please contact:

Caribbean region

Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI): sids4@canari.org

Integrated Health Outreach (IHO) - SIDS4 CSO Coalition: info@ihoab.com

Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Seas (AIS) region:

SIDS Youth AIMS Hub (SYAH): syah@syah.org , syah.cv@gmail.com

Development Indian Ocean Network (DION): TBC

Pacific region

Pacific Island Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO): siale@piango.org