

**Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4)  
27 – 30 May 2024, St. John’s, Antigua and Barbuda**

**Interactive Dialogue on “Investing in human capital: addressing health crises in small island developing States and building the potential of youth in small island developing States”**

**Thursday, 30 May 2024, 11.00 am**

**Interactive Dialogue Room, The American University of Antigua, Antigua and Barbuda**

**Short summary for Co-chairs**

Interactive Dialogue 5 on “Investing in human capital: addressing health crises in small island developing States and building the potential of youth in small island developing States“ was held on 30 May 2024. The Dialogue was co-chaired by H.E. Mr Jose Ulisses de Pina Correia e Silva, Prime Minister of Cabo Verde and H.E. Mr Patrice Gumbs, Minister Plenipotentiary of Sint Maarten (Kingdom of the Netherlands).

The fireside chat was moderated by Ms Cindy H. McCain, Executive Director of the World Food Programme and attended by Mr Vickram Bharrat, Minister of Natural Resources of Guyana, and Ms Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of UN ESCAP. The Panellists in the Dialogue were Baroness Patricia Scotland, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, and Ms Karuna Rana, Youth Advocate, Co-founder, AIS SIDS Youth Group.

Participants highlighted their deep concern regarding the confluence of crises and exogenous shocks affecting SIDS, the fragility of health and social protection systems, and rapidly ageing populations, which all restrict economic growth and the potential of younger generations. They also pointed to the increased threat of climate change and environmental degradation on the lives of the youth, and their lack of educational and employment opportunities.

The speakers called for multifaceted and holistic approaches to, and greater investments in, strengthening human capital and put forward tangible solutions across health, education, and employment.

On health, participants called for a strengthening of health systems, moving towards universal health coverage, and addressing burning issues including: the high burden of non-communicable diseases and mental health conditions, including key risk factors; improving maternal health, nutrition and food security; addressing climate-sensitive diseases; improving the climate-resilience of the health infrastructure; and strengthening health worker training, social protection and leadership. Other participants highlighted the need for greater investments in sexual and reproductive health services, and prevention of gender-based violence.

On education, many participants referred to the importance of ensuring quality education at all levels across all SIDS, harnessing the demographic dividend, including vocational and technical training programmes, digital education, teacher training, adult education, and life-long learning – which will enable a reduction in the number of unemployed, and strengthen economic resilience across SIDS.

On employment, investments are needed to create enriching employment opportunities, establish competitive industries, and leverage the natural resources of SIDS, including their ocean-based economies. Participants also called for dedicated efforts to prevent the migration of skilled workers and to minimize the brain drain by developing countries.

The meaningful engagement of the youth was noted by many as a key lever to enable them to become agents of change.

Participants also shared experiences about regional and national experiences to strengthen the human capital, including about national youth policies and empowerment initiatives, and programmes to strengthen gender equality. Many offered to share best practices and technologies through South-South and triangular cooperation while some called for a pooling of resources in SIDS regions to leverage local knowledge.

Many participants underscored the need for increased international financial support for strengthening human capital development in SIDS, including investments in innovative technologies and programmes. Examples of innovative tools included e-health programmes, telemedicine, digital learning programmes, and the use of nuclear technology to improve diagnosis of diseases.

The need for greater investments in the generation and collection of quality, disaggregated data across all areas of human capital was also cited as an urgent priority.