



Global Psychological Science: Charting A Course Towards SIDS Resilient Prosperity

The SIDS4 conference theme focuses on resilient prosperity. Achieving this means SIDS must cultivate and sustain the conditions and circumstances that will yield positive outcomes amidst a myriad of vulnerabilities in an increasingly complex and changing world. Psychological science offers valuable insights and tools to address these sustainable development challenges, and contribute to recognising the invaluable strengths of SIDS.

The 2023 Bridgetown Declaration on NCDs and Mental Health, emerging out of the SIDS Ministerial conference, recognised challenges to well-being as part of an existential threat to health and development in SIDS which is further exacerbated by the ongoing climate crisis. Nonetheless, mental health and well-being are yet to be fittingly prioritised, and the impact of stressors like climate change on mental health and well-being in SIDS has not been prominently or sufficiently addressed. This necessitates further and immediate action from all SIDS to ensure that a resilient prosperity will encompass not only the pursuit of economic diversification, growth and success, but one which is also grounded in the optimal well-being and mental health of its people, a prerequisite for a prosperous sustainable future.

The increased application of behavioural sciences and the biopsychosocial lens to frame, promote, treat and manage mental health and improve well-being is warranted as contemporary research continues to identify adversity, trauma and environmental issues as significant risk factors for the development of mental and physical health conditions. The Bridgetown Declaration endorses this as it emphasises “addressing the underlying social, economic, and environmental drivers of risk.” For SIDS, the research literature has identified both direct impacts (e.g. those posed by weather changes and extreme weather phenomena) and ‘creeping changes’ or slower impacts (e.g. those posed by rising temperature and sea levels, coastal erosion) of climate change resulting in loss of life, property, jobs, services and resources, displacement, unemployment, economic hardship and instability, violence, food and water insecurity, and migration, which exact a significant toll on mental health and well-being. The disproportionate impact of this mental health toll in SIDS mandates urgent and holistic action to advance resilient prosperity.

As experts in mental processes and human behaviour, psychologists also play a key role in many of the areas identified in the SIDS4 Declaration as necessary for strengthening health systems, namely: 1) enhancing prevention, preparedness and response to better cope with health emergencies, through the design and delivery of MHPSS (Mental Health and Psychosocial Support) services and comprehensive Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR); and 2) enhancing health literacy to promote healthy lifestyles and preventive measures to address NCD risk factors, through the application of health behaviour theories and behaviour change communication theories.

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Addressing these issues requires a sustained and multi-pronged approach from SIDS, including: the repositioning of mental health and well-being as high-priority goals for health systems, responsive policies and interventions that reflect the importance of and incorporate a greater role for the application of psychological theories and approaches in health services, expansion and development of the mental health workforce in health systems to facilitate their implementation, and accompanying monitoring and evaluation to address the data and research gaps which can yield information on the incentives, mechanisms as well as barriers for sustainability.

Many SIDS are represented in the International Union of Psychological Science as national members and through its regional members: the Asia Pacific Psychology Alliance (APPA), ASEAN Regional Union of Psychological Societies (ARUPS), Caribbean Alliance of National Psychological Associations (CANPA) and Pan-African Psychology Union (PAPU). The Union has a long history of capacity building, advancing psychological science and identifying and promoting cross-border best practices in mental health and the application of psychology in general. This approach concurrently reflects a recognition of commonalities among SIDS which reinforce shared best practices while respecting diversity which may necessitate cultural and contextual adaptations. Psychological science is at the nexus of the challenges, opportunities and strengths of SIDS.

As the Global Voice of Psychology, IUPsyS remains committed to promoting and supporting the role of psychology and psychologists as key players in multidisciplinary and multifaceted approaches aimed at enhancing healthy behaviour change, improving well-being and mental health and promoting sustainable development in aid of resilient prosperity across all SIDS.