

**MEETING SUMMARY**  
**Inter-Agency Consultative Group (IACG) on Small Island Developing States (SIDS)**  
**Date: 01 June 2023**  
**Microsoft Teams Meeting**  
**Time: 3:00pm – 5:00 pm (New York Time)**

**Member Organizations in attendance:** COMMONWEALTH Secretariat, DOALOS, FAO, GEF, GLIPSA, IAEA, IOM, IRENA, ITU, PIFS, RCO (Barbados), UN ECLAC, UNESCAP, UNRCO SAMOA, UNDCO, UNDESA (Co-organizer), UNDP, UNDRR, UNECLAC, UNECLAC POS, UNEP, UNESCO, UN-HABITAT, UNOHRLLS (Organizer), UNPFA, UNRCO (Mauritius and Seychelles), UNWTO, WIPO, WORLDBANK.

**Chair:** Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director of OHRLLS and Ms. Tishka Francis, Head of SIDS sub-programme, OHRLLS

**Summary:**

The IACG meeting focused its discussion on the work of the High-Level Panel (HLP) on the multidimensional vulnerability index (MVI) and the preparations for the Fourth International Conference on SIDS to be held in Antigua and Barbuda in 2024. Further discussions on the preparation of the Secretary-General Report on the Implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the participation of IACG at the High-Level Political Forum (2023) were under any other business (AOB). The meeting underscored the following: (1) finalizing the MVI as a tool to sufficiently capture the vulnerabilities of developing countries to address their development issues and grow their resilience over time is paramount. (2) An inclusive preparatory process for Fourth International Conference on SIDS is critical to respond to SIDS need for an inter-governmentally agreed, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented political outcome document and (3) joint efforts in the lead-up to the conference and a commitment to working together to address the challenges and priorities of SIDS is crucial.

**1. Opening remarks by IACG Co-chair(s)**

UN-OHRLLS

In her opening remarks, **Ms Heidi Schroderus-Fox**, Director of OHRLLS, noting the importance of the MVI and the upcoming SIDS conference, made the following key points:

- The aim to finalize the MVI as a tool that sufficiently captures the vulnerabilities of developing countries and help them to adequately address their development issues and grow their resilience over time is paramount.
- The [Fourth SIDS International Conference](#), hosted by Antigua and Barbuda in 2024, is an opportunity to set the agenda for the next decade.

- The UN and its partners need to support SIDS through the preparatory process for the conference and ensure an ambitious and forward-looking program of action.
- The preparatory process for the conference is taking place at a critical moment in the implementation of various agendas, including the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda for financing development. The success of these agendas and the upcoming summits has implications for SIDS. Their vulnerabilities must be emphasized in the discussions.

The Director of OHRLLS also informed:

- The annual SIDS national focal points (NFP) meeting will be held in the margins of the interregional preparatory meeting in Cabo Verde in August/September.
- Discussions are underway to organize a SIDS Global Business Network (GBN) Forum in March 2024 in Barbados.
- The number of SIDS has decreased from **38** to **37**, as the government of Bahrain chose to exit the category.

She underscored collaboration is necessary to amplify the voices of SIDS, secure more resources for them, and bring global attention to their needs.

### UNDESA

**Ms Lotta Tahtinen**, UNDESA, in her opening remarks, highlighted the upcoming HLPF and SDG summit, the importance of the reports informing these processes, and the connection to the preparations for the 2024 SIDS conference. The following were some of her salient points:

- Year 2023 is a busy one for UN DESA, facilitating key intergovernmental processes that have an impact on SIDS.
- The July session of the [high-level political forum \(HLPF\)](#) will act as a pre-event to the SDG summit in September. The HLPF will receive voluntary national reports (VNRs) from Member States, including SIDS such as [Barbados](#), [Comoros](#), [Fiji](#), [Guyana](#), [Maldives](#), [Singapore](#), [St Kitts & Nevis](#) and [Timor-Leste](#). The program for the HLPF, featuring sessions on SDGs and special situations of SIDS, is available on the HLPF website.
- [The SDG summit](#) will be held on September 18-19, and preparations are currently underway. The outcome of the SDG summit will be a negotiated outcome document, which is currently being discussed in informal consultations. The SDG summit is informed by the [Global Sustainable Development Report](#) and the SG's [Annual Progress report](#).
- The UN development system has proposed [high-impact initiatives for the SDG summit](#), and the Secretary-General has encouraged Member States to announce new policies and initiatives.

- The SDG summit and related processes could serve as groundwork for the 2024 Fourth International Conference on SIDS.

## 2. Update on the Work of the High-Level Panel on the MVI

**Ms Miniva Chibuye**, Sustainable Development Officer at OHRLLS, providing an update on the work of the High-Level Panel (HLP) on the MVI, noted the following:

- The MVI seeks to measure structural vulnerability and resilience across the dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.
- The HLP on the MVI has been finalizing the indicators and conducting sensitivity analysis. The panel also received comments and feedback from various stakeholders, including Member States, regarding the methodology, indicators etc.
- Based on the discussions, the panel decided to exclude trade openness due to unclear evidence on its impact on vulnerability. The inclusion of debt as an indicator faced challenges due to the lack of adequate data, but UNCTAD proposed the inclusion of total external debt service as a percentage of export revenue, which the panel is currently reviewing for data quality and alignment with MVI principles.

**Ms Anya Thomas**, UNDESA, adding to the update informed [documents](#) related to the MVI are available on the websites of DESA and [OHRLLS](#) for review. She also noted the following:

- There is still a lack of common understanding across Member States regarding the definition and characterization of vulnerability.
- The goal is to develop consensus and acceptance of the MVI and to achieve acceptance and an agreed conceptual understanding. This would be a significant step forward.
- The HLP for the MVI's report is working towards meeting the deadline for its report set by the GA and is considering the comments received to make necessary tweaks.
- The panel intends to undertake another round of consultations with Member States to address the issues raised and gather further inputs. The format of these consultations may be similar to the previous round, where discussions were held with all Member States before breaking into smaller groups.
- The panel will determine the extent to which they can incorporate feedback. Notifications and updates will be provided, including through streaming meetings on UN Web TV.

Ms. Thomas further underscored:

- A strategy needs to be put in place for presenting the MVI at the General Assembly in September. The short, medium, and long-term possibilities will be considered, with a focus on ensuring eligibility for concessional finance for SIDS. The process of achieving approval for the MVI is expected to take some time. A pathway will be developed, taking

into account the concerns of various stakeholders, and aiming for a sensible and expeditious agreement.

- The 4th International Conference on SIDS is an opportunity to gather further support for the MVI and highlight its importance as an analytical tool for SIDS.

## **Discussion**

- **Ms. Marinescu (UNOPS)** , congratulating everyone on the hard work on the MVI, expressed hope that it receives positive recognition at the General Assembly, even if it may not be fully completed this year. She noted the [Bridgetown initiative](#), which focuses on access to financing for countries in need (includes additional Official Development Assistance (ODA) of \$113 billion to reach over \$500 billion in development instruments through multilateral development banks). The RCO further underscored the initiative is not in competition with the MVI. Both initiatives are important and complementary, as the Bridgetown Initiative aims to make more financing available through multilateral development banks, extending maturity times and grace periods to avoid defaulting.

Ms. Marinescu further noted:

- The MVI is seen as a necessary complement to the Bridgetown Initiative because without the index, the eligibility criteria for accessing financing would remain unchanged, underscoring the importance of adopting both initiatives together.
- To increase the visibility of the MVI and connect it with the Bridgetown Initiative, a side event will be held at [Summit for a New Global Financing Pact](#) in Paris, hosted by the French President Macron and Prime Minister Mia Motley of Barbados. The event aims to make a call to leaders to adopt both initiatives together that could allow vulnerable countries access to additional financing. The exact timing of the side event will be communicated.
- **The Commonwealth Secretariat** emphasized the importance of not being left behind in terms of the planning process for the SDG summit and other upcoming conferences. The Commonwealth also acknowledged the need to clarify the relationship between the Bridgetown Initiative and the MVI, suggesting that the focus should currently be on the approval process of the MVI. The similarities and complementarity of the MVI and the Commonwealth's UVI were noted - the latter includes the non-structural part of resilience. Despite this difference, the importance of the Commonwealth's involvement in the MVI process and the need to ensure their involvement in the overall planning process was underscored.

- **DESA** encouraged the UN system to engage in discussions and to provide inputs and comments on the MVI, while acknowledging the time constraint to assimilate all the feedback.
- **OHRLLS** further addressed the issue of data gaps and suggested the need for continued collaboration between agencies to help Member States improve the quality of data on various indicators.

### 3. Update on the Preparations for the Fourth International Conference on SIDS

**Mr Sai Navoti**, Chief of SIDS unit, UNDESA, providing an update on the preparations of the Fourth International Conference on SIDS, noted the following:

- The preparatory process for the fourth SIDS conference has begun with the adoption of the (1) Conference agenda, (2) rules of procedure and (3) draft resolution on additional modalities and format of the conference.
- The conference will consist of the following components: (1) opening and closing segments, (2) six plenary meetings and (3) five interactive dialogues. The themes for the interactive dialogues will be finalized in consultation with Member States and the UN entity.
- The Republic of Maldives, along with New Zealand, were elected as Co-chairs of the Preparatory Committee for the [Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States \(SIDS\)](#), during the organizational session of the Preparatory Committee held in New York.
- Drawing Representatives from various regional groups, including the African Group, Asia Pacific Group, Eastern European Group etc. the members of the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee are: **Barbados, Cabo Verde, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Italy, Latvia, Maldives, New Zealand, Romania and Seychelles**. In addition, Samoa and Antigua and Barbuda are ex officio members of the Bureau.
- The dates for regional preparatory meetings were confirmed: **24 - 25 July 2023 (Mauritius), 8 - 10 August 2023 (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), 16 – 18 August 2023 (Vanuatu)<sup>1</sup> and 30 August -1 September 2023 is the Interregional preparatory meeting in Cabo Verde.**
- Consultations with host countries and UN agencies are ongoing, including discussions on host country agreements and the number of participants. Planning missions have been conducted and are ongoing, with one already held in Antigua. Space limitations may affect the number of representatives from UN systems attending the conference.

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<sup>1</sup> TBC(Fiji/Tonga?)

- Contributions from UN agencies to the regional reports should be coordinated with the respective regional commissions (ECA, ECLAC, etc.). The secretariat is hoping to make the reports available two weeks before each regional preparatory meeting to assist Member States in their discussions.

In addition, **Ms. Tishka Francis**, noted the following:

- OHRLLS's USG and High Representative, Rabab Fatima, as the Special Advisor to the conference, has responsibilities on advocacy, outreach, and fundraising efforts, as well as working together with DESA on the Inter-Agency preparations.
- On advocacy and outreach, the USG has already been heavily engaged in advocating for SIDS issues and the SIDS conference through participation in key events e.g.: she has had meetings in the UK, including the [Wilton Park dialogue on 'Small Island Developing](#); and she has had bilateral meetings with partners and other stakeholders, an effort that will continue throughout this year's HLPF, SDG Summit, COP 28 and others.
- Advocacy activities included the launch of the [conference website](#), to serve as a source of information and documentation on the conference and the preparatory process. The logo and tagline for the conference are being finalized and will be shared soon.
- OHRLLS is working with DESA to develop communication and partnership strategies with the Department of Global Communications (DGC) and other stakeholders.
- On fundraising, OHRLLS and DESA have prepared a briefing document that has been shared with Member States. The budget is around **\$3,000,000**, with half of contributions already secured. Efforts will continue to mobilize funds to meet the outstanding amounts for the conference, to ensure full representation from SIDS and other stakeholders.
- Funding of non-government representatives and private sector actors is being explored.
- The second phase of resource mobilization will focus on mobilizing resources for the implementation of the new SIDS agenda.
- OHRLLS is also engaged in preparing for the conference by developing knowledge products including on digitalization and trade, which are critical issues for SIDS in the context of COVID recovery.
- OHRLLS is also planning the [SIDS National focal point \(NFP\) meeting](#) and the [SIDS Global Business Network \(GBN\)](#) forum to strengthen private sector engagement and implementation of the new SIDS agenda. More information on these initiatives will be provided in due course.

## **Discussion**

- **RCO** (Mauritius & Seychelles): acknowledged the geographical dispersion of the Atlantic, Indian and South China Sea (AIS) region necessitates the involvement of the AIS's coordination between two economic commissions. The RCO also noted the importance of ensuring that government invitations are given high priority over others, with a focus on amplifying the voices of the eight member countries through the consultation process. The RCO also acknowledged Mauritius's initiative to take lead on the AIS regional report and underscored the need for guidance to ensure coherence among the different reports.
- **UNESCO**, acknowledging the high number of requests, including from Agencies seeking to attend the meetings, underscored that resources should not be a barrier to participation, and highlighted the importance of making efforts to ensure inclusivity to create ownership and engagement. She underscored the technology opportunities, such as Teams and Zoom as potential platforms that can enable wider participation - to include wider representation from development partners, private sector, youth, and civil society organizations etc.
- **DESA**, responding to questions regarding virtual participation, mentioned there were ongoing discussions with the host country on the possibility of streaming the meeting instead, because interactive online participation with interpretation poses logistical challenges. Acknowledging the unprecedented interest from partners for participation, DESA noted they are organizing consultations with stakeholders to gather their views, considering the limitations of in-person attendance.
- **DESA**, responding on questions on the outcome documents, noted leading countries take lead in the drafting of the outcome document, with dedicated support from the secretariat. DESA informed that consultations with respective agencies will take place to gather input on issues related to mandates and contributions to outcome documents.
- **DESA** further informed a reporting outline that is consistent at all levels (national and regional) to ensure comparability and to facilitate the creation of a single outcome document across the regional meetings and the interregional meeting has been prepared. The report outline was shared with missions earlier in the year, and the regional commissions are working to align inputs and analysis with the regional reports. The regional reports have strict word limits, emphasizing the need for conciseness. Mauritius is preparing a national report. Reports take a more analytical approach compared to previous reports and the UN system actively supports Mauritius in this endeavor.

- On the Outcome document for the regional meetings, DESA clarified the UN system initially takes responsibility for the zero draft, in responding to the specific call to deliver a dynamic and transformative outcome document. The regional commissions, together with the UN system, will work on the zero draft, which will then be handed over to the intergovernmental process led by the host countries.
- Stakeholders will have opportunities to provide inputs and comments on the outcome document. Agencies, as well as regional institutions such as PIF, SPC, CARICOM, will be consulted, with efforts being made to engage these institutions to avoid leaving them out of the process.
- **DESA** reiterated the commitment of the entire United Nations system and secretariat to work together for the success of the conference. DESA noted the cooperation and engagement from the regional commissions have been encouraging and looks forward to continued collaboration throughout the year and beyond.

**DESA** further encouraged IACG members to consider participating in the regional meetings, particularly highlighting the hosting capacity of Cabo Verde meeting, which is expected to accommodate many participants.

#### **4. Any Other Business (AOB)**

##### **SG report – Follow up on the SAMOA Pathway**

**Mr Sai Navoti**, speaking on the SG report on the Follow up of the SAMOA pathway:

- Thanked members for their contributions and emphasized the importance of their assistance in reporting on the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway. Submissions have been received, but those still working on their reports are encouraged to send them in. The word limit for the reports is 8000 words. Due to the word limitations, members are encouraged to submit a high-level summary and a full report, the latter to be published on the UN DESA website.
- Noted a section of the Secretary General's report will be dedicated to the MVI. This is because the General Assembly needs to consider the MVI in its upcoming session.
- Informed the due date for submission of reports on the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway is 11 July 2023, with some flexibility given for late submissions to include them in the official publication within the United Nations system.
- **UNEP** underscored the importance of using the SG report as a platform to make recommendations for the new program of action for SIDS. The process for developing the new program of action should also provide opportunities for UN entities to influence and inform the discussions of Member States.



- **DESA** also emphasized the need for a close and collaborative process to ensure that UN entities have the chance to contribute to and shape the discussions around the new program of action.

### **IACG at the HLPF**

**Ms Tishka Francis**, encouraging members to collaborate on events they would be organizing during the HLPF and beyond, to the lead-up to the conference in 2024, noted:

- The HLPF presents a significant opportunity for SIDS to emphasize their key challenges and priorities at the midpoint of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Reiterated the eight SIDS - Barbados, Comoros, Fiji, Guyana, Maldives, Singapore, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Timor-Leste - were slated to present their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) during the HLPF.
- There is a special SIDS session titled "*Small Island Developing States from Recovery to Resilience in the Face of Multiple Shocks*" scheduled for July 11th, from 4:15 to 6:00 PM.
- OHRLLS and DESA are planning a side event in conjunction with AOSIS during the HLPF. Further information on the event would be shared with all IACG members.

**DESA** added there is also **Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Partnerships** which will be held in the morning of the 11 July. The meeting features a second round of awards for SIDS partnerships where winners will be announced.

In closing, the **Chair** further assured members further updates and information will be provided to Members. The next meeting of the IACG will be communicated by DESA. A calendar of [SIDS related events](#)<sup>2</sup> will be shared, and members are encouraged to share their events related to SIDS. Lastly, a summary of the meeting will be circulated to the members in due course.

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<sup>2</sup> A prototype available ([HERE](#)) which will be assimilated in both OHRLLS and DESA websites. The site includes a section that allow IACG members to add their SIDS related events.