

MEETING SUMMARY

Inter-Agency Consultative Group (IACG) on Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

Date: 18 December 2023

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Time: 3:00pm – 5:00 pm (New York Time)

Member Organizations in attendance:

COMMONWEALTH Secretariat, FAO, GEF, IAEA, IOM, IRENA, ITU, UNIDO, UNCTAD, WHO, UNCDF, UNDESA (Co-organizer), UNDP, UNDRR, UNECLAC, UNESCO, UNOPS, UNOHRLS (Organizer), UNPFA, UNWTO, WIPO, WORLD BANK.

Chair: Ms. Anya Thomas, Economic Affairs Officer, UNDESA and Ms. Tishka Francis, Head of SIDS Sub-Programme, OHRLS

Ms. Anya Thomas opened the meeting with acknowledgments of the year's end and appreciation for attendees' participation and invited OHRLS to give an opening remark.

1. Opening remarks by IACG Co-Chair(s)

OHRLS

Ms. Tishka Hope Francis welcomed everyone and thanked UNDESA for organizing the meeting and indicated they will be contributing to the agenda items as the session proceed.

UNDESA

In her opening remarks, Ms. Anya Thomas addressed the challenges facing Small Island Developing States (SIDS) currently, status of preparation for the upcoming [4th International Conference on SIDS \(SIDS4\)](#) and the latest discussions around the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) and its critical role in shaping the discussions for the conference. Here are the key points:

- SIDS 4 takes place amid challenges like recovery from the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, along with climate change effects. SIDS are at a halfway point in implementing the 2030 Agenda, facing significant financial gaps, particularly in the Pacific.
- The importance of recognizing SIDS issues as business-as-usual approach is noted to be insufficient; For that reason, the outcome document must be ambitious, forward-looking, with clear actions and international community demands.
- Financial Architecture Reform is essential for addressing SIDS' vulnerabilities, involving accessible, flexible financial instruments and funds.
- In the lead up to the SIDS4 conference, a number of Preparatory Meetings were held at the regional and inter-regional levels to discuss and refine a unified vision. A Zero draft outcome document is due to be submitted to the Co-Chairs of the Preparatory Committee Meeting for its eventual distribution with the wider audience. The document is envisaged to incorporate lessons from the Samoa pathway, accountability, comprehensive monitoring, linking to the 2030

agenda, and conveying a political message to stakeholders. It should give assurance and commitment to assist in delivering a transformative outcome for resilient prosperity in SIDS.

Agenda Item 1 – Update on the SIDS4 Conference

UNDESA

A power point presentation was presented by **Ms. Anya Thomas** from **UNDESA** on the 4th SIDS conference, scheduled for May 27-30, 2024, in Antigua and Barbuda. Key points include:

- The themes for the Intergovernmental Dialogues (IDs) have been agreed upon by the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee. The Conference Secretary-General will share these themes with the UN system, guiding the content to be covered.
- The Preparatory Committee Meetings will be chaired by New Zealand and Maldives and will be held twice next year in New York. The first session will be from **22 – 26 January 2024** and the second session will be from **1 – 5th April 2024**.
- The zero draft outcome document will be presented during the first Prep Comm session meeting and will be webcasted, but it is only available for in-person attendance. However, the Co-Chairs have indicated they are willing to receive video statements. Details will be posted soon on the website.
- With regards to the format of the conference, there will be opening and closing sessions, a plenary session where heads of government, heads of UN institutions, stakeholders will make statements. There will be 5 Interactive Dialogues where each dialogue will last for 2 hrs. Themes of these IDs have been circulated to the IACG members. There will be Special events, side events and exhibitions. a fireside chat is planned, featuring two heads of government (one from the north and one from the south) and facilitated by a prominent journalist. This will be followed by responses from two individuals at the podium, and then the floor will be opened for further discussion. The host country (Antigua) has expressed a desire for extensive interaction and a strong key message from Member States. These dialogues will be structured around detailed background notes.
- A letter from the Under-Secretary-General (USG) indicates the preparation of short and concise IDs. Guidance will be provided to Member States, and next year's focus will be on working on these IDs. The involvement of UN entities is requested either as leaders or contributors in this process.
- Participation to the conference is open to Member States, UN system entities, IGOs, associate members of regional institution and special accredited stakeholders.

OHLSS

Ms. Tishka Hope Francis also informed the following key points:

- The USG of OHLSS has been appointed as the Special Adviser for the Conference.
- In collaboration with DESA and the Department of Global Communications, a communication strategy is being developed to focus on thematic activities and raise awareness about key issues on SIDS and the conference. A group including OHLSS, DESA, and the Government of Antigua and Barbuda is focusing on branding, music, art, and exhibitions for the conference.
- SIDS4 newsletter has been launched twice so far to update stakeholders.

- Events have been held, including at the IMF World Bank Group meetings and COP 28, focusing on the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, loss and damage, and financial issues critical for SIDS.
- Upcoming interactive dialogue discussions will delve into topics like loss and damage, and climate action financing, which will be integral to the interactive dialogues at the conference.
- Funding pledges from various countries have closed the funding gap, enabling the travel of representatives from the SIDS to attend the conference. Efforts are being made to encourage donations to the UNDP fund to support host country preparations for the conference.
- Global Business Network Forum is scheduled before the SIDS4 conference. Focus will be on private sector involvement, covering themes like the blue and green economy, digital transformation, and financing.
- Development of a strategy to engage national focal points in implementing and localizing the new SIDS program of action, with consultations underway.
- Working on side events to feed into the work to preparation of the conference on areas of trade and digitalization, in collaboration with various UN system colleagues and organizations.

Discussions

Ms. Simona Anamaria Marinescu (UNOPS) discussed the recent resolution concerning SIDS ([A/C2/78/L23](#)) and the follow-up to the Samoa Pathway. She highlighted the call for the establishment of a Center of Excellence for SIDS and the launch of a Global Data Hub at the SIDS 4 conference, as outlined in the resolution. She also mentioned a significant agreement signed between the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and a Public Foundation, focusing on the Global Data Hub and the Center of Excellence. This center, she noted, will play a critical role in addressing sustainability, energy transition, and adaptation, and is set to organize biennial dialogues to ensure the agenda remains relevant to evolving challenges. Additionally, Ms. Marinescu pointed out that each SIDS interested in the program will have a dedicated Global Data Hub, equipped with advanced technologies for monitoring loss and damage, aligning with resolutions from COP 28. She concluded by mentioning the ongoing review and anticipated finalization of the zero draft outcome document in January.

Ms. Petal Thomas (UNFPA) congratulated the DESA and OHRLS teams on their work and assured them of UNFPA's support. She expressed interest in the Global Data Hub agreement, emphasizing its relevance to UNFPA's focus on population data and its importance for Antigua and Barbuda and other SIDS. Ms. Petal Thomas inquired about potential meetings hosted by the Secretary-General at the conference and confirmed UNFPA's commitment to support the event. She highlighted UNFPA's keenness to assist in Dialogues 3 and 4 on data, digitalization, health, and youth in SIDS, expressing a willingness to collaborate with other UN entities and noting that joint efforts are appreciated by Member States. She indicated that official communication would follow regarding UNFPA's participation and responsibilities, particularly inquiring if DESA is responsible for preparing the respective dialogues and what types of resources are needed.

Adding to this, Ms. Anya Thomas from DESA noted that there is no sufficient information about the SG meeting with heads of UN institutions, although a Second Committee mandated meeting with International Financial Institutions and MDBs are scheduled. For the Interactive Dialogues, Ms. Anya

Thomas clarified that the lead or co-lead agencies would be fully responsible for drafting the papers and any other relevant related tasks for organizing the event.

Ms. Angelica JacomeDaza (FAO) asked about indicating preferences for more than one Interactive Dialogue (ID), given their interest in multiple dialogues. Ms. Anya Thomas responded that institutions should limit their choices to two IDs, preferably leading only one.

Ms. Simona Anamaria Marinescu (UNOPS) further added to the discussion by clarifying about the Global Data Hub agreement. She explained that there are two key documents: the first is a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding signed on September 20th during the General Assembly, involving the Public Foundation, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, and the Alliance of Small Island States. This agreement signifies the commitment of all SIDS through the Alliance. The second document details how the Global Data Hub, based in Antigua, will evolve to support all SIDS.

Agenda Item 2: Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI):

Ms. Anya Thomas from UNDESA, made a power point presentation about the MVI. The main elements in the presentation include the following:

- The High-Level Panel on MVI has released in September 2023 the advance unedited version of the report and is available on the UNDESA and OHRLSS websites. The final edited version is being prepared for a potential release in early 2024. Details about the mandates of the panel are accessible on the UNDESA and OHRLSS websites.
- The MVI is designed to measure vulnerability using an internationally agreed quantitative benchmark. Its key attributes include multidimensionality, universality, exogeneity, evidence-based approach, and a simple structure.
- The MVI is not intended to replace Gross National Income (GNI) but to complement it by providing additional context for assessing a country's development. The MVI consists of two layers: a global assessment index and vulnerability and country resilience profiles.
- The panel recommended the establishment of an MVI secretariat and an advisory panel for continual improvement and governance of the MVI.
- Following the Samoa Pathway discussions, a new intergovernmental process will examine the report and its applicability, leading to its implementation. This includes identifying appropriate custodial arrangements and exploring multidimensional vulnerability in the UN system.
- The UN system will be assembling a working group to pilot test the MVI as soon as the resolution passes. The Caribbean Development Bank has already started piloting it, and there is growing interest to explore more from the World Bank and IMF to explore MVI indices and its application to concessional financing.
- There is anticipation and caution around the intergovernmental process that will examine the MVI, with concerns about maintaining the integrity of the panel's work.

Discussions:

Ms. Tishka Hope Francis (OHRLSS) discussed various aspects of the MVI and the ongoing efforts to advance its work. She highlighted that an upcoming PGA process is not seen negatively but rather as an opportunity to reinforce the principle of universality, allowing all Member States to contribute to the discussion and consensus building. She noted challenges faced by certain groups of countries regarding

the MVI, particularly concerning ranking elements. OHRLLS has been proactive in addressing these issues, conducting briefings with AOSIS, UNDESA, and LDCs to clarify technical aspects and foster consensus.

Ms. Francis also touched on the task of assessing how the MVI will be integrated into the UN system. She mentioned that OHRLLS, in collaboration with UNDESA, is prepared to provide technical support and guidance, especially to UN agencies unfamiliar with the MVI's methodologies. This support is aimed at developing a proof of concept within the UN system, involving statistical analysis and the construction of indices.

Furthermore, Ms. Francis emphasized the growing interest in the concept of vulnerability, especially in relation to financing eligibility, as seen in recent World Bank and IMF meetings. The World Bank has shown a keen interest in this concept, and a successful IMF technical seminar with over 70 attendees signifies a substantial engagement with the issue.

Finally, Ms. Francis reiterated that although the MVI's advancement is a PGA-led process, it remains a critical topic for SIDS and will play a significant role in the upcoming SIDS conference. The UN system is expected to be prepared to support the implementation of the MVI and its outcomes.

Ms. Anya Thomas (UNDESA) emphasized the importance of identifying key UN entities willing to experiment with the new tool, potentially for program budget allocations or other aspects of their work. She highlighted the need for these entities to consider participating in this initiative, understanding that the group will be selective and not all entities can be accommodated. Ms. Thomas also mentioned the anticipation of acquiring skilled personnel, pending a decision from the 5th Committee, to support this group full-time. The urgency of producing tangible results quickly is crucial to inform the intergovernmental process. She stressed the importance of avoiding delays in the intergovernmental process due to uncertainties about the tool's effectiveness. A call for interested entities would be made by UNDESA and OHRLLS, seeking those ready to engage actively and contribute promptly to the intergovernmental discussion.

Ms. Petal Thomas (UNFPA)

Ms. Petal Thomas expressed her concerns and observations regarding the MVI. She noted that UNFPA, a voluntarily funded organization, primarily receives support from developed countries, many of whom are skeptical about the MVI. She raised the question of whether UNFPA should publicly support the MVI, given its reliance on these donors and the need to consider the pros and cons of such a stance.

Ms. Petal Thomas acknowledged the importance of the MVI but also emphasized the complexity of implementing it, particularly for agencies like UNFPA with specific mandates and strategic plans. She pointed out that if an agency decides to participate in the pilot phase of the MVI, it would need time to understand the implications and how to contribute effectively. This includes assessing internal processes, which are not straightforward, and considering whether the MVI aligns with the agency's focus areas, such as rights issues and sustainable development.

She also observed that population issues, a key focus of UNFPA, featured prominently in the MVI's indicators, suggesting a potential role for UNFPA. However, she stressed the need for clarity on what participation in the MVI would entail. Ms. Petal Thomas suggested that approaching this from a higher

level, such as USG to USG, might be effective concluding with the need for more information before committing to the pilot phase.

Ms. Simona Anamaria Marinescu (UNOPS)

Ms. Marinescu highlighted the role of the MVI as an analytical tool, emphasizing that it doesn't dictate financial allocations but rather enhances the quality of program design by incorporating an understanding of structural vulnerabilities. She noted that the MVI, along with vulnerability and resilience country profiles, can aid in monitoring the progress of countries towards resilience.

She mentioned that the MVI already has a mandate, as indicated in the language used in the Second Committee for SIDS, and it will be included in the next program of action for SIDS. However, the MVI's application is intended to be universal. The anticipated language of the General Assembly will provide a green light for its full adoption in UN programming.

Ms. Marinescu also discussed the integration of the MVI in the Common Country Analysis (CCA) by the United Nations Country Teams (UNCT), making it a starting point for country strategies, programs, and projects across various agencies.

Further, she informed that following COP 28, the Santiago Network secretariat, now hosted by UNOPS, plans to use the MVI and the vulnerability and resilience country profiles as monitoring tools for assessing loss and damage. This initiative is seen as a significant step forward, aligning with the broader agenda of loss and damage, which has become a critical focus due to insufficient funding for mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Ms. Anya Thomas (UNDESA) responded to the points raised by Ms. Simona Anamaria Marinescu and Ms. Petal Thomas, particularly focusing on the challenges of implementing the MVI within different organizations. She acknowledged Ms. Petal Thomas's concern about the reluctance of donors, especially from developed countries, to embrace the MVI. This hesitation is similar to what was experienced with the Caribbean Bank, which faced a challenge in getting approval from its board, predominantly from developed countries, to even test the MVI.

Ms. Anya Thomas agreed with the idea of presenting the MVI as a tool to enhance programming, emphasizing its role as a diagnostic and informational tool to make more informed decisions. She pointed out that while donors ultimately decide where to spend their money, having better tools for decision-making could lead to more effective use of funds.

She also appreciated UNOPS's interest in the vulnerability and country resilience profiles, noting that there is more work to be done in finalizing the indicators for these profiles.

Regarding the process of engaging with various entities for the MVI, Ms. Anya Thomas suggested that starting with a letter from the USG to set criteria and invite volunteer institutions could be a good approach. She recognized the necessity of managing expectations around the time needed for internal discussions and board approvals within these entities, acknowledging that these processes could cause delays in entities coming forward to assist with the MVI implementation.

Ms. Tishka Hope Francis (OHLSS) addressed the current status and future steps regarding the MVI within the UN system. She clarified that as of now, there isn't a General Assembly (GA) endorsed MVI

where UN agencies are required to adopt it. This distinction is important as it implies that seeking Board approval for using the MVI might be premature.

Ms. Francis emphasized that the design of the working group and its terms of reference need to consider the concerns raised about the MVI's implementation as a proof of concept within respective organizations. The focus should be on understanding how the MVI can be utilized as an analytical tool, to clarify its potential applications within the UN system.

She indicated that future steps would involve gaining more clarity and direction from the GA on the MVI's use. Once there is a better understanding, the UN system can consider adopting the MVI and integrating it into its processes. However, it is also acknowledged that not everyone might be comfortable with the MVI at this stage, suggesting a need for a gradual and informed approach to its implementation.

Ms. Francis also mentioned that guidance on using the MVI would likely come from the highest levels of the UN, specifically from the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General, who will give directive on how to proceed.

In reaction to the comment from Ms. Francis, **Ms. Simona Anamaria Marinescu** noted while the MVI is not yet formalized as a GA resolution, it is anticipated to become one, providing a mandate for piloting it. Initially, the MVI is expected to be tested for SIDS, given its nature as a universal index.

Ms. Marinescu highlighted that the MVI offers a valuable perspective in monitoring loss and damage, which can serve as an effective entry point for broader application of the index. She stressed the importance of the UN owning and utilizing the MVI, noting that UN agencies have been part of the MVI development process since 2021-2022.

The key aspect of the MVI, as Ms. Marinescu emphasized, is its capacity to differentiate in country analysis between vulnerabilities that can be addressed through policy and financial interventions and those that are exogenous and less responsive to intervention. This distinction, she argued is crucial for informed decision-making within the UN system.

Responding to the comments made by Ms. Marinescu, Ms. Francis emphasized the significance of the MVI and agreed on the need for the UN system to take ownership of it. However, she pointed out existing challenges with the MVI and the results of the panel's report. The purpose of the PGA process, as she mentioned, is to achieve universal acceptance and endorsement of the MVI, which is crucial for its successful integration and application.

Ms. Francis addressed the concerns raised by Ms. Petal Thomas, acknowledging that a significant portion of the membership is hesitant to adopt the MVI, as it has not yet been officially adopted by the GA. Despite this, she noted that it does not preclude the possibility of testing the current version of the MVI.

Ms. Angelica JacomeDaza (FAO)

Ms. Angelica JacomeDaza acknowledged the value of the MVI but raised concerns specific to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a specialized agency. She noted that in addition to the procedural requirement of obtaining approval from governing bodies for adopting tools like the MVI, there are practical challenges. FAO has specific indicators essential to its operations that the MVI may not fully

cover. While these indicators do not necessarily conflict with the MVI, they need to be tailored to align with FAO's unique mandate.

Agenda 3 – Any other business

Ms. Saeko Kajima (UNDESA) announced the upcoming SIDS Partnerships Awards 2024, inviting applications under the leadership of Ireland and Palau. The awards will focus on the three dimensions of sustainable development, evaluated based on SMART criteria. The deadline will be 1 March. More detail: https://sdgs.un.org/SIDSPartnershipsAwards#awards_2024

She also provided an update on the Steering Committee on Partnerships for SIDS,. The co-chairs of the Steering Committee on partnerships for SIDS, Permanent Missions of Portugal and Samoa to the United Nations, facilitated discussions on partnerships for SIDS during the preparatory meetings in each of the three SIDS regions. The sessions on partnerships explored priority areas in which SIDS partnerships can play a pivotal role, and on how the SIDS Partnership Framework can be strengthened to support meaningful and effective partnerships in the regions. The discussions from these regional meetings informed the inter-regional preparatory meeting in Cabo Verde. The summary of discussion was presented at the ambassadorial meeting of the Steering Committee on partnerships for SIDS held on 14 Dec. The detail of the ambassadorial meeting and the summary of discussion on partnerships can be found here: <https://sdgs.un.org/events/amb-meeting-steering-committee-partnerships-sids-20231214>

Furthermore, Ms. Kajima mentioned that in support of the effort to strengthen the SIDS Partnership Framework, with generous funding from Republic of Korea and Portugal UN DESA, in collaboration with ESCAP, are organizing a two-day SIDS Partnership Symposium in the margins of the 2024 Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, to gain insights from SIDS stakeholders on how the SIDS Partnership Framework could be further improved in priority areas and to foster peer learning and knowledge exchange. The recommendations from this Symposium will be submitted to the Steering Committee for further consideration. Additionally, on 30 January, in connection with upcoming ECOSOC Partnership Forum, there will be a side event organized by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, ITU and UNDESA, which will focus on the issue of fostering more SIDS partnerships in area of science, technology and innovation. She invited all to attend this side event. For detail: https://sdgs.un.org/events/SIDS-partnerships-STI_2024

Mr. Raymond Landveld (UNCTAD) announced UNCTAD will organize a Global Supply Chain Forum. This event is scheduled one week before the SIDS4 Conference and will be in Barbados, with a briefing for Member States planned on January 11th. The outcomes of this forum are intended to contribute to the discussions at the SIDS Conference.