QUESTIONNAIRE

Follow-up to and implementation of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States (ABAS)

Please note that strict word limits have been established for each question. The Secretariat is unable to consider any information beyond these established word limits. You are requested to report <u>only</u> on new or updated information. Information conveyed in previous surveys or Secretary-Generals' reports will not be considered.

PART A - FOSTERING RESILIENT PROSPERITY IN SIDS

1. Enhanced UN System Support for achieving Resilient Prosperity in SIDS (FOR the UN system)

Using the UN implementation Matrix[1] (attached) to guide feedback, briefly elaborate on any resilience building interventions or strategies (proactive or preventative) that were/are being implemented during the reporting period at national or regional levels aimed specifically at improving resilience in SIDS. Please include indications of resource allocations, if available (600 words).

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Development Sector has implemented several initiatives aimed at building resilience in Small Island Developing States (SIDS):

Smart Seas Project: This initiative, in partnership with Barbados, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago, focuses on enhancing maritime communication systems. By installing a VHF-DSC coast station in Trinidad and Tobago, the project has significantly improved emergency response capabilities for fishing communities. The project's outputs, including the online Smart Seas Toolkit and the living document "An Agenda for Accessible Communications@Sea," are designed for global applicability, addressing multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Cyber for Good Initiative: Between 2022 and 2024, this initiative supported 30 Least Developed Countries (LDCs), including six in Asia and the Pacific, to strengthen their cybersecurity frameworks. By leveraging partnerships with ITU-D Private Sector Members, the project provided access to advanced tools, technologies, and training programs, thereby enhancing digital resilience in these nations.

Early Warnings for All (EW4All) Initiative – ITU's Role in SIDS: As a key implementing partner of the Early Warnings for All (EW4All) initiative, led by the United Nations and championed by the WMO and UNDRR, ITU is working to strengthen the digital foundations of Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (MHEWS) in SIDS. Through technical assistance, regulatory guidance, and infrastructure support, ITU ensures that early warning messages are timely, targeted, and accessible to all, including persons with disabilities. In the Caribbean and Pacific SIDS, ITU is collaborating with local regulators, meteorological agencies, and telecom operators to assess gaps in last-mile alerting capacity, deploy or enhance Cell Broadcast and Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) systems, and build capacity for emergency telecommunications planning and disaster recovery. These interventions directly support SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and Sendai Framework targets on disaster risk reduction. The EW4All initiative is integrated with ITU's broader work on Smart Islands, resilient connectivity, and climate-smart digital infrastructure. **Projects implementations are currently ongoing in Cabo Verde, Guyana, Soa Tome and Principe, Haiti, Comoros, Kiribati. Mauritius, Solomon Islands and Tonga.**

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[1] accountability framework developed to promote and monitor progress with implementation of ABAS

Smart Villages and Smart Islands Initiative: Aimed at bridging the digital divide in LDCs and SIDS, this initiative empowers rural and remote communities with digital tools tailored to local development needs. In Vanuatu, over 10 remote communities have been connected, leading to measurable improvements in e-health and e-education access. The initiative promotes a community-driven approach, integrating ICTs into sectors like education, health, agriculture, and governance, thereby supporting progress toward SDGs 3, 4 and 9.

Giga School Connectivity Project - Led by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Giga provides open-source connectivity solutions and technical support to governments, helping them achieve universal school connectivity. Giga offers advanced connectivity support to more than 30 countries in 2023 including Barbados, Belize, Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, and currently developing a feasibility assessment and analysis on the different connectivity solutions to connect all schools in Sao Tome and Principe to the Internet.

2. Enhanced and Tailored Development Cooperation for SIDS (For Development Partners, IFIs and SIDS Governments)

Successful ABAS implementation will require improved, tailored development cooperation approaches and financial resources, calibrated to the specific needs, capacity constraints, and economic challenges facing SIDS. It will also require that relevant national/regional plans programme and polices are implemented. Briefly elaborate on:

i)   any planned or ongoing strategies/approaches to improve and deliver on more tailored development support to SIDS. What are the expected results from these interventions in the targeted countries Please include indications of resource allocations if available (600 words)

ii)   any planned or ongoing national programmes to develop more resilient SIDS economies. What are the expected results from these interventions. Please include indications of resource allocations if available (600 words)

i) Strategies to Improve and Deliver Tailored Development Support to SIDS

The ITU's initiatives are designed with scalability and adaptability in mind, ensuring that the specific needs of SIDS are met:

Smart Seas Project: By focusing on strengthening maritime communications, the project addresses the unique challenges faced by small-scale fishers in SIDS, enhancing their disaster resilience and contributing to sustainable fisheries management.

Cyber for Good Initiative: Through strategic matching with ITU-D Private Sector Members, the initiative provides tailored cybersecurity support to SIDS, aligning with their specific needs and capacity constraints.

ii) National Programs to Develop More Resilient SIDS Economies

The Smart Villages and Smart Islands Initiative exemplifies a national and regional program aimed at fostering more resilient and inclusive digital economies in Small Island Developing States (SIDS):
In Vanuatu, the initiative has connected over 10 remote communities, resulting in measurable improvements in e-health and e-education service delivery. It also enabled regional collaboration across the Pacific, supporting inter-country knowledge exchange, digital capacity building, and the co-development of digital solutions.

Building on Vanuatu's experience, **Fiji and Tonga** have begun integrating lessons learned into their national digital transformation roadmaps. These countries are leveraging the initiative's open-source toolkits, modular frameworks, and regional workshops to adapt and scale digital services such as community telehealth, digital literacy programs, and mobile-based agricultural advisory platforms.

The expected outcomes include:
- Increased digital literacy, particularly among women and youth;
- Enhanced delivery of essential services in remote areas;
- Strengthened national digital strategies and regional cooperation mechanisms; and
- Improved local capacity to sustain digital transformation efforts.

The initiative's emphasis on local ownership, public-private partnerships, and policy integration ensures sustainability. Its adaptable design and promotion of South-South and Triangular Cooperation make it a scalable model for digital resilience across SIDS.

PART B - COHERENT AND EFFECTIVE UN SYSTEM WIDE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES TO SIDS

Paragraph 36 of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) requests the UN Secretary-General: *"……. within his annual report to the General Assembly for the 80th Session on the implementation of the ABAS, to present proposals to ensure a coordinated, coherent and effective UN system wide capacity development approach to SIDS and to enhance the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the ABAS, including a potential single SIDS dedicated entity at the UN Secretariat."*
At the global level, the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) oversees UN efforts for sustainable development in 162 countries and territories, guiding, supporting, tracking and overseeing the coordination of development operations. The UNSDG derives its mandate from the Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, which serves as an important instrument for the monitoring and the assessment of UN development operations. The integrated nature of ABAS calls for a UN Development System that works in a coordinated and coherent manner while preserving each entity's mandate and role and leveraging each entity's expertise.

1. Coherent and effective UN system support to SIDS (For UN System Responses, 750 words)
  i. What challenges are encountered by UN agencies, to deliver a 'whole-of-system response' in addressing the needs, risks and vulnerabilities and to provide development programmes that address the underlying drivers of needs in SIDS?
 ii. What percentage of your entity's programming expenditures on development activities in SIDS in 2024 were allocated to joint programmes? What percentage will be allocated in 2025?
iii. What are the lessons learned, challenges and best practices of the UNSCDF (including multi-country frameworks) and their respective Country Implementation Plans (CIPs) in promoting joint programming?
 iv. What improvements would you recommend to enhance the UN's system-wide approach to capacity development in SIDS?
  v. How can the UN better partner with regional development stakeholders e.g. CARICOM Secretariat, SPC, PIF, SPREP etc to improve programme delivery, improve coherence and avoid duplication

1. Coherent and Effective UN System Support to SIDS

i. Challenges in Delivering a 'Whole-of-System Response'
The ITU's 10-Step Plan for SIDS also provides a collaborative entry point to engage regional partners like CARICOM, SPC, SPREP, and PIF. It **offers a framework that supports joint planning and implementation across thematic areas such as connectivity, skills development, digital public infrastructure, and innovation hubs.**

Delivering a coherent, whole-of-system response to the unique and evolving needs of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) presents a number of interrelated challenges for UN agencies.

1. **Limited Financial and Human Resources:** SIDS-specific programmes often compete with broader global priorities for funding. Many UN agencies operate under constrained

budgets, which limits their ability to tailor interventions specifically to SIDS contexts or sustain long-term support. Capacity limitations within agencies, especially at the regional level, can hinder the provision of technical assistance or rapid response in times of need.

2. **Fragmented Programming and Mandates:** While many UN agencies implement activities relevant to SIDS, efforts are often siloed according to individual mandates. This fragmentation leads to duplication, missed opportunities for synergy, and inefficiencies in resource utilization. Agencies often lack mechanisms to co-plan and co-deliver services in an integrated way.

3. **Diverse Needs and Contexts:** SIDS are not a monolithic group. They differ significantly in geography, economic structure, development level, and exposure to risks. One-size-fits-all interventions often fall short, and more nuanced, context-sensitive solutions require deeper coordination.

4. **Misalignment with National Planning Cycles:** The planning and budgeting cycles of UN entities may not always align with national development plans of SIDS. This can hinder national ownership, reduce the impact of interventions, and affect sustainability.

5. **Data Gaps and Weak M&E Systems:** Many SIDS face limitations in producing timely, disaggregated data. UN entities may struggle to align on common indicators or frameworks, complicating joint planning and evaluation.

6. **Coordination in Multi-Country Settings:** In regions like the Pacific or the Caribbean, multi-country coordination adds layers of complexity, requiring engagement with multiple governments and governance systems. This increases transaction costs unless regional entities are effectively leveraged.

7. **Limited On-the-Ground Presence:** Some UN agencies maintain limited or no physical presence in smaller or more remote SIDS. This can reduce responsiveness and local partnership development.

8. **Inconsistent Application of the UNSDCF:** The adoption of the UNSDCF has not been uniform across all SIDS, particularly those under multi-country frameworks, leading to inconsistent joint programming.

ii. Programming Expenditures on Joint Programmes in SIDS

ITU has launched a strategic proposal titled "A 10-Step Plan for SIDS" aimed at accelerating sustainable and inclusive digital transformation across SIDS. This proposal, aligned with the ABAS and the Global Digital Compact, outlines collaborative entry points for system-wide engagement, particularly in areas like climate resilience, e-commerce, cybersecurity, digital skills, and public-private innovation ecosystems.

The plan encourages enhanced collaboration on programmatic initiatives through shared infrastructure investments, capacity development, policy harmonization, and South-South and Triangular Cooperation. It provides a framework for scaling up joint investments and delivering high-impact, multi-sectoral outcomes in line with SDG priorities. The proposal can serve as a blueprint for joint programming with other UN agencies, IFIs, and development partners to implement ABAS more coherently.

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iii. Lessons Learned, Challenges, and Best Practices of UNSDCF and CIPs

The UNSDCF and associated Country Implementation Plans (CIPs) have provided a valuable platform for aligning agency mandates and fostering joint programming in SIDS. Successful practices include joint needs assessments, multi-stakeholder consultations, and shared monitoring frameworks. However, implementation can be hampered by differing budget cycles, uneven commitment from partners, and limited capacity at the national level. Best practices include regional joint programming compacts (e.g., Pacific Strategy), and the integration of digital development into country cooperation frameworks.

iv. Recommendations to Enhance the UN's System-Wide Approach

- Leverage existing strategic frameworks, such as the ITU's 10-Step Plan for SIDS, as a shared blueprint for digital transformation, climate resilience, and economic diversification. Its modular design can help UN entities align programming approaches, pool investments, and co-develop high-impact digital solutions across sectors.
- Create dedicated interagency working groups focused on SIDS within the framework of ECESA Plus.
- Enhance flexible funding and pooled finance mechanisms for joint SIDS programming.
- Standardize indicators across UN entities for SIDS-specific reporting.
- Expand the deployment of joint UN digital transformation advisers in SIDS.
- Institutionalize annual joint planning sessions with national governments.

v. Strengthening Partnerships with Regional Development Stakeholders

To improve coherence and delivery, the UN should:

- Formalize structured partnerships with regional institutions such as CARICOM, SPC, SPREP, and PIF.
- Engage in joint regional planning, implementation, and monitoring mechanisms.
- Co-host regional dialogues and capacity-building with these organizations.
- Share data and evaluation results for mutual learning and scaling up.

Regional partners play a pivotal role in maintaining continuity, contextual understanding, and implementation efficiency. By aligning UN programming with existing regional frameworks, the system can enhance impact and avoid duplication, while fostering local ownership.

2. Interagency Mechanisms for improved coherence

Under the chairmanship of the UN Secretary-General, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) provides broad guidance, coordination and strategic direction for the UN system in the areas under the responsibility of Executive Heads. Focus is placed on inter-agency priorities and initiatives while ensuring that the independent mandates of organizations are maintained. One particular focus of the CEB is system-wide coordination and policy coherence in the programme areas. The CEB has to date created three inter-agency mechanisms to increase coherence across the United Nations system in addressing urgent development challenges. These are UN-Water, UN-Oceans and UN-Energy.

vi.   As there is no single entity in the United Nations system that has sole responsibility for SIDS, do you see value creating a UN-SIDS to serve as the primary agent for promoting system-wide collaboration on SIDS issues, and to promote coherence in the UN system´s multi-disciplinary response to SIDS? (500 words)

Yes, there is strong value in establishing a dedicated UN-SIDS entity to serve as the primary agent for promoting system-wide collaboration on SIDS issues. From the perspective of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), such a mechanism would greatly enhance coherence, coordination, and the visibility of SIDS needs—especially in the area of digital transformation, which underpins resilience across all sectors.

Small Island Developing States face complex vulnerabilities due to their geographic remoteness, small economies, climate exposure, and limited access to digital infrastructure and services. While many UN agencies support SIDS through sectoral programs, a dedicated UN-SIDS mechanism could serve as a unifying platform to integrate these efforts and align them with national and regional priorities.
A UN-SIDS entity could fulfil several core functions:

1. **Coordination and Policy Alignment:**
   The entity could provide an integrated framework for joint planning and policy alignment across UN agencies. For example, ITU's Smart Islands and Smart Villages Initiative has shown that community-driven digital inclusion programs benefit significantly when aligned with national digital strategies and broader development goals (e.g., education, health, agriculture). A UN-SIDS mechanism could mainstream such integrated approaches across the UN system.

2. **Resource Mobilization and Partnerships:**
   The new body could facilitate collective resource mobilization and the scaling of high-impact, cross-sectoral projects in SIDS. For example, ITU's Cyber for Good project and Smart Seas initiative demonstrate how strategic matching between SIDS, donors, and private sector partners can unlock critical digital tools, services, and capacity-building. A UN-SIDS platform could help expand and replicate such models by brokering multi-stakeholder partnerships tailored to SIDS' priorities.

3. **Capacity Development and Knowledge Exchange:**
   The proposed mechanism could centralize technical assistance and promote South-South and Triangular Cooperation. ITU's work in Vanuatu and other Pacific SIDS has shown the value of inter-country learning and digital blueprints that are adaptable across regions. A dedicated entity could manage shared knowledge hubs, toolkits, and communities of practice to support regional capacity development.

4. **Accountability and Monitoring:**
   The body could support regular reporting on ABAS implementation and SDG progress, ensuring accountability and system-wide learning. It could work closely with ECESA Plus and the HLPF to track impact, identify gaps, and reinforce whole-of-system responses.

This mechanism need not be a new agency—it could be a lean coordination unit embedded within an existing UN entity, such as UN DESA, but with a clear mandate, dedicated staffing, and a governing structure that includes representation from SIDS. ITU would strongly support the development of such a mechanism and stands ready to contribute its technical expertise, tools, and experience in digital development.

By enabling more coherent and tailored support, a UN-SIDS body could significantly accelerate progress toward resilient, inclusive, and digitally empowered SIDS.

Coordination of UN System actions for the implementation of politically agreed documents e.g. ABAS takes place through the Executive Committee on Economic and Social (ECESA Plus). Its over fifty

members have developed a matrix for the follow up to ABAS, focusing on mandates specifically directed at the United Nations system as well as on areas where the UN system is already engaged through its programmatic work. The UN Implementation Matrix, which is being continuously updated, serves as an accountability framework and as a working tool to promote and monitor progress. ECESA Plus meets regularly to *inter alia* SIDS related matters and is convened by the Under Secretary General of DESA.

viii   How can ECESA Plus be used to more effectively harness UN agency contributions and to amplify systemic synergies?)
ECESA Plus can be leveraged to:
- Facilitate regular inter-agency meetings to align strategies and share best practices.
- Develop integrated work plans that capitalize on the strengths of each UN agency.

3. HLPF
ix.   How should the HLPF SIDS session be structured to effectively monitor progress to scale up implementation of the SDGs while at the same time driving implementation of ABAS? What role should the monitoring and evaluation framework of ABAS play in this? (250 words)

To effectively monitor progress and drive implementation of both the SDGs and the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), the HLPF SIDS session should be structured as a dynamic and results-focused platform. The session should begin with a high-level policy review on ABAS implementation, grounded in the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework, to provide a data-informed overview of achievements, gaps, and priorities across thematic areas.

To promote learning and replicability, the session should highlight case studies from SIDS, such as ITU's Smart Islands Initiative in Vanuatu or Smart Seas Project in the Caribbean, which demonstrate cross-cutting progress in digital inclusion, climate resilience, and community empowerment. These concrete examples help contextualize indicators within the M&E framework and inspire action.

The session should ensure broad stakeholder engagement, including youth, private sector, civil society, and regional organizations (e.g., CARICOM, SPC), to facilitate inclusive, multi-actor dialogue. Interactive formats such as moderated roundtables, expert panels, and "solutions pitch" segments can allow diverse voices to showcase innovative, scalable practices.

Furthermore, the ABAS M&E framework should be used to structure periodic reporting and country self-assessments, guiding voluntary national reviews (VNRs) and informing investment priorities. It should serve not only as a reporting tool but as a strategic planning instrument that aligns SDG acceleration with SIDS-specific vulnerabilities and development pathways.

Such a structure would reinforce accountability, promote integrated action, and position the HLPF as a catalyst for coordinated implementation of ABAS and the 2030 Agenda in SIDS.