

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.

PART A - FOSTERING RESILIENT PROSPERITY IN SIDS

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

Using the UN implementation Matrix **ONLY** (attached) to guide feedback, briefly elaborate on any resilience building interventions or strategies (proactive or preventative) that will be implemented at national or regional levels aimed specifically at improving resilience in SIDS. Please include indications of resource allocations, if available (600 words).

2. Enhanced and Tailored Development Cooperation for SIDS (For Development Partners ONLY)

Successful ABAS implementation will require improved, tailored development cooperation approaches, calibrated to the specific needs, capacity constraints, and economic challenges facing SIDS. Briefly elaborate on 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)

PART B - COHERENT AND EFFECTIVE UN SYSTEM WIDE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES TO SIDS (MEMBER STATES ONLY)

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 Quadrennial 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

- i. How would you assess the current level of coordination among UN agencies in supporting capacity development for SIDS? What challenges do you believe hinder effective coordination among UN entities in providing support to SIDS? What mechanisms would you suggest to improve the coherence of UN support for SIDS? (600 words)

The Cook Islands recognises and values the continued support provided by the United Nations system through the Multi-Country Office model and its network of non-resident

agencies. The Cook Islands Country Implementation Plan (CIP) reflects a strong commitment to integrated programming across climate resilience, health, social protection, economic diversification and governance, structured through the four strategic pillars of Planet, People, Prosperity and Peace. Current coordination arrangements provide a solid foundation for collaboration, particularly through joint planning mechanisms, the Joint National–UN Steering Committee, and alignment with national development frameworks such as the National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) and the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS).

UN agencies and regional mechanisms generally align well with the Cook Islands' broad national priorities, particularly in areas such as climate resilience, biodiversity and ocean governance, waste and pollution management, and disaster risk reduction. They provide valuable technical expertise, access to global guidance, tools and standards, as well as periodic funding support. Joint support tends to be strongest where there are established regional programmes and implementation pipelines, such as climate adaptation planning, disaster preparedness, environmental data and reporting, and project design support. At the same time, several coordination challenges remain. The presence of multiple UN entities operating remotely with different mandates and funding streams can lead to overlaps, gaps and inefficiencies in delivery. Programming can sometimes reflect global or regional priorities rather than the sequencing of national priorities and capacity constraints of small administrations. Reliance on non-resident agencies and remote implementation models may also limit responsiveness and sustained technical engagement at country level, particularly in areas requiring ongoing dialogue and adaptive support.

Administrative processes can further complicate coordination. Approval timelines, procurement procedures and reporting requirements can delay the transition from funding commitments to implementation. For small administrations with limited staffing capacity, these processes can increase transaction costs and reduce the time available for delivery. Support is often stronger at the planning stage than during implementation. There remain gaps in sustained technical assistance and predictable resourcing for core functions such as policy development, compliance and enforcement, monitoring systems and institutional capacity. Data and monitoring and evaluation support are uneven across sectors, and cross-cutting issues—particularly the interlinkages between oceans, climate change, biodiversity and pollution—are not always addressed in an integrated manner.

To improve coherence and effectiveness, the Cook Islands sees value in stronger system-wide coordination with clearer roles and responsibilities across agencies and reduced duplication in mandates and activities. Engagement frameworks should be simplified and better tailored to the capacities and realities of SIDS so that administrative requirements remain proportionate.

One practical option could be the development of a single UN country engagement plan that maps UN agencies active in the Cook Islands, identifies official focal points, and outlines current and planned programme pipelines. This would improve visibility across government of UN-supported activities and help align them with national priorities, implementation sequencing and capacity constraints.

Greater regional coordination could also improve efficiency by enabling pooled technical expertise for shared SIDS challenges. Continued investment in national data systems and statistical capacity is equally important to strengthen monitoring, support evidence-based decision-making and improve accountability.

Overall, integrated planning mechanisms such as the Cook Islands CIP demonstrate that coordinated approaches can enhance effectiveness when supported by adequate capacity, clear accountability arrangements and sustained partnerships. Continued efforts to simplify engagement processes and strengthen coordination will be important to ensure that UN support remains responsive to the unique circumstances of small island developing States.

- ii. There currently is no single entity at the UN Secretariat that has sole responsibility for SIDS. SIDS matters are currently advanced by UNDESA and UN-OHRLS. What is the value added of creating one entity that can serve as the primary agent (at headquarters) for promoting system-wide collaboration on SIDS issues? What in your view is the best final configuration for such a single entity in light of the ongoing UN80 discussions (1000 words)

The establishment of a single SIDS-dedicated entity within the United Nations system could provide important added value if it is designed to strengthen visibility, coordination and accountability for SIDS priorities while delivering practical improvements at country level. At present, responsibilities related to SIDS are shared across multiple UN entities, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLS). While these entities play valuable roles, the current arrangement can result in fragmented coordination across the wider UN system and limited operational authority to align the work of multiple agencies.

A single entity could improve coherence by acting as a central coordination point for SIDS issues within the UN system. This could help clarify mandates across agencies, reduce duplication of activities, and provide a clearer entry point for SIDS governments seeking support. In practice, such an entity could help coordinate UN agency contributions around nationally identified priorities under the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), ensuring that programming and technical assistance are better aligned with national development plans and implementation needs.

Stronger advocacy and visibility would also be a key benefit. SIDS priorities—such as climate vulnerability, ocean governance, disaster resilience, sustainable development financing and capacity development—often require sustained political attention in global decision-making processes. A dedicated entity could elevate these priorities across the UN system and ensure that SIDS perspectives are consistently reflected in global policy discussions, resource allocation frameworks and system-wide planning processes. This could include supporting coordinated messaging across UN agencies, convening senior-level dialogues on SIDS priorities and strengthening analytical work on SIDS vulnerabilities and resilience pathways.

A single entity could also enhance support for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ABAS commitments. For example, the entity could help develop a common monitoring framework that links global commitments with national development plans and reporting systems. Consolidated reporting arrangements across agencies could reduce administrative burdens on SIDS governments, which often face significant capacity constraints and must currently respond to multiple reporting and coordination processes.

The entity could also support data collection and analysis, strengthening the evidence base for policymaking and improving tracking of progress on ABAS implementation.

At the same time, the effectiveness of such an entity would depend heavily on its design. If a new entity simply adds another institutional layer within the UN architecture, it could risk increasing bureaucracy rather than reducing fragmentation. A headquarters-based entity alone will not address implementation challenges unless it has a clear mandate to coordinate across agencies and is linked effectively to regional and country-level operations.

The experience of the Cook Islands highlights the importance of arrangements that remain responsive to national realities. Small island developing States often operate with limited administrative capacity, geographic remoteness and high transaction costs associated with international engagement. UN support structures must therefore be designed to reduce complexity rather than increase it. Any new entity should focus on simplifying engagement with the UN system, reducing duplication of missions and reporting processes, and supporting integrated solutions that address cross-cutting issues such as climate change, ocean governance, biodiversity protection and sustainable economic development.

In considering the most appropriate institutional configuration, the Cook Islands sees merit in approaches that prioritise operational effectiveness and system-wide coherence. Strengthening existing arrangements could be one practical pathway if accompanied by clearer mandates, stronger coordination authority and improved alignment across agencies. Alternatively, consolidating existing SIDS-related functions under a single host entity with a unified results framework could help improve accountability and streamline coordination.

Should a new dedicated entity be created, several principles would be important to ensure effectiveness. First, the entity should have a clear operational mandate linked directly to implementation and monitoring of ABAS commitments. Second, leadership should be sufficiently senior—at least at Assistant Secretary-General or Under-Secretary-General level—to convene and coordinate across the UN system and advocate effectively for SIDS priorities in resource allocation discussions.

Predictable and sustainable financing will also be essential. Many current UN programmes rely heavily on short-term, project-based funding, which can lead to frequent changes in priorities and personnel. A SIDS entity should therefore be supported by a combination of core or assessed funding and transparent multi-year planning frameworks to ensure continuity of technical expertise and programming.

Equally important is ensuring strong accountability to SIDS Member States. Governance arrangements should allow SIDS governments to set strategic priorities, review progress and provide oversight of programming decisions. Mechanisms for regular consultation with SIDS regions and governments would help ensure that the entity remains responsive to national development priorities and operational realities.

Finally, any institutional reform should strengthen links between headquarters coordination and regional implementation. For Pacific SIDS in particular, effective support requires strong regional technical capacity and close engagement with governments. A single SIDS entity should therefore reinforce existing country and regional coordination mechanisms rather than replace them, including through shared technical expertise, joint missions and improved knowledge-sharing across SIDS regions.

Overall, the Cook Islands sees value in reforms that enhance system-wide coherence, elevate the visibility of SIDS priorities and reduce administrative burdens on small island administrations. The final configuration of any SIDS-dedicated entity should prioritise practical delivery, predictable support and clear accountability to SIDS Member States, ensuring that institutional reform leads to tangible improvements in implementation and outcomes under the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS.