

MEETING SUMMARY

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

Date: 19 Jan 2017

Venue: S-2724 BR

Time: 9:00 am – 11:00 am (New York Time)

Members in attendance: UN-DESA, UN-OHRLLS, CARICOM Secretariat, Commonwealth Secretariat, FAO, GEF, GLIPSA, IAEA, IMF, IOM, Office of the Permanent observer, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIDO, UN-Habitat, UN-Women, WIPO and World Bank.

Chair: Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director, Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS).

Summary

At the meeting of the IACG, participants were briefed on the SIDS resolutions A/71/224 and A/71/225 and implications to the group were highlighted. DESA made a brief presentation on the Development Account Project on Vulnerability and Resilience Country Profile (VRCP). Highlights of the QCPR were presented, and implications discussed. Participants discussed the draft Terms of Reference (TOR) of the IACG and the development of a work programme for 2017. The meeting ended with highlights and some discussion on the JIU report, the oceans conference and the Global Action Programme for Food and Nutrition Security led by FAO and the Bahamas symposium.

1. (ii) Update on SIDS Resolutions

Two SIDS resolutions were concluded in 2016.

- SIDS resolution A/71/225 *“Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations”*, is a bi-annual resolution reiterating the importance of protecting the fragile seas. The resolution calls for the United Nations to continue supporting the Caribbean States in the protection of biodiversity and a highly fragile ecosystem, and from degradation as a result of pollution from ships, illegal dumping, and land-based activities. It also notes the importance of the Caribbean Sea Commission of the Association of Caribbean States on sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea.
- SIDS resolution A/71/224 *“Sustainable development: follow-up to and implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States”* calls for a review of progress made in addressing the priorities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The resolution in its Paragraph 19 decided to convene a one-day high-level review in September 2019 at the UN headquarters in New York as part of 74th session, which will result in a concise, action-oriented and inter-governmentally agreed political declaration. The resolution instructs JIU to submit complete results of their study on the UN system support for SIDS before the end of 2016, for consideration by the GA 72nd session. On the HLPF, the resolution calls for future meetings

to continue addressing the sustainable development challenges of SIDS and the follow up to the Samoa Pathway, devoting attention and time in the HLPF discussions. However, there is always a challenge as other groupings question why other countries in special situations should not have an equal amount of time. The resolution gives ammunition in working with the ECOSOC bureau to ensure that there is sufficient space at the HPLF for the review of the Samoa Pathway. This year, Maldives and Belize will participate in the National Voluntary Reviews at the HLPF and UN-DESA is supporting them in their preparations.

(ii) The Development Account Project on Vulnerability and Resilience Country Profile (VRCP)

- The VRCP is a tool developed by DESA with experts from SIDS. It is an evidence-based policy formulation, planning, decision making and monitoring tool for self-assessment of a country's progress to address vulnerability and resilience. It can assist SIDS to monitor progress in the implementation of the Samoa pathway and other international commitments including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is funded by the Development Account for a little under USD 600, 000. It is currently implemented in eight (8) participating states, five (5) countries in Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea (AIMS) and three (3) in the Caribbean Region with a completion date of December 2017.

- The advantage of the tool is that it can also be used to support negotiations with international donor community in financing resilience measures particularly in countries that may no longer have access to concessional financing. Using both quantitative and qualitative indicators, the tool is not an index and as such does not allow for country comparison. DESA is going through national training exercises with participating countries to build capacity. In three (3) states (Barbados, Cabo Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe) the training has been completed, 4 countries (Guinea Bissau, Jamaica, Seychelles, and St Lucia) are remaining. These have been well received, with some countries indicating that they will use the tool in the next round of planning.

- The VRCP has built in an opportunity for capacity building in data collection and management, and DESA is also working to build up national statistics systems in the participating countries. Project documents including tools will be placed on the knowledge platform for access to all. DESA is engaging partners in order to promote wide spread support for use of the tool for national planning processes.

Discussion

- The current intergovernmental process has not so far sufficiently taken into account specific challenges of SIDS. At the GA level there is awareness of special needs of SIDS, especially with resolutions, yearly and biennially, but not enough time for policy oriented in-depth discussions. Dedicating time to these discussions is met with opposition amongst other political groupings challenging why SIDS should be given that treatment as opposed to other countries in special and fragile situations. HLPF should be the platform that allows for

coherent review on SDGs and the Samoa Pathway and how to link the two. There is need to make the best use of the GA led SIDS partnership dialogue, in promoting coherence and synergistic reviews of the implementation of the Samoa Pathway and the 2030 Agenda.

- The mid-term review will be a good opportunity to take account of progress on the Samoa Pathway, and linking it to the SDG agenda. However, dedicating only a day is a challenge - a missed opportunity - to ensure that the review is conducted adequately in a manner that has impact on the ground.
- Countries could tap on the VRCP, as it has connections and synergies with the roll out of the localization of sustainable development goals, as countries go through their national planning processes.
- The key lesson from the training conducted in VRCP is the need for comprehensive national statistical systems. Technical assistance, albeit with limited funds, is built in to support countries in improving national statistical systems and are encouraged to use micro grants in supporting and building that capacity.

2. QCPR – remarks from UN specialised agencies, funds and programmes

Background

- The QCPR is the primary policy instrument of the General Assembly to define the way the UN development system operates to support programme countries in their development efforts. This has implications for SIDS in many ways as UN development system seeks to improve their efficiency, coherence and impact of their operational activities for development in SIDS.
- The QCPR asserts the role of the UN development system and its core functions to assist governments, whose expectation include providing advisory services, normative development and support for government planning amongst others. It calls for the integration of core pillars from humanitarian, peace building to development and emphasizes joint programming. It requests the SG to carry out a system-wide outline of present functions with the view to identify gaps and overlaps. The QCPR also tasks the Secretary General to improve the resident coordinator system.
- For SIDS, the QCPR recognizes the special challenges by vulnerable countries and re-affirms the Samoa Pathway. It calls for strengthening of the south-south cooperation and strengthening core contributions to LDCs and SIDS. The call to review the UN system in order to review and tailor appropriate role for multi-country offices is also very relevant to SIDS.

Discussion

- QCPR has traditionally focused on the technical side (including cost efficiencies) but now it is becoming an engine to drive UN system development reform whose implications for SIDS and countries in special situations is yet to be seen. UN-OHRLLS, which has a role for advocacy for countries in special situations, should be supported to strengthen its advocacy efforts on SIDS to ensure the attention to SIDS is not lost in the reform of the UN. DESA who will be drafting SG SIDS report will try to have more in-depth analysis of what has been done

to support implementation of the Samoa Pathway on the basis of the contributions from all the relevant parts of the UN system and other relevant stakeholders to show where challenges and potential gaps will be.

- All agencies should support OHRLLS advocacy efforts on SIDS. Using specific information and evidence that highlight the particularities of SIDS to articulate issues beyond income, could strengthen the case for SIDS.
- Small island countries and big countries have different political arrangements, with different political strengths and circumstances which add another dimension that has implications for resource mobilisation due to different priorities from donors and other lending institutions. Political sensitivities need to be managed to address challenges in terms of development framework in some regions.
- With a growing number of priority groups, the need to focus on SIDS is apparent. IACG could identify specific thematic areas for SIDS and have a coordinated and concerted initiative for a bigger impact e.g. promoting areas important for SIDS including sustainable energy, oceans, tourism and climate change. One of the IACG meetings could be dedicated to a thematic area, focusing on the most important issues.

3. Discussion on draft Terms of Reference (TOR) of the IACG

Background

The last IACG meeting agreed that Terms of Reference of the IACG should be developed. OHRLLS and DESA have worked on the initial draft which was circulated to all members. The TORs articulates some of the main functions of this group, the composition of membership and modalities of operation.

Discussion

- The terms of reference for the group are overdue, and hopefully will be concluded swiftly - the group owes this to AOSIS, who want to see a more coordination of effort in supporting them. The TORs will help manage expectations of what the group is and what it is not and be able to communicate this clearly to stakeholders.
- This exercise is the first attempt to formalize the terms of reference. There has been a certain expectation by AOSIS in particular that the TORs be formalized. The JIU report pointed also to the need for Terms of reference.
- Information on how the agencies are doing in relation to the respective Samoa Pathway issues, as contained in the implementation matrix, should be reflected.
- The IACG group could occasionally meet with AOSIS, actively creating opportunities for interaction between the Member States and the UN system.
- There will be no intended cost implications i.e. there are no plans to organize extraordinary meetings taking place elsewhere requiring travel.
- IACG members are encouraged to send comments in writing regarding TORs. Communication to that effect will be sent to all members indicating timelines as well.

4. Discussion on development of an IACG work programme for 2017

Background

The JIU highlighted that the absence of an established work programme is hampering the realization of this group's full potential. The last meeting discussed this idea of the work programme briefly; one of the suggestions was that the UN Implementation Matrix of the SAMOA Pathway could be utilized to define the work plan for the IACG.

Discussion

- The composition of the SIDS IACG, a hybrid system with a wider membership, is different from other interagency consultative groups. The work programme should take cognizance of this wider membership and avoid possible restrictions and appearance as focused on the UN only. Maintaining the flexibility is important and drawing lessons from cases where TORs have had undesirable restrictions on a usefulness of a group.
- Areas that could be useful to capture in the IACG work programme could include global conferences, planned thematic discussions tied to the goals of the HPLF and Samoa Pathway priorities, regional events and what is happening on the ground – in country offices to link national with regional and global issues. The use of the web to share schedules and programme showing global, regional and national events is another good idea to share what is happening in SIDS.
- IACG members are encouraged to send ideas in writing. Communication to that effect, too, will be sent to all members indicating timelines.

5. Any Other Business

JIU report

- Opportunities to meet with JIU were sought. JIU took on board some of our inputs. The final report is being studied carefully. A JIU report recommendation relevant to the group is the need to establish a more regular and interactive line of communication with Member States, particularly with the representatives of AOSIS, so that their needs and queries can be more promptly addressed and so that they can receive regular updates on issues relevant to SIDS.
- IACG members are encouraged to look at the report for more in-depth discussion in the next meeting.
- JIU report is available online: https://www.unjiu.org/en/reports-notes/JIU%20Products/JIU_REP_2016_7_English.pdf

Discussion

- There is a need to build the entry point for more regular interactions with AOSIS, while preserving the interagency nature of the IACG.

The Oceans Conference

- The Oceans Conference will take place in New York, from 4-9 June, 2017. Secretary General's background note is available [online](#). The Permanent Representatives of Portugal and Singapore, the co-facilitators appointed by the PGA to oversee the preparatory process of the Ocean Conference, will organize an informal briefing on 1 February for Member States and stakeholders on how to organize the preparatory meeting.
- A preparatory meeting will be held on 15-16 February. It will consider the themes of the seven partnership dialogues to be held in the Conference, and elements of the political outcome of the Conference, a "Call for Action". In the margins of the preparatory meeting, the side events will be organized from 14 to 16 February. The programme of the side events will be released very soon.
- There will be further intergovernmental consultations in March, April with the aim to finalize the Call for Action in May. In conjunction with OHRLLS, DESA will also convene a SIDS preparatory meeting to be held in Jeju Island, Republic of Korea from 29 – 31 March.
- Emphasis is placed on voluntary commitments as the game changer in the sustainable management and use of marine resources. Working with DESA who will register voluntary commitments on the official site of the Conference, UNDP is facilitating gathering of voluntary commitments.
- All information is on the website (<https://oceanconference.un.org/>), with regular updates. All members are invited to the conference. Information on how to register is available on the website. The conference could be one of the occasions where the IACG could have a face to face meeting.

Discussion

- There are 7 informal preparatory working groups, mainly composed of UN agencies, and each prepared a report which was submitted to DESA as a contribution to the SG background note.
- Looking to support the Ocean conference including mobilization of voluntary commitments, an Oceans Action hub, a knowledge hub <http://www.oceanactionhub.org/> will complement conference website, providing timely information and allowing for interaction through chat rooms, backed by facilitators, helping with topics related to the thematic areas that will be considered at the Preparatory meeting together with resource persons managing the conversation. From anywhere one will be able to engage with the Ocean Conference. The site is for the UN system and Member States and they are encouraged to upload resource documents, publications etc.
- CARICOM Secretariat will participate in the preparatory committee on biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction (BBNJ). Focusing on ocean governance, two meetings are planned for 27 – 7 April and 10-25 July 2017.
- The members could consider a joint publication of SIDS in implementation of SDG 14.

Global Action Programme on Food Security and Nutrition in Small Island Developing States (GAP)

- FAO worked closely with DESA and OHRLLS Global Action Programme on Food Security and Nutrition in Small Island Developing States (GAP). The first draft of the GAP was circulated, and a 2nd draft has been finalised. The second draft, which is more action oriented, will be shared for comments by end January. FAO looks forward to comments.
- The GAP will also be presented at the FAO conference in July 2017, which gathers a large development community in Rome. There is a possibility for a side event during the HPLF 2017. The idea is to promote the GAP and get political buy-in and start implementing GAP in Member States with the support from the UN agencies.

The Bahamas Symposium

- The Bahamas Symposium on “Implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in Small Island Developing States (SIDS): equipping public institutions and mobilizing partnerships” will be held in the Bahamas from 21 to 23 February 2017 organized by DESA and the Government of the Bahamas. It will look at policy coherence at the global, regional and national level in localising the 2030 Agenda. There will be a session on partnerships, with some to be announced at the Symposium, focusing on how best to equip public institutions for realizing the 2030 Agenda and other commitments.