

Background Notes

Expert Group Meeting on “Integrated Approaches for the Implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the post-2015 development agenda: Focus on Linkages between SIDS, Climate Change, and Ocean and Seas” (2-3 September 2015 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, USA)

Session 1: Overview of key challenges of SIDS with respect to Climate Change and Oceans

Small island developing States have been recognised as a special case within sustainable development since the 1992 Earth Summit. In 2012, the Rio+20 Outcome “The Future We Want” noted that “SIDS have made less progress than most other groupings, or even regressed, in economic terms, especially in terms of poverty reduction and debt sustainability.”¹

The Rio+20 further noted that “Sea-level rise and other adverse impacts of climate change continue to pose a significant risk to SIDS and their efforts to achieve sustainable development and for many represent the gravest of threats to their survival and viability,”²

Following the Rio+20 Conference, the Third International Conference on SIDS highlighted Oceans and Seas, as well as Climate Change, as critical areas that required attention in the sustainable development of SIDS.

Heads of State and Government acknowledged in paragraph 31 of the SAMOA Pathway that climate change and sea-level rise continue to pose a significant risk to small island developing States and their efforts to achieve sustainable development and, for some, represent the gravest threat to their survival and viability.³ Furthermore, the international community recognized, in paragraph 15 of the Samoa Pathway, that “the adverse impacts of climate change compound existing challenges in small island developing States, and have placed additional burdens on their national budget and their efforts to achieve sustainable development goals”. In paragraph 53, it was acknowledged that oceans and seas, along with coastal areas, form essential components of the Earth’s ecosystem, and are intrinsically linked to sustainable development, including that of small island developing States.⁴

For SIDS, the threats to their sustainable development and survival have been analysed in “The Future We Want,” “The SAMOA Pathway,” and the Outcome document of the post 2015 agenda “Transforming Our World.”

The vulnerabilities of SIDS are exacerbated by their small size, limited resource base, and susceptibility to external shocks. While Climate Change and Oceans and Seas are very important to all countries, they do pose specific threats to SIDS as acknowledged by the SAMOA Pathway and the post 2015 development agenda.

With the post-2015 Outcome to be adopted at the September 2015 Summit and the process towards implementation of the SDGs about to begin, the linkages between the SAMOA Pathway and the post-2015 agenda are necessary in order to ensure that the sustainable development of SIDS remains on track. To this end, the Expert Group Meeting on SIDS, Oceans and Climate Change will be very important in the preparations of the transition into the post-2015 agenda.

In light of the international recognition of the special challenges of SIDS, the first session of the Expert Group Meeting on “Integrated Approaches for the Implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the post-2015 development agenda” will focus on the questions:

1. How do Climate Change and Oceans impact the Sustainable Development of SIDS?
2. What are the key challenges of small island developing States with respect to Oceans and Climate Change?
3. What are the multiple linkages between the challenges of SIDS in relation to Oceans and Climate Change?

¹ The Future We Want paragraph 178

² *ibid*

³ SAMOA Pathway Paragraph 31

⁴ SAMOA Pathway Paragraph 53

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Session 2: Integrated approaches for the implementation of the Samoa Pathway and the post-2015 development agenda

SIDS, climate change, and ocean and seas are closely interlinked. In the SAMOA Pathway, Member States recognized that “the adverse impacts of climate change compound existing challenges in small island developing States and have placed additional burdens on their national budgets and their efforts to achieve the sustainable development goals”. Oceans play a central role in the culture of SIDS, while at the same time being tightly linked to their economies. The devastating climate change impacts on oceans, such as sea-level rise, ocean acidification and the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, accompanied by increased flooding and inundation, coastal erosion and saltwater intrusion in coastal aquifers, make small island developing States all the more vulnerable, hence impeding the achievement of their sustainable development objectives. In the SAMOA Pathway, Member States acknowledged that “climate change and sea-level rise continue to pose a significant risk to small island developing States and their efforts to achieve sustainable development and, for some, represent the gravest threat to their survival and viability”.

In the finalised text for adoption of the post-2015 development agenda (dated 01 August 2015), Member States noted that “increases in global temperature, sea level rise, ocean acidification and other climate change impacts are seriously affecting coastal areas and low-lying coastal countries, including many least developed countries and small island developing States”. The text includes sustainable development goal 13, which aims to “take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”, and sustainable development goal 14, which aims to “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”.

The implementation of the Samoa Pathway and of the future post-2015 development agenda will require the pursuit of integrated approaches in order to find solutions that are commensurate with the multiple challenges of achieving sustainable development and its economic, social and environmental goals. The focus will have to be on clusters of issues and their interlinkages, rather than on specific sectors or topics in an isolated manner.

Questions for this session:

1. How can the interlinkages between SIDS, climate change and oceans and seas be addressed in an integrated manner?
2. How could the integrated approach be incorporated into national sustainable development strategy (if there is one in place)?
3. Which major aspects need to be taken into account when addressing the interlinkages between SIDS, climate change, including disaster risk reduction, and oceans and seas, through an integrated approach?
4. Are you aware of a SIDS country example where the interlinkages between oceans and seas and climate change are already being addressed in an integrated manner? What lessons can be learned from this experience?

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Session 3: Holistic solutions for climate change adaptation and resilience-building in the area of oceans and seas

The post-2015 development agenda and the SAMOA Pathway have embraced cross-cutting issues. The SDGs are interrelated through common targets, and the SAMOA Pathway emphasized that “there is a need for a more integrated approach to the sustainable development of small island developing States, with the support of the international community and all stakeholders”⁵. As called for by many Member States, silo approaches are no longer feasible. It is, therefore, important and most efficient to identify holistic solutions and actions to meet the multiple and interrelated challenges of climate change and oceans issues in SIDS, with a view to achieving sustainable development goals. It is also vital to develop and implement relevant resilience actions that fully integrate climate change adaptation, including disaster risk management, to build more resilient development.

The SAMOA Pathway and the post-2015 development agenda outcome document both reaffirmed that climate change is one of the greatest challenges that the world faces today⁶. In this regard, the SAMOA Pathway emphasized that “adaptation to climate change represents an immediate and urgent global priority”⁷, and called for resilience-building to the impacts of climate change and to improve SIDS’ adaptive capacity through the design and implementation of climate change adaptation measures appropriate to their respective vulnerabilities and economic, environmental and social situations⁸. Furthermore, the SAMOA Pathway called an action to “mainstream policies and programmes related to disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and development”⁹.

Oceans and seas play significant roles for SIDS, particularly due to SIDS’ ocean-based economies, as reaffirmed by the SAMOA Pathway and the post-2015 development agenda outcome document¹⁰. In this regard the following elements, amongst others, are considered particularly important, as stated in the two outcome documents: sustainable use of marine resources, sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism¹¹; ocean acidification¹²; enhanced scientific knowledge and research capacity on ocean health and transfer marine technology¹³; and sustainable management of marine and ecosystems¹⁴.

Questions for this session:

1. What kind of holistic solutions and actions can we identify in the areas of climate change adaptation, including disaster risk reduction and resilience-building, to cope with such impacts as sea-level rise, coastal erosion, ocean acidification and marine biodiversity loss in SIDS?
2. Building on the integrated approaches, as discussed in Session 2, how can we incorporate such holistic solutions into the national sustainable development planning and strategies of SIDS?
3. How could holistic solutions be addressed across different sectors, particularly in the areas mentioned above?
4. Are you aware of a SIDS country example where the holistic solutions across oceans and seas and climate change were successfully addressed? What lessons can be learned from this experience?

⁵ SAMOA Pathway, Paragraph 2; Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development, Paragraph 14

⁶ SAMOA Pathway, Paragraph 31

⁷ SAMOA Pathway, Paragraph 32

⁸ SAMOA Pathway, Paragraph 44a

⁹ SAMOA Pathway, Paragraph 52e

¹⁰ SAMOA Pathway, Paragraph 53; SDG 14

¹¹ SAMOA Pathway, Paragraph 53 & 54; SDG 14.7

¹² SAMOA Pathway, Paragraph 58n; SDG 14.3

¹³ SAMOA Pathway, Paragraph 58a & 58f; SDG 14a

¹⁴ SAMOA Pathway, Paragraph 57 & 58a; SDG 14.2

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Session 4: Means of Implementation for climate change adaptation and resilience-building in the area of oceans and seas

The SAMOA Pathway emphasized several strategies defined as “Means of Implementation” to ensure that the areas highlighted as requiring attention could be addressed. As identified in the SAMOA Pathway and the post 2015 agenda, these Means of Implementation included areas of partnerships, financing, capacity building, technology, trade, and data and statistics.

The post 2015 agenda outlined similar “Means of Implementation” necessary for the SDGs success, including institutional support, investment and innovation, debt sustainability, and global governance.

For SIDS, the Means of Implementation remain the necessary component in their sustainable development. For the last 20 years, most SIDS have honoured their commitments in terms of sustainable development policies and strategies and have taken ownership of their development; however, they still need significant assistance from the international community, particularly as it relates to adaptation to climate change.

While looking at the Means of Implementation, there is a need to consider which areas are best suited to address which specific areas of concern to SIDS. It is therefore necessary to examine climate change adaptation and resilience-building in the areas of oceans and seas, and within the context of the most appropriate strategy for SIDS’ sustainable development.

With this in mind, session 4 will consider the following questions:

1. What are, and how best can we utilize, the existing and innovative mechanisms (funding, capacity-building, technology, partnerships, etc.) for implementing the SAMOA Pathway and the post-2015 agenda in an integrated manner?
2. Are all “Means of Implementation” currently available in addressing Climate Change and Oceans and Seas in SIDS?
3. Which strategies can be developed for seeking funding for implementation of multifaceted projects and activities in SIDS (that entail climate change adaptation and resilience, as well as oceans components)?