

Steering Committee on Partnerships for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as part of the Small Island Developing States Partnership Framework

First inaugural meeting

25 February 2016, 3 pm, Economic and Social Council Chamber

Informal summary

The meeting was opened with a short film on the sustainable development challenges and opportunities facing Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Ambassador Ahmed Sareer, Permanent Representative of Maldives to the United Nations and co-chair of the Steering Committee, formally brought the meeting to order and offered welcoming remarks. He began by offering condolences and a message of solidarity to the Government and people of Fiji in the aftermath of Cyclone Winston. He noted that tragedies like these re-emphasize the importance of building resilience in the face of climate change impacts. Implementation of the SAMOA Pathway, and of the more than 300 partnerships announced at the Third International Conference on SIDS, will be critical, and he expressed the hope that the Steering Committee could address not only partnerships but all aspects of SAMOA Pathway implementation.

Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, then added his welcoming remarks, emphasizing that this first meeting of the Steering Committee is a beginning, not an end in itself, and he pledged that DESA will support SAMOA Pathway and 2030 Agenda implementation in a coherent and synergistic fashion. He noted that many partnerships are making encouraging progress, including those involving the private sector, and that the reporting template and upgraded platform that DESA has developed will help to encourage and track further progress. Mr. Wu acknowledged the leadership and support of the co-chairs as well as the Government of Samoa.

Mr. Gyan Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, in his remarks, noted that the Steering Committee could serve as a model for partnership follow up in other contexts as well. OHRLLS will work to forge broad alliances for SIDS as part of their mandated work to enhance coordination and coherence. They will be particularly active in advancing the engagement of the private sector through their Global Business Network, which should be linked to the platform overseen by the Steering Committee.

Ambassador Sareer presented the proposed working methods for the Steering Committee, which was approved by the meeting.

Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi, Permanent Representative of Italy to the UN and co-chair of the Steering Committee, then took the floor with a short statement emphasizing Italy's longstanding commitment and ongoing support to SIDS. He invited the DESA Division for Sustainable Development to present the proposed SIDS partnership standardized reporting template and process.

Data to be collected in the template includes:

- Reporting year
- Status of initiative (Completed, On track, Cancelled)
- Achievement at a glance (max 100 words)
- Challenges faced in implementation (max 200 words)
- Next steps (max 200 words)
- Measurable outcomes (beneficiaries and actions) (max 200 words)
- Deliverables (Delivered, Cancelled, Changed, New)

Other notable features include:

- Progress reports can be submitted any time through SIDS Action Platform by partnership focal points
- Beneficiaries and partners can review and comment online and using smart phones (Twitter)
- Results are fed in to the Steering Committee meetings
- Updates from partnerships featured in new SIDS Newsletter (first issue March)
- All progress reports synthesized and referenced in annual SG report on SIDS (deadline 1 May)

The template will be further examined by the Steering Committee following a test with a select number of focal points.

Ambassador Cardi then opened the interactive dialogue.

18 Member States actively participated in the interactive dialogue, including those representing regional and sub-regional groups¹. In addition, there was an intervention by the European Union and one UN organization. All expressed their sympathy and concern for Fiji and many tied the devastation of Cyclone Winston to the need for redoubling efforts to build resilience in SIDS. Participants noted that it is not possible to “transform the SIDS story of vulnerability unless we offer an alternate narrative—resilience.” The Permanent Representative of Fiji promised to convey the condolences to his Capital.

Participants emphasized the crucial links between SAMOA Pathway implementation and 2030 Agenda implementation, and many noted that the Steering Committee could offer valuable lessons to partnerships in the 2030 context as well as the partnerships announced in Samoa. The Steering Committee will identify gaps and lessons learned in partnerships, and Member States hoped that the partnership framework could be scaled up and applied more broadly in the coming years. The ultimate goal will be to ensure that “no one is left behind,” and that the partnerships “address the challenges of the weakest among us.”

Participants characterized the Steering Committee as “an enabler, a catalyst, a magnet or glue.” It represents a concrete and effective approach, involving all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, and it has an inherent flexibility. Member States praised the Steering Committee meeting as a “milestone toward operationalizing the commitments in the SAMOA Pathway.” It was noted that the commitments from earlier SIDS outcomes—the Barbados Plan of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation of the BPOA—should not be forgotten.

¹ Thailand (G77), Barbados (CARICOM), Tonga (P-SIDS), EU, Samoa, U.S., Mauritius, Australia, Jamaica, South Africa, Belize, Japan, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Philippines, Singapore, Mexico, Fiji.

Several participants noted the particular importance of partnerships for SIDS, many of which are middle-income countries and therefore not always eligible for certain other types of development assistance. Partnerships are effective only if they are implemented, however, and this inspired the theme of the Samoa Conference: “the sustainable development of SIDS through genuine and durable partnerships.” A participant defined these concepts: genuine partners listen carefully to challenges and needs of SIDS, and durable partners stay as long as they are needed. The partnership dialogues that were an integral part of the Samoa Conference reinforced these principles.

Member States shared information on a number of their current SIDS partnerships, including those addressing climate change, renewable energy, biodiversity, protected areas and ecosystem management, trade facilitation, building government institutional capacity, training in aviation and maritime skills, tourism, transport, disaster resilience, education, gender empowerment, oceans and seas, water, food and nutrition, and pooled approaches to climate finance. Some partners emphasized parallel efforts to strengthen SIDS domestic economies through economic diversification, improving the enabling environment, and enhanced domestic resource mobilization.

Specific suggestions for the Steering Committee included that meetings should be regular, with clear agendas and plenty of advance notice. A participant offered the idea of forming sub committees, including on technical assessment. Another Member State noted that the partnership template should be shared with the partnership focal points to ensure that the format is clear and useful.

Ambassador Cardi concluded the meeting with some final thoughts: the Steering Committee can be a catalyst for action in implementation of partnerships and the SAMOA Pathway in general. He pledged that the Steering Committee would work to carry forward the seriousness with which the Samoa Conference approached partnerships. To this end he encouraged full utilization of the platform, template, and processes. He suggested that the Steering Committee would meet quarterly or more often if deemed necessary, and he invited Member States to register their interest in ongoing participation with the co-chairs or the Secretariat.

Ambassador Cardi then brought the meeting to a close.
