

# 1. Special Case of SIDS – Vulnerabilities and Challenges

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## **SUMMARY**

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are a grouping of [52 similar countries](#), 14 of these self governing states<sup>1</sup> are located in the Pacific and are commonly referred to as Pacific SIDS (PSIDS). SIDS are accorded a ‘special case’ stemming from global recognition in Rio 1992<sup>2</sup> of the unique characteristics, challenges and vulnerabilities of SIDS and their ability to achieve sustainable development. This special case is defined largely by their small size, extreme isolation, limited and narrow resource bases, geographic dispersion and isolation from markets, diseconomies of scale, capacity limitations, susceptibility to climate change and natural disasters and global crises.

Twenty years on, SIDS pursuit of sustainable development, the MDGs and the changing global context have created new considerations for SIDS and their special development case. Progress has been uneven, significant challenges remain, vulnerabilities have increased while coping capacity in many SIDS has not, and other geographically defined special groupings<sup>3</sup> in the sustainable development agenda have emerged globally and regionally.

Most recently in June 2012, at the [Rio+20 conference](#) in Brazil, the world reaffirmed that SIDS remain a special case for sustainable development, expressed particular concern over the implications of climate change on SIDS, and accordingly supported the convening of a 3<sup>rd</sup> global SIDS Conference in 2014. In parallel the world is currently developing a common global post 2015 development framework, building on the experiences of the MDGs, and Sustainable Development initiatives and agreements since 1992. As Pacific SIDS engage in these processes, they will reflect on their national, regional and global progress to date, assess gaps and explore opportunities for the strengthened pursuit of lasting development. They will seek to have these positions effectively supported and reflected in the necessary outcomes of the SIDS 2014 and post 2015 framework.

## **KEY ISSUES**

The following key issues have been raised by PSIDS and their partners in relevant processes including the Rio+20 process, SIDS 2014 preparations, and post 2015 process as significant issues for consideration. This is a general overview of the sustainable development challenges and vulnerabilities facing Pacific SIDS and is aimed to complement the thematic briefs and support national consultations and assessments in relevant preparatory processes. No attempt is made here to capture all key issues in a comprehensive manner, many of which are by their very nature country specific.

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1 14 Pacific SIDS include - Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu & Vanuatu

2 In 1992, the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio acknowledged the “special case” of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which led to the development of a Global Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (BPoA) in 1994, Barbados. This has been supported and reiterated in subsequent global agreements such as the MDGs, Rio agreements, UNFCCC, CBD, HLF4, amongst others.

3 Including, Africa, Least Development Countries, Least Developed Land Lock Countries, and middle-income countries. [Para 32, Rio +20 The Future we Want]

### SIDS 2014 Conference

- Recent UN General Assembly resolutions have outlined the purpose of the SIDS 2014 Conference as, essentially: (i) to assess progress to date in the sustainable development of SIDS and to identify gaps; (ii) seek renewed political commitment for SIDS sustainable development; (iii) to identify emerging issues and practical partnerships for implementation; and (iv) to identify SIDS priorities for consideration in the post-2015 UN development agenda.

### *Progress and gaps to date*

- The latest substantive regional review<sup>4</sup> of Pacific SIDS (PSIDS) sustainable development, found that since 1992 the vulnerability of PSIDS has increased whilst capacity to cope has not. Most PSIDS have experienced low economic growth averaging 2.1%<sup>5</sup> which has declined over the last decade.
- The [5 year review of the Mauritius Strategy](#) for Implementation (MSI+5)<sup>6</sup> found that SIDS have made less progress than most other global groupings, or even regressed, in economic terms, especially in terms of poverty reduction and debt sustainability. In 2012, Rio+20 recalled and expressed concern over these findings and reaffirmed the special case of SIDS.
- It placed particular emphasis on the impacts and threats that climate change continues to pose to SIDS and noted that while SIDS have progressed in some areas, their overall progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals has been uneven.
- For the Pacific region there are significant variations between countries progress towards the MDGs. However when the largest and most populous PSIDS (PNG), is excluded, the region is on track towards reducing child mortality, with mixed progress on all the other MDGs, and significantly lagging globally on gender equality targets [[2012 Pacific Regional MDG Tracking Report](#)].
- Where progress has been most positive in the region, it has been as result of strong country leadership and through effective and collaborative partnerships.

### *Contributing factors and considerations*

- This mixed progress, and regressive development in some cases, has been due in no small part to the additional pressures of climate change, climate variability, increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, and sea-level rise which have been compounded by the international fuel, food and financial crises and the growing digital and inter-state infrastructure divide - the backbone of the global economy.
- In addition, the global rate of resource exploitation and consumption with growing populations and consumerism is stretching the carrying capacity of ecosystems beyond their ability to recover. There is no better example than in the world's Oceans and their depleted or depleting fish stocks and quality of the marine environment. These new pressures have combined and compounded the inherent capacity constraints and vulnerabilities of SIDS identified in 1992. Within this complex and evolving environment, SIDS continue to face significant and mounting challenges in a number of other key

<sup>4</sup> The 2010 PSIDS Five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the BPoA

<sup>5</sup> Source: ADB Database

<sup>6</sup> The Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI) was the outcome document of the 2nd Global Conference on SIDS held in 2005, 10 years after the original SIDS Conference in Barbados in 1994 which resulted in the Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA).

areas, including: developing and maintaining effective and adequate human capacity for governance, enforcement and development; health crisis in rising non-communicable-diseases (NCDs cause 75% of deaths in PSIDS annually); developing and maintaining cost effective infrastructure to engage with the global community and its markets and to support socio-economic priorities; establishing and maintaining viable and diversified economic development bases and value added industry; reducing risk to disasters and impacts of global crisis; securing foreign investment; strengthening development effectiveness; securing affordable, adequate and safe energy supplies; maintaining safe waters supplies; protecting biodiversity and shared resources; managing increasing amounts of solid and hazardous waste; and, in accessing adequate resources (financial and capacity) to effectively respond to climate change and other development challenges.

*Practical [Partnerships](#) and opportunities*

- Many partnerships<sup>7</sup> at all levels have been established over the years to support SIDS and PSIDS progress in most if not all of the key challenges listed above
- Keeping track of these partnerships and ensuring their coordination, accountability and efficacy presents a significant challenge for all stakeholders involved. The Forum Compact on development effectiveness is supporting PSIDS through a peer to peer review process (south-south and triangular) in strengthening national systems to engage and manage partnerships for development more effectively. At the regional level, the review of the Pacific Plan and its underpinning regional policies, approaches and partnerships is helping to refine, rationalise and strengthen regional and sub-regional partnerships in support of PSIDS development gains.
- The SIDS 2014 Conference offers a good opportunity to refresh, take stock and refocus as necessary, development partnerships at all levels in support of SIDS. Defining parameters for their documentation, categorization and monitoring will assist greatly in ensuring that policy commitments made at the SIDS conference in 2014 are backed by practical and accountable partnerships that can be monitored to ensure implementation is being progressed.
- Emerging views from Pacific consultations<sup>8</sup> have highlighted the need for all stakeholders to work together effectively and to build strong partnerships. This included between UN and CROP agencies to ensure there is no overlap in the process towards a post-2015 agenda. Additionally, between development partners to protect and improve on development outcomes.

*Looking forward ensuring SIDS challenges are effectively addressed in future development frameworks*

- There is no doubt the special case of SIDS, their challenges and vulnerabilities identified in Rio in 1992, has grown and must remain a key component in relevant global, regional and national strategies for SIDS. This must also permeate into the institutional structures and practical partnerships that implement and monitor these arrangements going forward and ensure they are accountable. The SIDS 2014 Conference offers an

<sup>7</sup> 14 Type II Partnerships were launched by Forum Island Countries at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Many of these continue today and have lessons learnt and best practice for the development of regional and sub-regional partnerships underpinning regional policy and the Pacific Plan in the Pacific region.

<sup>8</sup> Post 2015 Pacific Consultation, October 2012, Nadi, Fiji.

important platform for reinvigorating political support for SIDS sustainable development issues at all levels. It provides a timely opportunity for the distillation of key SIDS interests and a springboard for their inclusion in the post 2015 development agenda that will guide development cooperation and priorities over the next decade or more.

- Country level policy processes and implementation will remain the most important platform to effect lasting development in SIDS. Strengthened national systems will help to coordinate and tailor support in a way that is commensurate with the capacity of the individual SIDS.
- Global level policies and goals such as the BPoA, MDGs and Post 2015, have different purposes and implications for different countries and stakeholders. Many have significant implications for and on SIDS in particular: climate change; the state of the Pacific Ocean and its resources; global food security consumption and production patterns; global trends in energy supply and prices; trade facilitation and capacity to engage; the global financial system; access to appropriate technology and infrastructure; international law enforcement and capacity, migration and effective development partnerships.
- It is critical therefore that SIDS negotiate and project their interests based on a clear understanding of how these global policies and targets will affect them in the short, medium and long term, how they are translated at different levels, and who will largely be held accountable for their implementation. For example, global carbon emission reduction targets for climate change 15 years into the future must be seen as critical for impacting on SIDS. This does not translate into the same global, regional or national policy intervention or responsibility for SIDS as it might for other regions or large emitting countries. The same can be said for global targets set to restore the ocean stocks<sup>9</sup> to maximum sustainable yield. The responsibility for implementing this target might fall largely on fishing nations; however the implications on PSIDS will be very significant and will require their substantive engagement and monitoring.
- A post 2015 framework that all countries contribute to achieving with common but differentiated responsibilities is important. Such a framework could help to drive more balanced and sustainable development globally. It should build on, complement and balance the MDGs ensuring sufficient focus on social, environmental and economic pillars of sustainable development. Particular emphasis must be placed on the creation of effective targets and indicators that are clearly linked to means of implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Emerging views from the Pacific<sup>10</sup> have strongly called for targets and indicators that are resonant, universally beneficial, strategic, quantifiable, and anchored in past sustainable development frameworks that can serve as the building blocks for consensus-building. Further that it must include oceans (two thirds of the Earth's surface) as an integral part of the post-2015 development goals and account for the importance of addressing climate change and energy, amongst other things.

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<sup>9</sup> 2015 target as agreed to in JPOI to maintain or restore stocks to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield.

<sup>10</sup> Statement by H.E. Mr Robert G. Aisi, Permanent Representative of Papua New Guinea to the United Nations and Chair of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) to the United Nations. First Session of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Key Documents, References and Hyperlinks

1. UN-OHRLLS list of SIDS <http://www.un.org/special-rep/ohrls/sid/list.htm>
2. Rio+20, The Future we Want <http://www.uncsd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>
3. SIDS 2014 Conference <http://www.sids2014.org/index.php?menu=1498>
4. Pacific Regional Synthesis Report for 5 year review of Mauritius Strategy of Implementation  
[http://www.sidsnet.org/msi\\_5/docs/regional/pacific/Pacific\\_Regional\\_Synthesis-MSI5-Final.pdf](http://www.sidsnet.org/msi_5/docs/regional/pacific/Pacific_Regional_Synthesis-MSI5-Final.pdf)
5. 2012 Pacific Regional MDG Tracking Report  
<http://www.forumsec.org.fj/pages.cfm/strategic-partnerships-coordination/pacific-principles-on-aid-effectiveness/cairns-compact-1.html?printerfriendly=true>
6. Pacific Type II Partnerships launched at WSSD 2002  
[http://www.sprep.org/att/IRC/eCOPIES/Pacific\\_Region/1.htm](http://www.sprep.org/att/IRC/eCOPIES/Pacific_Region/1.htm)
7. Statement by H.E. Mr Robert G. Aisi, Permanent Representative of Papua New Guinea to the United Nations and Chair of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) to the United Nations. First Session of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
8. Post-2015 Pacific Consultation Outcomes Document, October 2012, Nadi, Fiji.
9. Key conclusions from the Round Table Consultation on Pacific Issues International Conference on the Post---2015 Development Agenda: 'Development for all: Stop conflict, build states and eradicate poverty'.
10. The evolving "special case" of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) - with a focus on Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS)\_CROP submission to Rio+20 zero draft development, November 2011.
11. ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES: THE CASE OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES IN THE PACIFIC - Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) November, 2012.