Symposium on "Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SAMOA Pathway in Small Island Developing States - SIDS: Equipping Public Institutions and Mobilizing Partnerships"

Think Piece 2[1]
Effective, accountable and inclusive institutions to realize our commitments

Achieving the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its principle to leave no one behind, will for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) require institutions which are strong, well-functioning and well-resourced and that are capable of delivering public services and can fully engage with multiple stakeholders. Institutions, formal and informal, determine how decisions are made, how resources are allocated, how well markets function, how natural resources are governed, how conflicts are managed and how violence and crime are prevented and addressed. Good governance means governance and Institutions that are participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive. Such institutions should follow the rule of law, inspires confidence and participation in the system by the citizenry, civil society and the private sector. Efforts to reform or strengthen institutions at the national level in SIDS in support of the 2030 Agenda, must involve strengthening institutions to assist in the high quality provision of services e.g. health care and education for the most vulnerable groups in society, which in turn helps to reduce poverty and inequality.

Key to citizen participation is access to accurate and timely information. Access to information allows scrutiny of policies by citizens and helps them hold elected officials accountable. Improving communication channels between the government and citizenry allows for the flow of information and ideas between the government and governed, between the government, private sector and civil society. This is essential for policy creation, evaluation and modification, where necessary. Participatory government helps to re-orient policies towards the needs of the community, allowing for greater public support for policies.

Critical issues for SIDS:

- The role of good governance in localizing The 2030 Agenda
- The political will and leadership required to overcome challenges to sustainable development
- The need to strengthen institutional capacity, with particular regard to efficiency, accountability and transparency
- The need to balance economic development with environmental stewardship
- The promotion of the rule of law at the national and regional level to foster a legal and political framework for sustainable development

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[1] This thinkpiece is prepared by UNDESA to guide Session 2 on "Effective Partnerships for implementing the SDGs" at the Symposium, to be held on 21-23 February 2017, at the Bahamas. More information about the Symposium is available at https://publicadministration.un.org/bahamas_symposium.
Note: This paper may not be exhaustive or exclusive in illustrating concepts or cases related to the topics. For any question or comment, please contact kwok@un.org

Addressing these issues will allow the building of inclusive societies as well as help SIDS to overcome particular vulnerabilities to cross-sectoral challenges such as climate change, ocean, migration and food security for example.

Getting organized for better policy coherence

Successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda in SIDS will require institutional frameworks that bolster policy coherence and support integrated responses at the national level. Policy coherence is an important pre-requisite for balanced, inclusive and equitable growth. Effective policy coherence involves the capacity of a country to implement government policy in a responsive manner and mobilize all parts of government to realize the SDGs. It includes the political will to address challenges which hinder sustainable development, as well as the flexibility to commit resources to reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience.

In pursuit of the 2030 Agenda, several SIDS (e.g., **Belize, Madagascar, Maldives, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Trinidad and Tobago**) have started incorporating SDGs in their national development strategy. Moreover, some SIDS like **Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Samoa, Timor-Leste, and Tonga** have reviewed or re-arranged their inter-institution coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation to promote coherent and integrated implementation. Some countries (e.g. **Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, Saint Lucia, Cabo Verde** have created or are in the process of creating inter-ministerial committees/commissions chaired/coordinated/led by the head of office. Others, such as **Barbados and Jamaica**, are using the leadership of key ministries with cross-cutting influence – such as finance ministries, or other influential ministries depending on the country context – to drive implementation by all parts of Government. Similar steps are being taken by other countries around the world.

The way SIDS started organizing their institutions for implementing the SDGs varies in terms of leadership, scope and structure. For example, in **Madagascar**, the institutional framework of the SDGs is composed of a Steering and Monitoring Committee chaired by the Prime Minister, and a Technical Committee chaired by the Minister of Economy and Planning. In **Maldives**, a ministerial committee will oversee the monitoring and coordination of the national SDG implementation. The most relevant ministries will be members of this committee. In **Mauritius**, the Steering Committee on the Implementation of SDGs will oversee the SDG-based national planning with a 15-year time horizon. The Ministry of Environment, Sustainable Development, Disaster and Beach Management has been called upon by the Cabinet Office to chair this Committee. **Samoa** is formalizing a new coordinating body, the National SDG Task Force in the Cabinet, for monitoring and reporting purposes. The Task Force comprises representatives of the lead ministries representing aspects of the three pillars of sustainable development (i.e., Finance and Planning, Natural Resources and Environment, Community and Social Development). It is chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. **Timor-Leste** established a national level SDG Working Group comprised of all government agencies and directorates representing all line ministries, including the Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister's Office. **Tonga** re-invigorated its structures for coordination with an MDG Taskforce comprised of members of the Cabinet.

Putting into practice an institutional arrangement that can effectively spearhead SDG implementation across the government and society is a challenging task. Public budgets and

accountability systems are usually aligned with departmental structures. Accommodating new institutional layers without complicating an already complex transformation process with additional bureaucracy is also a challenge. Breaking down silos through the merger of ministries can also be counter-productive in some situations; possibly leading to ineffectiveness, loss of transparency, accountability and expertise.

Many SIDS have been undergoing extensive public sector reform, looking at issues such as inter alia qualifications of public sector officials (skilled professionals), enabling legislation to manage the challenge faced by these countries, creation of institutions whose reach span multiple sectors etc. . Some of these reform programmes pre date the 2030 Agenda but will bolster effective implementation at the national level.

There will be no single pathway to SDG implementation; the country context will essentially define the best approach for SDG implementation. At the same time, all countries are grappling with the same challenges and embark in a new endeavour to reach highly ambitious interconnected goals. With these considerations in mind, SIDS could benefit from the sharing of experiences on how SIDS and non-SIDS countries are readying their institutions for addressing SDGs, including those that do not fall neatly under departmental or ministry portfolios. They can discuss how innovations in various areas can support effective and accountable institutions.

Engaging beyond national government administration

Successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda in SIDS also requires recognition that development challenges can no longer be addressed in isolation and in silos. Therefore collaboration among diverse institutions and stakeholders at local, national and regional levels is necessary. One key stakeholder is therefore national parliaments. Parliaments can play a major role in SDG implementation, for example, by translating the SDGs into national laws. People-centred sustainable development is buttressed by the rule of law. Human Rights are better protected in a framework where all are equal before the law and all are granted equal access to justice.

Among SIDS, **Fiji, and Trinidad and Tobago** are actively engaging their parliaments in pursuing the SDGs. In several non-SIDS countries (e.g., Afghanistan, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Malaysia, Mexico, Montenegro, Norway, Pakistan, Romania and Togo), parliaments are also engaged in the follow-up and review processes. Moreover, in some countries such as Germany, Pakistan and the Republic of Korea, institutional changes are being introduced, for example, by setting up task forces within parliaments.

In March 2016, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)[2] adopted an Action Plan to launch a comprehensive review of existing national legislative response(s) in each member country to ensure consistency with the Paris Agreement on climate change, the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. As a result, parliaments would put forward any amendment to existing legislation and develop new legislation by the end of 2017, where appropriate.

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[2] Member States of SIDS that are also members of IPU include: Cape Verde, Comoros, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Maldives, Mauritius, Micronesia (Federated States of),, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Singapore, Suriname, Timor-Leste, Tonga, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Engaging Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) can also be an important step to ensure oversight and inform SDG implementation. Most SIDS have Auditor General's departments as well as the internal oversight departments within ministries. The International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) is developing guidelines to audit SDG implementation.

In addition to engaging parliaments, effective engagement of local authorities is critical to the successful implementation of the SDGs. Some SIDS with local authorities systems have started this process, such as **Papua New Guinea**, and **Trinidad and Tobago.** All SDGs have targets that are directly or indirectly related to the daily work of local authorities. Sixty per cent of the SDGs are estimated to require the engagement of local authorities. With their proximity to the communities, local authorities are well placed to identify and respond to their needs, to engage excluded groups and to ensure that services and opportunities can reach them. These essential roles in ensuring that no one is left behind make them key actors in SDG implementation. Local authorities are also more prone than central governments to take integrated approaches.

Many of SIDS have highly dispersed population over great square miles of oceans, presenting a great challenge to public service delivery and stakeholder engagement. In this challenging environment, engagement of local authorities for effective service delivery and stakeholder engagement can become all the more important. Depending on the country context and sovereign decisions in this regard, decentralisation may increase efficiency in governance and allows for the adaptation of national policies to the particular local contexts. .

Engaging stakeholders

SDG implementation requires governments to effectively engage people and key stakeholders in decision-making and review, so as to ensure effective, accountable and inclusive policymaking and public service delivery. Systematic arrangements for public participation at all levels of policymaking are thus an essential part of the institutional framework for SDG implementation. This will allow for shared analysis of issues and challenges; build consensus on possible approaches and policies; help balance the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development; decide on trade-offs; and engage all stakeholders in a concerted way towards SDG implementation.

Inclusion of stakeholders and citizens in the decision-making processes also adds legitimacy to the policies pursued. It ensures that diverse views (civil society, grassroots organisations, women, youth, and private sector) are considered in policy making. Participation of the people in the development agenda fosters national ownership and ensures that "no one gets left behind." Effective stakeholder engagement also supports openness and transparency at the national level, which are the conditions necessary for increased investment and sustained economic growth. Policies shrouded in secrecy dampen public confidence and trust, leading to less support and buy-in from the population. People who are uninformed of their rights are less able to enforce their protection. Businesses that are refused access to information on financial policies or the performance of certain industries will be less inclined to risk investment funds.

Several SIDS (e.g., **Belize, Samoa, Trinidad and Tobago)** are actively promoting public participation. **Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Madagascar** and **Tonga** are taking steps to institutionalize stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the SDGs. A number of other countries around the world have also become active in mobilizing public participation (e.g., Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, France, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, the Netherlands, Somalia, Switzerland and Tanzania). Countries are using varied institutional mechanisms for such multi-stakeholder participation (e.g., Colombia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Mexico and Venezuela), including sustainable development councils, ad hoc forums, or electronic platforms.   The symposium will allow SIDS to discuss such modalities.

Strengthening the capacity of statistical institutions

SIDS need strengthened statistical capacity for proper assessments of the situation on the SDGs for the development of appropriate strategies as well as for adequate review. It is particularly urgent to increase the availability of high quality, reliable and disaggregated data. The small size of the countries, however, limits the capacity to ensure the disaggregation and quality of data required for some indicators. Moreover, many National Statistics Offices in SIDS are units within Ministries rather than independent organizations. There is often a lack of coordination among official data producers as well as fragmented production of statistics. In view of these challenges, several SIDS such as the **Dominican Republic, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Trinidad and Tobago** have taken initiatives to strengthen their statistical capacities.

Addressing long-standing challenges

The implementation of the SDGs has shed new light on the importance of some well-recognized principles of public administration. In particular, measures should be taken to prevent corruption from the outset of SDG implementation.

SIDS are experiencing greater demands for accountability and increased outcry against corruption from the populace. Corruption and illicit financial flows distort the market resulting in inflation. It creates a shadow economy which denies the government much needed tax revenues. It also frustrates the ease of doing business within the regions. Corruption de-stabilises institutions and thus obstructs economic development. Countries capable of controlling corruption are able to use their human, financial, and natural resources more efficiently and equitably with fewer losses and distortions. They are able to attract higher levels of foreign and domestic investment to foster sustained growth.

People's security is essential to sustainable development. Development in many SIDS regions (e.g. The Caribbean) is being undermined by rising crime and violence. Violence weakens social cohesion and goes hand in hand with deprivation, poor school performance and risk taking behaviours. The Samoa Pathway recognizes that "the sustainable development SIDS can be negatively affected by crime and violence, including conflict, gang and youth violence, piracy, trafficking in persons, cybercrime, drug trafficking and transnational organized crime".

Moving forward

In planning for institutional arrangements for implementing the SDGs, due attention needs to be given to the conditions specific to SIDS, as these have important implications for SDG implementation. For example, smallness may help simplify coordination across government,

possibly leading to greater public access to decision makers. But at the same time, smallness can also be a limiting factor. For example, in public service, it brings a modest pool of individuals with the skills required at a given moment. This is particularly true with regard to integration, an area where there are very few specialists in all countries.

The UN and other development actors should help facilitate experience sharing and support efforts of SIDS Governments to move beyond institutional silos and coordinate among and between national actors and with others. Such assistance could include keeping track of new, emerging practices and lessons regarding institutional arrangements in the areas addressed by the SDGs. The UN could also provide valuable assistance to SIDS in assessing and strengthening the capacities of their public administration and public service (both at the national and local levels) and the overall capacity of governments to effectively engage their parliaments, Supreme Audit Institutions, statistical institutions as well as other stakeholders. The UN system should itself adopt a Whole-of-System support for SIDS.

Guiding Questions

Breakout Group 1:
a) Shaping institutional arrangements and mobilizing institutions
b) Equipping and building capacities and tools

1. What are the challenges SIDS are facing in readying their institutions to SDG implementation – at the national and local level?
2. What institutional mechanisms are SIDS putting in place to address those challenges? What are the potential benefits and trade-offs of such arrangements?
3. Is implementation led by the Head of state and government, and/or an influential ministry? Are parliaments, local authorities, supreme audit institutions and stakeholders being engaged? Is policy integration being improved?
4. What are the constraints and opportunities arising from SIDS' specific conditions in developing accountable, inclusive and effective institutions in pursuit of SDGs? What have been good practices in overcoming the constraints?

Group 2:
(c) Delivering public services
(d) Building trust and ensuring public participation and accountability in
     SDG implementation

1. What are key challenges in delivering public services for realizing the SDGs? What are some innovative practices for public service delivery and what have we learned?
2. What are the successful experiences in engaging various development actors in policy making and implementation for the SDGs, including the poorest and most vulnerable?
3. Are there specific processes to inform people about their rights and the pursuit of the SDGs?
4. What are good experiences in ensuring good governance and tackling corruption and crime?

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