

The SAMOA Pathway:

Recommendations from Commonwealth civil society

This document provides an analysis of the main conclusions of the Third UN Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Summit held in September 2014. It offers recommendations from civil society in the Commonwealth from the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean¹ on the critical issues raised in the SAMOA Pathway, the principal output from the SIDS Summit, on how to begin to turn these commitments into a transformative agenda for the sustainable and inclusive development of SIDS.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) put forward these recommendations to build on the progress already made by SIDS governments and to demonstrate their commitment to work with governments to strengthen advocacy with the international community. In the same way, it aims to encourage SIDS leaders to make their pledges on the SAMOA Pathway actionable and meaningful. CSOs from the Commonwealth have begun to monitor and evaluate the progress and achievements of the Pathway and intend to document their findings.

Background

The SAMOA Pathway represents ambitious commitments made by 115 SIDS leaders at the Third International Conference on SIDS held in Apia, Samoa from 1-4 September, 2014. Since the first SIDS Conference in Barbados in 1994, SIDS have sought to use the UN conference platform to reinforce international recognition of SIDS as a special case for development. Small islands are on the frontline of global stress in experiencing the effects of climate change and in having limited financial resources and capacity to cope with these physical, social and economic impacts.

The outcomes of the September 2014 meeting were especially critical to signal to the international community the fundamental issues for SIDS to be included in the Post-2015 Goals to be agreed in September 2015.

SIDS have special significance in the Commonwealth. Of the 53 Commonwealth nations, 25 are SIDS. Civil society from the Commonwealth - in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and the Pacific islands, played a key role in the discussions in Apia. An interregional civil society partnership, the first of its kind, was agreed in Samoa between the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) and the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO), both regional organisations with broad-based constituents².

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[The SAMOA Pathway] is a relevant framework and the challenge now is to bring to life the sentiments expressed in the document.”

Emele Duituturanga,
Executive Director,

Pacific Island Association of NGOs (PIANGO)

The overall outcome

The interlinking issues affecting sustainable development have been well illustrated in the SAMOA Pathway. Through a member state driven and broadly participatory process, SIDS leaders acknowledged that the essential requirements for sustainable development are: poverty eradication; changing unsustainable and promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production; and, protecting and managing the natural resource base for economic and social development ³.

This will require: promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth; creating greater opportunities for all; reducing inequalities; raising basic standards of living; fostering equitable social development and inclusion; and, promoting the integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.

Mechanisms for dialogue and exchange with a range of stakeholders along with active progress monitoring will be essential to integration with other global development agendas and to build consensus for subsequent action.

Thematic issues

Climate Change

Building on the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) and the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI), the SAMOA Pathway calls for urgent international and national attention to address climate change. Despite miniscule contributions to the world's cumulative emissions levels, climate change and sea-level rise pose one of the gravest threats to SIDS and their sustainable development. SIDS must prepare for more extreme weather events every year, which have the greatest impact on the poorest and most vulnerable. As stated in the Pathway document, climate change impacts are compounded by the limited financial and human resources of SIDS to cope with the impacts. The impacts of severe hurricanes and cyclones, for example, often setback SIDS' development by decades.

The SAMOA Pathway makes linkages between commitments focused on sustainable energy, natural resource management, an ocean based and green economy approach and partnerships, thereby providing a holistic view on adaptation measures for SIDS. A number of SIDS leaders have already made pledges for bold climate action. The Prime Minister of Tuvalu, for example, has committed to employ 100 per cent renewable energy by 2020 ⁴. Tokelau already has 100 % electricity supply from solar power. The 4000 panels required to supply the country's energy needs was funded by the New Zealand government but installed and fully driven by the community ⁵.

Climate mainstreaming needs to be without exception in SIDS rather than 'projectised' approaches siloed in one department. Targets are needed to promote climate sensitive management of natural resources, including water resources and watersheds and for a much greater share of renewable energy in the energy supply mix. SIDS CSOs would like to see greater regional working and approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation. For example, the Pacific Climate Change Roundtable is held on a biannual basis, coordinated by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) and supported by regional CSOs, inter-governmental organisations and bilateral partners ⁶.

SIDS have an opportunity, despite their vulnerabilities, to model climate change adaptation that can be undertaken on a much larger scale ⁷. SIDS can also leverage their vulnerability to push for ambitious agreements and inform the benchmark set for emission reduction targets in 2015. Although countries have agreed to a long-term global goal to hold the increase in average temperature below 2°C, warming and associated risks will still be unevenly and unfairly distributed, with change highest for SIDS ⁸. Civil society has called for a more ambitious 1.5°C pathway for limiting global average temperature increase which is essential to minimize the risks to SIDS. In addition, SIDS are pushing for regularly assessed targets in developed countries rather than domestically determined national targets.

Inequality

SIDS leaders have acknowledged that people are their greatest resource. And that in order to achieve sustained, inclusive and equitable growth with full and productive employment, social protection and the creation of decent work for all, SIDS will seek to increase investment in the education and training of their people. High rates of unemployment, particularly among youth, women and persons with disabilities⁹ has been highlighted as a need to be addressed by sound macroeconomic policies and management.

What action will SIDS leaders take to ensure macroeconomic policies address inequality and level the playing field for disadvantaged communities? The growing gap between rich and poor has been identified by civil society and global leaders as one of the biggest issues for development of our time. Many SIDS have high levels of inequality. Within the Asia Pacific region, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have some of the highest inequality ratios in the region, between 0.40-0.50¹⁰. Net enrolment rates at primary school level in some Caribbean SIDS remains below 80 percent¹¹, an indicator that some sectors of

society are at a real disadvantage. Yet the SAMOA Pathway has very little to say about education.

Inequality is a hindrance to economic growth, stifling social mobility, and fuelling crime and social conflict¹². Reducing inequality has been noted in the opening paragraphs of the Pathway as an essential requirement for sustainable development but there are few further references as to how this will be addressed in SIDS. Since the BPOA and Mauritius Strategy, the social dimension of sustainable development has been an area of less focus than the economic and environmental dimensions¹³. Progressive taxation, living wages and establishment of quality, free education and public services are some of the deliberate far-reaching policies that can be implemented to help address the growing malaise of inequality.

Civil society leaders have suggested the establishment of 'stepping stone' equity targets which can be set nationally (or regionally) to encourage progress and reduce inequality indicators over a 3-5 year period - targets such as school-attendance gaps, the proportion of households with incomes less than half the national median, access to essential services¹⁴.



Food Security, Natural Resource and Water Resource Management and Biodiversity Conservation

The Pathway's emphasis on natural resource management has been well received by civil society. SIDS leaders have emphasized the need to ensure healthy marine ecosystems, forests, water and biodiversity resources. The importance of oceans to SIDS received particular attention. Oceans and seas are intrinsically linked to sustainable development of SIDS. Some SIDS have already made huge strides to conserve coastal and marine areas such as: the Coral Triangle Initiative and Phoenix Islands Protected Area in the Pacific.

The links between natural resource management, healthy ecosystem functions and food security and livelihoods – through sustainable agricultural practices and fisheries are also encouraging. The challenge of water management and supply for SIDS was also identified. SIDS are particularly vulnerable to increased stresses on their water resources. Watersheds quickly transition from upland to sea so that runoff following rainfall events travels swiftly from terrestrial to marine environments; therefore it is important to link water and watershed management with management of coastal and marine areas.

The relevant SAMOA Pathway commitments can be further strengthened through integrated planning and management. Integrated water resource management has been a challenge for SIDS governments despite commitments over the last 20 years in the BPOA, MSI and now the SAMOA Pathway. SIDS leaders have struggled to embed integrated institutional frameworks to reform national water sectors ¹⁵.

Participatory land use planning must be a prerequisite for balancing intense, competing land use needs on SIDS and ensuring that land and sea scapes meet livelihoods needs, maintain critical ecosystem services for public goods and support agriculture and wider economic development. In the Caribbean, for example, few countries have approved national land use, coastal zone, watershed or integrated development plans. The region has however developed valuable experience in the development of locally-specific integrated plans and multiple-use management arrangements such as Negril Environmental Protection Plan in Jamaica and the Soufriere Marine Management Area in St Lucia ¹⁶. The Partnership Initiative on Sustainable Land Management (PISLM) is a CSO lead initiative

working at the regional level providing useful experiences ¹⁷. In the Indian Ocean, Seychelles' Port Launay Mangrove co-management plan is another good example involving government, civil society and the private sector in planning and management. These examples, which have been initially led by civil society, can be scaled up to support larger-scale integrated planning approaches.

To help fulfil 'the empowerment of smallholders and small-scale food producers' ¹⁸, there is also need to enhance their organisational capabilities to enable producers and community groups to engage politically in the shaping of resource rights and to ensure their participation in land use planning, watershed and natural resource management decision-making. Smallholder and collective tenure rights (such as for indigenous communities and community-level governance) is also relevant for communities in SIDS to ensure just and secure tenure and to realise economic opportunity.

The green economy and ocean-based economy

Building on the aspirations for improved natural resource management of SIDS, the Pathway document mentions the green economy and discusses an emerging concept of ocean-based economies (also known as the blue economy ¹⁹) as important tools for achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication ²⁰. Oceans and seas and the concept of the ocean-based economy received significant attention.

The ocean-based or blue economy has its origins in the green economy concept – an idea and approach which has gained significant traction in recent years. The green and blue economy share the same desired outcome of raising economic growth and poverty reduction while reducing environmental risk and ecological scarcities ²¹.

While the major focus of greening strategies is nearly always in the sectors of energy, transport, infrastructure and often agriculture and forestry, ocean-based economy includes some of the above but focuses on maritime resources, coastal zone management, fisheries and climate change adaptation measures. The Government of Seychelles is using the concept of the blue economy as the framework for the country's future development ²² and the University of Seychelles has recently opened a Blue Economy Research Institute.

However it is not clear in the SAMOA Pathway what is the vision or the principles behind the green economy and the ocean-based economy. The Pathway suggests that this may be private sector led ²³. The potentially counteracting pressures of economic growth, reducing environmental risk and poverty reduction makes policies for pursuing social, economic and environmental goals critical ²⁴. Rather than relying on the private sector, SIDS leaders need national leadership and management approaches to 'greening' to ensure that they do not lead to complex social impacts for marginalised groups – such as rising energy prices; restricted access to coastal resources; exploitation of previously un-exploited resources (the Pathway mentions seabed resources ²⁵); and, collapse of traditional sectors. In the Caribbean, potential transitions in the labour force could have a significant impact on women who constitute a large part of the Caribbean labour force and who are the main breadwinners in many households ²⁶.

There is sometimes a presumption that green policies will bring long-term benefits to people living in poverty. However, these approaches also need to be designed with the participation, knowledge and practices of the target communities so that economic, social and environmental goals are met and there is significant benefits for both people and the environment.

Capacity building and skills training will also be needed to ensure that poor people can indeed take up the opportunities created. As with aspirations for building food security and managing important natural resources,

strengthening poor people's assets, rights and empowerment will be important to enable their engagement in decision-making ²⁷.

Sustainable Energy

The Pathway places significant emphasis on sustainable energy and efforts have already been made to support commitments such as the establishment of SIDS DOCK – a sustainable energy initiative to connect the energy sector in SIDS to global market finance and technology that can transform national energy sectors. Specific mention is made of the UN's Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All), an important global mechanism to advance sustainable energy initiatives at a national and global level. For those SIDS already signed up to SE4All, mechanisms are currently being developed to track progress and monitor commitments. Having committed to this initiative in May 2012, have Caribbean countries positioned themselves to access funding, projects and programmes under this initiative? ²⁸

The need to ensure access to energy for the poor and people in remote areas is mentioned in the Pathway document and SIDS must be strategic in how public and private sectors collaborate to finance energy access. While public and private finance is often directed to large-scale infrastructure, where commercial viability and returns are assured, it will be important to also identify how micro, small, and medium enterprises, which are often at the forefront of delivering renewable energy (such as community based biogas and off-grid solar systems) to poorer and remote communities, can also be supported.



The enabling environment

Institutional mechanisms

The interlinking issues affecting sustainable development, which has been well illustrated in the Pathway, requires joined up institutional arrangements and mechanisms at a local, national and regional level to effectively deliver. In the case of the Caribbean, experience shows that sectoral linkages between departments is frequently inadequate. Policies and plans are often managed by several government departments which do not work sufficiently together or do not fully integrate their programmes. In addition, the private sector is poorly involved in planning. At a regional level, the Sustainable Development Unit of the CARICOM Secretariat is under-resourced and challenged to support the implementation of environmental decisions ²⁹.

In the Pacific, the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) – a technical, intergovernmental organisation, has become a central actor in the Pacific to promote co-operation in the South Pacific region and improve sustainable development. SPREP also receives and channels international financial support. Since its establishment in the early 1990s SPREP has supported the capacity of national departments and environmental strategies. Coherent institutional arrangements such as this and collaborative approaches are critical to creating an enabling environment for sustainable development and integrating the BPOA, Mauritius Strategy and SAMOA Pathway.

Partnerships and the role of Civil Society

The focus on partnerships and dialogue has been viewed by many as a big success of the conference. More than 100 new partnerships, including that between CPDC and PIANGO, were announced in Samoa, apparently representing US\$1.9 billion in financial contributions. Carrying forward these partnerships in the integration of the

SAMOA commitments with the Post 2015 agenda could help to galvanise broad-based action across national and local governments, multilateral organisations, the private sector and civil society to build consensus and develop a more transformative agenda.

Civil society urges SIDS leaders to consider the enabling environment for civil society in as much as it considers that for the private sector and to do better in working with CSOs as development partners. The SAMOA Pathway recognises that the people of SIDS are its greatest resource, and it is ‘the people’ who are represented by the many civil society organisations operating throughout SIDS. The Road to Dignity by 2030 affirms that ‘If we are to succeed, the new [Post 2015] agenda must become part of the contract between people, including civil society and responsible business, and their governments, national and local’ ³⁰.

This document also states that ‘An enabling environment under the rule of law must be secured for the free, active and meaningful engagement of civil society, and advocates reflecting the voices of women, minorities, LGBT groups, Indigenous Peoples, youth, adolescents and older persons’ ³¹.

CSOs bring wide and varying capacities to the development process as capacity developers, innovators, service providers and technical experts ³². Just as ‘small island developing States are equal partners’ ³³ in the international arena, so too are civil society actors with their national and regional counterpart governments.

CSOs are also keen to see the international community fulfil their commitments to SIDS and are also working in the global arena to reaffirm the vulnerabilities of SIDS. Governments and CSOs can work hand-in-hand to leverage support for differentiated treatment for SIDS from international partners, to undertake collective action of global governance institutions and access to concessionary financing. CSOs can also support governments to monitor the BPOA, Mauritius Strategy and SAMOA Pathway – a key promise of SIDS leaders to the international community ³⁴.

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The focus now must be on the monitoring framework, which means that we need to be in a position to suggest indicators. There’s a niche that civil society can fill in data collection. But we need to also focus on advocacy; we can produce very good briefs for our governments. We could do this more often, and in these briefs we could establish key linkages between social, economic and environmental development.”

Gordon Bispham, Consultant and SIDS Expert
Technical Advisor, Caribbean Policy Development Centre

CSO recommendations for a transformative agenda

The following are specific recommendations from civil society across the Commonwealth to SIDS leaders to move beyond the commitments and to embed them in policy, planning and implementation systems.

1. CSOs are development partners:

Civil society organisations offer a wide range of expertise in development solutions and innovation and are themselves a representation of the voice of ‘the people’ – SIDS’ greatest resource, as acknowledged in the SAMOA Pathway.

Therefore: Civil society urges SIDS leaders to create an enabling environment for CSOs:

- Ensure freedom under the law for CSOs to organise and operate at an optimal level;
- Regularly work with, seek options and constructively engage with CSOs in development policy decision-making;
- Establish multi-stakeholder processes at the national and local level to assess development options, draw expertise and innovation;
- Create spaces for CSOs to be formally represented on decision-making bodies and structures;
- Listen, respond and act on CSO recommendations and campaigns.

2. Need for bold climate change action and commitments:

In solidarity, SIDS governments have an opportunity to leverage their vulnerability to push for the agreement of more ambitious targets from industrialised countries for emissions reductions that would hold the increase of average temperature below 20C. A 20C rise will have much greater risk for small islands.

Therefore: Civil society urges SIDS leaders to:

- Work as a collective at global climate change decision-making spaces, to be bold and to push for:
 - more regularly assessed targets in developed countries where the greatest emissions are generated;
 - actions in developed countries to limit global average temperature increase to 1.50C;

- Ensure a significantly higher proportion of renewable and sustainable energy in the energy supply mix of SIDS
- Develop climate sensitive management of natural resources in SIDS using integrated approaches to manage natural resources and mainstreaming adaptation and mitigation

3. Taking inequality seriously:

Greater attention is needed to address inequality in SIDS - a problem that is growing in SIDS and corrosive to the development of communities and nation building. Policies that reduce inequality also reduce gender inequality.

Therefore: Civil society urges SIDS leaders to:

- Implement macroeconomic policies that seek to reduce the disparities between the richest and poorer sectors of the country such as:
 - progressive taxation,
 - living wages for the lowest paid,
 - limiting executive pay,
 - ensuring quality free public services such as education and health,
 - limiting the influence of powerful elites in political decision-making;
- Establishment of ‘stepping stone’ equity targets, over a 3-5 year period, set nationally (and regionally) to incentivise progress against inequality indicators such as:
 - proportion of households with incomes less than the national median,
 - access to essential services,
 - school-attendance gaps,
 - corporate wage ratios.

4. Sustainable use of islands' natural resources:

SIDS leaders have recognised that healthy marine ecosystems, forests, water, watersheds and biodiversity resources are critical for livelihoods and sustainable development.

Therefore: to make commitments meaningful, civil society urges SIDS leaders to:

- Make and adhere to integrated and participatory land use plans and processes as a prerequisite for further development choices to balance competing land uses and ensure land and sea scapes meet ecosystem services;
- Scale up the principles and lessons from successful locally-specific integrated plans into national land-use planning processes;
- Fundamentally assess patterns of economic growth to determine their sustainability and decouple growth from environmental degradation.

5. Capacity development of marginalised groups for constructive engagement

To make real the commitment to resilient agriculture and fisheries, sustainable practices and improved food security, producers need to be able to engage in policy processes. The strengthening of small-scale producer groups and approaches to ensure the participation of hard to reach rural communities are essential so that these stakeholders can engage with policy-making processes.

Therefore: Civil society urges SIDS leaders to:

- Collaborate with CSOs to implement programmes to strengthen community groups and producer organisations
- Ensure access and constructively engage with community groups and producer organisations in relevant decision-making processes through dialogues and consultations
- Ensure policies and services are designed with the participation, knowledge and practice of communities to ensure they meet local needs.

6. Balance private sector interest with a national, people-centred vision for development:

Private sector solutions to development are critical but investment should intentionally reach marginalised groups and have an impact on poverty and development.

Therefore: Civil society urges SIDS leaders to:

- Provide national leadership and direction and ensure private sector investment aligns with national strategies and regulatory frameworks;
- Improve investor understanding of how they can contribute to inclusive sustainable development;
- Consider multi-dimensional investments - stimulating locally based micro-enterprise rather than focusing only on capital intensive investments;
- Design programmes with participation and knowledge of target communities so that economic, social and environmental targets are met.

Conclusion

The delivery of the SAMOA Pathway provides an opportunity for civil society to work together with SIDS leaders to make transformative change. The Commonwealth Foundation intends for this briefing, which was developed with civil society input, to be used as a tool to influence policy advocacy approaches, inform thinking on sustainable development and to identify how SIDS leaders can move beyond the commitments and implement them in policy and planning.

The Pathway comes at an important global juncture, just prior to the conclusion of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the international conference on Financing for Development and the Conference of Parties on Climate Change at which binding international agreements are expected. Therefore this is a critical and opportune time for action.

References and further reading

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- 19 <http://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/commonwealth-deputy-secretary-generals-address-sids-2014>
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