



FORUM

The 2014 Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States: Regional Preparations and Perspectives

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Abstract: *The Institute of International Relations (IIR) held the SIDS+20 Forum in June 2013. In keeping with the Institute's mandate and vision, it brought together regional academics, non-governmental organisations and policy makers to discuss the issues relevant to Small Island Developing States in the context of the regional preparations for the Third International Conference on SIDS (SIDS+20) then taking place in the three SIDS regions: Pacific, Caribbean and Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Mediterranean and South China Seas (AIMS) regions. The SIDS+20 Conference will be held in Samoa in September 2014. It marks an evolution in the international understanding of and engagement with the issues of small states and offers a unique opportunity to SIDS to chart their own development course and the way in which the global community can engage with these islands in the medium and long term. New partnerships, the new focus on their large marine space and the value of unique marine ecosystems and a need to move away from dependence on dwindling development aid are more recent additions to the traditional SIDS debates on development and vulnerability. This piece traces the evolution of the international agenda on SIDS from the First International Conference held in Barbados in 1994 right up to the International Conference on Sustainable Development of 2012 which had as one important outcome the call for the 2014 Third SIDS Conference. This paper sets the context for a selection of papers*

presented at the IIR Forum which follow and ends with a reflection on whether this latest international conference and attempt to elicit international support for these weak states will go farther than earlier attempts on the same theme.

Keywords: Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Institute of International Relations (IIR), 2014 Third International Conference on SIDS, Development Cooperation, Marine Resources

DEVELOPING COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATIONS FOR SIDS

There are 52 Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the world according to the U.N. Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States.¹ They are located in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans and in the Caribbean, Mediterranean and South China Sea Regions. While rich in cultural and biological diversity, they are particularly vulnerable to exogenous economic, environmental, social shocks and are behind the curve in development and international economic competitiveness in an increasing liberalized global world. Their distance from major markets increase transport costs and make their goods less competitive. They lack critical mass needed to benefit from economies of scale. Most of these states have commodity based, non-diversified economies with limited potential for export growth. In the Caribbean in particular, many islands face high debt, high rates of unemployment, high rates of crime and youth disaffection, the loss of trained workforce through migration to developed states and the economic and social burden of non-communicable diseases. These states already experience the effects of and are less resilient to sea level rise, increased frequency of extreme weather events such as hurricanes, storms etc. that are caused by climate change. With limited financial resources and technical capacity SIDS are challenged to implement measures to promote sustainable development.

What has the last three decades of multilateral action on Small Island Developing States achieved? SIDS-SIDS cooperation has been cemented through several forums that promote SIDS development. The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) grouping was formed in 1991 as a coalition within the UN system. Information sharing has been facilitated through SIDSnet since 1997. The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing

States established in 2001. Several UN agencies, regional and sub-regional organisations specifically address SIDS issues and the same is true for many global and regional non-governmental organisations. The challenge is to move beyond the identification of issues finding ways to effectively resolve them, the accounting for efforts and resources towards the same and the reduction of the duplication of efforts that many of the development programs face.

THE SIDS+20 FORUM AT THE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Institute of International Relations hosted the SIDS+20 Forum to discuss the debates relevant to the Caribbean region in the context of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) at the Institute on June 25th 2013. In keeping with the role of the Institute as a facilitator of discussions on international issues, it brought together academics, members of regional organisations, members of the civil society and members of government to address sustainable development in SIDS. It served to inform and assist in the preparation for the Caribbean Regional Preparatory meeting that was held the following week. This issue of the *Caribbean Journal of International Relations & Diplomacy* dedicates its *Forum* to some of the presentations that were indicative of several of the key issues that our region should take to the Samoa 2014 meeting.

The forum starts with an analysis by Nicole Leotaud and Anna Cadiz from the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI). In their piece entitled *Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS): A civil society perspective on priorities for sustainable development* they reflect upon the need for stronger partnerships with civil society actors as a way to approach economic development and resource management in what has become a post-development assistance epoch for many Caribbean states.

Christopher Corbin, Programme Officer of the United Nations Environmental Program presents a piece entitled *There is no Green without Blue: An analysis of the importance of coastal and marine resources to the development of Green Economies by Caribbean SIDS*. This focuses on the Caribbean Sea in the context of the Green Economy Debate and the sustainability and institutional issues related to marine and coastal resources and the governance mechanisms for their management.

The last piece in this special SIDS+20 Forum comes from Michael Witter from the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES) of the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica. His piece on *Raising the Issue of the Management of the Caribbean Sea in Samoa* encourages a new look at the Caribbean Sea from the point of view of the using the resources therein as part of the strategic development plans of the island states and pressing for a greater focus on the Sea in Samoa 2014.

WHAT IS NEW FOR THE 2014 CONFERENCE?

The pressing issues for SIDS will be the focus of international attention at the Third International Conference on SIDS to be held in Apia, Samoa in September 2014. The proposed conference theme is *The Sustainable Development of SIDS through Genuine and Global Partnerships*.

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 67/207 proposed that this conference to do four things: analyse the remaining implementation gaps in the Barbados Program of Action (BPoA) of 1994- the outcome document of the first International Conference on Small Island Developing States and the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation follow up conference of 2005 (MSI); develop renewed political commitment by all countries to address SIDS' special needs through practical actions and the mobilisation of resources; identify new and emerging challenges and opportunities for SIDS and ways to address them particularly through collaborative partnerships between SIDS and the international community and finally, contribute to the post 2015 UN development agenda by identifying the sustainable development priorities for SIDS.² The General Assembly's mandate is for a 'concise, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented political document'.

There has been a sense in all the preparatory meetings for the 2014 Conference that the development agenda and issues are not dissimilar to those facing SIDS at the first meeting in Barbados in 1994. This is also reflected in the 67/207 Resolution that calls for renewed international support for SIDS. Regional and Interregional preparatory meetings (Atlantic and Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea and South China Sea (AIMS); Caribbean; and Pacific) have all been held, and the UN Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee is to meet in January 2014.

THE ROAD TO SAMOA 2014

After tracing the history of the SIDS debate at the UN, this piece examines the more immediate regional preparations for Samoa 2014 and considers how SIDS regions can make progress on the development issues.

SIDS issues have been on the international agenda since the 1980s. In 1989 the UN General Assembly's 44th session passed resolution 44/206 that recognized the special vulnerability of these states to the effects of sea level rise and encouraged greater international attention to these countries through the United Nations Environment Program, the World Meteorological Organisation and through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It recommended that the SIDS question be a part of the discussions of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Rio 1992 was a key moment in the SIDS's multilateral governance history. The Conference adopted the Agenda 21 Program of Action and Chapter 17 recognised the special vulnerability of these small states. Rio proposed international support in the form of financing, technical cooperation, human resource development and capacity building to assist these countries in their efforts for sustainable development. It also announced the First Global Conference on Sustainable Development of SIDS for 1993.

That Conference was eventually held in Barbados in 1994 and culminated in the aforementioned Barbados Programme of Action. The BPoA showed the combined political will of SIDS to cooperate to address their particular challenges and identified 14 priority areas for sustainable development: climate change and sea level rise, natural and environmental disasters, management of wastes, coastal and marine resources, fresh water resources, land resources, energy resources, tourism resources, biodiversity resources, national institutions and administrative capacity building, regional institutions and technical cooperation, transport and communication, science and technology and human resource development.

In September 1999 at the BPoA+5 Review, the General Assembly adopted the review document: *State of Progress and Initiatives for Future Implementation of the Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS*. Member states at that UN General Assembly 22nd Special Session reaffirmed the BPoA and the

Agenda 21 principles and considered six priority areas for SIDS: climate change, natural and environmental disasters and climate variability, fresh water resources, coastal and marine resources, energy and tourism.

Implementation continues to be the illusive fulcrum of sustainable development and the Special Session noted the importance of national and regional sustainable development strategies, capacity building, resource mobilization and finance, helping these states to benefit from globalization and trade liberalization, transfer of environmentally sound technology, the creation of a vulnerability index specifically for SIDS, the importance of the SIDS Network (SIDSnet) for information sharing and finally effective international cooperation and partnerships.

Multilateral attention continued into the 2000 UN Millennium Summit. The UN General Assembly Resolution 55/2 in paragraph 17 resolved to implement the BPoA and the outcome of the 22nd Special Session 'rapidly and in full'. The Johannesburg 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development also dedicated a chapter of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation to SIDS, echoing the Millennium Declaration's resolve and proposed another international SIDS meeting, which was eventually held in Mauritius.

The Mauritius International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States of 2005 (a 10 year review of the Barbados Programme of Action) and the outcome documents: the *Mauritius Declaration* and the *Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action on the Sustainable Development of SIDS* (MSI) continued the international discussion on SIDS. The strategy called for support from the international community to take action in key areas: climate change adaptation and sea-level rise, energy vulnerability, intellectual property rights and development of resources, biodiversity, the promotion of cultural industries, mitigation and response to natural and environmental disasters, the management of marine resources, promotion of agricultural competitiveness, mitigation of the impact of communicable and non-communicable diseases, development of transport and security infrastructure, sustainable production and consumption and the enhancement of information and communication technologies.

The discourse continued five years later at the 2010 MSI+5 High Level Review Meeting on the Implementation of the Mauritius

Strategy for the Further Implementation of Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS and is contained in the General Assembly Resolution 64/199. Here the importance of building resilience, the value of cross-regional dialogue and cooperation were stressed and the commitments of the BPOA and the MSI were affirmed.

THE SAMOA 2014 MANDATE AND REGIONAL PREPARATIONS

In 2012, the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development's outcome document *The Future we want* highlighted SIDS issues and called for the convening in 2014 of a Third International Conference on SIDS. The UN General Assembly Resolution 67/207 affirmed and outlined the content of the Conference as was mentioned above. Apia, Samoa will be the venue for this meeting.

How have SIDS regions progressed in preparation for Samoa? How can the Samoa conference add value to the existing global framework that supports development in SIDS? What should SIDS hope to achieve with this conference? The regional preparatory meetings have all been held and ever present was the temptation to rehash the perennial problems of SIDS without adding actual content to the resolution of the issues. There is limited time remaining for SIDS to put together a focused, realistic agenda for international cooperation prior to Samoa, September 2014.

Generally the Pacific region's states seemed to have been more prepared than their Caribbean counterparts for their regional meeting and had come to meetings with most country consultations already having been concluded. In the case of the Caribbean three countries: Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Jamaica, had the results of national consultations available. Perhaps the AIMS region showed the most promise as regards having a clear focus that aligned with the Apia conference theme: there was substantial participation of 'national partners' including the local Youth network, NGOs, civil society and UN agencies. These stakeholders were actively involved in preparing the outcome document and outnumbered government delegates.

The Caribbean Meeting was the first regional meeting. The Kingston Outcome document of July 2013 outlined several of the challenges facing Caribbean SIDS and proposed 29 objectives for facilitating implementation of the BPoA and the MSI.³ The Caribbean region's Outcome document focused on debt and economic vulnerability and called on developed countries to

provide new and additional predictable financial resources for sustainable development and for the capitalization of the Caribbean Sustainability Fund. States sought the establishment of a dedicated mechanism to provide financing to developing countries for specific projects to be implemented through the UN Agencies, Funds and Programs. A sentiment echoed in the Pacific Regional meeting a week later was the need for increased flexibility in the debt sustainability framework and the criteria for eligibility for debt relief. In particular, it was noted that increased funds should be provided for debt roll over, innovative debt swap criteria are needed as are increased concessions for debt relief for SIDS. Caribbean SIDS argue that GDP is an inappropriate measure of economic sustainability of SIDS and should not determine access to financing. A dedicated technology transfer facilitation mechanism developing states and SIDS was called for.

On the climate change issue the meeting proposed that United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Climate Technology Centre and Network should be engaged to support Caribbean SIDS' scientific and academic institutions and that the Green Climate Fund should be operationalised by early 2014 to assist with mitigation and adaptation actions. Developed countries, the meeting noted, should be encouraged to increase financing to reach USD100 billion by 2020. The Outcome Document included calls for support on many fronts: for sustainable development; to strengthen national statistical and information systems, data collection and management capacity; to implement agreements related to coastal and marine resources, freshwater, land, energy, tourism and biodiversity resources as well as those related to natural disasters and waste management; to build resilience and risk reduction with regard to natural disasters; to develop and use renewable energy and foster energy efficiency and conservation; to develop sustainable agriculture; to address rising security challenges; to assist youth especially in the light of growing crime, violence and insecurity; for community building and empowerment; for poverty eradication; to address the challenges and opportunities of migration; to develop modalities for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases(NCD). The challenge for Caribbean States will be to prioritize this 'wish list' into a few key strategies that can add value to the existing SIDS support framework in time for Samoa. More work is needed to create the 'concise, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented political document' (as per Resolution 67/207).

Perhaps the key to achieving these goals comes from the Meeting's recommendation to find ways to increase the effectiveness of UN institutions that support SIDS in implementing the BPOA and the MSI.

The Pacific SIDS held their regional meeting a few weeks after the Caribbean meeting. The Outcome Document grouped recommendations into nine areas: climate change, health, especially non-communicable diseases, social development, governance, infrastructure, sustainable energy, oceans, sustainable resource management and protection and strategies for implementation.⁴ For the Pacific, key priority goals included a call for climate change to be included as a cross cutting issue in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The meeting reaffirmed its call for the UN Secretary General to appoint a Special Representative on Climate Security with resources to monitor and assist vulnerable countries in climate security challenges. There was a call to establish an international mechanism to address loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change at the Warsaw COP 19 of the UNFCCC. The Meeting also asked that the Montreal Protocol be used to gradually reduce the production of HFCs. As the in the Caribbean, there was a call for additional adaptation financing and readily accessible, predictable and sustainable financing arrangements that can be accessed at a rate commensurate with SIDS absorptive capacities.

Pacific SIDS also addressed health and NCDs, the inclusion of youth and women's development in social policy, the need for reliable and current data on sustainable development indicators⁵, the need to develop a cohesive framework that links global and national policy on issues of sustainable development and sustainable energy (including ocean thermal energy conversion). Specifically there was a call to include NCDs in the post 2015 development agenda. The meeting proposed that in time for the 69th UNGA, that there should be an international regime under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to protect and safeguard biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction as a way to safeguard the world's oceans. The meeting also proposed that an SDG should be the promotion of healthy productive and resilient oceans. Specifically as in the case of the Caribbean some delegates were unhappy with the absence of a 'Pacific-specific approach' in the outcome document.⁶

The Regional Preparatory Meeting of SIDS of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Mediterranean and South China Seas was held just

over a week after the Pacific Regional Meeting. Its Outcome Document⁷ followed closely the General Assembly guide Resolution 67/207. The AIMS SIDS pointed to many of the handicaps shared with other SIDS including food insecurity and insufficient access to fresh water, poor sanitation infrastructure and waste management, energy dependence, inadequate transport networks and land degradation and deforestation. These states have had to join the commercial loan market after recent graduation from their previous Least Developed Country status which they blame for leading to heavy debt. The Meeting recommended a 'paradigm shift' on the issue of sustainable development in SIDS based on the principle of *solidarity* both within the region and more generally among SIDS. This concept was not elaborated on sufficiently however into concrete proposals.

There were practical recommendations to utilize their competitive advantage as large ocean states to benefit from the blue economy- a conference in 2014 on the blue economy open to all SIDS regions is carded for January 2014. Some issues raised at the IIR Forum and later in the Caribbean Regional meeting were also mentioned in the AIMS region: the need for adequate, flexible financing that is available on more favourable terms for SIDS and the need to address the impact of non-tariff measures and barriers on trade for SIDS. The meeting also proposed the establishment of a dedicated regional coordinating agency similar to those existing in the Caribbean and Pacific regions. The AIMS SIDS regional priorities include oceans, sustainable energy, strengthening national governance for sustainable development, strengthening human capital, networking for optimal use of resources, resilience building and the development of indices to establish vulnerability, climate change adaptation assistance and a framework to procure 'universal health coverage' and the inclusion of this issue in the post 2015 development agenda.

Are the regions able to achieve the 67/207 mandate? What more can SIDS do as they prepare for Samoa?

At the end of the round of regional meetings SIDS have achieved four things: they have analysed the BPOA and MSI implementation gaps; they have called for renewed political commitment to address SIDS's needs; they have identified emerging challenges (such as crime and security and debt) and opportunities (such as the blue economy) and they have suggested concrete proposals (the operationalising of the Green Climate Fund by early 2014, the appointing of a Special Representative on Climate Security, the

establishment of an international regime to protect and safeguard biodiversity in oceans under UNCLOS, and the inclusion of universal access to health care, addressing climate change impacts and attention to NCDs in the post 2015 sustainable development goals).

A CALL FOR SPECIFICITY

SIDS still have a way to go. Foremost in the minds of delegates should be a way to find specific added value from a conference of such wide-ranging scope. The Interregional meeting's focus on the first day of deliberations precisely sought to 'close the gaps', through practical and pragmatic actions towards the implementation of the BPOA and the MSI.

While the national consultations and regional preparatory meetings were helpful to identify sustainable development issues, SIDS must hammer out what appears to be a wish list of items into a focused, realizable political document. Importantly, the ways in which new 'collaborative partnerships' will be constructed still has to be determined. The challenge appears to be the execution of what these SIDS see as solutions to achieve sustainable development. Institution building at the level of SIDS has long been identified as a major impediment to resolve their development challenges.⁸ The question is then which institutional arrangement best suits the implementation of the expected *Samoa Outcome Document*?

SIDS today obtain funding and support for projects through several sources and the exact impacts of these programs on sustainable development in many instances are inconclusive.⁹ Among the major funders are Global Environment Facility, the World Bank, The Asian Development Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency, the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the French Development Agency and the Development Cooperation Division of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These important donors offer programmatic funding to individual states and lack a general SIDS development focus.

The UN also has several agencies that work at the global and regional levels that address the needs of SIDS under the BPOA and MSI mandate, including the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation, the United Nations Environment Program, the Division for Sustainable

Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the United Nations Development Program and the work of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity . The programs are generally country and program based.

On another global front, the SIDS Regions seem ambivalent on the extent to which civil society and the NGO community may be relied upon to advance the effort. They are to some extent the guardians of the 'collaborative partnership' efforts of SIDS. Greater involvement of these groups carries sovereignty costs and the value of this is weighed differently in the different SIDS regions. The important difference in the SIDS regions in levels of development and economic and technical capacities may explain why some rely more heavily on NGOs for support. The Caribbean for example was reticent to have direct non-state involvement in the Kingston Outcome Document.¹⁰ Yet in the case of the AIMS region, NGO involvement was medullar to the outcome. Research confirms that greater involvement by NGOs helps strengthen the legitimacy of policies and cements pledged political support for higher levels of cooperation.¹¹ The Interregional Meeting recognizes space for the involvement of NGOs in the early part of deliberations at that meeting.

Island communities are 'deeply globally connected'¹² yet SIDS at present lack a common global platform to harness the multilateral and bilateral efforts towards SIDS development. SIDS should use Samoa to find ways to formalize that connection under a common political platform. The AOSIS coalition (formed in 1990) as a lobby group and negotiating voice may be a useful vehicle to push the Samoa agenda for 'collaborative partnerships'. Collaboration through AOSIS achieved 10 of 12 of the SIDS negotiating goals in the climate negotiations of 1990 to 1997 for the UNFCCC.¹³ AOSIS's success confirms that in spite of their vulnerabilities and small size, SIDS can use negotiations to 'borrow power' to achieve their goals.¹⁴ AOSIS today is an *ad hoc* lobby voice, without a secretariat or regular budget,¹⁵ supported by the New York diplomatic missions of member states.

Is there room at Samoa to give this common platform the mandate to coordinate this new phase of 'collaborative partnerships' post-Samoa? Thus far however the regional meetings have not addressed the possibility of how to harness such SIDS's efforts for 'collaborative partnerships' to achieve the objectives

highlighted in the preparatory meetings. Substantial reengineering of AOSIS will be needed if it is to effectively achieve an augmented role.

What is certain is that at the Apia Samoa SIDS+20 International Conference these states will have an opportunity to jointly determine how to engage the development community in the medium to long term. State delegates must do more than restate issues, set targets and signal political will. An agency to promote partnerships (between the state, intergovernmental agencies, private sector and civil society) and the specific recommendations of the regional and interregional preparatory meetings at a global level and at the SIDS-SIDS level would be a welcome development after all the previous indications of political will expressed over the years through the BPoA, Agenda 21, the MSI and more recently in the *Future we Want* Rio+20 outcome document.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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