



## MEETING SUMMARY

### Virtual Meeting of National Focal Points (NFPs) of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

**Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) Region**

**Tuesday, 04 August 2020 8:00am – 10:00am (NY Time)**

***(ZOOM with French & English interpretation)***

#### **“Enhancing coherence - A focus on the COVID-19 response”**

1. Government designated National focal points and representatives of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) from the AIS Region met virtually on 4 August 2020 to discuss the impact of COVID-19 and share experiences and best practices on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the national, regional and global levels. The meetings also sought to share experiences and best practices on mainstreaming the SAMOA Pathway and SDGs into national development processes as well their implementation and follow up, in the context of COVID-19, in line with the principle to “build back better”.
2. The meeting was attended by participants from Cabo Verde, Comoros, Maldives, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, and Singapore. UN agencies including the UN-OHRLLS (organizer), UNDP, UNDRR, UNEP, UNOPS, regional organizations including IOC, Resident Coordinators, development partners, as well as the GEF, ISA, WMO, and Climate Analytics participated.
3. The structure of the meeting included an opening segment and 2 main sessions: (1) Response to COVID-19 (Global and Regional); (2) Country Experiences in Response to COVID-19 with Responses from SIDS NFPs and Interventions from (other) UN System and other organizations during the interactive discussion. .
4. The opening segment was chaired by Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director, Office of the High Representative of LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS (UN-OHRLLS), and commenced with remarks from H.E. Ms. Fekita ‘Utoikamanu, High Representative, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS (UN-OHRLLS) and H.E. Ms. Lois Young, Permanent Representative of Belize to the United Nations, Chair of Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).
5. Remarks from the opening segment acknowledged the impact that COVID-19 has had on the already vulnerable SIDS. The segment emphasized:
  - the importance of annual NFP meetings that allow NFPs to share information, lessons learned, and best practices in responding to the pandemic and other development challenges;

- the effects of COVID-19 have exacerbated the existing vulnerabilities present in SIDS; the need for global economic restructuring that would allow SIDS to emerge cleaner, greener, and more resilient from the crisis; and
- policies that not only help with the recovery from COVID-19 but also allow for the continued achievement of the SDGs, 2030 Agenda, and the SAMOA Pathway.

***Session 1: Global and Regional Response to COVID-19***

6. This session was chaired by Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director, OHRLLS. This session provided background on:

- the initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the global and regional level; the successes and the challenges of these initiatives and how they could be integrated into SDGs and SAMOA Pathway implementation;
- the emerging priorities of the SIDS in the AIS region and how they are being addressed; and
- how international and regional platforms can support these priorities along with the implications of the MCO and Regional reviews.

Ms. Azeema Adam, Chief, Programme Management, DCO, gave a presentation on the emerging priorities in response to COVID-19 and how they can be supported by international platforms. Ms. Ana Graça, Resident Coordinator, Cabo Verde, also gave a presentation on regional efforts that can address the emerging priority areas. After the presentations, a respondent Mr. Bartholomew Armah, Chief, Economic Affairs, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), spoke on the impact that COVID-19 has had on Africa. Following the presentations, two interventions were made by Mr. Raj Mohabeer (IOC) and Mr. Rakesh Bhuckory (NFP Mauritius).

7. The meeting stressed that COVID-19 will deal a severe economic blow to the countries of the region. Positive growth trends prior to the pandemic will be reversed as economies are expected to contract as part of the fallout. It was noted that the tourism industry and the export of primary commodities have been hit particularly hard as international trade has been reduced and travel has been shut down to prevent cross border transmission. The domestic situation of countries has suffered as economic activity has been limited to prevent the internal transmission of the virus. This has hurt small businesses due to a lack of cash flow and decreased the amount of revenue that can be collected by governments.
8. The meeting emphasized that stimulus packages have played an important role in governments' responses to the impact of the pandemic. Governments have used them to provide macroeconomic stability to economies by providing much-needed liquidity to small and large businesses that have been hurt by the limited economic activity. The packages also include temporary tax exemptions, scaled-up social protection systems that provide social assistance income, support for vulnerable groups like the elderly and disabled, and measures that support the education system. It was also noted that these

efforts would generate enough economic activity to potentially offset economic contractions.

9. The meeting highlighted the need for greater coordination in response plans at all levels. UN country teams need to coordinate better with governments on developing and integrating national response plans that align with the UN development goals. The countries in the region also need greater coordination mechanisms to develop a possible regional response plan. Many countries are operating independently even when a plan that could encompass the region as a whole could lead to a more effective response and greater recovery from the impacts of the pandemic.
10. The meeting noted that socioeconomic response plans have been submitted from across the region to DCO and UNDP that outline national response plans to COVID-19. The response plans are guided by five pillars: strengthening health systems, scaling up social protection systems, protecting employment, macroeconomic responses with multilateral support, and developing community resilience.
11. The meeting noted that recovery plans for the region need to focus not only on the immediate response to the virus but on the medium term as well. These types of plans would ensure that countries build back better and become greener, more inclusive, and more resilient.
12. The meeting underscored the need for additional financing during the COVID-19 crisis. Reduced economic activity and limited revenue have limited the financial capabilities of governments to respond to the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. These financial shortfalls have been reflected in resource allocation decisions made by governments that have had to divert funds from sustainable development and socio-economic responses in order to address the public health crisis. Efforts are being made to gain greater access to ODA and FDA. The meeting called for the development of a multi-dimensional vulnerability index that would be used as the main indicator for access to development financing. This measure would recognize the unique vulnerabilities of SIDS in this region, instead of relying on income-based measures which prevent SIDS access to external financing due to their middle-income status.
13. The meeting emphasized the issue of debt in the region as well. Prior to the crisis, there had been some individual success in countries reducing their debt burdens but the pandemic has reversed these gains and made the situation worse for some. It was noted that governments have had to borrow more so that they could cover fiscal deficits that have resulted from the need to provide more funding for the socio-economic response plans. Some of these SIDS are also considered middle-income countries, which means that they do not have the same access to debt relief as low-income countries do. Many SIDS have advocated for a response similar to the G20's debt service suspension initiative (DSSI) for these countries, so that they can have some debt relief or outright cancellation. In addition, the majority of SIDS debt is held by private commercial lenders that have higher debt service payments than bilateral or multilateral lenders.

14. The meeting also stressed the importance of the acquisition of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies. The meeting noted the concern that SIDS in the AIS region cannot compete for access to these materials like larger countries. It was recommended that SIDS collectively acquire PPE so that their orders are substantive and as equally as compelling as those orders placed by larger countries.
15. The meeting highlighted the emerging priorities of the region in the context of COVID-19. These include: data collection and innovation, financing for recovery, social protections and food security, economic diversification, support for vulnerable groups, regional integration, and the improvement of human and institutional capital.

***Session 2: Country Experiences in Response to COVID-19 and Responses from SIDS NFPs and Interventions from (other) UN System - Interactive Discussion***

16. This session was chaired by Mr. Sébastien Vauzelle, Economist, UN RCO, Cabo Verde. This session allowed countries to:
  - share some of their country experiences, best practices, and lessons learned in response to COVID-19, including from the national, regional, and international perspectives;
  - speak to the challenges and opportunities related to enhanced coordination in the region;
  - highlight the challenges and opportunities going forward, including in the context of the Multi-Country Office and Regional Reviews; and
  - anticipate the implications for the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the SDGs along with the lessons learned from Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).National experience presentations were given by Ms. Fatouma Abdallah (Comoros), Ms. Elisabeth Agathine (Seychelles), and Ms. Saadh Aishath (Maldives).

***Country Experiences***

17. Presentations highlighted the early preparations and actions taken by SIDS in the AIS region that were put in place to prevent the spread of the virus to their respective islands and reduce the level of domestic transmission. It was noted that countries closed borders and limited the level of economic activity within domestic economies by closing non-essential services. Social gathering rules were also put in place that limited the size of social gatherings and curfews were put in place. In addition, health care systems were provided with more funds and resources to increase their capacity so they could handle the public health crisis.
18. Presentations emphasized that COVID-19 has had a tremendous negative economic impact on societies. Vital industries for the AIS SIDS such as tourism, fisheries, agriculture, and construction have been slammed by the effects of the virus, especially tourism which makes up a large portion of domestic GDP in the region. Due to a reduced

revenue stream and economic activity, government services have been cut, household incomes have fallen, and unemployment has increased. The lack of international trade, which can be attributed to border closures, has also reduced the amount of foreign exchange flowing into the country.

19. Presentations highlighted the stimulus packages and socio-economic response plans put in place to address the effects of the pandemic. Funds were provided to small and large businesses that have suffered from the limited economic activity and reduced demand as a result of social gathering rules. Central banks have played an active role in these responses by providing liquidity, lowering interest rates, and implementing foreign exchange policies to stabilize currencies. Social protection packages include unemployment assistance, the guarantee of basic services, and the expansion of health care systems to include the most vulnerable in society.
20. Presentations also stressed the need for building back better. Medium term measures have been put in place alongside policies geared towards the immediate response to COVID-19, so that societies may transition out of the ‘pandemic footing’ more smoothly. These measures are focused on developing resiliency and inclusivity, and include developing sustainable tourism, economic diversification, increased labor force participation, improvements in human capital, and addressing climate change vulnerabilities. This would also prevent any potential development progress from being lost.
21. Presentations also noted that the pandemic provided the opportunity to expand and develop digital technologies. Systems that were already in place were easily used for telemedicine and online education. However, it was noted there is still domestic digital inequality gaps, as well as gaps between SIDS and larger countries that can be closed with policy plans that target the development and innovation in this sector.
22. Presentations noted that COVID-19 will not help the debt situation in these SIDS as governments have to borrow to cover fiscal short falls.

#### *Interactive Discussion*

23. Following the presentations, interventions were made by H.E. Mr. Jose Rocha (Cabo Verde), H.E. Mr. Satyendra Prasad (Fiji), and Mr. Jean Jacob (UNEP).
24. The meeting noted that SIDS need to be treated as a special case for sustainable development. SIDS need specialized programs that target economic competitiveness, diversification, further develop social protection systems, and address issues relating to climate change.
25. The meeting noted that there needs to be a stronger integration of sustainable development measures and climate change policies into national response plans meant to address the impact of COVID-19.
26. The meeting also noted the need for economic tools that assess the economic impacts of pollution and environmental degradation.

27. The meeting highlighted that SIDS need greater access to funding and debt relief. Lack of access to ODA, concessional financing, and climate financing will make building back better more difficult. This issue will be compounded by the issue of debt facing SIDS.
28. The meeting also supported the creation of a multi-dimensional vulnerability index that would change the criteria for access to financing and debt relief from income-based measures to vulnerability measures. It was also noted that support from larger Member States is needed.

### ***Closing***

29. Mr. Sébastien Vauzelle, Economist, UN RCO, Cabo Verde provided a brief summary and concluding remarks were received from H.E. Ms. Fekita 'Utoikamanu, High Representative, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS (UN-OHRLLS).
30. The meeting underscored the importance of the establishment of the focal point mechanism and recognized that a lot more work will need to be done going forward to ensure the effective operation of the SIDS National focal point network. The meeting underscored the benefit of sharing experiences and best practices learned by national focal points as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic at the national, regional and global levels. The meeting also stressed the importance of continuing to share experiences and best practices on mainstreaming the SAMOA Pathway and SDGs into national development processes as well their implementation and follow up, in the context of COVID-19 in conjunction with need for building back better.
31. The meeting noted that discussions would continue at the in-person meetings of the focal points, which are still scheduled to be held in Antigua and Barbuda, when circumstances allow.

## Participants List

### 1. National Focal Points

Name	Member State
Ms. Abdallah Fatouma	Comoros
Ms. Aishath Saadh	Maldives
Ms. Elisabeth Agathine	Seychelles
Mr. Rakesh Bhuckory	Mauritius
Mr. Mugant Mehanathan	Singapore

### 2. Permanent Missions to the UN representation

Name	Last Name	Organization	Title
Silva	Alcinio	Permanent Mission of Sao Tome and Principe to the United	Chargé d'Affaires a.i.
Terence	Tan	Permanent Mission of Singapore to the United Nations	First Secretary (Political)
Jose Luis	Rocha	Permanent Mission of Cabo Verde	Permanent Representative

### 3. AOSIS Bureau

Name
H.E. Ms. Lois Young, Permanent Representative of Belize to the United Nations, Chair of AOSIS
H.E. Mr. Satyendra Prasad, Permanent Representative of Fiji to the United Nations, AOSIS Bureau Member for PSIDS
H.E. Ms. Thilmeeza Hussain, Permanent Representative of Maldives to the United Nations, AOSIS Bureau Member for AIS SIDS

### 4. Resident Coordinator Offices

Name	RCO
Ms. Ana Graça	UN Resident Coordinator (Cabo Verde)
Mr. Matthias Naab	UN Resident Coordinator (Comoros)

Mr. Mamadou Diallo	UN Resident Coordinator (Guinea-Bissau)
Ms. Christine Umotoni	UN Resident Coordinator (Mauritius MCO, Serves 2 countries (2 SIDS) Mauritius, Seychelles)
Mr. Sébastien Vauzelle	UN Resident Coordinator (Cabo Verde)

## 5. Other UN and international organizations

Name	Last Name	Organization
Mara	Murillo	UNEP
Petal	Thomas	UNFPA
Donna	Pierre	World Meteorological Organization
Sarah	O'Neill	UNOPS
David	Stevens	UNDRR
Marie	Bourrel-MCKinnon	International Seabed Authority
Asha	Bobb-Semple	Global Environment Facility
Julie	Andersen	UNDP
Riad	Meddeb	UNDP
Donna	Lagdameo	UNDRR
Frances	Fuller	Climate Analytics Inc.
Jean	Jacob	UNEP
Raj	Mohabeer	IOC
Bartholomew	Armah	ECA

## 6. Organizers

Name	UN-System
H.E. Ms. Fekita 'Utoikamanu,	High Representative, Under-Secretary-General, OHRLLS
Heidi Schroderus-Fox	Director, UN-OHRLLS
Tishka Francis	OHRLLS
Themba Phakathi	OHRLLS
Per Magnus Andresen	OHRLLS
John Henry Gordon	OHRLLS



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**“Enhancing coherence - A focus on the COVID-19 response”**

**AGENDA**

<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; color: orange;">01</p>	<p><b>OPENING</b>  <i>(8:00am-8:10am)</i></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director (UN-OHRLLS)</p> <p><b>Opening Remarks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E. Ms. Fekita ‘Utoikamanu, High Representative, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (UN-OHRLLS)</li> <li>• H.E. Ms. Lois Young, Permanent Representative of Belize to the United Nations, Chair of Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; color: orange;">02</p>	<p><b>RESPONSE TO COVID-19 (GLOBAL AND REGIONAL)</b>  <i>8:10am – 8:40 am</i></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director (UN-OHRLLS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Presentation I:</b> Response to COVID-19 (emerging priority areas and how international platforms can support or continue to support the response) – Ms. Azeema Adam, Chief, Programme Management, DCO</li> <li>• <b>Presentation II:</b> COVID-19 response – Regional (emerging priority areas and how regional platforms can support or continue to support the response) – Ms. Ana Graça, Resident Coordinator, Cabo Verde</li> <li>• <b>Respondent:</b> Mr. Bartholomew Armah, Chief, Economic Affairs, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)</li> </ul> <p><i>Guiding Questions:</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What are the COVID-19 response initiatives at the global and regional level? What have been some of the successes and challenges? How has the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the SDGs factored into these initiatives?</i></li> <li>• <i>What are the emerging priorities for small island developing States in the AIS in the context of the COVID-19 response? How are these priorities being addressed?</i></li> <li>• <i>How can international and regional platforms support these priorities, including as it relates to enhanced coordination in the region? What are the implications for the Multi-Country Office and Regional Reviews?</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; color: orange;">03</p>	<p style="background-color: #ADD8E6; padding: 5px;"><b>COUNTRY EXPERIENCES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19</b></p> <p><i>(8:40am – 9:50am)</i></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Mr. Sébastien Vauzelle, Economist, UN RCO (Cabo Verde)</p> <p><b>Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) SIDS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Presentation I:</b> Comoros</li> <li>• <b>Presentation II:</b> Seychelles</li> <li>• <b>Presentation III:</b> Maldives</li> </ul> <p><b>Responses from SIDS NFPs and Interventions from (other) UN System –</b></p> <p><b>Interactive Discussion</b></p> <p><i>Guiding Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What are some of the best practices, and lessons learnt in response to COVID-19, including from the national, regional and international perspectives?</i></li> <li>• <i>What are the challenges and opportunities going forward, including as it relates to enhanced coordination in the region?</i></li> <li>• <i>What are the implications for the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the SDGs? What are the implications for the Multi-Country Office and Regional Reviews? What are the lessons from Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)?</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; color: orange;">04</p>	<p style="background-color: #ADD8E6; padding: 5px;"><b>CLOSING</b></p> <p><i>(9:50 am – 10:00 am)</i></p> <p><b>Closing Remarks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Session 3 Moderator brief summary/takeaways</li> <li>• H.E. Ms. Fekita ‘Utoikamanu, High Representative, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (UN-OHRLLS)</li> </ul>

