CALL FOR ACTION
on
Water security and climate resilience in Small Island Developing States towards SDGs and SAMOA Pathway achievement

by the governments of Saint Lucia, Cabo Verde, Palau and Samoa

supported by:
UNESCO, UN-OHRLLS and UNESCO SIDS Group

on the occasion of the UN 2023 Water Conference Side-event "SIDS Resilience to Climate Change through Water Security: Towards SDGs and SAMOA Pathway Achievement"
24 March 2023, New York

We, the representatives of the Governments of Saint Lucia, Cabo Verde, Palau and Samoa, call upon Small Island Developing States (SIDS), partner countries, development partners, donors, UN organizations and the international community to strengthen existing collaborations, mobilize partnerships and put forward commitments for tangible actions to enhance water security in SIDS with a view to reducing their vulnerability to climate change impacts and strengthening their adaptation and resilience capacities, which are essential for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway.

SIDS are among the most water-scarce countries

Small Island Developing States are diverse, yet face common challenges arising from climate change. The SIDS are among the most water-scarce countries in the world, with 7 out of 10 facing the prospect of water shortages in the years to come and 9 out of 10 lying just a few metres above sea level. The main sources of freshwater in SIDS are groundwater and rainwater harvesting. Groundwater is prone to pollution from agriculture and saltwater intrusion due to rising sea levels. Freshwater resources in SIDS are under growing pressure including drought, population growth, urbanization, tourism and agricultural activities, while a limited availability of freshwater will curb their economic development and jeopardize social progress. Chronic water shortages in some SIDS undermine the human right to water, social cohesion and food security. The limited water infrastructure in SIDS is still the main cause of discharges of untreated, or partially treated, wastewater, threatening unique island, coastal and marine ecosystems of global importance such as coral reefs.

SIDS are disproportionately affected by climate-related disasters

SIDS are highly affected by climate change and face multifaceted climate-induced challenges, which include rising temperatures, more frequent and more intense tropical cyclones and storm surges, changes in rainfall patterns, floods and droughts. According to the Sixth Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released in 2021, sea-level rise is expected to double the frequency of flooding in much of the Indian Ocean and Tropical Pacific, whereas tropical cyclones will remain the main driver of flooding in the Caribbean and Southern Tropical Pacific. The Report also notes that the projected changes in aridity are expected to impose freshwater stress on many small islands, especially SIDS. It is estimated that with a warming of

1.5°C or less, freshwater stress on small islands would be 25% less as compared to 2.0°C. Due to their unique vulnerability and exposure to exogenous shocks, the economic costs of natural and water-related disasters in SIDS have measured up to 200% of GDP and averaged as much as 17%[1] of the annual GDP in terms of monetary value of damages. The Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC (2023) confirms that increasing weather and climate extreme events have already exposed millions of people to reduced water security, with the largest adverse impacts observed in vulnerable countries such as SIDS.

Small island nations that are water-secure will be more resilient to climate change

We call upon on Small Island Developing States, partner countries of all regions of the world, development partners, donors, UN organizations and the international community to strengthen existing collaborations, mobilize partnerships and put forward commitments for tangible actions to enhance water security in SIDS by addressing water and climate intertwined challenges with a view to reducing SIDS vulnerability to climate change impacts and strengthening their adaptation and resilience capacities, which are essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, the SAMOA Pathway and the SIDS Programme of Action.

In particular, to:

1. Strengthen existing collaborations with SIDS by incorporating water security and climate-resilient water management initiatives;

2. Mobilize new partnerships to address water and climate challenges in SIDS by leveraging existing mechanisms within the United Nations system, aimed at supporting SIDS in achieving sustainable development, such as the SDG 6 Accelerator Framework and the SAMOA Pathway, including the outcomes of the High-Level Mid-Term Review of the SAMOA Pathway (September 2019) which focused on the specific needs and challenges of SIDS regarding water quality, wetland conservation and water availability;

3. Approach the 4th UN Conference on SIDS with transformative partnerships that build a resilient water future for SIDS;

4. Facilitate strategic dialogue with development partners, donors and the international community with a view to supporting and upscaling water-related initiatives, sharing best practices and SIDS-SIDS collaboration as well as partnerships between development partners and SIDS;

5. Foster and strengthen scientific cooperation on water issues and mobilize in-country and international expertise to improve scientific knowledge and information on the status of availability and quality of freshwater resources in SIDS to identify unique water-related challenges, priorities and needs faced by SIDS;

6. Transfer and apply innovative climate-resilient water-related solutions, approaches, tools and technologies in SIDS such as rainwater harvesting, water reuse and circular economy to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts;

7. Support vulnerability assessment and disaster preparedness in SIDS for effective disaster mitigation, response and rescue measures, which are vital for the reduction of climate-induced water related disasters on the population and economy of SIDS;

8. Support effective water management and governance in SIDS through science-based policy advice and recommendations on water issues;

[1] OECD, 2018. Making Development Co-operation Work for Small Island Developing States.

9. Build capacity and develop skills of water sector professionals and post-secondary education institutions by implementing training programmes that meet the specific capacity-building needs in SIDS;

10. Raise awareness on water and climate issues, as on water-related disaster risk mitigation and management at all levels from policy and decision makers, local authorities and agricultural farmers to communities and the youth.

Finally, we call upon all Small Island Developing States, partner countries, development partners, donors, UN organizations and the wider international community to join us in advocating for enhanced water security and climate resilience in SIDS and to strengthen collaborations and commitments within the SIDS Partnership Framework as a means of implementing the SDGs and the SAMOA Pathway, in preparation for COP-28 and the Fourth UN Conference on SIDS in 2024.

The time to act is now!