

UN-OHRLLS contribution to the SG's background note for the preparatory meeting of the high-level 2020 UN Conference to support the implementation of the SDG 14

i. Activities, challenges and opportunities relating to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14

The Declaration, “Our ocean our future: call for action” adopted at the Ocean Conference in 2017, recognizes the special importance of certain targets in Goal 14 for small island developing countries (SIDS) and least developing countries (LDCs).

The Sustainable Development Goal 14 to “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” is of particular importance to the countries in special situations - the least developed countries, the land-locked developing countries and the small islands developing states - where millions of people depend on marine resources for their nutrition and their livelihoods.

SIDS unique dependence on oceans cuts across the three pillars of sustainable development. Many SIDS are, in fact, large ocean states, encompassing a significant portion of the world’s ocean when their exclusive economic zones (EEZs) are factored in. Of the 38 SIDS, 15 are custodians to 50 of the largest EEZs, with several of the atoll nation SIDS, including Kiribati and the Federated States of Micronesia ranking high. Naturally, the SAMOA Pathway emphasizes the importance of healthy oceans for SIDS.

On 27 September 2019, the General Assembly convened a high-level mid-term review on the progress made in addressing the priorities of SIDS through the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway. The political declaration which, resulted from the high-level review of the SAMOA Pathway, noted the importance of oceans, seas and marine resources to SIDS, and the commitment outlined in the Call for Action mentioned above further encouraged the fulfillment of the voluntary commitments pledged in the context of SDG 14.

The high-level review was preceded by regional preparatory meetings, held in each of the three SIDS regions; the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) region, the Caribbean region and the Pacific region. These meetings highlighted that SIDS continue to face challenges to achieving SDG 14, including threats from climate

change to biodiversity loss – undermining the full potential of SIDS to successfully achieve internationally agreed development goals.

Significant milestones have been achieved by SIDS towards the achievement of SDG 14. While SDG 14 calls for the protection and conservation of 10% of oceans spaces by 2030, a number of SIDS have declared a higher percentage of their ocean spaces as marine reserves. Most recently Palau, declared to protect 80 per cent of their exclusive economic zones (EEZs) as marine protected areas. Similarly, the Seychelles is in the process of identifying 30 percent of their EEZ to be designated as marine protection areas. SIDS have also demonstrated innovative pathways to harness capital markets for financing ocean-based initiatives with Seychelles becoming the first country in the world to issue a sovereign blue bond in 2018.

Activities:

Within its mandate on advocacy, mobilization of international resources and support to building partnerships with SIDS, OHRLLS conducted a number of activities related to ocean and SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs.

In the context of its activities focused on partnerships, OHRLLS together with its partners, organised a high-level dialogue on “Fostering partnerships with Small island developing states towards the 2020 Our Ocean Conference” in the margins of the 6th Our Ocean Conference in Oslo, Norway. The Dialogue was organized to engage partners of the SIDS Global Business Network (SIDS-GBN), an initiative of UN-OHRLLS, to strengthen private sector ties among the three SIDS regions and with the international business community, toward the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the SDGs.

The dialogue emphasized the need for scaling-up of ocean related private sector partnerships for SIDS. It also resulted in a commitment towards developing a brief on the SIDS’ role and opportunities in the UN Decade for Ocean Science. Another was announced by Parley for the Oceans to work with interested SIDS to scale-up Parley’s future island nation program aimed at innovative partnerships to avoid, intercept and recycle marine plastics. This commitment will also contribute towards the implementation of SDG 14 target 14.1 on marine pollution.

In May 2018, OHRLLS convened the 2018 Global Business Network Forum, in Balaclava, Mauritius. Recognizing the important role of the private sector in promoting sustainable tourism in SIDS, the 2018 Forum was held under the theme “Strengthening private sector partnerships for sustainable tourism development”. The Forum emphasized the cross-cutting nature of oceans, not only for SIDS economies but also in enhancing livelihoods, reducing poverty and food security. Tourism accounts for a significant proportion of the GDP of many SIDS, with tourism accounting for more than 50 per cent of exports in the case of the Maldives, the Seychelles and St. Lucia. Tourism is often one of the few activities for which their location, coupled with exceptional natural and cultural resources, is a strong competitive advantage for SIDS. Tourism has been key in the recent graduation of Samoa, Cabo Verde and the Maldives from the Least Developed Country (LDCs) status.

OHRLLS facilitated the development of the FAO Global Action Programme (GAP) on Food Security and Nutrition in SIDS, to promote sustainable, healthy, productive and resilient fisheries, and healthy ocean ecosystems to improve food security and nutrition in SIDS. The GAP provides a framework within which SIDS and their development partners can work to design and implement more coherent actions at the global, regional and local levels to promote food security and nutrition.

In March 2018, OHRLLS in collaboration with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) organized a side event on Enhancing the role of Women in marine deep-sea scientific research to achieve the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the vulnerable countries. Recommendations from the meeting included the need for enhanced outreach initiatives including through regional organizations like the African Union and inclusion of marine deep-sea scientific research in school curricula to increase awareness amongst the youth.

Challenges and opportunities:

- An over-riding factor to consider is the particular vulnerability of SIDS and LDCs to the impacts of climate change. Extreme weather events have a disproportionate and devastating effect on these countries.
- Exclusive Economic Zones are an important resource for fisheries, transport and tourism, and there are also emerging opportunities for deep sea minerals, energy and bioprospecting. SIDS and LDCs will need the continued support of

the international community and strengthened cooperation to develop their national capacity to realize the full potential of their EEZ's marine resources.

- SIDS and LDCs require support to strengthen national level capacity for fisheries governance and sustainable management of fisheries resources while facilitating the development of and increase value addition derived from fisheries products.
- Enhance and implement the monitoring, control and surveillance of fishing vessels so as to effectively prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, including through institutional capacity-building at the appropriate levels as called for in the SAMOA Pathway.
- Similarly, strengthened support is needed to address the range of steps in mitigating pollution of marine eco-systems including from land-based activities. This includes support for carrying out impact assessments, assessing the science-policy interface, and development of appropriate policy options.

ii. Scaling up ocean action based on science and innovation

- Action to develop the technological capacity of SIDS, including through the establishment of dedicated regional oceanographic centres and the provision of technical assistance, for the delimitation of their maritime areas and the preparation of submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf as called for in the SAMOA Pathway.
- The establishment and full operationalization of the Technology for LDCs will also support this group of countries including in the area of formulation of STI policies as well as scientific knowledge and technology transfer and information sharing.
- Enhance technical assistance and collaboration among SIDS Universities and regional ocean-focused institutions to research and address new and emerging issues, such as Sargassum affecting countries across the Caribbean.
- The participation of the landlocked countries in ocean science is important but these countries are still marginalized from taking part in ocean science and other related activities. This is in part due to their lack of capacity and hindered access to the sea. There is therefore the need to build the capacity of the landlocked countries to participate in ocean science to ensure that no one is left behind

iii. Developing partnerships

- Oceans is among the seven thematic priority areas of the SIDS-Global Business Network, aims to promote new and existing partnerships on conservation and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, as one of its seven thematic areas of focus.
- The value of partnerships as means of supporting sustainable development in SIDS was reiterated in the political declaration of the mid-term review of the SAMOA Pathway. The second UN Ocean Conference is an opportunity to scale-up partnerships and voluntary commitments that can support to strike a balance to conserve, protect, manage and sustainably use the oceans and its resources for the sustainable development.
- Recognizing the interconnectedness between ocean and SIDS, it is essential that SIDS are effectively included and represented in the interactive dialogues of the conference.
- Similarly, it is critical that the partnership dialogues provide a platform to focus on developing countries, in particular, SIDS and LDCs.