

Building resilient futures in SIDS using evidence-based planning and policies, robust data systems and technologies

Aligned with the theme of Interactive Dialogue 4: “Leveraging Data and Digital Technologies and Building Effective Institutions for a Resilient Future in SIDS”

27 May 2024 | 12:00 - 13:30 AST | Conference Venue, Room 6

Synopsis:

SIDS are highly vulnerable to climate change, natural disasters and external risks due to their dependence on trade and tourism. Their resilience hinges upon agile governance, future-proofed policies, access to comprehensive and timely data, and effective use of technology. A more forward-looking approach based on strategic foresight and systems thinking can help policy-makers identify high-impact actions and design resilient development pathways if supported by timely data and analysis. Operating under constraint, National Statistical Offices (NSOs) are willing to seize new data opportunities: digitalized administrative data, satellite imagery, citizen and Big Data. The use of geospatial information technology (GIT) can support a whole-of Government approach to the implementation of climate adaptation strategies and policies. The integration of local knowledge with scientific data and gender perspective underscore the critical role of evidence in empowering civil society and private sector to navigate challenges. The session will showcase success stories and offer diverse perspectives from policy-makers, representatives of official statistics and Disaster Risk Management Offices (DRMOs) to members of academia, women’s groups and UN officials.

Session Description:

SIDS countries are highly vulnerable to climate change, natural disasters and many are exposed to other external risks due to their strong dependence on imports of food and fertilizer and high reliance on export revenues from fisheries, tourism services, or single-commodity exports or preferential access to a single market. Their resilience greatly hinges upon agile governance, future-proofed policies, access to robust, comprehensive and timely data, and the effective use of technology. The importance of data-driven approaches and partnerships has been emphasized both in the 2030 Agenda and the Samoa Pathway.

In this context, evidence-based decision-making is required to support a more forward-looking approach to policies in SIDS countries. This forward-looking approach based on strategic foresight and systems thinking methodologies can help identify high-impact areas for action and design resilient development pathways. The implementation of national development, climate mitigation, DRR and sector strategies can be supported by these pathways. The pathways are critical tools to help articulate how different sectors contribute to shared policy objectives at different points in time, prioritize budget allocations, promote collaboration across Ministries, engage with other relevant stakeholders, and anticipate risks. They can also support the transition to results-based management and budgeting

by emphasizing the importance of shifting the focus from the operational level and activities to the strategic level and high-level outcomes.

Evidence required to inform this forward looking and simultaneously agile approach to strategic planning includes both timely data and analysis. In many SIDS, the small size of NSOs creates a constraint on their ability to produce key statistics relying on low frequency and resource-consuming traditional data sources. To overcome this challenge, these NSOs are willing to seize new data opportunities presented by administrative data and digital transformations, satellite imagery, citizen data and Big Data in some cases. To do that, NSOs will have to play the role of data stewards and guide their key stakeholders, including Government entities, academia, CSOs and the private sector, to help harness these opportunities in a way conducive to the production of high-quality and timely statistics. In addition, Universities as producers of knowledge with intellectual independence can support decision-making through data-based policy analysis and evaluation of programmes and policies in the context of national reviews of progress and reporting on the implementation of national sustainable development objectives.

When it comes to reducing risks and building climate resilience, the use of innovative technologies such as geospatial information technology (GIT) solutions can enable National Disaster Risk Management Office to better collaborate and promote Whole-of-Government approaches to support the implementation of climate adaptation strategies and policies.

Beyond policy-makers, civil society and private sector stakeholders also leverage data for resilience-building. The integration of local knowledge with scientific data underscores the critical role of data in informing evidence-based policies and empowering civil society/private sector to navigate challenges effectively fostering collaboration and addressing data challenges in the region.

The proposed session will review the above issues by using the examples of integrated and evidence-based planning from a number of SIDS. It will draw on the work on systems thinking and strategic foresight implemented by the Government of Seychelles, and previous capacity building activities in Mauritius and in the Caribbean region organized with the support of UNDESA's Division for Public Institutions and Digital Governance, RCO for Mauritius and Seychelles, ECLAC's Caribbean Office and UNITAR's Strategic Implementation of the 2030 Agenda Unit. It will also provide space for discussing how NSOs can use innovative methods and technology to provide timely and relevant data for decision-making. In addition, the roles of academia and civil society will be examined with a view to enhancing not only data production but also data analysis.

Following the examples of the use of innovative methodologies and evidence in national development planning overall, the session will then move into practical and actionable DRR and climate change resilience activities in supporting SIDS countries with innovative space-based applications and tailor-made capacity development programs.

Cutting-edge knowledge transfer activities and innovative geospatial information technology (GIT) solutions, including the use of artificial intelligence-based applications can lead to transformative changes in disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and land and ecosystem management activities in SIDS countries. In this session, examples of space-based decision support platforms implemented by UNITAR's UNOSAT Programme in collaboration with national Ministries as well as UNDRR and Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) in three Pacific SIDS (Fiji,

Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands) will be presented to illustrate how satellite technology can provide systemic assessment of climate risk and enhance climate adaptation decision making. This work is part of a three-year capacity development programme to leverage the use of space-based applications for improved disaster and climate resilience implemented under a broader cooperation framework signed in July 2021 and covering three Pacific SIDS and five LDC countries. Another example of GIT use is related to the resilience of infrastructure systems through strengthened governance. The work implemented by UNITAR's UNOSAT Programme and UNDRR in Tonga provides critical exposure and vulnerability information about key infrastructure and supports enhanced collaborations between the National Disaster Risk Management Office and representatives from the main economic sectors to ensure a whole government approach to the development of infrastructure resilience.

The session will conclude with showcasing DRR related project case studies illustrating the importance of strengthening women's empowerment in informing DRR policies. The absence of sex disaggregated data showing differentiated impacts of disasters on men and women is a major challenge preventing a better understanding of why women seem to be more likely to face higher levels of risks which further vary across different demographic and social groups. The increasing number of disaster-related events and the higher risk of death for women during such events that emerges from scarce data available highlights the need for gender mainstreaming in sustainable development and DRR policies. Failure to do so will further exacerbate gender disparities and hinder progress towards social inclusion, gender equality and women's empowerment. A capacity building programme run by UNITAR's Hiroshima Office Women's Leadership in Tsunami-based DRR trains Women to be leaders who work towards achieving inclusivity, sustainability and community resilience. It provides an example of how empowering women in the private sector and civil society can be a game-changer for gender-sensitive and inclusive climate adaptation and sustainable development.

The session will be organized as a debate, highlight success stories and offer diverse perspectives from policy-makers, official statistics and DRMO representatives, academia, CSOs and private sector.

Lead organizer: UNITAR

Partners: Governments of Seychelles, Tonga, Fiji, Norway, OECS, UNDESA, RCO for Seychelles and Mauritius, ECLAC, UNDRR, Samoa Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Programme (1h30min)

Speakers:

- *Mr. Nikhil Seth, UN Assistant Secretary-General & UNITAR Executive Director (moderator)*
- *Honourable Minister Fekita 'Utoikamanu, Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster, Environment, and Climate Change (MEIDECC), Tonga*
- *Ms. Elizabeth Agathine, Principal Secretary, Planning Department, Ministry of Finance, Seychelles*
- *Mr. Sivendra Micheal, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Fiji*
- *Mr. Andreas Kravik, Vice Foreign Minister, Norway*

- *Mr. Chamberlain Emmanuel, Head, Environmental Sustainability Division, Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission*
- *Mr. Abdullahi O. Abdulkadri, Coordinator, Statistics and Social Development Unit, ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean*
- *Mr. Nahuel Arenas Garcia, Chief, Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean, UNDRR*
- *Ms. Nadia Meredith-Hunt, Vice-President, Samoa Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Samoa*