

NGO Major Group – Priorities and Actions for sustainable development in SIDS

This statement is made by civil society organisations participating in the SIDS Inter-regional Preparatory Meeting held in Barbados 26-28 August, 2013.

1. The important role being played by civil society

Civil society is already playing vital roles in contributing to addressing development goals in SIDS, independently or in partnership with government and other actors, including as:

- **Service providers:** delivering services to meet societal needs such as education, health, food and security, community economic development; implementing natural resource management; undertaking disaster management, preparedness and emergency response, especially at the community level
- **Experts:** bringing unique knowledge and experience to shape policy and strategy, and identifying and building solutions on social, economic and environmental issues
- **Capacity builders:** providing education, training and other capacity building via informal as well as formal programmes for a wide range of target audiences and using a diverse set of capacity building approaches including innovative use of information and communication technologies towards building adaptive capacity
- **Representatives:** giving power to the voice of the marginalized or under-represented, including poor communities, resource users and women who are otherwise excluded from decision-making processes
- **Social monitors:** holding governments and private sector to account, promoting transparency and accountability
- **Advocates:** raising awareness of societal issues and challenges and advocating for change, including on a range of sustainable development issues
- **Innovators:** leading on thinking and practical action new and emerging issues to catalyse development in areas such as green economy, sustainable consumption and production, and renewable energy

Although civil society is increasingly being recognised as a vital “third sector” operating alongside the public and private sectors, in practice much more needs to be done to develop effective partnerships to better leverage the expertise, knowledge and experience of civil society. Best practices and existing achievements by civil society are an important foundation for scaled up interventions in partnership with government and other actors to deliver development results at the scale needed.

Civil society also represents diverse constituencies, including many vulnerable groups of stakeholders who may otherwise be marginalised from the decision-making process. As they give voice to these perspectives civil society brings legitimacy to the process. Their knowledge of

priority needs and opportunities on the ground are therefore critical in helping to design, implement and evaluate development interventions.

2. Key policy priorities and practical and pragmatic actions

Civil society proposes the following practical and pragmatic actions in selected priority policy areas, including regarding specific roles civil society can play in partnership with government and other actors.

a. Participatory governance

Inclusive governance that effectively engages all stakeholders is needed to improve success in policy planning, programme design, implementation of development initiatives, and evaluation and reporting of results.

1. Civil society should be equitably and effectively engaged in all policy development processes:
 - i. to bring valuable knowledge and perspectives from stakeholders at all levels to the decision-making process; and
 - ii. to build effective partnerships for implementation.
2. Funding streams and policy frameworks should be developed and/or strengthened to enable civil society to play a more effective role in programme implementation. This will require:
 - i. generating and allocating resources which can be used flexibly to support long term programmatic work by civil society so that it can better address long term development goals and achieve measurable impacts;
 - ii. developing and/or strengthening policy and legislative frameworks to support civil society development, accountability and partnerships.
3. Mechanisms should be created, appropriate to different national and regional contexts, for civil society to play a critical role in meaningful partnership with government and other development partners in decision-making, implementation and evaluation of results. This should include:
 - i. development of policies on how government and development partners will engage with civil society to improve representation, transparency, and accountability;
 - ii. strengthening representation on national, regional and global decision-making and advisory bodies;
 - iii. strengthening appropriate channels for engagement with government and development partners; and
 - iv. sharing information with, and seeking information from, civil society on key development issues; and
 - v. supporting dialogue among civil society on national, regional and global decision-making process, recognising the diversity of institutional modalities and capacities, as well as the scope of perspectives and different constituencies represented across civil society.
4. Specific targets and indicators should be developed for the SIDS programme of action and all partners, including civil society, should report on implementation and be accountable for results.
5. The contribution of civil society to achieving development goals should be measured and counted in national, regional and global assessments. Requirements for this include:

- a. establishing and/or clarifying appropriate indicators for outputs, outcomes and impacts;
 - b. building capacity of civil society to monitor, evaluate and report on outputs, outcomes and impacts;
 - c. establishing and/or strengthening databases for collection of information which includes mechanisms for civil society input; and
 - d. making reports analysing this information openly available to all stakeholders.
6. Corporate social responsibility initiatives should respond to national, regional and/or global priorities identified in collaboration with civil society and should be assessed and reported on.
 7. Longer-term technical and financial support should be provided to build resilience and transform models of development at grass roots levels.
 8. Implementation should take place via development of national strategic development plans, as well as sectoral and cross sectoral plans (for example for rural development), developed with meaningful involvement of civil society. Plans should clearly define roles for civil society in implementation. Mechanisms should be created or strengthened to support and enable civil society to be involved in design, implementation and evaluation of development initiatives.
 9. Effective development cooperation requires moving from top-down “aid” models to empowering SIDS to lead their own processes of development. The Paris Declaration on Development Effectiveness should be followed to implement principles of ownership, results, partnerships and shared responsibility.

b. Economic development

Social equity and environmental sustainability must become core and entwined objectives of economic development.

1. New indices for measuring human well-being as the central goal of development should be adopted to reflect the social and environmental dimensions of development going beyond simple economic indicators.
2. Economic development priorities should be determined based on national and regional visioning processes to identify appropriate strategies to different contexts, emphasising the importance of economic development which aims for long-term prosperity through equitable distribution of economic benefits and effective management of ecological resources; it is economically viable and resilient, self-directed, self-reliant, and pro-poor. This can be facilitated via integrated national development planning approaches taking place in some SIDS.
3. Legislative and policy frameworks should be developed to encourage economic activity following sustainable production and consumption systems, incorporating environmental and social externalities into business plans and markets, and considering the special needs to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to promote inclusive economic development. This should include creating and/or using existing, but under-used, incentives to encourage and support sustainable business practices.
4. Increased support should be provided to catalyse and support development of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that deliver economic, social and environmental co-benefits to communities as a key strategy to achieve socially equitable and environmentally sustainable economic development. Civil society is poised to play a critical role in catalysing and supporting entrepreneurship especially in poor and vulnerable communities and marginalised groups which do not have the capacity to access existing programmes for business development.

5. Development initiatives should be assessed based on a triple-bottom line approach to evaluate social and environmental, as well as economic, impacts and results to ensure sustainability and resilience.
6. Local, community-driven, economic development that brings social and environmental co-benefits should be supported. Civil society is well positioned to catalyse and facilitate bottom-up integrated development in partnership with government and other actors.
7. Inter- and intra-regional cooperation and trade as well as diversifying export markets should be pursued as key strategies for economic development in order to expand economic markets and opportunities, facilitate the exchange of skills and labour, reduce dependence on uncontrollable external economic drivers, spread risk and increase resilience.
8. Development of business continuity plans should be promoted, at scales from micro-enterprise to industry-wide, to enhance resilience to shocks such as natural disasters.
9. Increasing knowledge and capacity across SIDS should include learning from and scaling up best practices, including traditional practices, through the creation of action learning groups and establishment of demonstration centres of excellence.
10. Existing industries in SIDS should be moved up the value chain, through greater emphasis on the generation of high-skill services and value added products, in sectors such as energy, tourism, agriculture, and the cultural industries. This can increase returns on investment, reduce vulnerability to competition and expand employment opportunities.
11. Trade agreements should be negotiated that build resilience by inclusion of strong environmental and labour protections.

c. Ocean governance

Linked ocean governance policy cycles need to be multi-level, from local to global, for the equitable use of shared resources to benefit SIDS.

- a. Opportunities and support should be provided to enable resource users, including small scale fisherfolk organisations, to effectively engage in ocean governance at local, national and regional levels to protect their livelihoods and well-being and to ensure their continued and enhanced contribution to food security. This should include:
 - a. supporting establishment and/or strengthening of resource use and management networks (e.g. for small scale fisherfolk and managed and protected areas) at local, regional and national levels;
 - b. creating and/or strengthening opportunities for fisherfolk to engage in global policy development and how this is translated at regional and national levels, including the development of International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small Scale Fisheries.
- b. Inter- and intra-regional exchanges among SIDS should be facilitated for sharing on lessons and recommendations for coordinated and inclusive approaches to ocean governance.
- c. Regional policies, plans and mechanisms for the sustainable management of ocean resources should be developed and/or strengthened to:
 - a. catalyse new or expanded sustainable economic development opportunities for SIDS;
 - b. facilitate a coordinated approach to management of shared and transboundary marine resources;
 - c. manage extractive industries; and
 - d. implement ecosystem-based approaches that consider land-based activities as well as various uses of marine ecosystems and the rights and interests of all stakeholders.

d. Resilience to risks

Resilience of SIDS needs to be built to multiple, complex and inter-related risks from climate change and climate variability, natural disasters, and social, political and economic risks.

1. Policy priorities, funding, technical assistance, capacity building and action for SIDS should move from disaster response to resilience building approaches.
2. Disaster recovery should incorporate lessons on how risks can be avoided, particularly with the location and design of social infrastructure.
3. National development planning should incorporate strategies to reduce vulnerability and build resilience.
4. Building resilience of local communities “on the ground” should be a high priority. Civil society is positioned to facilitate this but needs to be supported to play this role via funding, an enabling policy environment, and establishment of partnerships with government.
5. SIDS should receive special priority for climate change adaptation funding based on recognising their unique and critical vulnerabilities.
6. Developed countries should meet global targets for climate change mitigation actions and funding for adaptation.

3. Conclusion

Civil society organisations recall our commitment to working in partnership with government and other partners to achieve SIDS development priorities.