ESCAP support for implementation of the Samoa Pathway for the sustainable development of small island developing States

Note by the secretariat**

Summary

The first paragraph of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway (Samoa Pathway) states that sustainable development of small island developing States “can be achieved only with a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and the private sector all working together to achieve the future we want for present and future generations”. The present report focuses on the strategic approach the Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific is taking in response to the Samoa Pathway, which is being guided by the three mandated functions for regional commissions in the Samoa Pathway: (a) building national capacity for sustainable development with United Nations country teams; (b) enhancing the “voice” and supporting the interests of Pacific small island developing States at regional (and global) forums; and (c) monitoring and reporting on the implementation of sustainable development.

The Commission may wish to review the present report and provide the secretariat with guidance on its recommendations and on any other matters concerning support for implementation of the Samoa Pathway for the sustainable development of Pacific small island developing States.
I. Introduction

1. The development challenges facing small island developing States were the focus of the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, which was held in Apia from 1 to 4 September 2014. The overarching theme of the conference was “the sustainable development of small islands developing States through genuine and durable partnerships”. The Conference adopted the Samoa Pathway\(^1\) as the framework for assistance and support to small island developing States in their efforts to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions.

2. The Samoa Pathway calls for, among other things, concerted efforts to address the adverse impacts of climate change and sea-level rise, and support in addressing common challenges hindering economic development in small islands, including sustainable management of the oceans. It also calls for support to reduce inequalities, raise basic standards of living, and foster equitable social development. The Samoa Pathway also provides the priorities of small island developing States for the development agenda beyond 2015. The agenda is expected to be concluded in September. It will include sustainable development goals, targets and indicators which, if properly contextualized, can be used to effectively monitor and report on the implementation of the Samoa Pathway.

II. Background: the special case of small island developing States

3. Small island developing States are considered a special case with regards to sustainable development, owing to their small size, remoteness from major markets and population centres, limited resource and export base, and exposure to global environmental challenges and external economic shocks.

4. The population of the 19 members and associate members of the ESCAP Pacific subregion exceeds 10 million, more than four times what it was in 1950. Over the past five decades, the people of the Pacific have experienced better economic circumstances and social development, however

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\(^1\) A/CONF.223/3.
the development progress has not been consistently spread across the subregion. Development within the countries and territories has also been inconsistent. The Pacific island developing countries and territories, with the exception of Vanuatu, have reported that more than 20 per cent of their population is living below the national poverty line.

5. Pacific economies have varying natural resource endowments, environmental challenges and levels of economic and social development. There are, however, issues that are common across the subregion. The economies share the ocean resources of the Pacific and face similar challenges associated with geographic isolation, diseconomies of scale and climate change. Notably, climate change has been highlighted by Pacific leaders as the “greatest threat to livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific”.

6. Additionally, in all Pacific island developing economies, women make up less than 10 per cent of the national parliament. Violence against women is seen as a major concern in many of the Pacific islands. All Pacific economies have experienced gains with regard to immunizations and health care; however, a rise in non-communicable diseases has hindered strong advancement in life expectancies. Youth unemployment is high in most Pacific small island developing economies. In addition, Pacific island economies face challenges related to resource dependency and are heavily dependent on fossil fuel for household energy, production processes and transportation.

7. ESCAP analysis on vulnerability to economic crises and the World Risk Index reveal that of the 37 sample countries, the three most vulnerable are the small island developing States of Tonga, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. As the third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was being held in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015, the Pacific was experiencing the most destructive weather system in decades, with super Cyclone Pam and king tides buffeting the subregion. The scale of devastation in Vanuatu clearly demonstrates the risks faced by Pacific small island developing States.

III. Response of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to the Samoa Pathway

8. The long-standing commitment of ESCAP to the Pacific small island developing States has included extending support to the three global small island States conferences held since the one in Barbados in 1994. Recent support has included drafting background papers on sustainable development issues in the Pacific, organizing the Pacific preparatory meetings and supporting national assessments for the mid-term review of the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation in 2010, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 12 to 22 June 2012, and the third International Conference of Small Island Developing States in Samoa.

9. At the conference in Samoa, Pacific leaders requested the Executive Secretary to strengthen the engagement and relevance of ESCAP in the Pacific. The Samoa Pathway identifies three functions on which the secretariat will focus its response to the leaders’ request:

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2 ESCAP, Building Resilience to Natural Disasters and Major Economic Crises, (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.II.F.3).
(a) To enhance national capacities and institutions through United Nations country teams in cooperation with national agencies and intergovernmental organizations;

(b) To enhance the Pacific voice through subregional, regional and global processes;

(c) To monitor the full implementation of the Barbados Program of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the Samoa Pathway, including through the monitoring frameworks of the regional commissions.

10. The secretariat has since developed its first ever Pacific strategy aligning its corporate strategy with the Samoa Pathway and key policy platforms in the Pacific. The strategy provides the framework for the secretariat’s responses to the Samoa Pathway, which are reported in this paper.

IV. Building national capacities and institutions

11. The small island developing States in the Pacific require continued and enhanced investments toward building human and institutional capacities so as to build the resilience of societies and economies. This will need to be pursued with the involvement of major stakeholder groups as called for in the first paragraph of the Samoa Pathway. Building resilient societies and the adaptive capacity of communities and institutions also rely on sound analysis and effective interventions.

12. The Samoa Pathway calls on the United Nations system, to, among other things, “continue to support small island developing States in their efforts to implement national sustainable development strategies”. ESCAP has been supporting the preparation and review of national sustainable development strategies in the Pacific through cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and other organizations. It helped review the Kiribati National Plan and is ready to provide additional assistance for the development of a new plan, if requested. Assistance was also given for the development of the Fiji National Green Growth Framework, which was launched in 2014. Also of relevance is the assistance extended by the secretariat towards the enhancement of multi-stakeholder platforms in the Pacific and national bodies to coordinate sustainable development, which is being provided through regional bodies, such as the Pacific Islands Development Forum.

13. Integrated planning and policymaking requires integrated information that holistically captures the economic, environmental and social dimensions of development. In addition to its ongoing work in statistics capacity development, the secretariat is implementing a pilot project to help build national capacity to produce environment-relevant indicators (through the System of Environment-Economic Accounting) and to mainstream gender-responsive budgeting. A number of countries, including Fiji and Samoa, are consulting with the secretariat on national activities under the project.

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3 A/CONF.223/3, para. 109 (a).
4 Ibid., paras. 117-120.
5 Ibid., para. 122.
6 Ibid., para. 108.
7 Ibid., para. 116.
8 This has been a key principle of sustainable development emanating from the 1992 Earth Summit, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and now the Samoa Pathway.
14. The inscription of inclusive and sustainable development rights in legislation and policy is an important way in which countries can advance the implementation of sustainable development goals. The secretariat, together with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, is extending assistance in drafting legislation for implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In this regard, it most recently gave advice to the Marshall Islands on its accession to the Convention (approved by parliamentary resolution in January 2015) and the drafting of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill and the national Human Rights Committee Bill (both of which passed their first parliamentary readings in February 2015). Similar work is planned for other countries, including Kiribati, Nauru and Vanuatu, to build on the success in the Marshall Islands. The secretariat will also explore opportunities to support the implementation of other human rights instruments that can enhance efforts towards achieving the sustainable development goals, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

15. A key response to climate change, as supported in Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals, is to build resilience and the adaptive capacity of climate vulnerable communities.\footnote{See \url{https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal}.} Climate change will present a number of migration scenarios to the Pacific, from temporary local displacement, owing to rapid onset events, such as disasters, to the possible need for permanent resettlement in other countries.\footnote{The recent devastation caused by Cyclone Pam demonstrates clearly that for many of the small atolls completely inundated by the sea, adaptation to climate change may include migration either internally or internationally.} When looking at these scenarios, it should be noted that voluntary migration of individuals and communities can be adaptive if it is well managed. The secretariat has initiated a project, entitled “Enhancing the Capacity of Pacific Island Countries to Manage Impacts of Climate Change on Migration”, in Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu, with the aim to: develop migration indicators and share information on labour migration; gather data on community attitudes to climate change induced migration; assist with the development of climate change responses and national action strategies to mitigate the risk of displacement; and enhance national capacity to effectively participate in regional, bilateral and global schemes on labour migration.

16. In the wake of Cyclone Pam, the secretariat helped support the recovery efforts of Vanuatu and Tuvalu through participation in a post-disaster needs assessment, providing satellite images for response planning, conducting community surveys, and extending advice on trust funds and climate disaster financing. Support was also provided through the office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Designated Officer, which included the use of secretariat facilities for response coordination meetings. ESCAP has also launched the Enhancing Knowledge and Capacity for the Management of Disaster Risks for a Resilient Future in Asia and the Pacific project, which will benefit efforts in the Pacific to mainstream natural disasters into fiscal policies and planning.

17. The Samoa Pathway recognizes the transformational role of energy, and the framework provided by the Sustainable Energy for All initiative of the Secretary-General, which focuses on access to energy, energy efficiency and renewable energy. The secretariat places high priority on the availability of reliable data and information on energy security in the Pacific, and is supporting the strengthening of the Pacific Regional Data Repository for SE4All, which is hosted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. The
secretariat is also assisting Pacific small island developing States in examining the viability of renewable energy sources, including biogas, through support from the Government of Kazakhstan.

V. Enhancing the “voice” and supporting the interests of Pacific small island developing States

18. As requested in the Samoa Pathway, the secretariat seeks to reflect as much as possible the concerns and interests of Pacific island developing States in the proceedings and outcomes of Asia-Pacific and global intergovernmental processes. This is in line with the ongoing role of the secretariat, as noted in paragraph 8 above. Moving forward, the main Asia-Pacific regional meeting through which the Pacific “voice” is heard on sustainable development is the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, which was mandated by the General Assembly\(^{11}\) to report to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly on the development agenda beyond 2015. The second meeting of the Forum will be held in Bangkok from 21 to 22 May 2015. Efforts are being made to ensure good representation of Pacific issues at the event.

19. Recent Asia-Pacific meetings during which the Pacific was well represented included the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review in November 2014; and the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS, both of which were convened by ESCAP. The Asia-Pacific High-level Consultation on Financing for Development, which is being co-hosted by ESCAP and the Government of Indonesia, will be held in Jakarta from 29 to 30 April 2015. It will serve as a preparatory meeting for the third International Conference for Development, to be held in Addis Ababa from 13 to 16 July 2015. That Conference is tasked with laying out the financing framework for the development agenda beyond 2015. The secretariat had sought to ensure that the Pacific would be well represented at the Jakarta meeting and that its interests were articulated.

20. A high-level policy dialogue of Pacific leaders on the Samoa Pathway will be held on 27 May 2015 as part of the seventy-first session of the Commission. This event again underscores the efforts of the Executive Secretary to deepen the secretariat’s engagement with the Pacific. Also of note, members of the Coalition of Low Lying Atoll Nations on Climate Change, which includes Kiribati and Tuvalu, have expressed their interest to co-host a side event at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, to be held in Paris from 30 November to 11 December, to highlight the links between climate change and human mobility. A positive development in strengthening the engagement of Pacific small island developing States with the broader Asia-Pacific region is the hosting by Tonga of the second Asia-Pacific Energy Forum, which will be held in 2018. This will be the first Asia-Pacific intergovernmental meeting organized by ESCAP to be held in the Pacific, signalling the importance of energy security in the Pacific and the scope for increased cooperation across Asia and the Pacific for the proposed sustainable development goal on energy.

\(^{11}\) A/RES/67/290, paras. 7 (f) and 13.
21. Pacific engagement in the Asia-Pacific region will also be strengthened through the Asia-Pacific regional economic cooperation and integration framework, which is being developed with active participation of experts and representatives of the Pacific in response to the Bangkok Declaration on Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia and the Pacific 2014. The Pacific may wish to actively participate at the preparatory meetings for this and ensure the subregion’s effective participation and voice in the process. Given the “special case” and vulnerability of Pacific small island developing countries, it is significant to note that the proposed framework recognizes the need to address shared vulnerabilities at the regional level while building on the cooperation and integration agendas and platforms that already exist at the subregional levels.

22. The secretariat advocates greater cooperation and integration within the Pacific subregion. In that context, it is actively exploring with Pacific regional organizations how best such support can be enhanced in support of connectivity including sustainable inter-island shipping, trade and information and communications technology (ICT). The secretariat has provided input into recent reviews and meetings on shipping organized by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and on ICT organized by the University of the South Pacific. Moving forward, the secretariat has noted the emphasis given in the Samoa Pathway to social equity, health, resilience, affordability and environmental impact with respect to sustainable transport;\(^\text{12}\) the need for special and differential treatment and effective participation in respect of trade;\(^\text{13}\) and the need for connectivity and ICT to be appropriate, reliable, affordable and environmentally sound.\(^\text{14}\) The secretariat has also taken note of the Pacific subregion’s desire to be recognized as a distinct international grouping in intergovernmental negotiations.\(^\text{15}\)

23. Analytical work and publications are important tools for raising the “voice” and profile of the Pacific small island developing States. The Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2015, the flagship publication of ESCAP, will be launched in May in Bangkok and in 30 other locations, including in the Pacific. It includes a theme study that focuses on “balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development”, which is a key strategy for implementing the Samoa Pathway and the development agenda beyond 2015. The following publications highlight issues of particular interest to the Pacific and were prepared for and made available at the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States: (a) Climate Change and Migration Issues in the Pacific — displacement as a result of climate change is an emerging issue and thus all options related to it, including migration and relocation, need to be considered; (b) Pacific Perspectives on Fisheries and Sustainable Development — prepared upon the request that leaders of Kiribati and Solomon Islands made to ESCAP, this publication looks at ways to increase sustainable returns of Pacific fisheries; and (c) The state of human development in the Pacific: a report on vulnerability and exclusion in a time of rapid change — a United Nations publication which looks at the issue of growing inequalities in the Pacific and the need to address this through inclusive and green growth.

\(^\text{12}\) A/CONF.223/3, para. 66.
\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., para. 107.
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., para. 111.
\(^\text{15}\) It is also worth noting that the members of the Pacific Islands Forum are negotiating among themselves the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations.
VI. Monitoring and reporting on implementation

24. The secretariat is tasked with monitoring and reporting under the Samoa Pathway\(^\text{16}\) which is consistent with its mandated reporting role to the High-level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development through the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. It also has dedicated programmes in statistical capacity development that are aligned with national planning processes.

25. The secretariat also has experience with regional reporting on the Millennium Development Goals and conducts periodic reviews on the sustainable development programme of the small island developing States, as noted in paragraph 8 above. In line with the Samoa Pathway call for equitable social development and inclusion, the secretariat also supports national reviews of human rights implementation, as part of the universal periodic review and United Nations treaty body reporting processes. The review reports have addressed issues of gender equality and the rights of people with disabilities, as well as the challenges associated with non-communicable diseases, water and sanitation, environmental degradation and poverty.

26. The System of National Accounts does not include natural, social and human capital or any other measures that extend beyond gross domestic product (GDP). This undermines the ability of Governments to assess and report on the performance of their economies in a holistic way. In support of calls for a “broader system of national accounting” and measures beyond GDP,\(^\text{17}\) the secretariat will provide assistance, in conjunction with other United Nations entities and Pacific statistical bodies, in developing indicators that are appropriate for the Pacific. As noted above (paragraph 13), the secretariat is implementing a project to help build national capacity to produce environment-relevant indicators (through the System of Environment-Economic Accounting) and to mainstream gender-responsive budgeting.

27. The Pacific subregion has had a history of regional reporting and peer review under the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, to which ESCAP has contributed. On statistics, the secretariat, as the United Nations representative on the Pacific Statistics Steering Committee, has been actively involved in the design of the 2015-2017 phase of the Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy. ESCAP has also been working with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and other regional partners to improve statistical capacity in the Pacific. In particular, it worked closely with the Pacific Brisbane Accord Group to ensure full participation of Pacific delegates at the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS), which was held in Bangkok from 24 to 28 November 2014.

28. Supporting Pacific small island developing States in the development of indicators that are aligned with the implementation of and reporting on the sustainable development goals is a high priority for the secretariat. This assistance is being provided at the regional level with ESCAP working with the United Nations Statistics Commission on indicators that are appropriate for the Asia-Pacific region and the Pacific subregion.

\(^{16}\) A/CONF.223/3, para. 122.

\(^{17}\) https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal.
29. A workshop organized jointly in November 2014 by the Asian Development Bank, ESCAP and the United Nations Development Programme with assistance from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat concluded that Pacific island Governments face the difficult challenge of contextualizing the sustainable development goals to make them fit national circumstances and to enhance national sustainable development planning and implementation. The Pacific small island States have sought to ensure that the priorities of the Samoa Pathway are well incorporated into the development agenda beyond 2015 with the intention of using the proposed sustainable development goals and targets and indicators to help implement, monitor and report on the Samoa Pathway. The secretariat is working closely with other United Nations entities and Pacific regional organizations, such as the Pacific Islands Forum and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, to coordinate assistance extended to Pacific member States so that the contextualization of the sustainable development goals is successful. Notably, three Pacific island countries, Fiji, the Marshall Islands and Papua New Guinea, have asked for help from the United Nations in this work while others, such as Kiribati, where national plans are under review with the intention to develop them within the next few years may provide additional opportunities to align the development agenda beyond 2015 with national processes.

VII. Sustainable development of Pacific small island developing States through genuine and durable partnerships

30. The Samoa Pathway presents a clear and ambitious agenda for the sustainable development of small islands developing States, which requires coherent and coordinated support from development partners, including United Nations system and regional organizations, to make a tangible impact on the lives of Pacific island people and communities. As stated in the first paragraph of the Samoa Pathway, “this can be achieved only with a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and the private sector all working together to achieve the future we want for present and future generations”.

31. While the development cooperation environment of the Pacific evolves and adapts to new circumstances with new aid modalities, the role of ESCAP in the Pacific must also evolve to ensure relevance and effectiveness. The value addition of ESCAP to Pacific small island developing States must be clearly based on robust analysis and innovative solutions that take a holistic and systemic approach to sustainable development in response to the priorities of Pacific leaders. Pacific regional priorities have been clearly articulated through regional agreements, including the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. The secretariat will work through established mechanisms, such as working groups of the Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Pacific, to support and advocate the implementation of the Samoa Pathway.

32. The theme topic of the seventy-first session of the ESCAP Commission is “balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: from integration to implementation”. Integration has been an important focus of the work of the secretariat in the Pacific, particularly through its work on the promotion of the National Sustainable Development Strategy approach in national planning and budgeting processes, initially guided by the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation and now the Samoa Pathway. Pacific Governments need effective tools to undertake strategic analysis of the costs and benefits of policy choices in the context of sustainable development, and must be able to monitor the impacts of those
policy choices over time. Prioritizing, sequencing and integrating the sustainable development goals into national sustainable development planning will present considerable challenges to Pacific small island developing States, particularly the smaller ones. Integration will remain the central focus of the response of the secretariat to the Samoa Pathway under the mandated functions for regional commissions. The secretariat stands ready to assist the Pacific small island developing States and Pacific organizations in their efforts to dovetail this work on the Samoa Pathway with the implementation of the development agenda beyond 2015.