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# Regional approaches in sustainable development

## Introduction

This chapter examines the role of regional co-operation in making progress with the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI). It examines historical features of regional co-operation in small island developing states (SIDS) and the role of the United Nations (UN) in capacity development. It illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of co-operation in SIDS as part of wider South-South co-operation. Regional co-operation operates within the SIDS geographically contiguous states such as in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). This reveals the current reality and future opportunities for promoting a more effective sustainable development strategy within SIDS and through the wider policies and programmes in the fields of environment, economics, trade and social development by complementary partnerships and networks across the SIDS and the other countries and territories in their regions.

The general definition of sustainable development employed here is that of the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*<sup>1</sup>: that is 'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. This chapter also uses the operational definition of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Sustainable Development Programme:

'Sustainable development as a new way of approaching economic and social development and environment conservation. It can be seen as a new way of life, a culture, a philosophy that guides everyone's day to day decisions, and underpins each policy, strategy and decision at every level of decision-making – local, community, sub-regional, and national, as well as international. To achieve sustainable development, one needs a whole country approach – government, private sector and communities.'

One focus of the chapter is the pursuit of national interests, examining those elements of national trade, economy, environment and development in regional strategies and how far regional co-operation is worthwhile for the individual states themselves.

## Historical regional co-operation and sustainable development policy in small island developing states

### Caribbean region

In the Caribbean, the driver for integration was as much economic as it was social. In the

West Indies, an economic framework in the form of the West Indies Federation was established in 1958. This was followed by the creation of the Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA), a customs' union, in 1972. CARIFTA did not provide, however, for the free movement of labour and capital, nor the co-ordination of agricultural, industrial and foreign policies. Countries also gave priority to foreign policy co-ordination and external economic negotiation<sup>2</sup>. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which is now recognised as one of the most integrated regional groupings of SIDS states, was established by the Treaty of Chaguaramas in 1973 with the following objectives:

- a improved standards of living and work;
- b full employment of labour and other factors of production;
- c accelerated, co-ordinated and sustained economic development and convergence;
- d expansion of trade and economic relations with third States;
- e enhanced levels of international competitiveness;
- f organisation for increased production and productivity;
- g the achievement of a greater measure of economic leverage and effectiveness of Member States in dealing with third States, groups of States and entities of any description;
- h enhanced co-ordination of Member States' foreign and economic policies; and
- i enhanced functional co-operation, including:
  - more efficient operation of common services and activities for the benefit of its peoples;
  - accelerated promotion of greater understanding among its peoples and the advancement of their social, cultural and technological development;
  - intensified activities in areas such as health, education, transportation, and telecommunications.

Impetus for sub-regional co-operation has grown in the wake of these challenges and institutions such as CARICAD<sup>3</sup> were formed with UNDP funding for the purpose of (a) establishing a national advisory and co-ordinating mechanism or sustainable development council; (b) launching a consultative process at the national and regional levels; (c) conducting case studies of innovative experiences from which to derive policy and operational insights and lessons; and (d) establishing a regional network for information sharing.

Within the Caribbean region, there is another regional organisation – the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) of seven member states and two associated states. Formed in 1981, the member countries signed a treaty agreeing to co-operate with each other and promote unity and solidarity among the members. Their main mission was to contribute to the sustainable development of the OECS member states by assisting them to maximise the benefits from their collective space by facilitating their intelligent integration with the global economy; by contributing to policy and programme formulation and execution in respect of regional and international issues; and by facilitation of bilateral and multilateral co-operation.

## Africa region

In Africa, the Union of African States (UAS) was formed in 1959. The UAS predated the

Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was established in 1963 and is now the African Union (AU). The AU is responsible for the implementation of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The primary objectives of NEPAD include eradicating poverty and halting the marginalisation of Africa from the globalisation process. The continent is further served by other regional organisations which divide Africa into North, South, East and West. The Union of Arab Maghreb serves North Africa, and as the name suggests, the South East and West African countries are served by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Another big player on the African continent is the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations (UN) in 1958 as one of the UN's five regional commissions. ECA's work programme now focuses on achieving results in two related and mutually supportive areas:

- promoting Regional Integration in support of the African Union vision and priorities, and
- meeting Africa's special needs and emerging global challenges.

Within these two aims, the Commission focuses on the following thematic areas:

- regional integration, trade and infrastructure;
- meeting the MDGs with a special emphasis on poverty reduction and growth, sustainable development and gender;
- promoting good governance and popular participation;
- ICT, science and technology for development; and
- statistical development.

At the **regional level**, the thrust of ECA activities is predominantly focused in two areas. First, ECA aims to play a significant role in monitoring and reporting on the progress being made by the continent on meeting global and continental commitments, thus supporting progress in regional accountability. Second, ECA aims to continue its role in advocacy and consensus building, including developing common positions to give the region a stronger voice in global forums.

At **sub-regional level**, emphasis is now placed on advisory services and technical assistance aimed at building the capacity of the RECs to implement their agendas and, particularly, to promote regional integration.

The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) has also been concerned with promoting sustainable development of the Western Indian Ocean Islands. The IOC also represents the island states in international forums and defends their interests on specific environmental and economic issues, as well as facilitating regional co-operation and integration. Established in 1984, the IOC encourages and strengthens co-operation within the Indian Ocean region on a number of levels, including: diplomatic co-operation; economic and commercial co-operation; co-operation in the field of agriculture, maritime fishing and the conservation of resources and ecosystems; and co-operation in cultural, scientific, technical, educational and judicial fields.

## Pacific region

In the Pacific, as noted by Rolfe<sup>4</sup>, co-operation first came without integration and was functional in nature. As in the Caribbean, the metropolitan colonial powers promoted the formation of a co-operative system known as the South Pacific Commission (SPC). Rolfe points out, 'The SPC reinvented itself' as the representative of regional states and dependent territories to develop 'programmes of technical assistance, professional, scientific and research support and planning and management capability building, focusing on land, marine and social resources'. The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) was founded in 1971 as the South Pacific Forum. In 2000, the name was changed to the Pacific Islands Forum better to reflect the geographic location of its members in the north and south Pacific. The main goals of PIF are to stimulate economic growth and enhance political governance and security for the region through the provision of policy advice; and to strengthen regional co-operation and integration through co-ordinating, monitoring and evaluating implementation of leaders' decisions. The organisation comprises three sub-groups based on cultural characteristics: the Melanesian Spearhead Group, the Smaller Island Group, and the Micronesian states. The latter grouping has free association status with the United States and closer relations with that country than with other influential states such as Australia and New Zealand.

In the Pacific, a number of agencies are involved in providing assistance in capacity-building in SIDS. For instance, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has co-ordinated the preparation of national environmental management strategies throughout the region, with assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), UNDP and Australia.

## The regional role and international agreements

The regional role has characteristics that reflect not only geographic proximity but political organisation and association in SIDS. Historical networks have served as an important context on which regional systems in SIDS have emerged. The patterns of regional development, with the exception of countries such as the Maldives, have been similar even when formal regional systems have been institutionalised.

**Table 5.1. Regional trade agreements in SIDS<sup>5</sup>**

RTAs	Description	Member countries
CARICOM	Caribbean Community & Common Market	Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Trinidad and Tobago, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa	Angola, Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, Zimbabwe
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council	Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates

MSG	Melanesian Spearhead Group	<b>Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu</b>
OCT	Overseas Countries & Territories	Greenland, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, French Southern and Antarctic Territories, Wallis and Fortuna Islands, Pierre and Miquelon, <b>Aruba, Netherlands Antilles, Anguilla</b> , Falkland Islands, South Georgia, South Sandwich, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St. Helena, Ascension Islands, Tristan da Cunha, Turks and Caicos, British Antarctic, Indian Ocean Territory, British Virgin Islands
PICTA	Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement	<b>Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu</b>
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum	Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, The Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, The Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, French Polynesia
PACER	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations	Australia, Papua, New Guinea
PATCRA	Agreement on Trade & Commercial Relations between the Government of Australia & the Government of Papua New Guinea	Australia, New Zealand, Cook Islands, <b>Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Western Samoa</b>
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community	Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, <b>Mauritius</b> , Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, <b>Maldives</b> , Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
SPARTECA	South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, <b>Maldives</b> , Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
SAPTA	South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement	
Trans-Pacific	Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership	<b>Brunei, Darussalam, Chile, New Zealand, SEP, Singapore</b>
	West African Economic & Monetary Union	Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, <b>Guinea Bissau</b> , Mali, Nigeria, Togo

The SIDS regions function with differing forms of 'collective diplomacy', whilst preserving national sovereignty. The evolution of regional integration has meant that while states have remained legally intact, the interplay of international, regional and national relations has forced convergence of some functions.

One such organisation is the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP). This is an ad hoc committee composed of the heads of the Pacific Island intergovernmental organisations, and permanently chaired by the Pacific Forum Secretariat. Its purpose, according to its charter, is to discuss and co-ordinate the work-programmes and policies of the different regional agencies to avoid either duplication or gaps in the provision of services to member countries.

The definitive statement with a proposition for a higher level of regional co-operation between the South is as follows:

'South-South co-operation, including co-operation among SIDS, is critical at the bilateral, sub-regional and regional levels in strategic areas, such as information and communication technology, trade, investment, capacity-building, disaster management, environment, food, agriculture, oceans, water, energy, health and education.'

The proliferation of regional co-operation for SIDS started in the 1960s. They generally followed the 'South-South Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs)<sup>6</sup> under-the-industrialisation by-invitation' model of the Presbisch school of economics. The second phase occurred in the 1980s and saw the creation of agreements between Northern and Southern states generally in geographically contiguous spaces, e.g., the Caribbean and the US. The present-day renewal of interest in regional integration systems in the South is a reaction to the growing presence of regional agreements developed particularly to advance the domestic interests of Northern countries. This is a departure from early Southern models that followed the core-periphery logic of the Presbisch school and sought to create internal organisation that responded to historically conditioned economic and often political relations. Far from mere 'reaction', it was a movement aimed at shaping policy choice and direction based on an internal logic, understanding and ethos aimed at self-development. Since the 1980s and the emergence of new regionalism in SIDS, the increasing demands placed upon domestic institutions and a crisis of capacity, regional co-operation has taken a new direction in all the SIDS regions. The new collective diplomacy is now shaped more and more by the demands of the new multilateral trade system and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).

In the aftermath of the Uruguay Round and the GATT 1994, SIDS worked more within the reality of altered economic frameworks, with an end to trade preferences and international institutional development. There was a coincidence in timing of the heightened demands for sustainable development policy initiatives and trade policy initiatives in Agenda 21 and the Barbados Plan of Action and the Uruguay Round. Since then, policies on sustainable development became based on a need for social, economic and environmental co-operation, with regional co-operation as an important operating mechanism.

Understanding the extent to which these strategies are incorporated into national policy

frameworks and national sustainable development strategies could explain the degree of absorption of the new thinking on trade and environment linkages. The significance of the trade and environment dimension for SIDS in the multilateral system and in regional organisations recalls the SIDS principles enunciated in the BPoA of the need for integrated treatment of the two sectors in national, regional, sub-regional and international processes. The Mauritius Strategy in 2005 reaffirmed the need for regional treatment of environment and trade, adopting in this way the new language in the Doha Development Round, the WTO and regional trade areas such as Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). MERCOSUR and NAFTA have incorporated environmental instruments but there remains a challenge in monitoring progress.

Other examples of regional trading bodies in SIDS states that have incorporated environmental policy include the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In 2002, ASEAN adopted a strong environment focus through the signing of the ASEAN Agreement on Trans-boundary Haze Pollution. It later created the Cebu Declaration on East Asian Energy Security and the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network in 2005. In addition, it is a signatory to the Asia–Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate.

The SIDS are committed to regional co-operative instruments. In Africa, SIDS operate within multiple regional blocs that oversee trade. In the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) for example, are Guinea Bissau and Comoros. Comoros, Mauritius and Seychelles are also members of the COMESA and Seychelles (until recently) and Mauritius are members of the South Africa Community (SADC). In Asia, SAARC countries also set up the South Asia Free Trade Agreement. Like other regional trade groupings, the primary objective is the reduction of trade barriers generally in the form of border tariffs and other duties.

The MSI is essentially an environmental strategy upon which is superimposed the rhetoric of globalisation, liberalisation, multilateralism, regionalism and development. It supports regional co-operation, but falls short of offering a framework for implementation. Formalisation of the regional pattern therefore undertakes multiple shapes and forms built on preconditions for distinctive forms of co-operation and emerging experience on how co-operative ventures are best obtained and maintained to serve national interests.

Padma Narsey Lal<sup>7</sup>, observed the following points in implementation of the Mauritius Strategy:

- confusion or lack of understanding about the benefits of regionalism,
- disconnect between those espousing regionalism and those who have to deal with national development efforts on a day to day basis (linkages national and regional), and
- absence of appropriate methodologies for mainstreaming regionalism.

On the development of national, regional and international linkages and any perceived emphasis on South-South regional co-operation for sustainable development, Lal found that:

- often international and regional initiatives are seen as being imposed from outside, 'top down', with
- little understanding about what really needs to be done when operationalising these commitments.

With regard to the relationship between trade, regional co-operation and sustainable development, she noted a number of paradoxes:

- Regional co-operation and trade and sustainable development are not necessarily explicitly defined. Through international negotiations on WTO-related matters regional co-operation may be practised. SD is often talked about but not necessarily really practised at this level.

South-South co-operation<sup>8</sup> has grown since the 1970s particularly through the support from the United Nations agencies with broad-based partnerships led by its agencies – United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and others. The approaches to regional co-operation are not now so narrowly defined. A strictly regional co-operation through trade may also bring about limited welfare impacts in low income countries. Many of the current regional initiatives are more broad-based with RTAs seen as a platform for increasing both non trade and non environmental co-operation ventures, extending to technological and scientific co-operation and development and improvements to public goods.

In 1997, the Small Island Developing States Network (SIDSnet) was established as a direct follow-up to the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA), with the primary goal of supporting the sustainable development of SIDS through enhanced information and communication technology (ICT). SIDSnet also assists in the implementation of internationally agreed development goals in SIDS, in particular the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI), the Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). SIDSnet responds to several critical challenges faced by small islands including (1) remoteness, isolation and geographic dispersion, (2) poor connectivity and data management, particularly through ICT, (3) limited human and technological capacity, and (4) the need for greater international recognition and assistance in reducing SIDS' economic and environmental vulnerability.

The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), which was founded in 1991, is a coalition of small island and low-lying coastal countries that share similar development challenges and concerns about the environment, especially their vulnerability to the adverse effects of global climate change. It functions primarily as an ad hoc lobby and negotiating voice for small island developing states (SIDS) within the United Nations system. With a membership of 43 states and observers drawn from all oceans and regions of the world (Africa, Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Pacific and South China Sea), AOSIS deliberates on important issues that mostly pertain to the implementation of MSI and other international initiatives like the MDGs.

## Regional co-operation principles in implementing the MSI

Since 1990 there have been many regional economic agreements with criss-crossing arrangements, some with little apparent coherence linking specific country needs. The MSI sets out principles for addressing environmental concerns and development goals linked to sustainability. This includes the integration of SIDS into the global economy from a diversity of entry points. The MSI is a multidimensional and multipurpose project. Many regional initiatives have made important contributions to the economic welfare of small states, and doubtless to political stability as well. However, there is a need to consider where this proliferation is leading in terms of enhancing capacity for trade and international economic relations.

The regional co-operative model in the MSI considers SIDS's vulnerability characteristics. The policy includes some consideration of limited state capacity but does not concern itself with any prospects of failure based on impediments to co-operation such as relative gains and payoffs among the SIDS due to their state preferences. This presents a major problem for SIDS – the need to place into context and to analyse the specific characteristics and thereby preferences of regions and islands. Small states may address constraints of size, capacity, markets, economic and environmental vulnerabilities, through regional co-operation arrangements.

There is an assumption that negotiation will lead to effective implementation. The principle holds that research, analysis, advocacy, policy development, political action and decision-making will lead to effective implementation.

The first premise is that the transfer of knowledge and experience through co-operation should be based on negotiation<sup>9</sup>. This requires:

- **Problem identification.** It is assumed that regional co-operation for development must be mainstreamed in SIDS. But the challenges in co-operating between SIDS need more detailed qualification and quantification as vulnerabilities are affected by other factors such as regional and international differences, security issues, power struggles, migration, and others. The definition of what constitutes the regions and sectors for which co-operation is required is integral to effective implementation. For example, unequal economic and political partners pose problems for negotiations, implementation and understanding of co-operation aims and objectives.
- **Research and preparation.** Deeper analysis of sectoral issues is required on the measures and tools available for achieving the desired outcomes. This includes analysis of regions, stakeholders and how they can alter and influence decision-making, identification of relevant domestic and international legal provisions, and a determination of the influence and role of citizens, the media and public opinion in regional co-operation arrangements. It also involves the review of research and training opportunities, ongoing assessments of priorities and needs, the exchange of experience and the dissemination of information. This will be an ongoing requirement in order for countries and regions to make rapid adjustments to general policy proposals.

- **Team Building, Working Groups and Networks.** Phase I: It is necessary to co-ordinate, prepare and collect information on various sectors to inform co-operation and co-ordination strategies. Countries should organise initiatives in collaboration with supranational agents, private sector, civil society organisations and others, including citizens. Phase II: Networks and groups should continue collaboration in the regional co-operation exercises, collating and disseminating information, and playing more active roles in specialist interpretations of provisions and dimensions of regional organisations.
- **Brainstorming Options for regional co-operation.** This can take place at several levels: with inter-governmental and intra-governmental involvement, in commercial, non governmental organisations including business, trade, environmental, labour, development, IGOs and others. After these phases have been completed, technocrats can then begin to design relevant regional co-operation schemes for sustainable development that are well researched based on local experience and best practice.
- **Development of regional co-operation strategies.** These need to be negotiated at multiple levels: national, bilateral, within SIDS, outside SIDS, internationally, regionally, with southern partners, with donor and multilateral agencies, etc. This may include several forms of regional functional co-operation.

The approach to regional co-operation is contingent on arriving at a balance between the three elements of trade, environment and development (with all its diverse components) within and outside the geographical regions of SIDS. The best form for optimum effective regional co-operation may be expressed as follows:

**Level I:** Co-operative relationships by sector between SIDS regions

- Working groups are established by sub-sectors within each sector. Research is undertaken.

**Level II:** Co-operation between regions

- Sharing and learning from experiences of other island states and regions based on common problems and challenges by sector through an intensification of communication and advocacy.

**Level III:** Co-operation between island regions and other southern states

- Deepening and broadening of South-South co-operation to address how to source funding for Southern corporate partners as a measure; deepening of cross border partnerships (e.g. education, training, exchanges, technical co-operation, etc.).

**Level IV:** Co-operation with global institutions (multi-lateral / IGOs / INGOs and others)

- Developing opportunities for funding inter-regional co-operation projects, institutional and administrative strengthening, training, etc.

Regional co-operation for sustainable development has to be entered into as an arrangement which guarantees regional citizens and governments opportunities to benefit from the deals and to participate consistently over time.

There are a number of ways for making regional co-operation more effective in achieving progress with MSI and delivering real benefits to the member states. Kahle and Lake<sup>10</sup> have made the following useful observations about the possibilities of deepening co-operation through creation of networks:

‘Networks are enduring or repeated interactions among multiple actors that are typically characterised by reciprocity. Distinguishing networks from alternative forms of governance requires a narrowing of recent descriptions, which define networks as a pattern of regular and purposive relations among like government units working across the border that divide countries from one another and that demarcate the domestic from the international sphere ... they may lack a legitimate organisational authority to arbitrate and resolve disputes that may arise during the exchange. Relations between states in a network are enduring – not ad hoc.’

For the regional dimensions of the MSI to be implemented, a network of sectors linked through supranational organisations may work best<sup>11</sup>. Sectors may be highly organised formal collective units that meet to organise across sectors to address implementation needs and requirements. The greatest opportunity for success lies in a combination of brainstorming and field work based on collection and review of appropriate baseline data. Structured, formal organisation is required for SIDS in networks to overcome the historical problems of weak institutions and the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms.

SIDS regional co-operation can then best proceed within regions and then outward to deepen South-South links within SIDS and with other countries. A stronger political element is required to help take forward the developmental thrust of SIDS as it brings together the disparate elements of international development commitments (MDG, Monterrey Conference on Development, AFT, etc.).

## **Current regional frameworks for implementing the MSI**

In view of the many challenges faced by small states, mostly as a result of their economic vulnerability, more sub-regional mechanisms may emerge to allow effective action, while taking into account the existing constraints in terms of financial, human and institutional resources.

Regional integration and co-operation systems in SIDS are still evolving and may be converging. Regional co-operation is a means of reorganising limited resources, pooling governance systems, increasing complementarity between organisations, states and institutions (internally and externally) and ultimately reinstating elements of sovereignty. The best modelling from past organisation may be reinserted and is a means of enabling SIDS to strengthen national and regional existing relationships, or shed some, towards the goal of strengthening their bargaining power. At the same time, they also become stronger internally.

## Caribbean region

In the Caribbean, the absence of a co-ordinating mechanism at the Caribbean sub regional level was highlighted as impeding the BPoA implementation process as early as 1995. A first attempt at creating such a mechanism was made in 1999, at the initiative of the ECLAC sub regional Headquarters for the Caribbean, but did not materialise. However, precisely because both the BPoA and the Mauritius Strategy contain provisions requiring that sub regional institutions and agencies play a significant role in the co-ordinated implementation of both, this issue had to be addressed.

Discussions were held in 2005, and it was then agreed that, based on the overlapping nature of the mandates of regional and sub regional institutions, duplication of efforts and expenditures should be avoided. The co-ordinating mechanism should then be aimed at finding a way to pool and combine the limited resources of SIDS so that the existing constraints could be overcome. At the Twenty-first Session of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDCC) in January 2006, member governments agreed to set up a Regional Co-ordinating Mechanism (RCM) for the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the further implementation of the BPoA. The stated objectives and functions of the RCM require that more and better support should be provided to Caribbean SIDS to ensure the implementation of the MSI.

The RCM is to promote awareness at all levels of issues and activities related to sustainable development, and assist in the mobilisation of new and additional resources for the achievement of sustainable development in Caribbean SIDS. It must also optimise the benefits of these resources, through effective co-ordination of initiatives and activities, and assist in the development, monitoring and co-ordination of a sub regional work programme, facilitate the exchange of best practices and transfer of knowledge, liaise with SIDS in other regions for the promotion of joint positions at international forums, strengthen institutional arrangements, and ensure the effective participation of civil society organisations.

The RCM is currently engaged in the establishment of a sub regional database on sustainable development activities, and of co-operative agreements and partnerships among agencies. The governance structure of the RCM requires Ministerial approval to ensure that it obtains the highest level of recognition among stakeholders. The establishment of the RCM was accompanied by the creation of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Key objectives for the establishment of the RCM included information sharing, co-ordination, strengthening of institutional arrangements and effective participation of civil society organisations. The RCM is also designed to assist in the mobilisation of additional resources. One of its main functions is also to provide assistance and support to countries at the national level, and to consider national priorities with regard to the implementation of the MSI.

A crucial component of the RCM structure is the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) which comprises 15 representatives from a number of governments, regional organisations, civil society representatives and development partners. TAC has since highlighted the many challenges it faces as a co-ordinating mechanism. It stated that the awareness and understanding of MSI on the part of government officials and the level of engagement of the donor community was clearly insufficient. The heterogeneity among member coun-

tries also results in uneven capacities of countries to generate necessary and appropriate data. In addition, there is still a continued perception that the Mauritius Strategy is a framework for action within the environment sector only.

In 2006, ECLAC carried out two studies with the aim of deepening the appreciation of Caribbean SIDS for the MSI and providing improved understanding of obstacles to its implementation. One of the main aspects highlighted in the first study is the extent to which SIDS in the sub region require support from the international community to be able to better implement MSI. The scarcity of their financial as well as technical resources impacted on countries' abilities to address their needs. According to the findings of the study, SIDS were concerned with energy resources and coastal and marine resources. In addition, the view was expressed that natural and environmental disasters, climate change and sea level rise were among the top priorities for Caribbean SIDS.

The second study also contributed to an enhanced understanding of MSI as it focused on '*Challenges in the implementation of the MSI in the Caribbean*' (LC/CAR/L.101). Such challenges were identified on the basis of responses to a questionnaire sent to 23 CDCC member countries and 11 sub regional agencies that had placed sustainable development on their agendas. Difficulty in accessing financial and technical resources was cited as one of the main deterrents to implementation of the MSI by countries and agencies that responded to the questionnaire. Furthermore, insufficient public awareness with regard to the provisions and content of the Mauritius Strategy was also considered a significant obstacle. The report provides a well-informed overview, by sector and theme, of the various existing and anticipated difficulties and suggests that, in the case of climate change and sea level rise, the lack of strong political will, combined with restricted access to resources and technical expertise, was delaying implementation. The absence of a synergistic approach to national plans and policies also acted against effective implementation of MSI.

### Pacific region

In the Pacific, the regional approach, or regionalism<sup>12</sup>, has the potential to deliver necessary services to countries more cheaply than if countries were to provide the services themselves. The Pacific Islands Forum, through the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, has launched the Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Co-operation and Integration, which sets out a number of very worthwhile initiatives promoting, in the spirit of the Mauritius Strategy, the sustainable development of Pacific small island developing states.

In the Pacific Plan, the Forum and the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) have undertaken, inter alia, to help advance countries' sustainable development by the following.

- Developing and implementing their national sustainable development strategies.
- Developing and implementing national and regional conservation and management measures for the sustainable utilisation of fisheries resources.
- Developing and implementing policies and plans for waste management.
- Implementing the Pacific Energy Policy and associated Strategic Action Plan to provide available, reliable, affordable and environmentally sound energy for the sustainable development of all Pacific island communities.

- Investigating the potential for expanding regional technical and vocational education training programmes to take advantage of opportunities in health care, seafaring, hospitality/tourism and peacekeeping that can enhance and standardise such programmes, ensuring the portability of technical qualifications.
- Harmonising approaches in the health sector under the Samoa Commitment to Achieving Healthy Islands, including implementation of the HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection prevention strategy, a stronger focus on non-communicable diseases, and agreement on the recruitment of health workers.
- Enhancing advocacy for, and co-ordination of, youth programmes and monitoring of the status of youth.
- Enhancing regional sports networks to support the development role of sports.
- Securing international finance for sustainable development, biodiversity, and environmental protection and climate change in the Pacific, including through the Global Environment Facility.

Other Pacific Plan themes, also contributing to the sustainable development of Pacific Small Island Developing States and hence reflecting the content of the Mauritius Strategy, address the important issues of economic growth, good governance and security. Under the theme of economic growth, the objective is to raise output through increasing sustainable trade, including trade in services, and investment. Efforts are already being made to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure development and the delivery of common goods and services. The economic growth strategy would also include raising private sector participation in, and contribution to, the development of Pacific SIDS.

The Pacific Plan addresses these concerns under the theme of good governance, which aims to improve transparency, accountability, equity and efficiency in the management and use of resources in the Pacific. The Pacific SIDS agreed that because countries were dissatisfied with having to understand and report on many different international conventions and declarations relating to sustainable development, a single document, the Pacific Small Island Developing State Matrix, to be called the 'Pacific SIDS Matrix', would be compiled by the CROP group for those countries. The document would combine and draw on all the sustainable development conventions and international instruments, including Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Millennium Development Goals, the Mauritius Strategy and the sub region's own sustainable development plans, including the Pacific Plan. It is intended to make it easier to understand, implement and report on the international conventions.

Another important initiative, amplifying Chapter X of the Mauritius Strategy on transport and communication, is the adoption of a sub region-wide Pacific Regional Digital Strategy. The three pronged approach prescribes different policies at the national, regional and global levels. At the national level, the policy suggests liberalisation of the communication sector to allow private operators to compete for, run and manage the country's telecommunications within a regulatory framework that facilitates development appropriate to the people and cultures of the Pacific. Countries are encouraged to provide the domestic telecommunications and information infrastructure, while the sub region could provide the technical expertise which is lacking in most Pacific SIDS.

The great advances achieved in ICT hold potential for alleviating the common problem of the isolation and remoteness of Pacific small island developing states. The Mauritius Strategy recognises the potential of ICT for development and recommends policies for SIDS to follow. Pacific SIDS can develop some of the opportunities presented by ICT, for example, telemedicine, distance learning, improved early warning systems and e-commerce, and some have already done so. ESCAP has started a number of ICT initiatives in the region, including setting up the Intergovernmental Consultative Committee on the Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development, which last met in September 2005.

The private sector in the Pacific small island developing states is receiving support from the establishment of the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation, which the Pacific Plan has undertaken to support. The Organisation is expected to carry out the requisite reforms for upgrading and placing the private sector at the forefront of development as a development partner with government. Many of the services, including utilities, which are currently the responsibility of the government, are expected to be devolved to the private sector, where it is hoped competition will result in reduced prices for the benefit of consumers.

The contribution of ESCAP to implementation of the Mauritius Strategy has been mainly through its technical assistance programmes, providing advisory services, building national institutional capacity and training in the different sectors and areas of operations of Pacific SIDS. Since the launching of the Strategy, ESCAP has helped seven countries, Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, to address their emerging social issues through workshops on identifying emerging social issues in least developed countries; through the second session of the Committee on Emerging Social Issues (attended by representatives of Kiribati, Palau, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu); and through two other workshops, providing training on how to mainstream gender and girls' education into countries' development programmes and national development processes.

There are several constraints faced by the Pacific region in implementing the Mauritius Strategy. Firstly, there is a lack of national implementation capacity stemming from the lack of national understanding, ownership and political will to implement the Strategy. Public services in many of the countries are small and unskilled and as states require a critical mass of institutions, for example, parliament, the judiciary and the executive branch (including foreign missions, education and health services and police) to exist as 'states', their small human resources are often spread too thinly across government institutions, resulting in ineffectiveness and poor performance.

Another constraint is the tendency of governments to exclude the wider civil society, thereby foregoing the benefits of society-wide participation and support for implementation of the Mauritius Strategy. Many governments of Pacific SIDS need to consult more widely and build partnerships with stakeholders, not only on the Mauritius Strategy but also on their overall national sustainable development strategies.

The co-ordination and harmonisation of aid is another challenge faced by the Pacific SIDS in the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy and there is a need for innovative ways of co-ordinating aid among donors. The prospects for Pacific SIDS being able to finance implementation of the Mauritius Strategy from their own resources are not encouraging because

the majority of them have very limited sources of financing for economic development. Overall, although many SIDS have made significant strides in the implementation of MSI +5, there are still a few difficulties to overcome. For many SIDS, access to financial resources is a special challenge because of the small size of their economies and the high relative cost of better market information and project preparation. Furthermore, capacity development and education suffer from migration of talented people and the problems of specialisation within a small population. The requirements for implementing the MSI +5 place on SIDS a heavy workload for such countries with limited human resources and expertise. This translates into a lack of capacity for implementation. Many SIDS also lack effective management of education and training services to meet the knowledge management requirements for MSI. The implementation of sustainable development strategies and the ability to monitor and evaluate progress rely on effective knowledge and information powered by modern ICT. Accelerated development in these fields may hold the key to overcoming the vulnerabilities of SIDS arising from their fragmentation, isolation, and remoteness.

## Conclusions

Concerted efforts are being made by the small island developing states to implement meaningful policies and adaptation strategies to address their vulnerabilities and build resilience both at national and regional levels. It is clear that countries require support from the international and regional communities in implementing several areas of the MSI and, as such, it is recommended that the regional mechanism be further strengthened as soon as possible, so as to provide direction and oversight to implementation of the MSI.

While small states acknowledge that sustainable development is primarily a national responsibility, there is a need for strengthened co-operation and partnership in support of sustainable development of SIDS at the national, sub regional, regional and international levels. Such partnership should be broad-based and ensure the involvement and participation of relevant stakeholders.

Mainstreaming the MSI through regional co-operation should start with a negotiation of positions and actions, driven primarily by stakeholders and actors within the SIDS who themselves seek to ensure that domestic policy-making coincides with regional co-operation goals in a viable supranational entity, preferably a regional co-operation arrangement. Within the complex mix there is expected to be positioning based on how to apply the best strategies and action planning in spite of constraints, cultural differences and institutional roadblocks.

The existence of willingness and an Action Plan or Framework is not guaranteed to bring about results. Effective co-operation depends upon thorough research that includes both specialist and citizen participation. Co-ordination is unachievable without a segmentation of the whole into its distinct parts, and an understanding what they are, how they interrelate and how they can best be addressed. It is not sufficient to enumerate or state the problem but map and remap solutions based on ongoing redefinition and reshaping of parameters in response to changing social, economic, environmental and political factors. The most effective approach may be to take small progressive steps within sectors.

Many SIDS are already dependent on larger regional co-operation schemes and SIDS must advance regional co-operation as progressively and as efficiently as they can, a factor given implicit recognition in the common framework of the MSI. There are, however, no shortcuts to implementation. Regional co-operation can be the foundation for expanding into international development but it must be seen to be worthwhile in delivering benefits at national level.

There is co-ordination of activities relevant to the implementation of MSI undertaken by UNDESA through its SIDS unit. This is largely pursued through meetings of the Inter Agency Consultative Group (IACG) on SIDS, which is an informal co-ordinating mechanism for the focal points of all relevant UN agencies, Regional Commissions and regional intergovernmental organisations to have a chance to exchange expertise, experiences, policies and information on planned activities, as well as co-ordinate joint efforts. Much of the future work will have to be done by SIDS themselves if international aid declines as SIDS make progress in economic development.

Mainstreaming regional co-operation is achievable providing it is not seen as an alternative but complementary to internal national development and external international co-operation. The expressed interest and continuing political rhetoric in support of integration has not for the most part been matched by political will and systematic action to advance and deepen the integration process by many SIDS.

Although a few of the groupings are beginning to make modest progress, the overall achievement to date has been slow to materialise, both in terms of cross-border trade and investment among member countries and with respect to the strength and capability of the institutions themselves. Moreover, the proliferation of multiple and multifaceted integration schemes operating within the same geographic area has, in some cases, resulted in overlapping membership and duplication of mandates. There is a need to harmonise the regional plans and co-ordinate various activities to promote efficient and co-ordinated use of resources and best practice. There is also a need to review the coherence, governance and consistency of the international monetary, financial and trading systems, and to promote greater participation of small island developing States in international financial decision-making processes and institutions and in the process of setting international rules, codes, norms and standards.

The recent regional reviews of MSI + 5 indicated that the future focus should be on implementation of initiatives that address SIDS's vulnerabilities and strengthen their coping capacities, with support from the international community through partnerships. The meetings highlighted the need for strengthened co-operation and partnerships and suggested building on existing mechanisms with enhanced and co-ordinated roles for regional organisations and UN organisations. This calls for strengthening public-public and public-private partnerships, which could take the form of South-South co-operation, including SIDS-SIDS, and the building of alliances with donor communities in a co-ordinated manner for the effective delivery of assistance.

In terms of building on existing mechanisms, the MSI + 5 review also considered ways to improve the CSD Partnerships mechanism that has been in place since WSSD in 2002, by

reviewing and re-launching a revised set of CSD Partnership Initiatives that provide focus and impetus for action to address the vulnerabilities of SIDS, building on lessons learned since 2002. In addition to regional co-operation, SIDS should make fuller use of National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) as a mechanism for implementing the requirements of international and regional commitments such as the Mauritius Strategy, the Pacific Plan, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the Millennium Development Goals.

## Further reading

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## Notes

- 1 The Report of the Brundtland Commission, headed by Gro Harlem Brundtland, *Our Common Future*, was published by Oxford University Press in 1987. The Brundtland Commission, formally the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), known by the name of its Chair, Gro Harlem Brundtland, was convened by the United Nations in 1983. The commission was created to address growing concerns 'about the accelerating deterioration of the human environment and natural resources and the consequences of that deterioration for economic and social development'. In establishing the commission, the UN General Assembly recognised that environmental problems were global in nature and determined that it was in the common interest of all nations to establish policies for sustainable development. Available at [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)
- 2 World Bank – *Experiences and Opportunities for Capacity Sharing through regional cooperation and integration: The case of the Caribbean Community*. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PROJECTS/Resources/40940-1118776867573/casecaribbean.pdf>. Last accessed 13 August 2010.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Rolf, Jim (2007). 'Many Small states, Two Regions, Different Constructions'. In *Social Economic Studies*: 56. Nos 1 & 2.
- 5 There are other groupings such as the UMOEA states (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire,

- Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo). Of these blocs, there are five regional organisations of which small island developing states form part: CENSAD (Comoros: 2007 and Guinea Bissau: 2004 and Togo); COMESA (Comoros: 1994 and Mauritius); ECOWAS (Cape Verde: 1976); SADC (Mauritius: 1990 and Seychelles:1997) and ECCAS (São Tôme and Príncipe: 1999). Seychelles has since withdrawn from SADC. All of these groupings and associations generally fall within the ACP bloc and are mainly economic and trading organisations.
- 6 See Alessia Lo Turco (2005). 'Are South-South RTAS Growth Enhancing: The Case of Latin American Agreements, 1960–2000' in *Applied Econometrics and International Development*: 5. No. 2.
  - 7 Padma Narsey Lal, Sustainable Development Advisor of the Pacific Islands Secretariat: comments made in response to a questionnaire for selected implementers of MSI in the SIDS regions.
  - 8 *Co-operation South Journal*. October 1995. *Idealistic Notions for Realistic World: the Case for South South Co-operation*. Accessed at: [tcdc.undp.org/CoopSouth/default.asp](http://tcdc.undp.org/CoopSouth/default.asp).
  - 9 This negotiations framework builds on the work undertaken in *Analyzing the Issues*, article by Prof. Geza Feketekuty (2004) of the Institute for Trade and Commercial Diplomacy at Monterrey, California. It can be accessed at: [www.commercialdiplomacy.org](http://www.commercialdiplomacy.org)
  - 10 Kahler, Miles and David A Lake in: *Economic integration and global governance: Why so little supra nationalism?* (University of California, San Diego Paper Prepared for the Workshop on Explaining Global Regulation, University College, University of Oxford 20–21 October 2006.)
  - 11 Ibid.
  - 12 Regionalism is described in the Pacific Plan as countries working together for their joint and individual benefit.