

# Ensuring a sustainable COVID-19 recovery in Small Island Developing States

## The role of institutional mechanisms and civil service skills for SDG implementation

A regional consultation and knowledge-sharing workshop  
co-organised by the Government of Aruba and the OECD  
Virtual Meeting, Thursday, 11 March 2021 at 9am-12pm AST (2pm-5pm CET)

### **Purpose**

This workshop aims at raising awareness among Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the role of skills and institutional mechanisms for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the synergies between effective SDG implementation and COVID-19 recovery. It will facilitate an exchange of good country practices to build resilience and coherence across sectors and levels of government and seek to identify opportunities and challenges for aligning national SDG strategies with COVID-19 recovery plans, as well as related capacity gaps. It will also provide input to an ongoing OECD consultation to develop a practical Guidance Note to enhance policy coherence in SDG implementation.

### **Background**

Responding to the COVID-19 crisis requires mutually supportive and integrated policies across economic, social and environmental areas to address the deeper nature of the crisis. Addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability in our systems, which stem from e.g. inequalities, weak governance and institutions, inadequate public services, depletion of natural resources and the degradation of biodiversity and climate, will be essential to building resilience against future shocks.

Strengthening individual and institutional capacities for coordinating actions across sectors and levels of government, and for aligning short- and long-term objectives, is part and parcel of a sustainable recovery from the pandemic. Horizontal and vertical coherence along with long-term visioning and planning are also prerequisites for successful implementation of the SDGs. Consequently, many of the mechanisms put in place and lessons learnt by governments since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 provide important direction for ensuring a COVID-19 recovery that 'leaves no one behind'.

Drawing on country experiences and best practices, the OECD Council Recommendations on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) and Public Service Leadership and Capability (PSCL) set out a number of principles that can aid governments in their efforts to recover from the crisis in a balanced and coherent manner. The PCSD Recommendation underlines the need for political commitment and leadership, whole-of-government coordination and policy integration, and reporting and monitoring tools; while the PSCL Recommendation calls for a value-driven, trusted and capable civil service and responsive and adaptive human resources.

### **Rationale**

Given their heavy reliance on tourism, many SIDS have been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Tourism accounts for more than 30% of GDP. In some countries, this is as high as 90%, making them especially vulnerable to falling tourist numbers due to the pandemic. In 2019, SIDS welcomed some 44 million international tourist arrivals and the sector earned USD 55 billion in export revenues. International tourist arrivals were down 47% in the first four months of 2020.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, [www.un.org/ohrls](http://www.un.org/ohrls).

SIDS are also particularly vulnerable to the challenges posed by climate change and rising sea levels. The need to continuously finance recovery from recurring extreme weather events severely hampers the ability of vulnerable countries to address additional shocks. Recovery from tropical storms often takes years or even decades.

In this context, improved skills and institutional mechanisms for coherent SDG implementation could help SIDS to reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience, while ensuring that ongoing efforts to reboot and restructure their economies do not come at the expense of long-term sustainability objectives.

Due to their relatively small jurisdictions, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are well suited for testing and operationalising new and innovative policy principles. This provides scope for developing actionable and scalable tools aimed at strengthening institutions, skills and leadership capabilities for coherent SDG implementation, as well as for extending the use of existing SDG tools and approaches to guide the COVID-19 recovery.

Aruba, the host of this pilot workshop, has offered to serve as an “incubator” in this regard. As an early implementer, this small island was one of the first ten countries in the world to receive a UNDP-led ‘Mainstream, Accelerate and provide Policy Support’ (MAPS) mission to support the development of a roadmap for SDG implementation. Aruba has also sought the support of the OECD in identifying and leveraging complementarities between its national SDG Strategy and the new Draft Master Plan ‘Repositioning Our Sails: Aruba's Mission Driven Model for Economic Recovery & Resilience’. Aruba’s experiences, along with those of other SIDS, offer important insights and regional perspectives to the development of the OECD Draft Guidance Note on PCSD, and will help to strengthen the global relevance of this tool.

### ***Target audience***

While the workshop agenda is centered on Caribbean SIDS, participation from SIDS around the world is encouraged and welcomed: the issues at hand are of global relevance and the approaches discussed could be replicated in other regions of the world. The target audience includes policy-makers from central and local governments, parliamentarians, civil society, private sector, academia and research institutions in SIDS and donor countries alike.

### ***Format***

The workshop will take place online. Participants will benefit from a mix of interactive polls, presentations and peer-exchanges, featuring inputs from the OECD, UN and other experts.

### ***Background material***

- [OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development](#) (OECD, December 2019)
- [OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability](#) (OECD, January 2019)
- [Zero Draft Guidance Note on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development](#), (OECD, November 2020).
- [Building a coherent response for a sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery](#) (OECD, November 2020)
- [COVID-19 pandemic: Towards a blue recovery in small island developing states](#) (OECD, January 2021)

## Draft Agenda

9am-12pm AST (Oranjestad) / 2-5pm CET (Paris)

### 9h00-9h15 Opening session

- **Welcome remarks**, by Prime Minister Evelyne Wever-Croes, Aruba.
- **Introductory remarks**, by OECD Deputy Secretary-General Jeffrey Schlagenhauf.

### 9h15-10h15 Session 1: Aligning SDG implementation with a sustainable COVID-19 recovery in SIDS

Moderator: Piera Tortora, Coordinator – Sustainable Ocean for All, OECD Development Co-operation Directorate

This session will provide an overview of SDG progress in SIDS in the Caribbean region, as well as of the challenges and opportunities in ensuring a sustainable COVID-19 recovery. It will show that immediate and short-term recovery measures do not need to come at the expense of long-term sustainability objectives.

**Interactive poll:** *In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges for SIDS in implementing the SDGs?*

- Presentation: *“Challenges and opportunities for SIDS to implement and integrate the SDGs for more competitive, resilient and sustainable economies and societies post-COVID-19”*, by Mr. Riad Meddeb, Senior Principal Advisor for SIDS, Bureau for Policy and Program Support/Global Policy Network, UNDP.
- Presentation: *“Identifying and building on complementarities between Aruba’s national SDG Strategy and the Draft Master Plan for Economic Recovery and Resilience”*, by Jocelyne M.M. Croes, Special Advisor (Raadadviseur) on Multilateral Affairs National SDG Aruba Commission.

#### Peer-to-peer exchange, followed by open discussion and Q&A

- Trinidad & Tobago
- Malta

*Guiding questions for discussion:*

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your country, e.g economically, socially and environmentally?
- What opportunities exist for aligning national SDG strategies and COVID-19 recovery plans?
- Does the Draft Guidance Note on PCSD provide a useful tool for translating these opportunities into action?

### 10h15-11h15 Session 2: The role of policy coherence and civil service skills for more effective SDG implementation

Moderator: Carina Lindberg, Policy Advisor, OECD Public Governance Directorate

**Interactive poll:** *In your opinion, what are the biggest obstacles to policy coherence for sustainable development?*

This session will introduce the concept of policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD), a key means for implementing the SDGs; and highlight how skills and institutional mechanisms for PCSD can contribute to more effective implementation. It will seek to identify good practices among SIDS for balancing short- and long-term objectives; considering synergies and trade-offs between different policy areas and SDGs; and accounting for policy impacts both domestically and internationally. These good practices will contribute to the development of a practical and action-oriented Guidance Note for enhancing PCSD in SDG implementation.

- Presentation: *“Institutional mechanisms and civil service skills for effective and coherent SDG implementation”*, by Ernesto Soria Morales, Senior Policy Analyst, OECD Public Governance Directorate.

#### Peer-to-peer exchange, followed by open discussion and Q&A

- Belize

- Canada
- Poland

*Guiding questions for discussion:*

- What mechanisms has your government put in place to implement the SDGs? Are these mechanisms effective in balancing different objectives and priorities, with a view to strengthen policy coherence and accelerate progress on the SDGs?
- Are the institutions involved in SDG implementation equipped with the appropriate skills and leadership capabilities needed to work across levels and sectors of government?
- Where do you see the biggest need for practical guidance in strengthening PCSD? Does the Draft Guidance Note on PCSD correspond to your needs?

### **11h15-11h50 Session 3: Identifying capacity gaps and priority areas for action**

Moderator: Jocelyne M.M. Croes, Special Advisor (Raadadviseur) on Multilateral Affairs National SDG Aruba Commission

This session will seek to identify some of the institutional and knowledge gaps in the region, based on experiences from ongoing capacity-building initiatives for SDG implementation. This will help to define areas where future work and practical guidance is needed, both in terms of civil service skills and leadership capabilities and institutional and governance arrangements. As such, the session could potentially inform the development of a larger-scale capacity-building programme for coherent SDG implementation that is guided by regional needs and priorities.

- Presentation: *Governance capacities for the SDGs in the Caribbean region – key findings*, by UN DESA.

**Reactions:** *Ongoing capacity-building initiatives in Aruba and the region*

- Mr. Glenn Thode, Rector, University of Aruba.
- Mr. Christophe Dietrich, ICON Institute.

**Open discussion and Q&A**, all participants.

*Guiding questions for discussion:*

- What would you consider being the most critical components of a capacity-building programme for delivering on the SDGs?
- What are some of the main gaps in existing initiatives?
- Does the Draft Guidance Note on PCSD offer a good overall framework for designing an SDG capacity-building programme for civil servants?

Wrap-up and next steps, by OECD.

### **11h55-12h00 Closing remarks**

- Closing remarks, by Aruba.