



Building resilience in small island economies: from vulnerabilities to opportunities

Hotel Victoria, Pointe aux Piments, Mauritius, 23-24 April 2012

<http://brusselsbriefings.net> and <http://acpbriefings.net>

KEY MESSAGES FROM MAURITIUS BRIEFING

1. Context

The United Nations currently classifies 52 countries and territories as **Small Island Developing States (SIDS)**¹. It is a diverse group with more than 50 million people, 43 of them located in the Caribbean and the Pacific regions. The group includes relatively rich countries but also some of the poorest countries in the world.

Although small island nations across the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions have significant differences in terms of size, population, social and economic conditions, infrastructure and standard of living, there are many disadvantages that derive from small size, such as a narrow range of resources, excessive dependence on international trade, high transport and communication costs, high population density. Due to their small size, isolation and fragility of island ecosystems, their renowned biological diversity is among the most threatened in the world. Natural disasters are of special concern to small islands because of their dependence on agriculture and tourism, which are particularly vulnerable to natural and environmental disasters.

A group of Members of ACP Parliaments and ambassadors raised with CTA at the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly held in May 2011 in Budapest the need to deal with this issue of specific vulnerabilities for a group of ACP economies. A Brussels and regional Briefing were subsequently organized in 2012. The 27th Brussels Briefing² on ACP Small island economies: from vulnerabilities to opportunities was held on 4th April 2012 (see http://brusselsbriefings.net/past-briefings/small_island_economies). The regional Briefing in Mauritius was organized on 23-24th April 2012 in partnership with the Mauritius Government and the EU delegation in Mauritius.

120 participants attended the Briefing in Mauritius coming from almost all of the islands of the Pacific, the Caribbean and Africa and from the various sectors (public, research, private, civil society, ACP, regional and national policy-makers). The Mauritius Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (former Minister of Agriculture and lead ACP-EU negotiator), The Honorable Dr Arvin Boolell, opened the Briefing; H.E. Ambassador Skerritt-Andrew, Chair of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors and H.E. Mr. Jagdish Dharamchand Koonjul Ambassador of Mauritius in Brussels participated actively to the discussions in addition to their respective presentations.

2. Commitments by Mauritius participants

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have commonalities in terms of inherent vulnerabilities due to internal and external factors. While vulnerabilities would not change (territorial exiguity, high population density, small natural resource base, etc), SIDS can build their resilience to withstand external shocks. Sound policies and strategies, good

¹ List of small-island developing states: <http://www.un.org/special-rep/ohrls/sid/list.htm>

² The Brussels Briefings are organized since 2007 by CTA in collaboration with the European Commission, the ACP Group, Concord and other partners on key issues and challenges for rural development in the context of EU/ACP cooperation in Brussels.

governance, innovation, **sharing of expertise and up-scaling best practices** are key in SIDS' ability to build their resilience.

2.1. Political framework favorable to small island economies

- ✓ **Value of speaking with "one SIDS voice"**
The small island economies are too small to fail and the cost of failure is too big. They should have a stronger position at the UN and need to strengthen their collaboration and to increase their influence at international level such as WTO, UNCTAD, EU and get differentiated treatment. There is a need to get SIDS' visibility at major high-level summits.
- ✓ Ambassador Skerritt-Andrew, chair of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors), and Ambassador Koonjul of Mauritius committed themselves to increase the visibility of small islands at the level of the **ACP Group** and within the EU, especially in the context of the negotiations for the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), which could take into account the specific needs of small islands in regional envelopes.
- ✓ **Governance** is key to promote sustainable development. The role of public sector in providing an enabling environment has been the driver behind growth in successful economies such as Mauritius.
- ✓ **Interregional integration and regional cooperation** has been very efficient in some areas (trade, fisheries) even if a number of implementation challenges remain. The NEPAD representative committed to have the SIDS challenges addressed within the NEPAD-CAADP framework.
- ✓ The Briefing agreed on the need to "**regionalize Rio+20**" and discuss at regional level the outcomes and implementation issues. In that context, the UNESCAP Pacific Office announced a regional event after Rio.

2.2. Identifying strategies to promote sustainable development in small island economies

- ✓ Diversification is key for small economies and it can be promoted through sound policies and **interlinkages between sectors** (agriculture, tourism, ICTs...).
- ✓ **Agriculture needs to be mainstreamed** within the key sectors of small islands. The food import bill should be reduced by sourcing food from local farmers and strengthening farmers' organizations. **Strategies to attract young people into agriculture should be designed.**
- ✓ **Social capital** is one of the major assets of small islands as they need more and more high-skilled and specialized expertise. While SIDS suffer from **high level migration** and brain-drain, this can be turned into an advantage to build productive resources, e.g. remittances. Innovative approaches such as circular migration being tried by Mauritius can be used to upgrade skills while serving the country's needs.

- ✓ **Green growth and green investment** have the potential to spur growth for SIDS. The experience of promoting green awards for enterprises in the Caribbean is a way to encourage greening the economy and bringing together research, private sector, governments.

2.3. Engaging the private sector

- ✓ The need to develop smart partnerships between public, private and development partners was strongly highlighted. PPPs are key to address the main challenges of small islands in terms of infrastructure, transport and communication and access to capital.
- ✓ There is a need to facilitate technology transfer to help SIDS develop alternative and appropriate technologies. The Briefing proposed a Technology Transfer Facility, which could work on a cooperative basis allowing small islands to access costly technologies more easily.
- ✓ The Briefing recommended identifying champions within private sectors and promoting entrepreneurship in small islands.
- ✓ In terms of market access, the Briefing recommended adding value to small island products through branding, distinctive and differentiated products and markets.

2.4. Sharing practical solutions

- ✓ The Briefing recommended CTA to establish an online platform which will provide key information on small-island economies and promote knowledge sharing and dialogue on priority areas.
- ✓ Documenting best practices and successful models is important. CTA and its partners should support centres and networks of excellence across the ACP regions.
- ✓ Strengthening partnerships and promoting new financing models will benefit the small island economies by bridging the gap between development partners and private sector. Successful models need to be documented and shared.

3. **Actions 2012 and beyond**

3.1. **Global level**

- CTA and its partners will develop joint awareness activities with the United Nations High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), especially in the context of post-Rio+20.
- CTA and its partners (UN, EC, ACP Group, Commonwealth Secretariat, Indian Ocean Commission, Regional organizations) will launch a knowledge sharing and capacity platform aimed at exchanging experience and best practices on key priority themes for small island economies along the concepts of common and differentiated vulnerabilities and resilience.

3.2. ACP-EU policy level

- H.E. Ambassador Skerritt-Andrew and H.E. Mr. Jagdish Dharamchand Koonjul raised the need to support SIDS at the high-level ACP-EU events starting (ACP-EC joint Committee of Ambassadors and Council of Ministers).
- The need for specific support to SIDS will be raised at the ACP Council of Ministers and ACP-EU council of Ministers to be held in Vanuatu mid-June 2012, especially in the context of the 11th EDF resources.
- CTA and its partners will share technical resources in the capacity.org platform of the EC.
- A Brussels Briefing in 2013 could look at Green growth and regionalizing Rio+20 for the specific case of small island economies.

3.3. Regional level

- CTA will co-organise with the Eastern Caribbean States and the CDE a Green Growth Investment Forum for the Caribbean. Key expertise and experiences amongst investors, public sector and development partners that would assist in promoting a sub-regional strategy on green economic growth are shared (July 2012).
- CTA will join forces to organize a regional Briefing in the Pacific with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Office and other partners to look at the implementation of Rio+20 (August 2012).
- CTA will develop a MOU with the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and will collaborate more specifically on sharing resources and best practices. The IOC is interested in managing the web platform for the region (September 2012).

Available information

- All presentations are online. A Reader has been produced (http://www.acpbriefings.net/briefings/small_island_economies/)
- A policy brief and short report are being produced.
- The Media coverage is available: <http://www.acpbriefings.net/about-the-briefings/press-coverage/>
- The evaluation forms from participants are very good. A summary will be online.
- The webstream worked very well and the edited videos will be online in the coming weeks.