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Sustainable Development Goals and building resilience in a changing climate

An analysis of African, Caribbean and Pacific
States' 2020 Voluntary National Reviews

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This Brief is produced to coincide with the first SDG Moment that took place on 18 September 2020. This is also a month that marked the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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I. Introduction and objectives



This document is produced as part of the series of Policy Briefs by the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) in collaboration with the Intra-ACP Global Climate Change Alliance Plus (GCCA+) Programme. The series features work on enhancing political dialogue, knowledge sharing, promoting collaboration and building synergies around common issues and actions on climate change amongst member countries/regions of the OACPS.

The aim of this Brief is to understand how action on climate change is being addressed in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by conducting an assessment of 2020 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of countries that belong to the OACPS.

The Brief will assess how ACP countries have integrated: climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction,

biodiversity loss, land degradation and oceans, in their sustainable development processes and actions. The above-mentioned issues are related to SDGs 11, 13, 14 and 15 which are also related to sustainable cities and communities, climate action, life below water and life on land, respectively. Matters specific to SDG 17 on building partnerships to facilitate international cooperation for sustainable development will also be explored.

II. Voluntary National Reviews and Sustainable Development Goals

A number of significant global multilateral agreements were adopted in 2015. These are: **The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction** (March 2015), **Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development** (July 2015), **the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** (September 2015), and **the Paris Agreement on Climate Change** (December 2015).

At the core of the 2030 Agenda, are the 17 SDGs, which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership. The goals recognize that eradicating poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve and protect terrestrial and marine biodiversity.

To this end, the annual High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, is the main UN platform responsible for the follow-up and review of the SDGs. This is done on the basis of the annual Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, therefore developing and developed countries are encouraged to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven".

The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

For 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 47 countries presented their VNRs at the HLPF in July 2020. Of these, 20 were ACP states, namely: **Barbados, Benin, Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia (Republic of The), Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Seychelles, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda and Zambia.**

The draft Political Statement produced at the 2020 HLPF acknowledges the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in reinforcing pre-existing obstacles to realising the Goals. It echoes findings of the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report. The first in a series of quadrennial reports, that points to slow, stalled and uneven progress in implementing the SDGs. The Report is particularly critical of the worrying trends seen in several of the SDGs, such as SDG 2, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16. It notes increasing obesity, inequality, greenhouse gas emissions – with an increase in the impacts of climate change, land degradation, biodiversity loss, wildlife trafficking, absolute material footprints, overfishing and deterioration of coastal waters, as well as increasing pollution from human activity, as major negative trends that were observed to be on the rise.



It is against this backdrop, and in view of the 2020 HLPF, that the paper assesses the VNRs submitted by the 20 Member States, in order to understand how SDGs 11, 13, 14, 15, and 17 are addressed at the national and sub-national levels, particularly in light of the above-mentioned negative trends.

Through desk reviews and analysis of

the 2020 VNRs and related literature, the current Brief will start by identifying the national guiding policies, institutional structures and coordination mechanisms in place as reported in each 2020 OACPS VNR. This will be followed by a closer examination of the selected SDGs mentioned above, to understand how they are addressed in the countries' VNRs.

¹ United Nations Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C
² <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/priority-areas/links/related-information/what-is-local-and-indigenous-knowledge/>
³ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/SBSTA2019_04E.pdf

III. Highlights from OACPS countries' 2020 Voluntary National Reviews (VRNs)

A robust coordination mechanism with adequate institutional structures and guiding policies are necessary to steer successful planning and implementation of SDGs. Such mechanisms and structures are country-specific and dependent on national circumstances and priorities. However, the cross-cutting nature of the issues under each

SDG, "will require institutional collaboration, innovation and incentive systems that facilitate action and accountability across sectors as well as across government levels¹."

This section provides results of the assessment of the situation in OACPS countries as reflected in their 2020 VNRs.

Guiding policies for Sustainable Development

A variety of guiding policies for SDGs exists in the OACPS countries. A detailed reflection of the policies is found in Table 1. These are characterised by a number of interlinked features, which have also been highlighted as key in the implementation of Sustainable

Development, as seen partly in the OECD's Policy to Enhance Sustainable Development² and in The 8 principles for promoting policy coherence³. For the 20 OACPS countries assessed, the common characteristics are, notably⁴:

(i) Policy coherence

Alignment, integration and mainstreaming into sectoral strategies/policies. For example: in **Barbados**, their Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan reflects an alignment of the country's anti-poverty and sectoral strategies with the SDGs; The **Gambia** mainstreamed SDGs into its National Development Plan (2018–2021).

(ii) Medium (5-year) to long-term (10-year) timeframes

For example: **Kenya's** long-term development blueprint, Vision 2030, is implemented through five-year medium-term plans. The current and third medium-term plan covers the period 2018 to 2022; **Liberia's** Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development 2018–2023 is the second in a series of 5-year national plans under the Liberia Vision 2030 framework and follows the Agenda for Transformation (2012–2017). The Pro-Poor Agenda aligns with Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the SDGs.

(iii) Encompass the three "pillars" of sustainable development – the economic, social and environment.

For example: in **Papua New Guinea**, the Medium-term Development Plan III (2018–2022) and the National Strategy for Responsible Sustainable Development (StaRS) and legislated National Responsible Planning and Monitoring Act (2016) constitute the guiding policy on sustainable development – translation into sectoral policies focusing on women empowerment, health, education and human rights, land laws and climate change and marine protection policies and

measures; under its National Long-term vision – "Vision 2033"; **Seychelles** ensures the provision of health and education services to its entire population (Very High Development Index in 2019 – only country in Africa and the Indian Ocean); **Saint Vincent's** National Economic and Social Development Plan (2013–2025) with a vision of "Improving the Quality of Life for All Vincentians" "is built on the principle of putting people at the centre of its development".

(iv) Translation into sectoral policies

For example: **Solomon Islands'** National Development Strategy (2016–2035) translated into a medium term development plan and actionable programmes and projects with five priorities – economic growth, poverty alleviation, quality health and education, environmentally sustainable development

and good governance. **Trinidad and Tobago's** National Development Strategy 2016–2030 (Vision 2030) – relevant sectoral policies on non-communicable diseases, education, National Mitigation Plan (2017–2022), National Climate Change Policy (2011) and Carbon Reduction Strategy (2015) among others.

(v) Localisation of SDGs into national/sub-national policies

For example: **Benin** ranked the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals in order of priority and integrated them into the national planning framework; Benin has successfully completed the process

of localizing these targets; **Malawi's** National Planning Commission localizes the SDGs in its national vision and in the resulting medium-term development plans that apply at all levels.

(vi) Alignment with statistical systems

Alignment with statistical systems where applicable, and the establishment of (new) national statistical systems for planning and monitoring of implementation of SDGs. For example: **Malawi** has established a National Statistical System (2020 – 2023) for

accurate planning and monitoring of implementation; **Mozambique** is developing a National Statistical System to track progress of SDGs; while **Niger** is reinforcing its National Statistical System for more reliable statistics.

A robust institutional structure is required to ensure coordination, implementation and monitoring of the different policies and actions and actors, for the successful mainstreaming and implementation of SDGs across national and subnational policies and sectors.

¹ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2478Institutional_Coordination_Mechanisms_GuidanceNote.pdf

² <http://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/1869800.pdf>

³ <http://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/oecd-recommendation-on-policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development.htm>

⁴ Examples are from the OACPS' 2020 VNRs reports (summaries)

Institutional setup/Coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation

All of the assessed OACPS countries have a coordination/institutional structure in place for SDGs implementation (Table 2). The analysis highlighted robust institutional/coordination mechanisms in OAPCS

countries, which are in line with some of the common best-practices in global SDG institutional arrangements. The following characteristics were observed in OACPS countries:

(i) Leadership

In some OACPS countries the leadership (president of coordination mechanism) role for the monitoring of implementation of SDGs lies with the second Vice-President (e.g. Burundi), Prime Minister (e.g. Niger), Office of the President (e.g. Nigeria), Office of the Prime Minister (e.g. Uganda). While in the majority of countries, the coordination role is with a cross-cutting ministry such as the Ministry of Planning (and Development) (e.g. Benin, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Trinidad

and Tobago, Papua New Guinea, Samoa) or the Ministry of Finance (e.g. Gambia, Liberia, Seychelles (both)). With their specified Malawi, Niger, Trinidad and Tobago, Papua New Guinea, Samoa) or the Ministry of Finance (e.g. Gambia, Liberia, Seychelles (both)). With their specified lines of leadership, these mechanisms give clear signals of political commitment and accountability, which is necessary for a successful implementation of the SDGs.

(ii) Collaboration across ministries and different tiers of government

Almost all of the OACPS countries have established steering committees coordinated by the lead ministry (as described in point (i) above), involving other ministries and in most cases, to bring together sectoral working groups across ministries, breaking down silos, and promoting inter-ministerial cooperation. There are also technical inter-ministerial committees that bring together sectoral working groups across ministries. These

structures are further broken down into sub-national technical committees such as in Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea. Such cross-cutting collaborations, can facilitate vertical and horizontal integration of SDGs. Furthermore, the involvement of sub-national level stakeholders such as districts, municipalities and local governments is necessary to ensure implementation on the ground.

(iii) Formal inclusion of stakeholder groups

all the mechanisms of OACPS countries include a wide array of stakeholder groups such as civil society organisations, trade unions, religious and youth organisations, private sector (e.g. Comoros, DRC...), development partners (e.g. Benin, Comoros, Gambia, Liberia...), women representatives (e.g. Burundi, Trinidad and Tobago), youth (e.g. Kenya...), media (e.g.

Malawi), academia (e.g. Seychelles, Samoa), representatives from other government ministries and departments. Inclusion of stakeholder groups improves awareness raising of SDGs across a wide array of the community, can improve participation, the sharing of experience and monitoring, thus contribute to the successful implementation on the ground.



⁵ <https://www.bccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SDG-Best-Practices-for-Institutional-Structures-Policy-Brief-BCCIC.pdf>
⁶ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2478Institutional_Coordination_Mechanisms_GuidanceNote.pdf

IV. Links between SDGs, DRR/DRM, NDCs and NAPs

This section assesses to what extent the issues under SDGs: 11, 13, 14, 15, 17 were addressed in the 2020 VNRs and how these are linked to Disaster Risk Management/Reduction (DRM/DRR); Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).

Results

14 of the 20 OAPCS countries mentioned all SDGs, including the ones under investigation, while five mentioned only some SDGs and no information was given by one country. Please see Table 3 for more details.

The distinct actions given under the respective SDGs, show how the country has implemented these SDGs. A few examples are given below:

BENIN

Benin adopted a Climate Change Law (no date given), National climate Law and local climate plan.

BURUNDI

Under SDG 11: National Development Strategy on renewables; SDG 13: National Strategy and Action Plan on Climate Change (2013); SDG 15: adapted the national strategy and action plan to fight against soil degradation (2011–2016).

COMOROS

Government is planning to extend surface of protected areas to 25%; increase renewable energy from 0.6 to 40% by 2030; strengthen disaster resilience and adapt agriculture; restore wetlands.

GAMBIA

Strengthened the early warning system in terms of DRR; development of Gambia National Park Risk Profile to increase resilience.

KENYA

SDG 11: housing subsector prioritised, to create 500 000 new units within five years, adopted robust early-warning system; SDG 13: President approved National Climate Change Action Plan 2018–2022; SDG 14: deepened Blue Economy Strategy and collaborated with other stakeholders to promote adaptation and mitigation measures on fisheries and aquaculture; SDG 15: National Solid Waste Management Strategy 2015, implementation and enforcement of plastic bags ban initiative.

LIBERIA

SDG 13: National Climate Change Policy and Response Strategy (2018); SDG 14: will address unregulated fishing through multi-year plan for monitoring and surveillance systems; SDG 15: National Forestry Reform Law in 2006 and Community Rights Law 2009 in force; SDG 17: domestic resource mobilisation to increase tax revenue and minimize tax fraud.

MALAWI

National Climate Change Policy 2018 and National Resilience Strategy running up to 2030.

NIGER

SDG 17: National Forestry Plan 2011–2021; Investment Plan for the Sahel region (PIC-RS 2020–2025).

NIGERIA

SDG 17: Integrated Sustainable Development Goals model – a tool to support national development strategies and programmes on SDGs.

SEYCHELLES

World's First Sovereign Blue Bond launched in 2018 – to mobilize resources for local communities, businesses in sustainable fisheries; launched coastal management plan (Marine Spatial Plan).

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

2019 Draft Energy Conservation and Energy Efficiency Policy and Action Plan; review and update of National Climate Change Policy underway.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

SDG 14: developing Integrated Ocean Management System and National Oceans Office through National Oceans Policy; SDG 11: enactment of land laws, customary land for about 87% of country now available for housing and urban development; SDG 13: formulation and review of Climate Change Management Act.

SAMOA

Within its NDC, IMPRESS project aims to improve the performance and reliability of renewable energy power systems in Samoa from 2017–2022; has a National Climate Change Policy and Climate Change Bill; SDG 11: implementation of City Development Strategy.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

National Climate Change Policy (2012) – started National Adaptation Plan Process for medium to long term priorities to adapt to climate change.

There are generally common objectives in actions on climate change adaptation, and those to reduce disaster risks. However, if the potential for synergies is missed, it increases chances of duplicating efforts by the wide range of institutions and actors involved. Thus there are benefits to improve coherence between climate change actions, adaptation and disaster risk reduction. In the current study, 10 out of the 20 OACPS VNRs made explicit definitions of their actions to address DRR/DRM in their respective countries; while 14 and six countries out of the total explicitly mentioned the significant climate change actions in their NDCs and NAPs, respectively. Table 4 gives more details of OACPS countries' actions on climate change adaptation and mitigation as described in their VNRs, and linked to their NDCs.

According to the OECD (2020) :

"The adoption in 2015 of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda provides a clear mandate for increased coherence in countries' approaches to climate and disaster risk reduction."

As seen from this study, OACPS countries are recognizing the need for policy coherence. The robust national and sub-national coordination systems/institutional structures and SDG guiding policies are cornerstones which can further be exploited to support a stronger coherence between SDGs, Climate Change and DRR/DRM actions. The mere "integration" of these actions in the VNRs is already a step in this direction, however, further dialogue and refinement of the process would be required at the national and sub-national level to streamline the processes, institutions and coordination mechanisms, building on synergies existing between the different policies, while preventing the duplication of efforts. The role of development co-operation could also be explored in this regard; such actions could be integrated or streamlined with those under SDG 17.



V. Common challenges to the successful implementation of SDGs in OACPS countries

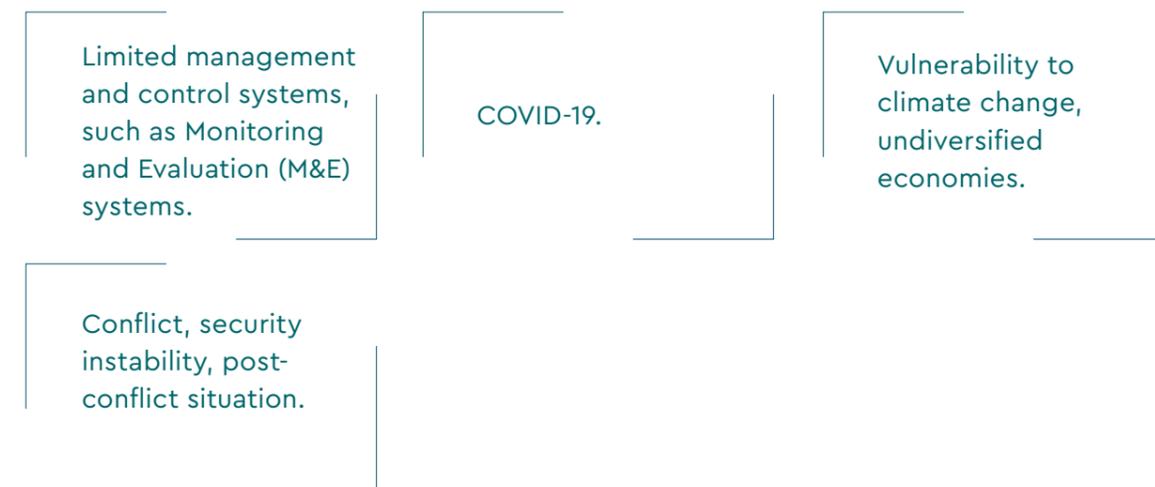
OACPS countries have identified a number of challenges in their 2020 VNRs that constrain the implementation of SDGs in their countries. These have been grouped together as common challenges and are

presented below.

As can be seen below, the top three challenges (in terms of frequency of reporting) are:



Other challenge include:



These challenges have direct implications for the identification and establishment of indicators, reporting and monitoring of implementation progress. As seen in the previous section, OACPS countries have reported on efforts to improve,

develop and/or strengthen their data and statistical services, while some are working to mobilize resources for SDGs implementation. The impacts of these actions will be notable in the coming years.

⁷ <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/public-environment-climate/documents/oecd-common-ground-between-paris-agreement-and-sendai-framework-climate-change-adaptation>

⁸ <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/public-environment-climate/documents/oecd-common-ground-between-paris-agreement-and-sendai-framework-climate-change-adaptation>

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study assessed the 20 Voluntary National Reviews submitted by OACPS countries to the HLF in July 2020. The findings point a mixed picture of actions, processes and coordination mechanisms in place, as well as a number of substantial challenges that can hinder the successful implementation of SDGs in OACPS countries.

On a positive note, there are clear signals that much work is being undertaken by these countries with respect to implementing the SDGs. Second, there is evidence of political will to steer the process of SDGs implementation and integration into different policies, sectors and different levels of government at the national and sub-national levels. Third, an implicit integration of SDGs into other related policies such as climate change mitigation, adaptation and building resilience to disaster risks, was observed by the findings of this study. This is particularly clear in the information given under NDCs – as these are efforts countries have undertaken or plan to undertake in the coming years, that are already embedded in their SDGs, as seen in the VNRs.

Conversely, significant challenges still exist that hinder the effective implementation

of SDGs in OACPS countries. These challenges are not unique to SDGs alone, but are also relevant to the general implementation of other policies such as climate change, biodiversity and DRM/DRR. Furthermore, they are to a large extent influenced by several factors, not least the countries' socioeconomic, geographic and geopolitical situation, among others. For example, of the 20 VNRs assessments, 40% (eight) were from OACPS Small Island Developing States (SIDS): Comoros, Seychelles, Barbados, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Solomon Islands. All OACPS countries are part of countries most vulnerable to climate change and many, even non-SIDS countries have been impacted in recent times, for example Mozambique (cyclone), Malawi (cyclone), Kenya (locusts, drought), Niger (floods).

In view of these findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

AT THE NATIONAL AND SUB-NATIONAL LEVELS

- i. **improved coordination between the different institutional structures and processes dealing with SDGs, climate change action/NDCs, DRM/DRR through:**
 - Structured dialogue;
 - Streamlining the processes and actions by capitalising on existing synergies and reduce duplication of efforts where they are likely to occur.
- ii. **Build on existing structures or new ones,** prioritise a multi-stakeholder approach to data identification, collection and sharing across the different levels of government.
- iii. **Ensure that COVID-19 measures and interventions** are built within the principles and policies engraved in the countries' SDGs such that they do not interfere or hinder such actions.
- iv. **Strengthen capacity** to identify, collect and share data and statistical information with the various stakeholders and sectors.

AT THE INTRA-ACP LEVEL, THE SECRETARIAT OF THE OACPS COUNTRIES TO:

- v. **Promote and facilitate the exchange and sharing of information,** expertise and experiences among OACPS countries on SDGs, climate change, DRM/DRR and related interventions – through dialogue, events, communication and knowledge sharing initiatives.
- vi. **Support and foster best practices in M&E and MRV in OACPS countries and regions.**
- vii. **Others?**

Links to more resources

The RIO Conventions: <https://www.cbd.int/rio/>

The SDGs: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Special edition: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals Report of the Secretary-General:

<https://undocs.org/en/E/2019/68>

The Heat is On Report 2019:

<https://outlook.ndcs.undp.org/>

June Momentum for change:

<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/june-momentum-for-climate-change>

Paris Agreement:

<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs>

NDC Registry:

<https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/Pages/LatestSubmissions.aspx>

Side events at HLPF 2020:

https://enb.iisd.org/hlpf/2020/side-events/10jul.html?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ENB%20Update%20%2010%20July%202020%20SW&utm_content=ENB%20Update%20%2010%20July%202020%20SW+CID_7b8c58d695cd6e22f4f6077cfc40c6b2&utm_source=cm&utm_term=Read#event2

Summary of statements at side events:

https://enb.iisd.org/hlpf/2020/side-events/10jul.html?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ENB%20Update%20%2013%20July%202020%20SW&utm_content=ENB%20Update%20%2013%20July%202020%20SW+CID_924d355ab1bc50a15db8a3f4901271e6&utm_source=cm&utm_term=Read#event1

Towards Localization of the SDGs:

https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/report_localization_hlpf_2020.pdf

ENB: <https://enb.iisd.org/vol33/enb3365e.html>

Voluntary National Reviews: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020#vnrs>

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