

PART A VULNERABILITY REDUCTION AND RESILIENCE BUILDING IN SIDS

1. Enhanced Support for a resilient Post COVID 19 Recovery in SIDS

Vulnerability reduction and resilience building are critical issues that must be addressed by SIDS. Briefly elaborate on any resilience building interventions or strategies (proactive or preventative) that have been or are being implemented at national or regional levels that aim specifically at improving resilience in SIDS. Please include financial resources expended in this regard, if available (750 words).

UNICEF is accelerating support towards mitigation and adaptation measures that ensure that infrastructure, social services, communities and individuals are climate-responsive and resilient to crises, such as pandemics and natural disasters. With climate and economic resilience heavily entwined in SIDS, UNICEF, for example in the Pacific Island Countries (with a 5-year budget of US\$ 63 million), is supporting the development of climate-resilient, affordable, and safe water and sanitation service delivery models. These models, particularly for small and remote communities and informal urban settlements, are used to formulate investment cases for leveraging resources.

In Cabo Verde, where the tourism sector contributes to 25% of the country's GDP, COVID-19 had an outsized impact on the country, leading to a nearly 16% reduction in the country's total GDP. The Joint Office (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF) played an important role in reducing acute vulnerabilities and strengthening resilience, for instance in supporting and updating the Single Social Registry (CSU) and distributing urgent cash support to 30,000 vulnerable families.

In the Maldives, another country heavily reliant on tourism, UNICEF supported income and business support programmes, and a successful nationwide information and vaccination campaign which was essential to rebooting the economy in the context of COVID-19 recovery. As resilience of the economy and society depend heavily on natural resources, the Government of the Maldives is increasing investments in renewable energy and has set an ambitious commitment to achieve NetZero by 2030.

Climate resilience is a priority for all SIDS. In UNICEF's Eastern Caribbean Area Office, UNICEF is collaborating with Governments in Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Antigua and Barbuda on the Children's Climate Risk Index-Disaster Risk Model (CCRI-DRM) risk assessment. The objective is to ensure that national development and humanitarian planning processes are built on a multi-hazard assessment of risk, leading to improved resource allocation and resilient interventions.

In Papua New Guinea, UNICEF is also building shock-responsive, resilient systems and communities by applying multi-hazard risk analysis and linking development, humanitarian, and peace-building programme interventions. With financial resources at US\$ 69 million over 5 years, UNICEF is prioritizing strengthening systems and institutions, particularly at sub-national levels, to operationalize proven, sustainable, scalable models.

With gaps in vaccine/immunization management systems revealed and intensified by COVID-19, expansion of digital solutions and immunization management systems have been a focus of UNICEF in many countries. In Jamaica, UNICEF contributed to the modernization of the cold chain system through procurement and distribution of state-of-the-art cold chain equipment (valued at US\$ 800,000) to 140 public health centers across the country. In collaboration with UNICEF Supply Division, there is also the impending establishment of Oxygen Plant-in-a-Box at two major hospitals in Jamaica. In Antigua and Barbuda and Trinidad and Tobago, the HOPE Management Information System (MIS) was rolled out (covering all aspects of cash programme implementation, registration, targeting, payments, etc.), and in Sao Tome and Principe, vaccine management was improved and digital tools for hygiene, sanitation and water supply assessments introduced.

UNICEF worked with ILO, UNESCO and WFP under the Sustainable Development Fund to implement the ‘Resilient Caribbean: Engaging and Training, Strengthening Integrated Social Protection Services’ project. This project supported social assistance reform in the British Virgin Islands, including a transition towards a digital system for operationalization and data management, as well as the development of pragmatic and user-friendly tools to support the implementation of social assistance programmes, such as making social protection systems more shock- and gender-responsive.

Across sectors, evidence-based planning was highlighted by country offices as essential to vulnerability reduction and resilience building post-COVID. In Sao Tome and Principe, UNICEF is strengthening the country’s health system capacity through bottleneck analysis training, and has supported the capacity of the National Institute for Statistics to disseminate analyses on deprivations. In Comoros, proof-of-concept initiatives for social protection schemes are being pursued, with one focused on social reintegration of victims of violence, and another targeted at families with malnourished children.

With COVID-19 severely impacting learning and education, in Cabo Verde UNICEF pioneered digital learning in elementary schools. This included a pilot in digital language learning. In Sao Tome and Principe, UNICEF also leveraged the Parental Education Program to improve demand for social services, supported equitable access to education, and strengthened the child protection system to improve coordination and implementation of multi-sectoral responses to violence against children and gender-based violence. In Sao Tome and Principe, UNICEF spent US\$ 2,813,719 in 2022.

2. Enhanced and Tailored Development Cooperation for SIDS

Improved, tailored development co-operation approaches, calibrated to the specific needs, capacity constraints, and economic challenges facing SIDS are necessary if SIDS are to effectively recover from the COVID Pandemic. Briefly elaborate on any planned or ongoing strategies/approaches to improve and deliver on more tailored development support to SIDS. What are the expected results from these interventions in the targeted countries. Please include indications of resource allocations if available (850 words)

COVID-19 revealed pervasive gaps in connectivity, both with regard to digital connectivity, as well as poor connection between islands, which remains one of the great challenges still holding back SIDS, such as Cabo Verde's, development. This challenge is similarly faced in the Maldives, where the Integrated National Public Ferry Network project has been initiated to improve access to services, including health care services, and reduce inequalities for people residing in the atolls.

Expansion of digital connectivity in SIDS for online education, telemedicine, e-payment systems, etc., can improve access and opportunities and enable SDG acceleration, especially in the context of COVID-19 recovery. For example, in Sao Tome and Principe, with resources planned for 2023 programming at US\$ 3,143,609, UNICEF is modelling innovative interventions, such as digital learning for improved learning outcomes or digital monitoring of the functionality of water points to increase community and system resilience.

Across SIDS, UNICEF programming also supports national commitments to transform education and targets for education recovery (in the Caribbean, a contribution of US\$ 4,602,630 was dedicated to Outcome 4 on Education). Schools are also being targeted as platforms for the delivery of coordinated interventions in WASH, climate change, health and nutrition, violence prevention, reporting, etc. In the Pacific Island Countries, for example, UNICEF is ensuring that schools and health-care facilities have adequate and quality WASH services and that children and their families have knowledge, skills and resources to practice safe WASH.

With COVID-19 exacerbating the learning crisis, in countries such as Papua New Guinea, UNICEF is focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy, and transferable, green and digital skills, so that girls and boys become more agile, adaptive learners. In the Pacific Island Countries, UNICEF is prioritizing holistic learning, ensuring children develop with Pacific cultures and values embedded in learning, while promoting a rights-based environment.

UNICEF is also drawing on the potential of adolescents and youth for a richer analysis of the evolving context and needs. Adolescents and youth offer innovative and/or community-led solutions, and in Comoros this is harnessed through mechanisms such as ‘young reporters’ and ‘adolescent clubs’. In the context of climate smart systems and services, in Papua New Guinea UNICEF is ensuring local people and groups are involved in disaster risk training and will support the development of a framework to empower children to advance climate and environmental justice. Similarly, in Sao Tome and Principe it is UNICEF’s priority to engage with and equip adolescents, including those that are out-of-school, with skills to act as agents of positive change and increase their participation in decision-making.

Rooting programming and interventions in evidence-based planning was also emphasized by UNICEF in Sao Tome and Principe, the Pacific Island Countries, and Jamaica, where it is used to identify and address equity gaps in services for children. Evidence generation through Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), for example in Turks and Caicos and Trinidad and Tobago, have also been reported as an effective means for UNICEF to obtain an in-depth understanding of vulnerabilities.

UNICEF has also tailored its programmes to national requests and priorities concerning vulnerable children, including new draft child protection and child justice laws in Barbados; 17 new or

amended draft laws to combat gender-based violence (GBV) and a draft Victims' Rights Policy in Grenada; and immediate review of longstanding bottlenecks in the child protection and child justice systems in Saint Kitts and Nevis. The Family Court Division was also opened in Antigua and Barbuda, after longstanding developmental support from UNICEF.

In Cabo Verde, the Joint Office's interventions strengthened health structures in all municipalities, leading to more inclusive and cost-effective policies and expansion of access to sexual and reproductive health services, including gender-based violence prevention and care. Cabo Verde carried out a major reform on sexual abuse of children that culminated in the revision of the Penal Code and the Code of Penal Procedure.

Finally, knowledge sharing across the network of UNICEF programmes is particularly beneficial in the SIDS' context. Where appropriate, as mentioned by UNICEF's country office in Comoros, developing multi-country initiatives for emulation and knowledge transfer can be particularly beneficial and impactful. UNICEF also works closely with sub-regional entities. In the LAC region, UNICEF works with CARICOM, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), and the Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), including to strengthen the emergency preparedness and response to the needs of affected children and families, with focus on the social sectors.

PART B

IDENTIFYING POLICY PRIORITIES IN SIDS FOR THE NEW AGENDA

The SAMOA Pathway contains numerous action areas which require policy formulation, programmes or projects to implemented at national, sub regional and/or regional levels. While SIDS have made a fair amount of progress with actioning these over the last decade, several gaps remain. As the international community prepares for the 4th International Conference on SIDS, what are the key priority policies, programmes and projects that are needed to further advance the SIDS development agenda and why? (750 words)

Economic recovery and international financing for sustainable growth

- In the wake of COVID-19, ensuring economic recovery, fiscal consolidation, and sustainable growth, as well as promoting urgently needed economic diversification is crucial in many SIDS. In a similar vein, situating sustainable growth in the environmental and climate challenges faced by SIDS is essential. This will require continued political commitment, long term planning, social dialogue, and partnerships to drive the Sustainable Development Agenda forward. However, access to international finance mechanisms and concessional financing terms remain major development challenges for many, including the Maldives. Urgent international finance is crucial to address climate adaptation, mitigation and to ensure sustainable development. This was emphasized by many country offices, including the multi-country office of the Eastern Caribbean Area.

Investing in and engaging with adolescents and youth

- Prioritize investment in adolescents and youth to support their transition to adulthood. This involves increasing resources for education, health, protection, and participation for adolescents. Technical and vocational education and training should be provided to enhance employability. UNICEF Guyana and Suriname emphasized enhancing human capital through climate resilient and inclusive education, with a focus on learning loss recovery and skill development. Investing in adolescents, including providing quality education and health services, can help to build their skills and capacity and support their transition to adulthood, leading to increased employment and economic growth. This was particularly emphasized by Sao Tome and Principe.
- Similarly, as emphasized by the Office of the Eastern Caribbean, encouraging meaningful engagement of children and young people in all national and sub-regional plans, policies, and actions, is crucial. Harnessing the transformational potential of digital technology can provide opportunities for young people to engage in such ways, as well as more broadly to engage in the global economy, as emphasized by UNICEF's Office in the Pacific.

Well budgeted and shock-responsive social protection and essential social services, with emphasis on gender equality and climate resilience

- Promote social development through human capital, inclusion and mobility, reduction of inequalities, eradication of extreme poverty, and gender equality. Strengthen gender and child-sensitive policies and budgets and improve capacity to design and implement evidence-based social behavior change, for example, for prevention of violence and early pregnancy, as well as increased access to existing support services. This will contribute to reducing poverty and inequality and promoting social justice and human rights.
- Universal health coverage and resilient health systems are crucial to avert the effects of climate change on health and livelihood, as emphasized by Belize. Similarly, strengthened and shock responsive social protection systems are needed, ensuring that the most vulnerable children and their families, including those with disabilities, have access to pathways to address their vulnerabilities (Jamaica), and focus on mental health impacts of climate change and disasters (Eastern Caribbean office).

Broader cross-sectoral analyses and harnessing ICTs

- Broader, cross-sectoral cost analyses should be carried out to help SIDS reflect on their current public policies and on reforms that may be necessary to achieve the SAMOA Pathway. Investment cases and analyses are often sectoral in nature and may at times fail to present the true cost of, and opportunities in, policy options. In this regard, closing data gaps, especially as they pertain to progress on the SDGs, is required. As emphasized by UNICEF Comoros, a greater focus is needed on the use of ICTs for information management and sharing, as well as understanding how technologies, including AI, may be harnessed to respond to specific vulnerabilities of SIDS. Specifically, innovating to enhance programme effectiveness, including more access by girls and rural children to digital technology to reduce the digital divide; strengthening institutional capacities to deliver quality, inclusive, sustainable services; and closing the gap between SIDS and

other nations, could be accelerated through technology.