

Mauritius and Seychelles - Neighbours Leading the Way in the Indian Ocean

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press release

Apia — ECA is providing a platform to African SIDS to discuss the unique opportunities they have at the 3rd International Conference on African Small Island Developing States in Samoa 1st-4th of September. Mauritius and the Seychelles are two development success stories among the African SIDS.

Situated in the Indian Ocean, both countries are vulnerable to a range of climate change impacts, including sea level rise, flooding and drought. Flooding is of particular concern to both countries, but especially to Mauritius. In March of 2013 a flash flood in the capital of Port Louis claimed the lives of 11 people. As a result the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre was created to coordinate disaster response. In January of 2013 heavy rain and strong winds caused flooding on the islands of Mahe, Praslin and La Digue in the Seychelles, which caused landslides, destroyed homes and

affected thousands of people. The Seychelles has risk reduction policies and plans in place, including early warning systems for floods, cyclones and tsunamis. However, in light of the extent of the loss and damage from recent flooding there is recognition that these efforts need to be expanded.

One area in which Seychelles is leading the African SIDS, if not the world, is on the development of its blue economy. The Seychelles has an exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which at 1.3 million km² is over 1000 times the size of its land territory. With the help of The Nature Conservancy, the country has developed a plan to protect 30 percent of its EEZ while sustainably managing the remaining area. The Seychelles has also recently established a debt swap for adaptation program, which would see a proportion of debt forgiven to free up resources for managing the protected area. Mauritius is also making strides in protecting its own EEZ. It has established fishing reserves and two marine parks on the main island of Mauritius and four marine reserves, one marine park and three fisheries reserved areas on the island of Rodrigues.

A key issue for the SIDS is a lack of arable land. While 38.4 percent of Mauritius's territory is arable land, only 2.2 percent of the territory of the Seychelles is fit for agricultural production. As a consequence Mauritius imports 75 percent of its food supply while the Seychelles imports 70 percent of the food needed to meet the nutritional needs of its population. The Government of Mauritius has developed a strategy to increase the amount of food grown locally and encourage Mauritians to eat locally grown food. However, it is unlikely that the country will be able to grown enough food to meet the needs of its growing population entirely and therefore Mauritius is also in the process of negotiating with Mozambique and Madagascar to grow staples such as maize and rice in these countries, which have much more arable land. With much less arable land, the Seychelles will likely have to continue importing food. However, it is also planning to implement policies to increase the amount of food grown locally and allow the stockpiling of staple food products, such as rice, in order to cushion against price shocks on the global market.



Conference on Small Island States

At the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in Apia, Samoa, Mr. Carlos Lopes, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) chaired a side event themed, 'The Paradox of the 'small' securing development opportunities in the face of climate change in Africa Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

With a GDP per capita of 23,152 USD and 16,195 USD[1], respectively, the Seychelles and Mauritius are the most developed countries of the African SIDS. Both countries aim to continue to promote sustainable development while addressing the increasing frequency and severity of climate change impacts. However, there is a need to understand more about how climate change will impact key economic sectors and vulnerable populations in both countries and thus efforts to strengthen the collection, management and analysis of weather and climate data and information are on going.

The SIDS conference end today, Thursday 4th September in the beautiful island of Apia. The warmth of the people of Samoa will serve as a rich testament that developing SIDS in the face of climate change impacts and will enable leaders from SIDS to build lasting partnership in the interest of sustainable development. The theme of the conference: Global Choices - Island Voices would have served to send clear message that partnerships starts with amplifying the voices of the most vulnerable populations and ensuring that their stories and struggles towards sustainable development takes centre stage in the global agenda. Travelling such long distances for many of the Africa SIDS will provide strong indicators to government across the world that SIDS cannot be severed from the climate change debate and that their marines, oceans and people are all part of the nucleus of economic growth and prosperity.

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