UNESCO input for the 1st Preparatory Committee Meeting (24 - 26 February 2014)

Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States
‘Genuine and Durable partnerships for Small Island Developing States’

With reference to UNESCO’s mandate in education, natural sciences, social & human sciences, culture, and communication & information, this document examines key priorities identified by small island developing states (SIDS), identifies critical gaps and areas in need of strengthened political commitment, as well as possible ways in which these issues may be addressed.

ENHANCING ISLAND RESILIENCE THROUGH QUALITY EDUCATION, EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING

Education and training - the key modalities of capacity-building, should be placed high on the international community’s agenda in regard to SIDS. Special attention should be paid to quality learning and equity in education. Teacher education is critical in this regard. Non formal education for youth and adults remains important priority areas for many SIDS.

Managing complex, coevolving social-ecological systems for sustainability requires the ability to cope with, adapt to and shape change without losing options for future development. In this context, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is critical. We need to keep up the momentum for ESD beyond the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), especially in the light of the growing sustainability issues faced by the world and by SIDS. SIDS experiences and abilities to cope with change can make a valuable contribution to the global community in showing the way forward towards sustainability and demonstrating know-how in terms of sustainable management and promotion of natural and cultural diversity.

“Think global, act local” should be put into practice by translating SIDS visions and goals into focused priority areas and objectives for action at local, national and regional levels. New thinking and behaviour should be shaped through ESD, to ensure that island citizens and future leaders are able to understand and integrate this complexity and changes, and acquire the skills in a wide range of fields towards strong knowledge societies. Based on five types of learning (learning to know; to do; to live together; to be, and to transform oneself and society), ESD is a driving force of change and innovation in education, teaching and learning. It can play a key role in the reorientation of economies and societies towards sustainable development.
Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development (CCESD):

Mitigating and adapting to climate change, including disaster preparedness requires the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and behaviors. Indeed, in many regions, varying weather conditions and climate-related shocks are making it harder to deliver quality education in safe learning environments. UNESCO assists in strengthening national capacities to integrate climate-relevant components into national education plans, with appropriate policy advice regarding ESD.

In the context of climate change, education should help the next generation of SIDS young people understand what climate change is and how they can work to address its impact for the future of this earth. It encourages behavior that promotes a sustainable future, and support should be provided by the international community to educators to take local, contextualized action to mitigate and especially to adapt to climate change. It should be guided by four principles: contextual relevance, knowledge-based learning, action-oriented learning, curriculum linked.

So far, the dispersed attention paid to resilience proves insufficient within the context of SIDS. Interdisciplinary work could lead to identification of ways and means of encouraging adaptive approaches and flexible institutions that attempt to build social-ecological resilience in the face of complexity, uncertainty and surprise. Structured scenarios and active adaptive management are two promising tools for resilience-building in complex, unpredictable systems that might usefully be examined in a small island context. The need to account for resilience in this changing world is a perspective that might usefully be embedded in strategies, policies and practices for the sustainable development of SIDS.

Pre- and Post-Disaster Education

While education systems are greatly affected by disasters, they are also part of the solution. DRR education can prevent loss of lives and infrastructure. No hazard alone results in a disaster- it is the the combination of vulnerable and ill-prepared communities with a hazard event that results in a disaster.

DDR education has many functions. It can provide life-saving skills that protect people during and after disasters. Disaster prevention education can also support the mitigation and prevention of the human causes of disasters such as failed natural resources management and climate change, on a long-term basis.

Together with other partners, UNESCO promotes a comprehensive approach to DRR education based on education policy, plans and programmes that are aligned with disaster management at national, regional, district and local school site levels. The comprehensive schools safety rests on three pillars: 1. **Safe Educational Facilities:** including site selection, safe access (functionality), safe construction and retrofit (global structural and local structural), and non-structural safety; 2. **Disaster Management:** including education sector planning taking into account DRR standard; operating
procedures, ongoing school-based planning for risk reduction and educational continuity, drills etc. 3. **Disaster Prevention and Risk Reduction Education**: the integration of DRR into teaching and learning, including DRR in formal school curricula and non-formal education within the framework of Education for Sustainable Development.

Informal education in emergency situations is also particularly important for youth, who are especially vulnerable to the lure of gangs and crime in the unstable environment of a crisis. Though these youth can be a factor of social unrest, they are too often left out in emergency response that tends to focus on younger children and formal education for the primary levels.

**Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET)**

TVET is an essential element for the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to enter the job market, that requires vision and capacity to respond to the challenges of a global knowledge based economy. Some SIDS regions face a number of challenges in terms of TVET policy, governance and fragmentation of patterns and structure of TVET. In addition, significant populations are affected by disasters such as hurricanes and are in need of skills for reconstruction. The post-disaster rebuilding of countries or areas affected, including the immediate reconstruction as well as the mid and longer term economic recovery, requires skilled labor in many different professions. Likewise, there is a need to create opportunities for youth as well as rural populations access TVET - and to reform TVET content and curriculum to meet the labour market needs.

In this context, interventions for preparing quality skilled graduates for the needs of the SIDS labour market should primarily focus on TVET policy, capacity building, networking, awareness building, as well as needs assessment at national level, as well as pursue an integrated strategy to strengthen and enhance the quality of TVET programmes at the sub-regional level.

In addition, the "green economy" is one of the topics that was promoted during the Rio+20 summit, and an important issue in the SIDS context. As a consequence, the provision of skills for the emerging green economy is a new challenge for TVET, especially in the Caribbean. Orienting TVET towards green jobs is thus a necessity.

**Harnessing the Potential of Ocean Sciences and Technologies for Healthy Oceans**

The vast ocean spaces governed by SIDS, whilst rich in potential, also often threaten the very survival of the communities that depend on them. SIDS can gain significantly in terms of wealth and poverty alleviation from ocean sustainability by protecting the marine biodiversity, securing equitable access to ocean resources while wisely managing their utilization, and reducing marine pollution. To reach this goal, the Samoa Conference needs to recognize that building the capacity of nations to sustainably and equitably manage the ocean and coasts under national jurisdiction is key, including
capacity in marine natural and social sciences, including research, and marine management, as well as through technology transfer and the use of traditional and non-traditional tools and approaches.

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO is coordinating international support and providing scientific expertise in order to assist SIDS in meeting these challenges. As an example, the Rio+20 outcome document recognised the importance of promoting the application of IOC Guidelines on the transfer of marine technology. Last year, the IOC had the opportunity to organise an Expert technical meeting with the UN Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, and SIDS on the topic of Marine Science Capacity and Technology transfer to Small Island Developing States.

As part of this effort to strengthen SIDS capacities, the international community needs to promote the participation of SIDS in the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) to ensure that these nations have access to data and information for supporting climate change adaptation and local decision measures. Being at the forefront of ocean change, SIDS also need to build capacities for dealing with threats such as ocean acidification. As an example, IOC through the Pacific Islands Global Ocean Observing System, PI-GOOS is helping nations to develop an observation network for ocean acidification, building expertise at the regional level. Coral reefs and pelagic fisheries are vital for the economies and environments of tropical small island states. The IOC can also assist SIDS in identifying the most vulnerable species and habitats in need of protection through the collection of marine biodiversity data, building on global databases such as the IOC’s Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS).

Whilst the concept of Blue economy has been put forward in the context of SIDS as an opportunity to strengthen national economies, blue growth can only be sustainable if the appropriate management frameworks are in place. This requires a shift from the usual sectoral management to integrated ecosystem based management. The use of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) has become the preferred approach of many coastal countries to manage increasing conflicts among the multiple uses of their exclusive economic zones, whilst preserving marine ecosystem functions. For SIDS that are the first impacted by climate change and coastal hazards, increasing community resilience to sea-level related hazards is a vital question. Nations need to promote the conduct of coastal risk assessments in a multi-hazard framework, but also acquire access and capacities in ocean modeling in order to support hazard assessment for tsunami and storm surges, which are essential for implementing efficient disaster preparedness programmes.

Underwater cultural heritage also has great importance and potential for SIDS. The strong cultural connection to the sea is a shared specificity due to their vast Territorial Waters and Exclusive Economic Zones, covering immense expanses of the world’s oceans. Much of the history and heritage of these regions are preserved underwater. Sunken cities, shipwrecks, prehistoric sites represent an untapped potential for research, education and
development, including opportunities for dive and snorkel tourism. However, these significant sites are seriously threatened by treasure-hunting and industrial operations. In addition, some of the sites in the Pacific region are exposed to risks of unexploded World War ordnance and fuel loads which threaten their fragile environments. The management of underwater cultural heritage needs to be strengthened. This issue was recognized in the UN resolution A/RES/66/231 and inscribed in the UNESCO 2001 Convention. Accordingly, underwater cultural heritage will be a priority issue for the Third International Conference for SIDS.

PREVENTING BIODIVERSITY LOSS AND ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

SIDS contains a wealth of biological diversity of global value. Fisheries and aquaculture supply 4.3 billion people with more than 15 percent of their annual consumption of animal protein. Expanding knowledge on marine biodiversity has provided breakthrough advances in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, food production, and aquaculture. Clearly, the conservation and equitable use of biodiversity is essential for the sustainable development of SIDS. At the same time, their small size and isolation increases their vulnerability. Although progress has been made in this area, SIDS continue to experience loss of biodiversity due to; invasive and alien species, deforestation, overexploitation, pollution, natural disasters, coral reef deterioration and habitat degradation and loss.

Investing in natural capital and maintaining biodiversity results in a return on investment. Therefore, the sustainable integration of biodiversity and ecosystem services into the economy through activities such as eco-tourism and using net-positive forms of renewable energy presents opportunities for SIDS to engage in public-private partnerships that are mutually beneficial. Additionally, decision makers have to play a lead role in designing policy and institutional frameworks that adequately acknowledges the gains from biodiversity and ecosystem services, and includes these measures in national sustainable development processes. Other priority areas for SIDS include developing education curricula at all levels, on biodiversity conservation, its sustainable use and its role in building the resilience of fragile ecosystems to withstand the impacts of climate change.

One effective mechanism for the sustainable management of cultural and biological diversity is through UNESCO’s networks of sites. Biosphere Reserves, designated under UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and World Heritage sites reinforce local capacities and promote awareness in SIDS about cultural and biological diversity by conducting inventories of terrestrial and marine biodiversity, which include information on physical, environmental and human threats. These initiatives also build the resilience of Islands to mitigate/adapt to climate change impacts. It is crucial that the SIDS of the Caribbean, Pacific and AIMS become more aware of how to value and make maximum use of these sites as effective tools for sustainable development.
ENSURING SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF FRESHWATER RESOURCES

Small islands face numerous challenges with respect to freshwater resources. The relative fragility of the hydrological cycles on SIDS means that the evaluation, planning and development of freshwater resources has to be approached with special care to work within these hydro-environmental limits. Groundwater occurrences are highly dependent on regular recharge events. The geophysical settings of many SIDS leave them vulnerable not only to extreme climatological and seismic events but more critically to periods of low recharge and adverse environmental impacts, including pollution, saline intrusion, soil erosion and mass wasting. The prevention of saline intrusion is a case in point: small changes in freshwater table elevations from excessive extraction can lead to large-scale intrusion of saline water into coastal aquifers and freshwater lenses, effectively removing large sections from the available water resource base.

UNESCO International Hydrological Programme (IHP) within the framework of the GEF-funded project on “Groundwater Systems in SIDS” is currently undertaking a groundwater assessment based on hydrogeological, biophysical, socio-economic and institutional indicators in 43 SIDS. Together with Simon Fraser University, the Organization is preparing a report on the interlinkages between aquifers and the ocean to assess the potential for saltwater intrusion. The outcome will allow identification of the most vulnerable systems and provide data for developing sustainable management strategies.

The economy and society of some SIDS are often threatened by flooding and other natural disasters. Effective regional Flood Forecasting and Warning Systems is one way of disseminating best practises and facilitating information sharing to overcome the disastrous effects of floods and improve resilience. Such systems are often more effective when complimented by public campaign and educational programmes that mobilize all members of society especially youth. These challenges also require significant international cooperation, built on a strengthened science-policy interface and the development of institutional and human capacities involved in water conservation.

PRESERVING TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND PROMOTING CULTURE FOR DEVELOPMENT

As a leading advocate of the crucial role of culture for development, UNESCO is convinced that culture yields not only economic benefits but contributes to the overall wellbeing of communities and individuals by reinforcing a sense of dignity and fostering social cohesion and equality. To leverage the benefits of culture, UNESCO supports SIDS in designing and implementing innovative cultural policies to strengthen heritage and creativity. This involves protecting and safeguarding tangible and intangible heritage, promoting responsible
tourism, boosting creative industries, and transmitting traditional knowledge through cultural institutions such as museums, archives and cultural centres, with a special focus on indigenous and local communities and youth.

The Barbados Programme of Action (Paragraph 46) notes that measures to protect and preserve the natural, tangible and intangible cultural heritage practices and traditional knowledge of SIDS are inadequate. Additionally, indigenous bio-cultural heritage recognizes the deep connections among people, culture, knowledge and the natural environment, and can meaningfully advance inclusive social and economic development. Traditional knowledge is a major contributor to the economic activities of SIDS, and there is a need to explore other factors that complement traditional economies in order to improve and create new market opportunities. SIDS must make efforts to institutionalize mechanisms that facilitate a concrete connection between culture and development to ensure that development practices are culturally relevant, human-centred and incorporate heritage and cultural industries. These efforts can include supporting evidence-based research that informs policy making on issues concerning culture, and making strategic linkages between cultural policies and complementary policies on trade, industry practices and human rights while establishing systems of incentives that recognizes the rights of creators.

The creative sector adds value to economic activities by triggering innovation. According to UNCTAD, over the past 10 years, global trade in cultural goods and services has doubled to over $620 million in 2011. Much of this growth is taking place in the Global South. In fact developing countries have increased their exports of creative goods by 12.1% annually. This indicates the potential of developing countries to capitalize on the opportunities of this growing market. There is need for increased resources and enhanced partnership for the development and strengthening of national and regional cultural activities and industries by and for SIDS in the areas of cultural and creative industries. It is also important to foster the international mobility of local artists, creators and cultural professionals and to facilitate access to global markets for cultural goods and services from SIDS. More emphasis is needed on building the capacities of the SIDS to develop a dynamic culture sector which supports sustainable development through the emergence of cultural and creative industries and markets. UNESCO is supporting the development of policy frameworks and technical and infrastructural capacities to support small and medium-sized cultural enterprises and creators.

Finally, greater emphasis will have to be paid to cultural contexts of development policies and programmes especially in the areas of education and health in SIDS to enable a more effective, inclusive and human-centred approach to development.

The UNESCO-UNDP Creative Economy Report 2013, Special Edition, “Widening Local Development Pathways” focuses on cultural and creative industries at the local level in developing countries. The report highlights how the formal and informal dimensions of cultural industries give them the flexibility to grow creatively. Where the creative sector is highly dependent on tourism for many of the SIDS, the Report explores “creative tourism”, which
encompasses local cultural industries such as music, performance, and art. It notes that the island economies tend to have large trade imbalances in creative goods, services and intellectual property. The marketing and audience-development challenge is to shift away from “commodity tourism” that involves high levels of external control towards a branded tourism product that draws on local capabilities, resources and identities.

INCREASING CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESS TO ICTs

Greater access to communication and information technologies (ICTs) and increased connectivity have been identified by SIDS as one of their priorities for future sustainability. Indeed, ICTs platforms enable higher education opportunities for students and teachers, especially for those living in remote parts of the world, like SIDS. They also provide access to scientific knowledge, including on issues such as climate change, which is a major challenge for the SIDS.

In this context, UNESCO is supporting SIDS in developing their media landscapes, particularly through the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC).

ENGAGING YOUTH

As with many developing regions of the world, the SIDS have a very young population, with most countries having more than 60% of the population under 25 years of age. Young people are both affected and often marginalised by unsustainable practices, but at the same time they are key actors for addressing such issues, bringing energy, innovation and voluntary effort to many sustainable development activities.

Key technical areas for addressing the needs of young people include education, sustainable livelihoods, healthy lifestyles, and stronger communities. Lack of sustainable livelihoods, opportunities for further education and breaking down of community support structures are often leading to an increasing number of young men and young women involved in violence and crime. Therefore focusing on education and support structure for young people are critical to the provision of productive and healthy lives for the SIDS young people. Youth (including marginal or vulnerable groups), like other key actors and constituencies, need to be mobilized in programmes and actions that are culturally sensitive and scientifically sound, that take advantage of the opportunities opened by modern ICTs, and that promote the exchange of information and experience within and between regions and between islands of different affiliations. Youth should be empowered through designing and implementing their own ideas for a sustainable future. Opportunities for youth livelihoods, especially in areas vulnerable to sea level rise and other impacts of climate change, as well as on creative and cultural industries, should be explored as they can address key issues for young
people and also address sustainable development needs at the same time. Effective examples can then be replicated in other SIDS countries.

“My World My SIDS” is a multi-agency collaborative mobilizing effort, led by UNESCO, which gives a chance to young people in SIDS to participate in the preparation process for the Third World Conference on SIDS and its preparatory process. Through a series of regional and inter-regional conferences in Jamaica, Fiji, Seychelles, and Barbados, young people were able to discuss the challenges for SIDS from a youth perspective and provide inputs for the inter-governmental process and proposals for the post 2015 development agenda. The project aims to increase collaboration between SIDS young women and men to foster youth action for sustainable futures in SIDS countries by (i) promoting youth empowerment, advocacy and networking in SIDS; (ii) strengthening capacity of youth in SIDS in order to increase the level of their participation in (a) developing national youth policies; (b) contributing to national, regional and global fora, (c) mobilizing for international sustainable development fora (e.g. BPOA +20); (d) fostering the establishment and strengthening of local and regional youth networks; and (e) promoting existing youth programs addressing sustainable development agenda in SIDS.