The modalities resolution for the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, and its global preparatory process, was adopted on 11 December by the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly. The Conference theme, “the sustainable development of SIDS through genuine and durable partnerships,” has also been decided upon.

The preparatory meetings will take place on 24-26 February and the final one in 23-27 June, both in New York. Informal negotiations will be held as needed in between the two prepcoms. The 10-member Bureau is to be elected at the first prepcom. The co-chairs have been requested to circulate a draft outcome document by 14 March 2014. The Barbados inter-regional meeting outcome will serve as a basis, while inputs will be invited on the theme and objectives of the Conference from all participants of the prepcom.

The Conference itself will feature an innovative series of “multi-stakeholder partnership dialogues,” running in parallel to the plenary session. The partnership dialogues will provide the opportunity to recognize current successful partnerships and initiatives, launch new partnerships and initiatives involving a wide range of stakeholders, and hold interactive discussions on key priorities related to SIDS. Updates on the conference preparation will continue to be posted at www.SIDS2014.org

Plans proceed for the International Year of SIDS 2014

The year 2014 has been designated by the General Assembly in 2012 as the “International Year of Small Island Developing States”. The International Year of SIDS will be aimed at: a) Building momentum towards the SIDS; b) Mobilizing international interest and support for sustainable development in SIDS countries; c) Highlighting the achievement and resilience of SIDS in overcoming their unique development challenges; d) Celebrating the rich cultural heritage of SIDS and the contributions the SIDS collectively can bring to the global community.

A brainstorming Expert Group Meeting (EGM) was held on December 5-6 to discuss the strategy, key messages and planning for the Year, as well as learning from experts on cultural aspects of SIDS to be highlighted and experiences from the implementation of other international years, shared by FAO, UNFF and UNESCO. At the opening, Nikhil Seth, Director of the Division of Sustainable Development, DESA, encouraged participants to engage wholeheartedly in the planning of the international year. Moderator of the first session, Ambassador Ronald Jumeau, Seychelles, echoed this call by stressing the significance and importance of the year, being the first year ever dedicated to SIDS, the pressure is on to showcase SIDS – “ownership of the year belongs to the islands”.

An inter-agency planning committee has been set up to start planning for the International Year consisting of DESA/SIDS Unit, DPI, UNESCO, OHRLIS, UNDP, UNEP and GLISPA). The planning committee will consult with wider SIDS community through IACG and AOSIS.
Immediate follow-up actions from the EGM are being implemented, which include: a) Planning for a half-day global launching event in New York, tentatively on 24 February; b) Development of a dedicated website for the International Year with a strong linkage to the SIDS Conference website; c) communication to be sent out to all member States and UN system inviting each and all to join in raising the profile of SIDS – highlighting the challenges they face and their resilience – while celebrating their achievements and rich cultural heritage.

UN Member States Rally Support for SIDS Going Forward into the Post-2015 Era

The 6th session of the open working group on the Sustainable Development Goals held discussions on the “Needs of countries in special situations, African countries, LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, as well as specific challenges facing the middle income countries”, on December 11-12. It was highlighted that countries within these groupings are lagging behind in the achievement of the MDGs, and that special attention should be given to them in the spirit of ‘leave no one behind’. Keeping this in mind, it was stressed that the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda need to take into account the particular situations and needs of countries in special situations. In their interventions, several non-SIDS UN member States stressed the need to pay attention to SIDS issues, recognizing the challenges faced – namely climate change and rising sea levels - and pledged their continued support towards the development of SIDS.

Member States also welcomed the convening of the Third International Conference of Small Island development States in Samoa 2014, anticipating an action oriented outcome and strengthen partnerships with SIDS.

Tonga and Mauritius to be among the first to pilot test the Vulnerability Resilience Profile (VRP)

UNDESA’s DSD - SIDS Unit with EU finances for a project to support some of the SIDS in monitoring and evaluation of the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation has embarked on training workshops in the Pacific and AIMS/Indian Ocean SIDS regions. These training workshops have been conducted for Tonga and Mauritius whom are two of the pilot countries under the project. The training workshops focused on the Vulnerability Resilience Profile (VRP), which is an analytical framework or tool aimed at supporting the monitoring and evaluation of the nineteen critical areas for sustainable development of SIDS.

The first workshop was held on 13th-15th November in Nuku’alofa, Tonga and was attended by 25 participants. The primary aim of the VRP is to enable decision makers, policy makers and development practitioners in SIDS like Tonga use the VRP to assess its own progress in addressing vulnerabilities in the various areas of sustainable development, and to help the SIDS develop appropriate responses at the national, local and community levels to strengthen their resilience. The VRP could also be a tool to help countries to align their national planning process with commitments to sustainable development. At the same time the VRP, could enable SIDS to compare its own progress with other countries, identifying best practices and building up a knowledge base for future national development.

Top right: Tonga’s acting Prime Minister addresses participants at the opening session of the workshop. Bottom: Participants at the Tonga training workshop
The Vulnerability-Resilience Profile (VRP)
The VRP addresses the *vulnerability-resilience nexus* and consists of an assessment of a country’s vulnerabilities and its capacity to cope with these vulnerabilities. The vulnerability assessment is based on both qualitative and quantitative indicators and indices that reflect a country’s vulnerabilities to threats in terms of the three dimensions of sustainable development: environmental, economic and social. These indicators and indices are developed through a multi-stakeholder consultative process, and the VRP contains guidelines on how to carry out these dialogues. The resulting resilience assessment evaluates the measures that strengthen the coping capacity of the country to prevent, adapt to, or mitigate these exogenous and endogenous risks and threats for each of the three dimensions of sustainable development in terms of actions at three levels: national, regional and international. The national actions include government policies, plans and projects, and actions by communities, civil society and the private sector - all of which would ultimately build a country’s resilience. These national efforts would be supported by regional responses such as technical assistance, information sharing and capacity building activities by regional organizations, and by international responses such as technical, logistical and financial support from the United Nations system and development partners.

Purpose and value added of the VRP
The primary aim of the VRP is to enable SIDS to assess their own progress in addressing vulnerabilities in each of the thematic areas of the BPOA and the MSI, and to help them develop appropriate responses at the national, local and community levels to strengthen their resilience. It could be a tool in helping countries to align their national planning processes with the international agreements relevant to SIDS.

The secondary aim is to enable individual SIDS to compare their own progress towards achieving the goals of the BPOA and the MSI with other countries at the regional and international levels, identifying best practices and building up a knowledge base. This would facilitate the periodic review for the MSI that is carried out every five years.

The VRP also provides SIDS with a clear pictorial presentation of the vulnerability-resilience nexus that uses existing information and data and can aid decision-making. The VRP methodology is intended to complement ongoing local, national and international processes rather than to duplicate or replace these initiatives.
The 2nd training workshop on the Vulnerability-Resilience Profile (VRP) was held in Mauritius. It was conducted for officials from a wide range of sectors and key line ministries of the Government of Mauritius and civil society. The workshop was held on 9th-11th December at the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) Headquarters, and was well attended by more than 20 participants. The workshop was jointly organized by the IOC and the SIDS Unit. The project is made possible with funds from the European Union and benefits several SIDS from the Caribbean, Pacific and the Indian Ocean. The VRP framework/methodology will be published in 2014 and be made available to all SIDS and as a contribution to the SIDS Conference.

The preparations culminated in the inter-regional meeting, held in Barbados 26-28 August. There, SIDS delegations, many at the Ministerial level, gathered to discuss, debate and emerge with an all-SIDS position, articulated in the Barbados Outcome. This outcome document will serve as one of the inputs into the zero draft of the Third International Conference outcome.

As another input into the Conference preparations, the SIDS Unit organized two expert group meetings early in the year, one on SIDS and the post-2015 development agenda, and one on emerging issues in SIDS. Both meetings brought together policy and academic leaders in the field of SIDS sustainable development and both yielded concrete outcomes reports.

In December, Member States agreed on the modalities of the Conference, discussed above, and the global preparatory process will be launched in January 2014.

The SIDS Unit technical cooperation program has also continued to grow, helping to build capacity in all three SIDS regions, particularly in the area of monitoring and evaluation of progress of the various areas of sustainable development of SIDS as outlined in the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation. As one example, an innovative analytical tool is being rolled out with EU support to help SIDS develop “vulnerability resilience profiles,” moving beyond traditional GDP-only measures and more accurately and holistically assessing the progress of SIDS to address its vulnerabilities and build resilience. Advisory services were provided by the SIDS Unit in the area of national sustainable development strategies.

As the year winds down, the SIDS Unit looks forward to 2014, the International Year of Small Island Developing States as well as the year of the Third International Conference. We are grateful for your past collaboration and look forward to continuing our work together next year.