Genuine and Durable Partnerships are needed for sustainable development of Small Island Developing States
## Contents

### Special feature

**Interview with Ambassador Ali’ioaiga Feturi Elisaia**

Permanent Representative of Samoa to the UN

### Interviews

1. **Samoa Hosts 2014 SIDS Conference as they Graduate from the LDC Category**
   
   MediaGlobal Bureau Chief Nosh Nalavala interviews Ambassador Ali’ioaiga Feturi Elisaia, Permanent Representative of Samoa to the UN

2. **Serving the Least Developed Countries**
   
   Marc Bichler is the Executive Secretary of United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). MediaGlobal Bureau Chief Nosh Nalavala interviews him in New York.

3. **Post-2015 Agenda: Economic development, Social development and Environmental development for LDCs**
   
   Permanent Representative of Belgium to the UN Bénédicte Frankinet in conversation with MediaGlobal Bureau Chief Nosh Nalavala on Least Developed Countries

### Also in this issue

1. **Sustainable Energy For All: A Prerequisite For Development**

2. **Strengthening Partnerships Towards Disaster Risk Reduction for Small Islands**

3. **An Update on the Preparations of the Intergovernmental Agreement to Underpin the Trans-African Highway Network**

4. **UN-OHRLLS Partners with American Museum of Natural History on Small Islands Ecological and Social Resilience**

5. **Marine Science, Tech Transfer and Capacity Building Vital for Sustainable Development in Small Islands**

6. **Biennial Regional Reviews of the Implementation of the IPoA**

7. **Experts Brainstorm New Development Agenda for Landlocked Developing Countries**

8. **ESCAP's Young Leadership Programme for LLDCs/LDCs**

9. **Vulnerable Countries within the Post 2015 Agenda**

**MediaGlobal NEWS** is an independent international media organization, based in the United Nations, creating awareness in the global media on social justice and development issues in the world’s least developed countries. MediaGlobal News is headquartered in New York with offices in the United Nations Secretariat. With a strong focus on the global South, MediaGlobal News disseminates news stories globally on economic development, global health, food security and the impact of climate change on developing countries.

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Marine resources are paramount to the survival of small islands.
Sustainable development is not possible without sustainable energy. From job creation and economic development, to security and the full empowerment of women, energy lies at the heart of all countries’ core interests. Recognizing the vital importance of energy in reaching agreed development goals, the General Assembly, in 2010, decided to declare 2012 the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All to increase awareness of the importance of addressing energy issues.

Yet, traditional development assistance will never be enough to change energy markets; billions of dollars in private investment are needed, and all sectors of society need to come together to drive the transformational changes needed to get to sustainable energy for all.

With this in mind, and in response to the challenge laid down by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General launched in September 2011 his pioneering Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative to catalyze and mobilise all stakeholders, from businesses to governments, and from civil society to multilateral development banks, to take concrete action toward three interlinked objectives to be achieved by 2030. These include: providing universal access to modern energy services; doubling the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency; and doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.

Mobilizing Action On The Ground

Since the launch of the initiative in September 2011, the political momentum and support has continued to grow. The African Union, the European Union, AOSIS, and many more groupings have endorsed the Secretary-General’s undertaking. At Rio+20, in June 2012, these countries came together in their determination to make sustainable energy for all a reality, while recognizing the Secretary-General’s initiative countries. As 2012 drew to a close, the General Assembly – with Rio+20 in mind – once again underlined their unanimous support for the issue by declaring 2014 to 2024 the “Decade of Sustainable Energy for All.”

In more practical terms, billions of dollars have been committed by development banks, donor governments and private sector, and more than 75 countries have so far chosen to partner with the initiative to pursue Sustainable Energy for All’s objectives, including some 33 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Several countries have established specific targets, for example, Samoa is working to increase the contribution of renewable energy to its total energy production by 20 percent and to promote energy efficiency practices across all sectors. Timor-Leste aims to ensure that 100,000 families have access to solar energy by 2030. These commitments are captured alongside some 20 others in the Barbados Declaration, a document adopted at the 2012 High-Level SIDS Conference on Achieving Sustainable Energy for All.

When a country expresses an interest in working to achieve Sustainable Energy for All, one of the first steps undertaken is a situational analysis and stocktaking exercise. This assessment helps to identify existing high-impact opportunities that can be scaled up or accelerated to advance sustainable energy production.

For example, in Uganda, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development is working closely with the EU Energy Initiative Partnership Dialogue Facility to advance a number of recommendations and a list of priority projects resulting from Uganda’s SE4ALL Rapid Assessment and Gaps Analysis. The assessment was completed during a series of technical assistance missions that brought together key stakeholders from Uganda’s energy sector. Some of the priority needs identified in Uganda include...
accelerating electricity connections and providing incentives to implement rural grid extensions; increasing support for geothermal resource exploration, and improving energy efficiency in the industrial sector.

Some of the other LDCs that have completed SE4ALL Rapid Assessment and Gaps Analysis include Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal and Togo. Several others are currently in progress. While Sustainable Energy for All’s three objectives guide each assessment, the resulting tools, interventions, and investments differ to suit each country’s unique energy scenario.

Bringing Everyone To The Table

Sustainable Energy for All’s added value comes into play by mobilizing a diverse array of resources and expertise, while bringing everyone to the table. This begins with the initiative’s own top-level leadership. Together with World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim, the Secretary-General co-chairs an Advisory Board that convenes distinguished global leaders from governments, development banks, business and civil society, combining the efforts of hundreds of committed stakeholders from around the world on an unprecedented scale. Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), serves as a member of the Advisory Board.

In its first Advisory Board meeting that took place on 19 April 2013, the Secretary-General emphasised that the time has come to move to the next phase of the initiative – it is time to turn commitments into kilowatts. World Bank President Jim Yong Kim underlined that we need to set concrete targets and milestones to drive action, and board members agreed that Sustainable Energy for All can change the paradigm of investment. A number of new commitments and initiatives were launched, including “Energy & Women’s Health” High-Impact Opportunity led by the World Health Organisation, UN-Women and the UN Foundation.

The Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Sustainable Energy for All, Dr. Kandeh Yumkella, who is leading the initiative, presented his five immediate operational priorities:

1. establishing a robust Global Facilitation Team to support the initiative,
2. dramatically accelerating country action,
3. expanding high impact opportunities,
4. operationalizing hubs,
5. scaling up global advocacy and stakeholder engagement.

Business As Usual Is Not An Option

Sustainable Energy for All recently launched its first Global Tracking Framework report, produced by a multi-agency team led by the World Bank and the International Energy Agency. The Framework provides a comprehensive tool and a set of indicators that will track progress towards the Sustainable Energy for All objectives. It confirmed that about 1.2 billion people don’t have access to electricity, while 2.8 billion have to rely on wood or other biomass to cook and heat their homes. Renewable energy accounts for only 18 percent of the global electricity production.

The Global Tracking Framework report underscores that countries, international organizations, private sector and civil society need to more than double existing energy investments of $409 billion. At least $600 billion more is needed every year until 2030, making paramount Sustainable Energy for All’s efforts to build a diverse global network capable of delivering innovative and viable sustainable energy solutions to the world.

This is a unique moment. Energy is a top-drawer agenda item for the private sector and for governments. With Member States currently steeped in the negotiations on sustainable development goals, and with the recent emphasis on the importance of energy as a separate goal for sustainable development in the report by the Secretary-General’s high-level panel, a unique opportunity exists; to integrate energy into the Post-2015 development framework and to create real change on the ground – change that drives growth, improves the bottom line, and protects the environment.

More information on the Sustainable Energy for All initiative is available at: http://sustainableenergyforall.org.
INTERVIEW
Samoa Hosts 2014 SIDS Conference as they Graduate from the LDC Category

MediaGlobal Bureau Chief
Nosh Nalavala interviews
Ambassador Ali’ioaiga Feturi Elisaia, Permanent Representative of Samoa to the UN

Nosh Nalavala Ambassodor
Ali’ioaiga Feturi Elisaia, congratulations on graduating from the LDC category next year. Samoa is graduating with the understanding that multi-stakeholder partnerships will be sustained. How certain are you of their support?

Ali’ioaiga Feturi Elisaia For Samoa, the fact that we are graduating speaks volumes in terms of the strength of our partnerships that had been nurtured over years. We would like to think that beyond graduation we will continue to count on this partner ships, because partnership for us is shared responsibility where you celebrate successes and don’t apportion failures.

We have been able to cultivate and nurture a level of confidence in those partnerships which gives us a level of comfort and the strength to move forward and accept the challenges of being a non-LDC come January next year.

NN SIDS have special needs. In fact small islands and AOSIS are demanding special status, similar to LDCs. Where does Samoa stand on this demand?

AFE We have been very supportive of the call by some of the Small Island Developing States to accord special category status for them. I think in terms of being an LDC, the reality for Samoa is that come the first of January, 2014 we will wake up the next morning, still sleeping in the same bed, in the same house and still in Samoa. We will still be isolated, have a small private sector and a net importer of goods and services. Therefore the structural difficulties and the accompanying challenges will still be with us, so that is why it is important for the UN community to be open minded about the goal to have a special category for Small Island Developing States because that will be our reality come 2014 when we finally graduate out of the LDC category.

NN By graduating out of the LDC category, will Samoa still have access to some of the facilities that are given to LDCs?

AFE I hope so. I think the current practice is that we can request for the continuation of some of this assistance up to a maximum of 3 years. We are positive about our graduation, we realize that is going to be a big challenge but we are also prepared psychologically and mentally to try and ensure that we have the means and the support to try to cushion the impacts when we lose some of this special assistance.

NN I guess it is also a matter of national pride?

AFE National pride could have played a role but it was by no means the overriding one. We always maintain that every country wants to progress and move forward, and if this is a feature of it, we will embrace it and move on.

NN It’s been 20 years since the first international meeting on SIDS in Barbados. Next year, Samoa is the host to the international community for another international conference. How far do you think SIDS have progressed in all these years?

AFE When we had the review for the Mauritius Strategy in 2010; the verdict was that some of the Small Island Developing States were carrying the bulk of the load in terms of their sustainable development, and in fact some had probably moved backwards. Now that’s why the Samoa Conference next year is critically important. It should be the avenue for SIDS to seek a renewed political commitment from the international community to their challenges and vulnerabilities, and it should also identify some of the new and emerging challenges faced by the group. The conference also provides Small Island Developing States some space so that they can try and reprioritize, if need be, some of their own sustainable development needs.

NN What is the objective of this Conference and its main agenda?

AFE The Conference, as you probably recall was a decision that was taken at Rio+20 Conference to address some of the issues I just alluded to, like renewed political commitment on practical and pragmatic actions, assess progress to date and remaining gaps in implementation, SIDS input to the post-2015 development agenda etc.

For Samoa, we wanted to host the conference, not for the sake of just hosting one, otherwise we may as well have it in New York where the majority of member states are represented, but because we felt we have something to share with the international community, in the context of our relationship with the United Nations and its predecessor, and that is where the importance of partnerships comes in.

We are passionate about partnerships because it speaks to our own history and also our future moving forward. When we talk of partnerships it is not necessarily the ideological partnerships of just North-South, it also includes South-South and triangular partnerships. Importantly, it also includes SIDS-SIDS partnerships and those between SIDS as a group and their development partners.

NN What is the main agenda of this Conference, Ambassador?

AFE The main agenda is to see how SIDS sustainable development can be placed on a secure footing, their vulnerabilities minimised and their challenges addressed comprehensively. Obviously, the international community should be aware of the realities of Small Island Developing States and their needs and see how as partners they can work together to advance and respond effectively to SIDS agenda.

NN If you feel that the objectives of the Barbados framework has not been fulfilled, do you think that it is now time for a new strategic framework that is action-oriented and relevant for the next decade?

continued on page 6
Could you explain some of the adaptation measures Samoa has adopted towards coastal erosion, cyclones, excessive rainfall, tidal surge, tsunami (as in 2009) - all of which contributed to major disasters in your country over the years?

Even before the tsunami, Samoa had always been implementing adaptation projects because it makes good common sense to do so. We see over time some of our own coastlines being eroded and drinking water from wells becoming undrinkable. So it was the natural and logical thing to work with our partners to increase our adaptive capacity by building sea-walls and replanting mangroves etc. We also made sure that the excessive carting of sand for commercial use was regulated. But we realize that these are only temporary measures.

What the tsunami did was transformational and a real eye opener. Our government has been trying over the years to encourage people along the coastal areas to move further inland, to little avail. It took the tsunami for people to do just that without much prodding from government.

After the tsunami, we have been working closely with our partners to try and use the lessons learned from this experience to try and build up our resilience. Such things as revising the building codes, improving warning systems, general awareness programmes including resettling people from coastal areas further inland are some of the initiatives being tried out. We are working with our main development partners, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the World Bank, China, and the European Union to ensure that people are not only aware of some of these natural calamities, but to make the infrastructure cyclone proof.

What the 68th session has been tasked to determine, including the governance of the intergovernmental preparatory processes.

What would be the ideal outcome document for this Conference?

We would like an outcome document that is succinct, concise and action orientated. Hopefully we don’t have to try and re-paraphrase the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation as those are given and important reference points. We need an outcome document that is pragmatic and implementable. Whatever outcome document emerges, it should be one that strongly reflects the challenges and opportunities of SIDS. Also, it is important that there is buy in from our development partners, because we need to work together with all of them to ensure implementation happens. The stakes are high for the SIDS and the international community and we do not want to lament this in years to come as another missed opportunity.

NN Samoa faces the impact of climate change, similar to other island states. Could you explain some of the adaption measures Samoa has adopted towards coastal erosion, cyclones, excessive rainfall, tidal surge, tsunami (as in 2009) - all of which contributed to major disasters in your country over the years?

AFE Even before the tsunami, Samoa had always been implementing adaptation projects because it makes good common sense to do so. We see over time some of our own coastlines being eroded and drinking water from wells becoming undrinkable. So it was the natural and logical thing to work with our partners to increase our adaptive capacity by building sea-walls and replanting mangroves etc. We also made sure that the excessive carting of sand for commercial use was regulated. But we realize that these are only temporary measures.

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AFE Hopefuly during the preparatory process for the Samoa conference, SIDS Member States will be able to determine that, because the Conference is to do a stock-take of where things are since Barbados and Mauritius so that if there are gaps in the implementation stage, we need to know what the causes are and how to ensure that the gaps are minimized if not substantially met.

I think the decision on whether we need a new strategy will become clearer when the three regions of SIDS have their inter-regional meeting in late August this year in Barbados.

NN Could you explain the preparatory process for the Conference?

AFE There is a national process that is currently in progress. Individual SIDS had been asked to submit national reports which will be synthesised into a draft regional document which will form the basis of the discussions at the 3 regional meetings. The Pacific regional meeting will be held in Fiji in mid-July, the Caribbean one in Jamaica a week earlier and for AIMS it will be in Seychelles. The outcome from the three regional meetings will be compiled into a synthesis report to be prepared by UNDESA. This report will be the main document for consideration at the inter-regional meeting in Barbados.

NN Are you planning any national, subregional and global level preparations prior to the Conference? Any thematic pre-Conferece events on a global level?

AFE The expectation is that all these will be decided in the 68th session when the modalities resolution will be negotiated amongst the UN member states. The outcome document that will emerge from the Barbados inter-regional meeting will be SIDS input into the intergovernmental process through the Group of 77 and China. On whether there will precoms, or through facilitation by appointed Facilitators remains to be seen, because that is something that the 68th session has been tasked to determine, including the governance of the intergovernmental preparatory processes.

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NN SIDS member states have repeatedly indicated that the small islands are at risk of getting submerged by a rise in ocean level due to climate change and have accused industrialized countries of backing away from their cuts in emission pledges. In that sense were the COP Conferences in Copenhagen and Rio a failure and are you hopeful about the upcoming Conference.

AFE Global warming is real and is happening at an accelerated speed. It is a fact that sea-level rise and ocean acidification is a major threat to the security and livelihoods of the people of the SIDS. For the low-lying islands, it is an existential issue. We are concerned with the lack of ambitious and urgency shown by those in leadership positions, but we remain hopeful that reason will prevail and countries will work collaboratively to address the threats posed by climate change.

Was the Copenhagen Conference a failure? Everyone has his own take. But what I know is that the Clean Climate Fund and the Fast Start Finance were products of that conference. And Rio+20? I would not be talking about the global conference on SIDS next year in Samoa if it wasn’t for the Rio decision.

This is why we have proposed to AOSIS and our development partners that the overarching theme of the 2014 global Conference should be “The sustainable development of SIDS through genuine and durable partnerships”. Because at the end of the day, whether we are dealing with climate change, pursuing green growth or trying to get a fair return from the blue economy, we cannot and won’t be able to go it alone. We need to work with our partners. It could be a different set of partners depending on the issue or goal at hand. Thus we cannot emphasise enough the centrality of partnerships as a catalyst to help accelerate SIDS sustainable development. For us, partnerships include member states, civil society, NGOs, private sector, major groups and the United Nations. All have strengths and strategic roles and contributions to assist SIDS meet their aspirations. And all partnerships matter.

NN What do you expect from the international community at this point of the SIDS history?

AFE We all need to take a hard and honest look at ourselves. Too often we point fingers and conveniently blame others, when the fault lies probably with us. We are all part of our global family, where events or decisions taken in New York or elsewhere do have ripple effects where events or decisions taken in New York or elsewhere do have ripple effects that will impact us ultimately no matter how isolated, small and insignificant we may be and whether we were part of the decision making process or not.

To all our partners, we are all in the same boat and it behoves us to help each other, because “What goes around comes around, and today could be my turn, and tomorrow, yours”. That is my message to the international community.
STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS TOWARDS DISASTER RISK REDUCTION FOR SMALL ISLANDS

UN-OHRLLS in partnership with UNISDR co-organised a featured event at the Fourth Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva. The Global Platform took place from May 19-23, 2013 at the Geneva International Conference Center with the SIDS-related meeting taking place on May 21.

The central thrust of the meeting was to highlight the vulnerability of SIDS to natural disasters and the corresponding impact on development. It was also expected that participants would raise the alarm for immediate action and support risk reduction efforts associated with disasters and enhance SIDS’ resilience. The Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2013 was launched by the Secretary-General prior to the event, it was expected that the meeting would extract SIDS-related information given the publication of new risk data and the need to highlight the role of the private sector in contributing to risk mitigation.

In view of the upcoming Third International Conference on SIDS in 2014, the event also sought to identify work to be done on disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and sustainable development to contribute towards the preparatory process of the international Conference. Similarly, with the second phase of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA2) in preparation in 2015, views were sought as to how resilience building for SIDS would be incorporated into HFA2.

High level interventions included those by H.E. Mr. David Basile, Minister of the Interior, Republic of Haiti, H.E. Mr. James Fletcher, Minister of the Public Service, Sustainable Development, Energy, Science and Technology, Saint Lucia, H.E. Ms. Nikki Kaye, Minister of Civil Defence & Emergency Management, New Zealand, H.E. Ms. Marisa Morais, Minister of Internal Affairs, Republic of Cape Verde, H.E. Mr. Mohamed Nazim, Minister of Defence, Republic of Maldives, Ms. Kristalina Georgieva, European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Mr. Rajendra K Pachauri, Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and Mr. Andrew Maskrey, Coordinator, United Nations Global Assessment Report (GAR) on Disaster Risk Reduction.

Participants attending the event highlighted the need for SIDS to institute effective early warning systems, strengthen planning and guidelines, and share best practices. It was made clear that an investment in reducing disaster risks was one of the best ways for SIDS to gain traction and increase their competitiveness. Delegates reiterated that it is important that disaster risk reduction and resilience building be mainstreamed into national development programmes.

High Representative for LDC, LLDCs and SIDS Gyan Chandra Acharya stressed that “the global community working together must help them [SIDS] with innovative ways and means to reinforce their capacity in the face of acute adversity.” The High Representative emphasised that the means of livelihoods is precarious for SIDS and thus disaster risk had to be thought of in a holistic manner including from the fundamental perspective of survival and sustainability of livelihoods and development efforts.

Mr. Jan Eliasson, UN Deputy-Secretary-General (DSG) in his keynote address, said that when it came to the environment and climate, there was no “Planet B”. Mr. Eliasson stressed the urgency of the issue of disaster risk reduction for SIDS and given this group of countries contributes less than 1% of greenhouse gas emissions, SIDS are on the frontlines of climate change and suffer disproportionately. The DSG also stressed that the effects of climate change on SIDS was of serious concern which could affect their economies, territories, and at times their very existence.

The active engagement of the private sector in SIDS was of vital importance as businesses had an important role to play in terms of building resilience and sustaining livelihoods.

The importance of preparedness was stressed as being vital including the use by authorities of simple language and graphics to explain hurricanes.
and these messages being translated into guidelines and recommendations and broadcast as early warning messages through various media. Integrating disaster risk reduction into education and awareness curricula from primary school level upwards and including at the grassroots/community level was also stressed as an important avenue for improving preparedness and building capacity for resilience.

It was demonstrated that disaster risk reduction is a developmental issue, involving governance, partnerships for sustainable financing, and emerging partnerships. It was stressed that climate change adaptation should be strongly aligned with disaster risk reduction, and more resources should be made available through regional cooperation in such areas as data procurement; where many SIDS lacked individual capacity.

Emphasis was placed on the need for heightened cooperation amongst SIDS. Given that these countries have experienced various levels of natural and man-made disasters, they are best placed to institute best practice and disseminate lessons learned amongst themselves. Speakers concurred that Caribbean nations were coming together to address climate change, sustainable development and trade. One of the challenges however, was to ensure that the strategies were mutually reinforcing. Efforts were also presently focused on tourism and community-level risk reduction, rather than spread out into broader sectors, such as health, agriculture, education, finance, environment, water, sanitation, rural communities etc.; a cross-sectoral approach would be advisable. Despite agreement on the need for cross-sectoral programmes, it was recognized that lack of resources meant priority being given to important sectors – such as tourism – at the expense of others. In this light, there was emphasis on the need for greater regional solidarity to bolster disaster risk reduction in those sectors that were lacking.

**Issues to be addressed in the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA2)**

- HFA2 needs to reflect the disproportionate effects of climate change on SIDS and that this is a group of countries which contributes the least – less than 1 per cent – to global greenhouse gas emissions, yet bear the greatest burden to the multiple impacts of climate change. Furthermore, the Global Assessment Report 2013 chapter on SIDS clearly makes the case – given the latest risk data – of the high exposure of SIDS to natural hazards. In this light, SIDS is the group of countries which stands to gain the most if investments in disaster risk reduction can be leveraged.

- HFA2 should recognize that by virtue of SIDS’ geographic features, they are more often than not situated in areas highly prone to natural hazards. Importantly, communities in SIDS are located in highly prone areas as these are access points to livelihoods. This includes for instance fishing communities exposed to coastal phenomena, farming communities located on steep slopes – some of which are volcanically active, geologically unstable or prone to flooding etc.

- HFA2 will need to stress that SIDS continue to require support and partnerships in establishing and maintaining effective early warning systems. Such systems need to be well coordinated, simple to understand and provide guidelines for action by communities in responding and mitigating the effects of hazards. Data acquisition and data management resources would enhance the ability of SIDS to predict and respond effectively to hazards.

- National development plans need to effectively integrate and mainstream disaster risk reduction through a holistic cross-sectoral approach involving all relevant stakeholders including private sector and civil society. However, it must be realized that given capacity and resource constraints faced by SIDS, it is often the case that resources are directed and prioritized to select sectors at the expense of others. While this is understandable, it often means that gaps are present in maintaining resilience. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on pooling limited resources through better coordination by government authorities and relevant stakeholders.

- HFA2 needs to reflect on the trans-boundary effects of shocks which are often felt disproportionately by SIDS including for instance price rises in food, fuel and other commodities.

- Education regarding disaster risk reduction from primary school level upwards needs to be emphasized as vital to building resilience in SIDS. Rural communities will need support in this regard. It is also vital that expertise already present in SIDS be supported and enhanced with the support of development partners.

- Private sector engagement and partnerships needs further commitment and expansion. As many SIDS economies rely on a handful of industries – notably tourism – it is crucial that private sector be recognized as important stakeholders in the resilience building agenda.

- HFA2 must encourage South-South cooperation and especially amongst SIDS themselves. As a group of countries that is often exposed to similar hazards, SIDS are best placed to share lessons learned. This cooperation needs to be supported by not only SIDS themselves but their development partners.
Marc Bichler is the Executive Secretary of United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). MediaGlobal Bureau Chief Nosh Nalavala interviews him in New York.

Nosh Nalavala | The United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) country programmes are tailored to the needs of individual countries, are they all LDCs or do you offer financial support to landlocked and small island states as well?

Marc Bichler | Our mandate states that we should work first and foremost in LDCs, and as you rightfully say, many of the Small Island Developing States and Landlocked Developing States also are in the category of the 49 LDCs. In that regard the question can be answered very affirmatively: We work in the Pacific Islands but we also work in Laos and in Rwanda. We work in those parts of the world, both in our practice areas, one is inclusive finance, and the other is local development finance. When I say we work first and foremost in the LDCs, it is well understood that our core budget – as we call it – is exclusively reserved for investments in the LDCs. We use our core budget as capital investment in these countries at the local level to serve the public side, the local governments, but also the private side. We use our investment capital in designing, implementing, and concept proving, and also pilot projects.

NN | Would you say that UNCDF is the UN capital investment agency for the world’s 49 least developed countries (LDCs)?

MB | Yes, UNCDF promotes inclusive and sustainable growth by creating new opportunities for poor people, small businesses and local governments. We focus on Africa and the poorest countries of Asia, with a special commitment to countries emerging from conflict or crisis. We provide seed capital and technical support through inclusive finance programmes to help microfinance institutions reach more poor households and small businesses; and through local development finance programmes to strengthen public financial management systems and improve infrastructure investment and delivery of basic services by local governments.

UNCDF’s focus is “first and foremost” on those countries in greatest need — the world’s least developed countries, which include several landlocked and small island states — therefore all our core contributions are invested in the world’s poorest countries (currently supporting 37 out of the 49).

NN | A two part question: In order for you to fund the LDCs, where does this fund come from — is it the commitments that the developed countries made at the Brussels Programme of Action, and then later on in the Istanbul Programme of Action, is this the commitment of the developed countries? In what areas do you offer financial assistance to LDCs?

MB | Our funding of the regular resources of the CDF mainly come from, Member States of the UN, donor governments; we rely on the basis of some 36 different sources of core funding, so the donor governments, but also increasingly partners from the private sector – mainly the big philanthropic foundations that have their home here in the United States. These are the sources that we work with for the time being and since we carry in our name the terms, Capital Development we set out to develop capital in the wider sense of financing for development.

How do we provide this financial support to the LDCs? Our main practice areas are: on the one side, inclusive finance/micro-finance, and on the other side, local development finance. Through working in these areas we work on the one side, for the individuals and their micro-enterprises, but at the same time through their local governments; we work and finance their collectivities and the endeavours of their collectivities of the same individuals.

UNCDF invests its seed capital to pilot and test innovative ways to unlock larger resource flows from the public and private sector to the local level — promoting sustainable and inclusive growth, especially in rural areas. For UNCDF local development finance is about the improvement of basic services and therefore of the quality of life at the grassroots level.

NN | In these three areas of financing that you have underscored, how do you take these three areas of financing and implement them toward the uplift of the poorest regions in Africa which is Sub-Saharan Africa and of course the Sahel region as well; how do you take these three pillars of finance and implement them tangibly?

MB | Well, obviously as a UN agency we can only work with the approval of the government of a given county. But our specificity is that we work mainly at the local level and in all of our partner countries we can work through local development finance and through inclusive finance. In the best of the cases we work in two practice areas at the same time, in the same country, in the same region at the rural level in order to have our practice areas be mutually reinforcing. To be more precise, when it comes to inclusive finance, we work very often through a network of some 90, what we call, financial service providers, or also MicroBanks or MicroFinance Institutions in the respective countries because these are very often organizations that grow from the bottom-up, that we then support in developing their capacities, management capacities, their human resource capacities. In order to deliver the
adequate financial services that core populations in their geographic area would need. UNCDF implemented 70 percent of its portfolio in Africa through local development finance and inclusive finance programmes. We work in approximately 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and in the Sahel region.

UNCDF’s global programmes in Africa include some of our key thematic initiatives such as MicroLead and YouthStart that promote microfinance and financial services for the youth.

NN Does UNCDF determine the need and the implementation of funds, for example the uplift of women and children or in some cases the areas of HIV/AIDS; so who determines? Does UNCDF determine the need and the implementation of or is it the local governments of those countries?

MB We are very much aware of the importance of ownership. Of course we orientate our activities very much along the lines of the development policies at large in a given country, but also orientate ourselves according to decentralization policies. When you have to work with local governments for example or according to the financial sector regulations in the given country, we will always listen to our partners at the local level in order to not impose a view that is not locally grown. It is a question about credibility first, but also about sustainability. We cannot afford to work in areas that are not considered a priority by our partners.

Achieving gender equality and promoting women’s empowerment is not only a human right and a worthy goal in itself, but also makes economic sense and enables long-term sustainable progress on a number of indicators. With the recent introduction of its Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women Strategy, UNCDF has made women’s empowerment a priority cross-cutting theme and is determined to secure a future of equal rights, equal opportunities and progress for all.

NN I would presume that you have a monitoring system as well?

MB Absolutely. We are working on a constant basis of improving our monitoring and evaluation system team here in headquarters, but also in our regional offices.

NN Some 78 percent of the 300 million young people in Sub-Saharan Africa live on less than $3 a day, and 48 percent live on less than $1 a day. UNCDF launched YouthStart programme to finance low-income youth. How does it work and what are its elements of success?

MB YouthStart is a very ambitious programme. It focuses on young people sometimes as young as 12 or 13 years old. That of course already triggers some challenges from a legal point of view in some countries, so we can only work if the legal framework is given and allows us to work at that level. YouthStart is an introduction to financial activity through micro-savings; as I said, savings being the most prudent and healthiest way of approaching financial activities overall.

NN Does UNCDF contribute to that?

MB Yes, absolutely. We do so in a partnership with the MasterCard Foundation who adopted as a matter of fact this programme and finance it to a larger extent.

NN So they are one of your donors towards this programme?

MB Again, this comes very much into our business model where we design a project, we implement it at the pilot stage, we concept prove it, and we approach financial partners with deeper pockets to come on board and help replicate which allowed us with CleanStart to work through local financial service providers in 8 different countries.

In 2012, YouthStart provided 10 participating financial service providers in eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa with training and technical assistance in the areas of youth microfinance, youth development, integration of financial and non-financial services, and youth client protection. Through pilot tests between the programme’s launch in 2010 and 2012, YouthStart partners have provided financial services to 113,525 youth, and financial education to nearly 65,000 youth, of which 41 percent were young women and girls.

NN Clean energy access is a major constraint for the world’s poor. Over a quarter of the world’s population lacks access to electricity. How is your initiative CleanStart working towards low-cost clean energy?

MB Through CleanStart we encourage micro-finance institutions to partner with local clean energy suppliers; as an example, we use one micro-finance institution in order to set up a partnership with for example, a local provider of solar panels or of the new types of cooking stoves. We also encourage the micro-finance institutions to design the well-adaptive financial instruments through which core populations can get access to the clean energy technologies. This is also strongly supported by our financial partners and I think it is a worthwhile effort to adapt to climate change and taking it from the bottom-up, but through well-established micro-finance institutions that are our partners in our activities of financial inclusion.

NN Can you talk a little bit on how your energy initiative extends to climate change adaptation, because that is a matter of great concern not only to UNCDF, but also to the entire United Nations and the world?

MB Absolutely, I think it will be more about adaptation than about mitigation programmes. Building resilience for climate change includes investing in and maintaining water and sanitation facilities, establishing and enforcing zoning and land use planning, managing natural resources and building and maintaining basic infrastructure – activities within the mandate of local governments throughout the world.

Throughout 2012, UNCDF piloted an innovative “Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCal).” We started in Bhutan where we provided performance-based LoCAL grants to enable local government to tackle the effects of climate change – primarily increased floods as a result of glacial melt in Himalayas. Evidence is emerging showing that these type of grants can improve local governments’ capacity to deal with climate change as well as their overall performance, especially in core administrative and financial areas. UNCDF is now planning for a rollout of LoCAL to address issues of food security and disaster risk reduction in several countries across Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

“We focus on Africa and the poorest countries of Asia, with a special commitment to countries emerging from conflict or crisis.” – MARC BICHLER
Preparations of the Intergovernmental Agreement to Underpin the Trans-African Highway Network

The European and Asian regions have successfully developed intergovernmental agreements to underpin their road transport highways. The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network was adopted in 2003 as a treaty and entered into force on 4 July 2005. The European region adopted the European Agreement on Main International Traffic Arteries (AGR) in 1975 that defines the E-road network of routes of strategic importance for international traffic flows and sets the standards to which they should conform and it went into force 4 December 2001.

Benefits of an intergovernmental agreement – economic, social and environmental include improved connectivity, improved efficiency, lower transportation costs, less delays, promotion of trade in particular intra-regional trade, safer roads etc.

Adoption and implementation of an intergovernmental agreement can benefit the LLDCs in overcoming the current physical impediments and in unlocking their potential to generate higher levels of social and economic development. The Africa region taking note of these developments started to make plans to develop a similar intergovernmental agreement to underpin the Trans-African Highway Network (TAH).

On 19-20 September 2011, OHRLLS, UNECA, and AUC organised an Experts meeting in Addis Ababa. The meeting discussed regional norms and standards for the TAH, elaborated the key elements of the intergovernmental agreement, proposed recommendations and developed an action plan for the adoption of the intergovernmental agreement on the TAH. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe also shared their experiences on both the process and substance related to the development of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Highway Road Network and the Railway Network in their regions. The meeting concluded deliberations with a set of 10 recommendations to speed up the adoption of uniform minimum continental norms and standards for design, construction, maintenance and operation of the TAH and the adoption of the intergovernmental agreement that will provide the legal framework to define the norms, standards and specifications for the TAH.

The recommendations of the Experts meeting were considered by the Second African Union Conference of the African Ministers in charge of Transport held 21-25 November 2011. The Ministers adopted a declaration that called for the speeding up of efforts towards elaborating and establishing the intergovernmental agreement on the Trans-African Highway.

Relevant General Assembly resolutions
Paragraph 19 of GA Res 66/214 (on LLDCs) adopted in December 2011 and Paragraph 17 of Res 67/222 adopted in December 2012 acknowledged and encouraged the efforts by OHRLLS and ECA in corporation with AUC and other relevant international and regional organizations, towards assisting in the elaboration of the intergovernmental agreement on the Trans-African Highway.

Steering Committee
A steering committee including all the organisations OHRLLS, UNECA, AUC, World Bank, NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency, Regional Economic Communities was formed to further guide the process of elaborating the intergovernmental agreement. The World Bank provided financial assistance from the Trade Facilitation Facility and also technical assistance. The first meeting of the
Trans-African Highway... continued from page 11

Steering Committee in Dec 2012 provided guidance and elements for the development of the draft agreement and its annexes.

Validation Workshop on the draft Intergovernmental Agreement for harmonization of the road norms and standards on the Trans-African Highways (TAH) network as well as consideration of the draft African Road Safety Charter on 20-21 February 2013, in Johannesburg, South Africa.

A Validation Workshop involving the steering committee, all RECs and Corridor organisations was held in February 2013, in Johannesburg, South Africa with the financial support of the World Bank. The meeting reviewed the draft Intergovernmental Agreement for harmonization of the road norms and standards on the Trans-African Highways (TAH) network as well as reviewed the draft African Road Safety Charter. The meeting recommended changes to the draft agreement and its annexes – the TAH routes; Road Norms and Standards; Road safety; Environment; and Socio-economic; and the draft African Road Safety Charter.

Continental workshop on validation of the draft Intergovernmental Agreement and its Annexes held 4-6 June 2013, Accra, Ghana.

The meeting held in early June, was attended by about 60 delegates from African countries and 35 from Regional Economic Communities and International organizations. The meeting thoroughly reviewed: the draft intergovernmental agreement; its annexes – Annex I: Trans-African Highways Network Routes; Annex II: Basic Guidelines for Road Classification and Standards on TAH; Annex III: Road Safety; Annex IV: Social development; and Annex V: Environment; and the draft African Road Safety Charter.

UN-OHRLLS Partners with American Museum of Natural History on Small Islands Ecological and Social Resilience

From April 9-11, UN-OHRLLS partnered with the American Museum of Natural History’s Center for Biological Diversity to convene a science symposium which brought together local island resource managers, researchers, educators, island leaders, policymakers, and other leading conservation practitioners to present and analyze island based resilience case studies.

The symposium stressed that island ecosystems present unique challenges for conservation due to distinctive ecological and evolutionary processes and vulnerability to threats. It was recalled that biological diversity on islands was not only of global importance but likewise was suffering from numerous threats including natural disasters, diseases, overexploitation, deforestation, drainage of wetlands, habitat loss, illegal trade in endangered species, and climate change. In this light, the Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity considers species on islands to be at most risk of extinction. Ninety-five percent of birds, 90 percent of reptiles, 69 percent of mammals and 68 percent of plant extinctions worldwide have occurred on islands.

Recognizing the importance of island biodiversity, including in policy agendas of the UN such as the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy, as well as international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, UN-OHRLLS focused its interventions on the key roles that managers play in the management of island biodiversity.

Nineteen percent of birds, 90 percent of reptiles, 69 percent of mammals and 68 percent of plant extinctions worldwide have occurred on islands.
The value of enhancing the capacity of local managers within their national authorities to inform and provide inputs to global policy processes leads to more inclusive and representative global agendas that can in turn be implemented nationally and locally with the strong support of the international community and relevant stakeholders. It was stressed that there remains a need to develop and strengthen the science and policy interface between island biodiversity conservation practitioners and policymakers in islands, and between islands and the international community.

As managers “on the ground,” they are the most knowledgeable on the success stories as well as issues and obstacles they face in translating many of the policies that have been set globally. Global policy processes and agenda setting will benefit from the success stories and the lessons learned that managers can provide through their extensive knowledge. The involvement and inputs of managers, through their national authorities, to global policy processes leads to better global agendas that can in turn be effectively implemented nationally and locally with the strong support of the international community partners and stakeholders. The need to develop and strengthen the science and policy interface between island biodiversity conservation practitioners and managers and policymakers in islands and between islands and the international community is paramount.

**INTERVIEW**

**Post-2015 Agenda:**
Economic development, Social development and Environmental development for LDCs

Permanent Representative of Belgium to the UN
Bénédicte Frankinet in conversation with MediaGlobal Bureau Chief
Nosh Nalavala on Least Developed Countries

**Nosh Nalavala** At the outset I would like to ask you what is the strategic focus of the Friends of the Least Developed Countries, and if you can elaborate on it. At the same time tell us if this is a new organization within the framework that the LDCs are trying to set up?

**Ambassador Frankinet** The Friends of the LDCs existed before the Istanbul conference, and the strategic focus remains very much the LDCs. The aim of the Group is to make sure that the attention of the international community on the LDCs does not get lost, especially in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

It is a group of countries that want to keep the interest of the LDCs in focus, a group of people and countries that are able to meet outside the formal fora of the UN in order to exchange best practices, to discuss the effectiveness of the policies that we have applied as donors in relation to the LDCs, and to identify possible bottlenecks and new initiatives that we can push through.

We also want to follow very closely the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action because we want this to remain on the agenda.

**NN** Who are the other partners with you and who are the Friends of the LDCs? Are they only donor countries? Could you tell me who the donor countries are?

**BF** A lot of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries and among them emerging countries, including Turkey and South Africa approach to development.

**NN** How have the LDCs done in fulfilling the MDGs? Are they only donor countries? Could you tell me who the donor countries are?

**BF** In the implementation report of the MDGs, some LDCs have made progress, but on the other hand, we know that we still need a very special effort for the LDCs to fulfill some of these goals.

**NN** The LDCs have expressed a genuine interest in moving away from the traditional reliance on official development assistance (ODA) towards greater foreign direct investment (FDI), trade expansion and technology transfer. ODA continues to remain a pivotal preserve for gains over the last decade to fight poverty and support progress in these countries. What kind of partnership do you envisage between development partners and LDCs to ensure that the official development assistance does not taper off, while greater FDI flows, technology transfer and trade expansion is facilitated? In other words, do you feel that ODA is something detrimental to the LDCs, and that they should now look at FDI as a more practical solution towards governance?

**BF** The value of enhancing the capacity of local managers within their national authorities to inform and provide inputs to global policy processes leads to more inclusive and representative global agendas that can in turn be implemented nationally and locally with the strong support of the international community partners and stakeholders. The need to develop and strengthen the science and policy interface between island biodiversity conservation practitioners and managers and policymakers in islands and between islands and the international community is paramount.
Post-2015 Agenda
continued from page 13

BF I think those are not mutually exclusive. We understand very well that for some of the LDCs, ODA remains a vital component of their resources in order to promote development, but on the other hand, we also know that real development means basic autonomy and independence and the more they shift to other financing means the better it is for them. But as a part of the donor community we are very conscious that ODA remains a very important part, for the moment, for LDCs. But it’s a means; it’s a means toward an end, and the end is basically to become self-reliant at some point.

NN Belgium was one of the signatories of the Brussels Programme of Action. To what extent has Belgium fulfilled its commitment towards the LDCs?

BF We remain very much committed, and we feel that we have done our part and we will keep doing it. Mostly because in our programme of foreign assistance and ODA, the countries that we work with, which is a list of about 18 countries, we are very much focused on the LDCs. Half of our partner countries are LDCs, so that remains a very important part of our ODA as we focus our commitment to the Istanbul Programme of Action.

NN While you have expressed a very strong commitment to the LDCs, how far is Belgium reaching out to the small island developing states and the landlocked developing countries?

BF Within the debate on climate change, the small island developing countries have certainly received new attention. I think they share our concerns that we as developed countries share in terms of climate change and its impact.

NN I would like to zero in on climate change, since that’s the issue you just mentioned. To what extent is Belgium impacted by climate change, and in what way?

BF I think we have too short of a timeframe to decide whether we are really suffering from the scientifically proven effects of climate change. What I can say is that it is very much at the forefront of people’s minds. If you take a country like Belgium, I think people are very much aware of global warming because of public opinion awareness, government awareness, European awareness. I think the European level has contributed a lot to the discussion among the UN member-states that has trickled back down to the respective governments, and inside the country grassroots movements and civic society are also very much aware of it. Again, maybe not the direct effects of climate change, but I think people are very conscious that if we don’t change the way we are behaving and the consumption patterns in terms of energy, life will be much more difficult nationally, and at some point globally.

NN Is Belgium involved with climate change diplomacy at the various COP meetings?

BF Yes, we are very active in this area. For Belgium, it’s a two-tier operation because as you know, the European Union normally speaks with one voice. We have agreed together as 27 members with the European institutions on the goals that we have set for ourselves. When Belgium works it’s usually through the EU.

NN Is Belgium at all involved in with the SIDS Conference that’s coming up in Samoa next year, and in what way?

BF I think we will have to. It’s an event that’s being prepared also in this framework — so we will definitely do our part in this regard.

NN I would like to go back to the issue of LDCs, specifically, how do you foresee Belgium assisting the LDCs to raise the visibility of the challenges and the constraints the LDCs face in international fora, such as the European Union? How can Belgium work to ensure that the LDCs are integrated and prioritized in the international cooperation policies of development partners?

BF I think it’s already very much on the agenda. As I described in the beginning, the fact that we are aware that some countries have moved on and this group of countries still has very special needs is very much present in the EU development agenda and on the OECD development agenda. It’s not a new thing and I think the Group of Friends makes sure that we are not stuck with old ideas about how to go about it — we are trying to exchange and to come up with new suggestions identifying where things have not worked and come up with new ideas.

I think also it’s very important to exchange ideas horizontally between countries that have actually graduated from the status of LDCs because they are success stories. In this regard, I think we are very aware that South-South cooperation is an instrument that maybe we have not used enough in the past, and that countries of the South who have actually produced new ways and developed new initiatives are also much more in a position to contribute to this debate.

NN At the outset of our conversation, you mentioned the post-2015 development agenda. What are your expectations in relation to this agenda for sustainable development goals, and how could a renewed framework for development support the LDCs?

BF I think it’s very clear that we will have to make sure that the specific needs of the LDCs are kept in mind. We are going probably into the post-2015 agenda toward something that will be much more integrated in terms of economic development, social development and environmental development. All these three pillars should have a horizontal quality that is sustainability.

“I think people are very much aware of global warming because of public opinion awareness, government awareness, European awareness.”

- BÉNÉDICTE FRANKINET
Marine Science, Tech Transfer and Capacity Building Vital for Sustainable Development in Small Islands

From May 14-17, UN-OHRLLS alongside UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), and the UN Office of Legal Affairs’ Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, organized an Experts Group Meeting (EGM) on The Significance of Marine Science and Technology for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and the Importance of Capacity Building and Marine Technologies Transfer to SIDS to Support Sustainable Development.

UN-OHRLLS facilitated the participation of nine experts from SIDS countries representing the three SIDS regions of AIMS, Caribbean, and the Pacific. UNESCO’s IOC facilitated the attendance of a further seven experts again from the three SIDS regions. The meeting was a great success with some 20 recommendations that will be included in the regional preparatory SIDS meetings to be convened in July.

The Oceans, for SIDS, is an issue that clearly cuts across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of their sustainable development objectives. SIDS have demonstrated leadership in managing the living marine resources that occur under their respective jurisdictions and are again leading the way on matters concerning exploration and exploitation of non-living marine resources. The need to build capacities and scientific know-how remains a crucial component for SIDS’ sustainable development aspirations and indeed tackling the multifaceted adaptation and mitigation requirements of climate change.

Some of the recommendations from the EGM included calls for renewed and accelerated efforts to place oceans and marine science at the heart of the sustainable development agenda for SIDS. New emphasis needs to be placed on the value of SIDS acknowledging that they are in fact Large Ocean States (LOS), custodians to vast ocean spaces that are globally significant for reasons including food security, rich biological diversity, carbon sequestration, and natural resources exploitation.

The EGM pointed to the need for improved coordination mechanisms at national levels that are placed highly within national bureaucracies in order to elevate the national policy discourse on oceans governance and marine resources management. SIDS should seriously consider setting up national Ministries of Oceans/Marine Resources that place oceans at the center of SIDS national development policies taking a holistic approach linked to agriculture, watershed management, forests, and biodiversity conservation. There is substantial value in marine science and technology contributing toward informed decision making on the broad range of oceans and marine resources including the effective designation of managed and protected areas, enhanced integrated coastal management, improved ocean zoning, effective sustainable marine resources management, and improved tourism policies.

The EGM noted that Ocean issues are generally narrowed to the field of fisheries by national authorities in many SIDS, with responsibility for Oceans spread across various Ministries with inadequate resources for marine issues, coupled with inadequate local investments in human resources and infrastructure relevant to oceans and seas.

Internationally, adequate resources are needed to alleviate the “conservation burden” that SIDS face, some of whom have undertaken commendable and noble voluntary commitments to conserve vast tracts of ocean spaces and in the process foregoing valuable economic benefits. The EGM called on the international community for ongoing and long-term commitment with a focus on quality over quantity to assist SIDS in meeting the challenges of oceans management.

Likewise, increased resources including technical support is required, in order for SIDS to effectively implement the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and to develop their marine scientific research capacities, including their obligations to deposit coordinates of areas under their national jurisdictions in accordance with UNCLOS provisions.

continued on page 16
With regard to new and emerging issues, particularly in the exploitation of mineral and other non-living resources, enhanced partnerships are required. Here, clearing house mechanisms are needed to support and promote such cooperation.

The EGM recalled that the area of Oceans and marine resources has been among the main issues where success stories of SIDS/SIDS cooperation and partnerships have occurred; including on management of highly migratory fish stocks, protection of large marine ecosystems, marine boundaries, and continental shelf submissions.

The EGM acknowledged the difference in how oceans is approached in the different SIDS regions including that of the large oceanic realms in the Pacific and Indian Oceans compared to more emphasis on coastlines and near-shore marine resources such as in the Caribbean region. Nonetheless, there is an opportunity for closer collaboration in these approaches given the unique challenges and prospects to share lessons learned.

The marine science research programmes of the SIDS University Consortium needs strengthening to promote SIDS/SIDS partnerships in the field of academia that places emphasis on the interdisciplinary approaches to developing marine science curricula.

Support measures to retain built capacity in marine sectors should be established including incentives for continuous upgrade of professional knowledge and build capacity aimed at reducing the brain drain in SIDS of marine and ocean sector specialists.

Recognizing that training programmes in SIDS were mostly one-off, this placed long-term benefits in doubt. Inadequate infrastructure also hampers the effectiveness and long-term viability of training programmes, and a lack of ship-based training programmes means that quality experience is often lacking. Thus, a long-term perspective is needed which should explore the possibility of regional training Centers as well as seek the support from SIDS development partners to facilitate ship-sharing mechanisms.

Measures to raise awareness and knowledge on the benefits flowing from compliance to UNCLOS and other ongoing processes relating to scientific data and information gathering by national and regional centers, universities, end users, private sector, and others need to be improved.
Experts Brainstorm New Development Agenda for Landlocked Developing Countries

As the first 10 years of the Almaty Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries is drawing to an end, the UN General Assembly resolution (A/RES/66/214) mandated the convening of a comprehensive 10-year review conference of the Almaty Programme of Action in 2014. The General Assembly also decided that the conference should be preceded, by regional and global as well as thematic preparations. In this context, UN-OHRLLS organized a Brainstorming Meeting on the Priorities of a New Development Agenda for the LLDCs held in New York from March 20-21, 2013. The aim of the two-day meeting was to discuss the key development challenges and needs of the LLDCs and identify the priorities of a new development agenda for the LLDCs.

Progress Achieved since 2003

Since the adoption of the Almaty Programme in 2003, a lot has been accomplished. One remarkable achievement of the Almaty Programme to date has been the universal recognition of the special needs of LLDCs, which has generated tangible actions by not only the transit countries and the LLDCs themselves, but also by the partner countries, international, and regional institutions. The last 10 years have seen stronger support from development partners toward transport infrastructure development, and trade facilitation and support from transit countries to harmonize transport and transit policies, simplify border control and procedures and facilitate trade.

Flows of official development assistance from traditional donors increased substantially from $16.5 billion in 2003 to $25.7 billion in 2011. ODA to LLDCs fell by 3.3 percent since 2010 as result of fiscal austerity. Aid for Trade disbursements to LLDCs rose from $4.7 billion in 2006 to $6.4 billion in 2011. Foreign Direct Investment net inflows to landlocked developing countries increased from $3.9 billion in 2000 to $35 billion in 2011.

Since the adoption of the APoA, the LLDCs as a group have increased their exports from $43 billion 2003 to $221 billion in 2011. In the same vein, the group has achieved higher annual rates of economic growth which averaged 7.8 percent between 2003 and 2007. However this was affected by the global financial and economic crisis and slowed down in 2008 and 2009 but recovered to 7.4 percent in 2010. Almost half of the LLDCs have a low per capita GDP of less than $1,000. In addition when compared to other groups of countries (including transit developing countries, all developing countries, and developed countries) the landlocked developing countries have the lowest GDP per capita.

On the social development front, LLDCs have experienced a positive trend in the Human Development Index between 2003 and 2011. Nevertheless 15 of the LLDCs are still in the lowest HDI ranking. LLDCs have made advances on some MDGs including: primary education, gender parity in primary education, increased percentage of women in decision-making power, and stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS. Progress has been slow on reducing widespread poverty, hunger, child and maternal mortality and improving access to sanitation.

Ongoing Challenges

Some key challenges continue to impede the ability of the LLDCs to more effectively engage in international trade. Transit transport infrastructure is still inadequate and inefficient and as a result, transport costs in LLDCs are still the highest in the world, resulting in high and uncompetitive costs of doing business. According to the World Bank’s Doing Business 2012 Report, the average costs of exporting and importing a container for LLDCs are $2,600 and $3,300, while transit developing countries are only paying 50 percent of these costs. Physical transport continued on page 18
infrastructure remains inadequate and of poor quality and much more needs to be done to make trade facilitation more effective and help reduce the high transaction costs and long time it takes LLDCs to conduct trade. LLDCs still take double the time it takes transit countries to import or export.

LLDCs rely heavily on natural resource-based commodities for their exports including bulky primary agricultural commodities, oils, and minerals, making them highly vulnerable to commodity price fluctuations. While the export concentration ratios for other developing countries have remained relatively stable below 0.15, since 2000, they have dramatically increased for the LLDCs from 0.17 in 2000 to 0.38 in 2010 mostly owing to higher world demand for minerals and fuels. Lack of upgradation in value chain and lack of productive capacities continue to be stark challenges to the group.

Furthermore, new and emerging challenges linked to the food, energy, and economic crises, as well as the negative impacts of climate change and environmental degradation including loss of biodiversity have increased tremendously the burden on LLDCs’ economies – a burden that none of the countries can afford to confront themselves alone.

**Suggested key priorities of a new development agenda for LLDCs**

Given the wide array of challenges that the LLDCs face, the meeting stressed that a comprehensive and holistic programme of action is required for the next decade that will more concretely address their broader development issues. The meeting suggested that the new development agenda for the LLDCs must not be designed simply as a sectoral programme but must concretely address LLDCs’ challenges in a more holistic manner, with measurable targets and indicators. The new development agenda should help them to secure a rapid and sustained positive economic growth that delivers decent jobs and enables them to make significant strides towards poverty reduction and broad based sustainable development.

The following priorities were suggested for the new development agenda for the LLDCs.

1. **Enhanced infrastructure development** (transport, energy, and communication) and maintenance, in both LLDCs and transit countries is still very important. The missing links in the road and rail infrastructure and infrastructure upgrading needs that need to be met in all the regions with LLDCs are still large.

2. Development of the “soft” infrastructure through increased ratification/accession and effective implementation of UN and other international conventions (including the TIR Convention), regional and subregional and agreements on transport and trade facilitation by LLDCs and their transit neighbours, simplification and harmonization of policies, legal and administrative regulations, border crossing and customs procedures, and replication of trade facilitation initiatives that have worked in some LLDCs such as one stop border posts and dry ports, and the conclusion of the WTO agreement on trade facilitation is important for unlocking the export competitiveness of LLDC. A Trade Facilitation Agreement at the WTO could bring down the cost of moving trade today from roughly 10 percent of trade value to 5 percent.

3. Enhancing the trade potential of LLDCs through diversification of the export base; value addition in production and export; diversification of export markets; provision of preferential market access for LLDCs; support to LLDCs to join global and regional value chains; addressing of supply side issues through technical and infrastructure support; and provision of targeted support to countries that are in the process of WTO accession.

4. Promoting structural transformation through industrialization, increased agricultural productivity, and improved technology transfer. LLDCs, in their pursuit of sustainable development, must transform their economic structures by promoting agricultural production and processing, manufacturing, competitive industries, and export structures that produce higher value-added products.

5. Enhancing the role of the private sector. The meeting proposed that the new development agenda for LLDCs should prioritize private sector development and in particular SMEs which are important for job creation, economic empowerment of women, and contributing to poverty reduction. LLDCs governments should develop deliberate policies to support the strengthening of the private sector, in particular improved access to financial resources, development of appropriate human capacity and promote investment in supportive economic infrastructure.

6. Improved trade in services. The WTO and the OECD have recently released statistics on trade in added value. One of the key findings of this work is that services play a greater role in international trade than previously thought. LLDCs should...
give greater attention to this sector, which is not as intimately affected by landlockedness as manufacturing or agriculture.

7 Tapping into Global Value Chains. The meeting noted that the use of Global Value Chains and trade in services are becoming more prominent features of the international production landscape and provide opportunities for LLDCs. By becoming a key supplier feeding into the chains, LLDCs can get significant potential benefits.

8 Addressing vulnerability to climate change, desertification and land degradation and improving environmental sustainability. LLDCs need to address problems related to climate change, desertification, and land degradation into their national development plans. In order to fully address and mitigate ensuing problems and build resilience in LLDCs, there is need to scale up adaptation and mitigation actions on the ground, secure global participation and scale up funding for climate change mitigation measures.

9 Enhancing international support measures – Given today’s challenging economic environment, it is more critical than ever before to harness financing for transport infrastructure and trade facilitation in both LLDCs and their transit neighbors in order to continue building on the progress that has been made over the past decade.

10 Intensified regional integration. The meeting noted that intensified regional integration was very important for the integration of LLDCs into the regional and international markets. Participants stressed the need to develop and implement key regional transport projects and regional transport agreements.

11 Enhancing capacity building in all areas (institutional capacity, education, human capacity, and skills building). The meeting noted that one of the biggest barriers preventing the LLDCs from fully exploiting the services sector in an efficient way is their limited capacity. In this regard, the meeting suggested that LLDCs would require support towards enhancing human and institutional development.

These suggested priorities for a new development agenda for LLDCs form background material for the preparation of the draft outcome document of the 10-Year Review Conference on the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

ESCAP’s Young Leadership Programme for LLDCs/LDCs

Participants in the ESCAP Young Leadership Programme for Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries (LDCs and LLDCs) in Asia and the Pacific have landed the opportunity as a valuable learning experience in multi-lateral processes for their countries, at a closing ceremony hosted recently by ESCAP Executive Secretary Noeleen Heyzer.

Speaking at the ceremony, Ms. Heyzer said: “The power of this programme lies in the opportunity that it offers, to future regional leaders from our LDCs and LLDCs, to better understand the multilateral system, and the mechanisms and channels available to them to make the voices of their countries more loudly heard. I have been pleased by the calibre of participants in the programme.”

Initiated in 2011 by Ms. Heyzer, and launched following the High-level Meeting on the Implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action for LLDCs, in Ulaanbaatar, ESCAP’s Young Leadership Programme aims to build the skills of young officials from the LDCs and LLDCs, to engage more effectively in multilateral forums, negotiations and processes that will contribute to the future development of their countries. The programme takes place in Bangkok for a three-month period every year which coincides with preparations for the annual ESCAP Commission Session.

LDCs and LLDCs have limited capacity to engage in negotiations at various multi-lateral forums. This capacity is further stretched as, increasingly, they are also engaging with partners in the private sector and in both national and regional civil society.

The five participants in the 2013 Programme, three from Cambodia and two from Uzbekistan, reflected on the value of the programme and their learning on matters ranging from country graduation from LDC status, to infrastructure services, as well as trade and investment.

“It’s been a fruitful experience. I’ve gained so much in so many aspects,” said Sean Vitou, currently an assistant working in the Office of the Council of Ministers in Cambodia. “This programme has enabled me to participate in various briefings, discussions, key analytical issues, conferences (including video-conferences), negotiations and multilateral forums.”

“I got to see and learn about the roles and functions of ESCAP and how it supports its 62 member States,” said Mr. Vitou. “Not only have I improved my knowledge about the things I was interested in, I’ve also enjoyed learning about new cultures, exploring various places, and making new friends from all over the world. This course has provided me with substantive knowledge which I hope to utilize and share with my colleagues in Cambodia so that we can enhance our capacity to help foster sustainable growth in developing our country”.

Currently in its second year, last year’s pilot launch of the programme included participants from the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Bhutan Ministry of Finance.
**Vulnerable Countries within the Post 2015 Agenda**

By Patrick Guillaumont

It is now apparent that the Post 2015 Development Agenda will be designed universally and will incorporate two sets of objectives, namely the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is clearly in this spirit that the report of the High Level Panel appointed by the UN Secretary-General was written. This dual orientation should however recognize the special and unique challenges of the world’s most vulnerable countries. The Post 2015 Development Agenda must find its legitimacy and consistency by taking into account the needs of these countries.

**Consistency between universalism and differentiation**

Let us start from the principle of universalism in the objectives. Through universalism equity is to be promoted among world citizens: all the poor are under consideration. It is here to be reminded that justice means access to equal opportunities and that opportunities for citizens differ depending on the country in which they live, according to the probability of the country development. The probability of an individual not to be poor in the future is significantly lower in poor countries facing structural handicaps to growth (particularly structural vulnerability) than in other countries. The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have precisely been defined as poor countries suffering from structural handicaps to growth. They are more likely than others to remain poor. Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are also two major groups of countries facing major structural vulnerabilities.

An economic vulnerability index (EVI) was developed by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) in order to identify least developed countries. It is an index of structural economic vulnerability, relying on indicators of “shocks” (natural and external) and of exposure to shocks, and evidences the high vulnerability of LDCs and SIDS. Estimated retrospectively over 30 years by FERDI, the evolution of the index shows a smaller decrease in vulnerability in the LDCs compared to that in other developing countries.

EVI is only one of the two structural handicap indicators used to identify LDCs, the other one being the Human Assets Index (HAI). The HAI index can be seen as reflecting an important factor determining the structural resilience of countries to shocks. Thus by combining the HAI and the EVI we may design a structural handicap index (SHI), which underlines the structural vulnerability of the LDCs.

Their inherent handicaps explain why LDCs have fallen behind in achieving the MDGs compared to other developing countries. For instance, considering the target of halving the proportion of people living below the poverty line (MDG 1), the average rate of decline between 1990 and 2010 was 29 percent against 48 percent in other developing countries. It can also be shown that more economic growth is to be achieved in the LDCs than in other developing countries in order to reduce poverty by a given rate, then to reach the first MDG.

**Consistency between broadening objectives and the priority of vulnerable countries**

The goals of sustainable development cannot be defined and pursued without taking into account corresponding vulnerabilities: vulnerability is a risk for sustainability. It is then normal that an universal sustainable development agenda seeks to address vulnerability on a variety of fronts (economic, social, environmental) and pay close attention to these particularly vulnerable countries, such as LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs. Economic vulnerability threatens the sustainability and inclusiveness of economic growth, as does the state or political fragility, which itself to a large extent results from structural economic vulnerability.

As it has been done for economic vulnerability through EVI, it is possible to assess the structural vulnerability to climate change through a specific index, depending not on current or future policies but rather on factors reflecting both the likely magnitude of the shocks (elevation of the sea level, desertification) and the increase in recurrent shocks (rainfall and temperature). According to the physical vulnerability to climate index (PVCCI), made by FERDI, LDCs and SIDS appear to be more vulnerable than other countries.

In a nutshell, the enlargement of the agenda on sustainable development should put more emphasis on the specificity of the challenges facing vulnerable countries, especially LDCs.

**Inter-temporal coherence between Post-2015 agenda and prior commitments**

What would be the credibility of the Post 2015 Development Agenda if commitments made by the international community toward vulnerable countries were forgotten? The statement of a new partnership would be immediately considered as suspect.

On May 2011, the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries adopted the Istanbul Plan of Action (IPoA), including a large set of “priority action areas” in a “renewed and strengthened partnership for development”. Although some of its goals may not appear realistic (especially halving the number of LDCs which meet the criteria of graduation by 2020), this plan brings together a large number of actions which have to be taken by the LDCs and their partners in the next ten years.

In the same way, commitments will be made in the forthcoming Conferences on LLDCs and SIDS in 2014. It is important that the ongoing process on defining the future agenda includes their conclusions and recommendations.