



Small islands team up with private sector for concrete partnerships ahead of Conference

Press Release

Apia, 29 August 2014 – Senior government officials, top United Officials, and key players in the private sector will meet on 30-31 August for a two day Private Sector Partnerships Forum ahead of the 2014 Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in Apia, Samoa.

The Forum will take place at the Samoa Conference Centre, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi (TATTE) Complex, Sogi, Apia and is expected to be a platform for the forging of durable partnerships between SIDS, development partners and the private sector, all aimed at supporting the sustainable development of small island nations.

Co-organized by the Government of Samoa, the Samoan Chamber of Commerce, the UN Office for Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) and Digicel the event is likely to see the announcement of concrete partnerships as well as showcase existing collaboration.

The Forum will cover six thematic areas including: oceans and marine resources, connectivity (ICTs and Transport), sustainable agriculture, sustainable tourism, disaster risk reduction and renewable energy.

“The importance of the private sector is not a new phenomenon in the global discourse on SIDS. Ten years ago the Mauritius International meeting on SIDS emphasised this and called for a strengthening of business and industry in SIDS in an effort to support their development aspirations,” said High Representative and Under Secretary-General for UN-OHRLLS, Gyan Chandra Acharya.

Acharya added that for SIDS, partnerships not only make business sense, but are also a necessity.

“The characteristics that make SIDS inherently vulnerable have a direct impact on the islands’ own private sector development and growth,” he added

SIDS are small in terms of population, and in most cases also in land mass. Due to their small size, small islands find it difficult to benefit from economies of scale. As many of them are remote and isolated from the world’s major markets, transport costs to and from and within the SIDS are among the highest in the world. Therefore, many SIDS have geared their economic activities towards tourism, promotion of cultural and natural heritage, fishing and marine resources, financing, and information and communication technology (ICT).

The Samoa Chamber of Commerce acknowledges the significance of this opportunity to establish durable and fruitful partnerships not only between businesses, but between the private sector, government and the development partners.

"We believe that access to broadband is a basic human right, however many small island states are a long way from that goal. Partnerships and effective co-operation between governments, private sector telcos and international development agencies are key to driving economic growth, innovation and opportunities for investment in next generation services and infrastructure for SIDS.

In the Pacific region there are a number of submarine cables that have been financed by the World Bank, ADB, IFC and governments but access costs to these cables are 10 times the price of similar submarines cables in the Caribbean. Unfortunately a high priced monopoly has been created. These monopolies need to be broken up urgently otherwise broadband access to all people will never happen. Broadband is the umbilical cord for economic development.

This week we hope that the Private Sector Forum provides the platform to drive these discussions and target the particular need to reduce international bandwidth costs that are increasingly strangling economic growth and job creation in the Pacific region," said Digicel Group Chairman Denis O'Brien and UN Broadband Commissioner.

"SIDS are a diverse group of countries with uniquely different challenges, opportunities and priorities. But whatever their national goals and aspirations are, the common enabler to achieving them is through the power of genuine and durable partnerships. My own country is passionate about partnerships because it speaks to our history as an island nation and our journey in these uncharted waters of globalization," said Ambassador Aliioaiga Feturi Elisaia, Samoa Permanent Representative to the United Nations

BACKGROUND:

1. Sustainable Agriculture

Agriculture has historically been the foundation of cultural and economic activities in SIDS and today continues to play a significant role in sustaining livelihoods. There are opportunities for private sector entities to reinvigorate agricultural production in SIDS and contribute to the livelihoods of rural communities, for example, to help increase self-sufficiency in food production and take advantage of the international growth in organic agricultural produce.

2. Fisheries and Marine Resources

For many SIDS the ocean and its vast resources are the firm basis upon which jobs and economic growth depend. The health of the oceans is not only vital to SIDS but to the global community at large. There is potential for private sector entities to partner with SIDS towards ensuring the sustainable management and utilization of ocean resources.

3. Connectivity through Transport and ICTs

Connectivity is crucial for SIDS to access the international marketplace, arrange the transport of goods, telecommunications or internet based transactions. Many SIDS continue to grapple with the high cost and infrequency of transport connectivity whether by sea or air. This is an area where partnerships between governments and private sector have great potential to yield improved transport links and achieve more efficient logistics.

4. Renewable Energy

Many SIDS are heavily dependent on fossil fuels for their energy needs. The efforts of the private sector can play a major role in developing affordable and competitive renewable energy sources that should lead to a significant shift from a high dependence on imported fossil fuels, to more sustainable locally harnessed energy sources.

5. Sustainable Tourism

The travel and tourism industry is vitally important to SIDS. Private sector activities are a cornerstone of the viability of the tourism sector and reflect the importance of the sector in socio-economic development for SIDS. There is merit in further exploring how best tourism activities can be expanded, where capacity allows, and made more sustainable.

6. Disaster Risk Reduction

SIDS' small and open economies leave them especially exposed and highly vulnerable to external shocks resulting from disasters. If resilience building is to be successful in the years to come, it will require active and concerted partnerships between various actors including governments, private sector and local communities.

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