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United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Remarks

by

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High Representative
and
Under-Secretary-General**

**for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States**

at the side-event on

“Roundtable meeting of Small Island Developing States”

13:15-15:00

Conference Room S-1522

6 March 2018

**49th Session of the UN Statistics Commission
United Nations, New York**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues and Friends

What a pleasure to be here with you! I recognise some friendly faces from a long road travelled together here in the audience...

Thank you Paris21 for having me with you.

Yours is a very important meeting and I can not stress enough what I already conveyed in an address yesterday:

at a time of rapid information or let us say opinion flow, the need for timely and accurate and verifiable data has never been more important!

The LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS however do continue to face immense challenges in generating the timely quality statistics needed for the planning, follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

SIDS face very specific constraints.

So, the initiative of Paris21 to issue a revised NSDS Guidelines for SIDS is a very important initiative in tackling challenges.

Data are not an end in and of itself but a critical tool for decision and policy-makers tasked with turning the commitment of the global community to Agenda 2030 to a reality of a sustainable and inclusive development for all.

That is our shared challenge and you have a major role to play in that.

We also know, and the NSDS revised guidelines do identify six critical areas for work, that the SIDS are confronted with major challenges to meet the data requirements of Agenda 2030

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For example, in its Voluntary National Review, Maldives documented that data from the existing National Statistical System only allowed for 64 SDG indicators to be identified (or 27% of the total). Another 57 SDG indicators (or 23% of the total) could be compiled with additional efforts. However, there was no mechanism established thus far to compile data for 37 indicators (15%), while 86 indicators (or 35%) were identified as Tier 3. This is a typical pattern in SIDS (as well as LDCs).

What to do?

In my short remarks, I just wish to focus on a couple aspects for action and these concern: institutional constraints and skill gaps, funding and greater collaboration.

SIDS are typically equipped with limited size offices, evidence-based policy-making is a relatively new feature and statistics are not necessarily perceived as a value-adding objective to invest in. The Paris 21 NSDS Guide does recognise this.

The generation of data needed for Agenda 2030 requires statistical effort across sectors and analytical capacity able to capture the cross-sectoral and by times complex nature of the interlinkages between the SDGs. This demands specific skill sets but also sectoral capacities which often times lack.

First, many SIDS still need to transition from a National Statistics Office to an empowered National Statistics System and I add a “statistical culture “.

Agenda 2030 has already proven to be a good transformation driver in this direction.

Belize, for example, reported that the Government has taken initial steps to transform the Statistical Institute of Belize to a National Statistical System to ensure there is a coordinating mechanism for the collection, compilation and publication of statistical information for all SDG related data.

It shows what strong political support can achieve!

Second, national budgets should attribute commensurate funding to statistics systems in recognition of the central role that robust statistics systems play in sustainable development governance. However, domestic resources alone cannot meet the needs. Predictable and sustained investment from external sources is needed including for skill development. Third, within countries, greater collaboration on data collection across sectors with shared data needs can help to improve data quality and lower costs via economies of scale.

Fourth, we need strengthened regional statistics cooperation.

Indeed, economies of scale are an important feature in SIDS regions.

Regional skill sharing, exchange of experience and best practice between countries will be critical to enhancing statistical development within SIDS. It will help with introducing or updating relevant legislation, empowering statistics institutions and systems, and sharing of best practices regarding institutional arrangements such as steering committees and coordination, training and planning modules, as well as technical and methodological issues.

One of the key achievements in SIDS regions has been the harmonization of data collection initiatives and collective reporting on relevant development indicators at large.

This must be continued and deserves sustained and stronger support from various partners as we need comparable, consistent and complete data sets.

And let us not forget the role of technology. There may well be an underinvestment in this area. Expanding internet connectivity, especially broadband, the use of handheld devices and related technologies need to be looked into so as not to leave the SIDS behind.

Yours indeed is a very important meeting. It is in your hands to help showing the SIDS capacity for innovative sustainable development solutions for Agenda 2030 ranging for instance from tourism, to disaster risk reduction and management, energy, oceans, and fisheries.

But for this we need timely quality statistics - this only will allow us to measure and report on successful practices and initiatives.

I now look forward to listening to you, exchanging with you and wish you productive deliberations.

Thank you.