

**AIMS CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM**  
**CEDREFI, Republic of Mauritius**

***From Sustainable Island Living to Sustainable Development: Time for Action***

**Background**

Following the International Meeting on the review of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in January 2005 and its principal outcome which is encapsulated in the document entitled the '*Mauritius Strategy*', a series of initiatives have been taken at various levels to implement the strategy and enhance the implementation of the Programme of Action for SIDS. Civil Society from the three major regions made a commitment, at the Civil Society Forum held in Mauritius prior to the International Meeting, to continue to play an active role in the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy through the development of their own strategies, plans of action, programmes, and the consolidation of their existing coordination mechanism. Indeed the Mauritius Strategy underscores the need for action at the regional level and the active participation of civil society. It is from this perspective that civil society from the AIMS region is proposing a regional strategy to fulfil its role as a key stakeholder in the process.

**Sustainable Island Living Concept**

Sustainable development is a difficult concept for many people to understand and capture. Various terms have been used in the developmental literature and sustainable development has become a rather popular cliché. However, there has been limited progress on the ground. In the context of the current commitment for the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy, it is proposed to borrow the concept of 'Sustainable Island Living' from UNESCO (in the context of the work of Small Islands Voice) and 'Nature Seychelles' (Seychelles civil society focal point for SIDS). Sustainable island living personalizes a process that enables everybody to enjoy a decent living and a good quality of life in terms of satisfying their needs (economic, social, ecological and cultural) and creates an enabling environment for the future generation to fulfil its aspirations. In so doing, sustainable island living addresses the control and distribution of resources and the decentralisation of decision-making. Furthermore, it is based on core values such as a culture of partnership based on shared vision, good governance, autonomy of the community, and participatory approaches. The intention is to build a solid foundation on core issues and challenges. A thorough analysis of stakeholders' socio-cultural context, existing vulnerabilities and potential for resilience is an essential step in the process which ideally leads to an appropriate forum for multi-stakeholders dialogue and decision-making. In spite of the heterogeneity and diversity of the AIMS region<sup>1</sup> in terms of different geopolitical affiliations, history and culture, as SIDS they share common problems and issues as emphasised in the Programme of Action for SIDS and the Mauritius Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> The complexity is reflected in the fact that the region is made up of five? island sub-regions namely the African SIDS of the South West Indian Ocean (Mauritius, Comoros and Seychelles) and Atlantic sub-region (Cape Verde, Sao Tomé & Principe, Guinea-Bissau), the Mediterranean (Malta and Cyprus), South China Sea (Singapore) and Bahrain from the Persian Gulf.

## **Multi-Stakeholder Approach**

The multi-stakeholder approach is based on the experiences derived and lessons learned from the civil society regional preparatory process prior to the Mauritius International Meeting. One of the major achievements in the regional process has been the building of bridges between major groups of the region<sup>2</sup> and creating an enabling environment for them to move the preparatory process forward. On the basis of these experiences, the AIMS region is structuring itself through the setting up of an integrated cross-sectoral platform. This will allow for a regional monitoring and dialogue mechanism for civil society in the context of the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy. In each of the SIDS in the region, a focal point will be set up to coordinate the national and regional processes. Currently, national focal points already exist in Maldives, Comoros, Seychelles and Mauritius. Others will be established as the regional platform is operationalised.

This platform has the advantage of putting each partner on an equal footing and it also creates conditions for the development of a cross-sectoral approach for the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy. Provision is also made for the institutionalisation of a division of labour among the national focal points such that each will be responsible for a certain number of specific chapters of the Mauritius Strategy. This approach will strengthen a sense of common ownership for the implementation process and ensure the collective engagement of regional civil society partners.

## **Way Forward**

The way forward should contribute to changing the mindset of policy makers and the citizens through regional actions and projects to promote sustainable island living. These projects should be rooted in the realities of the communities and avoid ‘one size fits all’ approaches. Consequently, the development of regional activities will be based on the principle of subsidiarity and variable geometry and will aim at the mobilisation of existing regional expertise. When needed, expertise from other SIDS regions will be utilised.

The priorities for civil society are the following: (i) Organisation of a foundation workshop for the launching of the platform and setting up of regional coordination (ii) Development of a regional database on the SIDS stakeholders and available expertise (iii) Popularisation of the Mauritius Strategy through a multimedia toolkit (iv) Development of training programmes (v) Creation of a regional civil society event based on the outcome of regional research and actions on sustainable island living. The proposed implementation strategy, combined with policy analysis and problem-solving actions, should consolidate and strengthen sustainable island living.

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<sup>2</sup> The UN concept of major groups has been adapted to the reality of the region and comprises trade unions, fishermen community, small farmers, women groups, youth, NGOs and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) etc.