

**FORTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS**
(26–28 June 2018, Noumea, New Caledonia)

AGENDA ITEM No. 6: Implementation of the SIS Regional Strategy 2016–2020

(Paper presented by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS))

Summary

1. This paper provides a status report on the progress of implementing the Smaller Island States (SIS) Regional Strategy 2016–2020, which was endorsed by SIS Leaders in Koror, Palau, on 24 June 2016, and by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, on 9 September 2016, as well as the Strategy’s companion Implementation Plan.
2. The Forum Secretariat has progressed work in the Strategy’s priority areas of air and sea transportation, particularly regarding the negotiation of fair and equitable air services agreements and the development of a model for joint tendering of air services on selected intra-regional routes between the SIS and with neighbouring countries. Work has also progressed on labour mobility with regard to skilled migration, employment creation, and immigration facilitation, including legislative drafting of immigration laws in partnership with the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference (PIDC).
3. Climate change work under the Strategy includes a joint SIS proposal to the Green Climate Fund (GCF), notably agreeing on (i) infrastructure resilience, (ii) sustainable transport, and (iii) a climate change insurance facility as the three thematic areas SIS wish to pursue under joint proposals.
4. As a ‘living’ document, the SIS Regional Strategy will undergo a mid-term review in late 2018 as part of the overall effort to keep it relevant and responsive to the expectations of SIS members and stakeholders.
5. Premised on the Strategy, the Joint CROP-SIS Attachment Programme is due to commence later this year and will run for a minimum of three years. It will involve the placement of SIS representatives across all nine participating CROP agencies in fields consistent with the five priority areas under the SIS Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Recommendations

6. CRGA is invited to:
 - i. reaffirm the SIS Regional Strategy and Implementation Plan as the basis for articulating its support for SIS regional priorities;

- ii. note the updates on air services, labour mobility, and climate change work under the SIS Strategy;
- iii. agree on activities within the SIS Implementation Plan where the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and SPC can build stronger partnerships in order to access the technical and financial assistance needed;
- iv. comment on areas in the SIS Regional Strategy for consideration in the mid-term review;
- v. endorse SPC's participation in the Joint CROP-SIS Attachment Programme.

Background

7. The SIS is a Forum construct, comprising a subgroup of eight Forum member countries – Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and Tuvalu.
8. Against a background of ‘unique and particular’ vulnerabilities linked to their small size, lack of natural resources and remoteness, SIS face a range of development challenges that limit their capacity to ensure resilience and long-term sustainable development. As a consequence of setting priorities under the SIS Regional Strategy 2016–2020, there is a specific focus on issues that are common to the group and that require further work. The SIS Strategy was endorsed by SIS Leaders in Koror, Palau, on 24 June 2016, and by Forum Leaders in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, on 9 September 2016. The following five priority areas are specified in the SIS Strategy: climate change, labour (mobility), health, marine, and air and sea transportation.
9. To translate the Strategy into time-bound actions, supported by genuine and durable partnerships, SIS Leaders in September 2016 tasked the Forum Secretariat with developing the Implementation Plan for the Strategy. On 4 September 2017, SIS Leaders endorsed the Implementation Plan in Apia.
10. In Pohnpei, SIS Leaders also requested CROP agencies to integrate key actions of the SIS Strategy into their programme frameworks and tasked CROP agencies with providing more specific reporting on targeted SIS work undertaken at the regional and national level, including challenges and constraints for implementing the SIS Strategy.

Current issues

11. SPC plays a vital role in and across all of the five priority focal areas of the SIS Strategy – from the ‘health’ area in general to specific activities, such as SPC-led work with development partners on the WASH initiative (climate change). SPC also plays a key role in providing technical assistance to map current labour flows (labour mobility), supporting the delivery of SIS-focused action against the Regional Roadmap on Fisheries relative to coastal fisheries (marine), and supporting the facilitation of constructive political dialogue between SIS and relevant governments in the Forum and Pacific stakeholders to achieve fair and equitable air services agreements and proper management of upper air space for SIS.
12. Work on progressing the 2017 SIS Leaders’ decisions on air services is currently being carried out by the Secretariat in two phases. The first phase involves: (1) the development of options and analyses, which could support SIS members in the negotiation of air services agreements with international counterparts/contracting parties; and (2) development of a concept note identifying the various aspects of aviation support expected by SIS. The second phase intends to provide analyses of option(s) to develop a model for joint tendering for the provision of air services on selected intra-regional routes between the SIS as well as with neighbouring countries. Reports will be produced on the completion of each phase.
13. SIS interests in labour mobility are being pursued through new schemes that specifically target certain SIS countries as well as Australia’s Pacific Labour Scheme and New Zealand’s Fisheries Employment Pilot. Several SIS have also highlighted the importance of attracting skills (e.g. Cook Islands), with the Secretariat looking to provide options to better leverage existing labour

mobility tools, such as labour databases, to facilitate the movement of skills into countries other than Australia and New Zealand. Labour mobility was raised during PIFS regional consultations, including by SIS countries, especially in the context of creating employment. PIFS has also partnered with PIDC to support its work on immigration facilitation, including work on legal drafting in members such as RMI. PIFS further represented SIS members' interests in the Pacific Labour Mobility Arrangement Meeting, including by advocating for intra-regional labour mobility to be supported through this mechanism.

14. SIS Leaders agreed on (i) infrastructure resilience, (ii) sustainable transport, and (iii) climate change insurance facility as the three priority thematic areas for joint SIS proposals to the Green Climate Fund (GCF). SIS Leaders also acknowledged that joint SIS proposals will not preclude SIS members from working individually and/or joining other Pacific joint programmatic proposals. Since then, the Forum Secretariat has convened three coordination meetings for GCF-accredited entities (AEs) to discuss their project pipelines, including a joint SIS proposal. AEs stand ready to assist but can only do so if the SIS National Designated Authorities (NDAs) approach an accredited entity as a 'collective'. In the absence of that, AEs are working bilaterally with a number of SIS members to develop and submit national projects. The Forum Secretariat will consult with the SIS NDAs and SIS Officials in the second quarter of 2018 to identify a way forward. Despite that, four SIS members (Tuvalu, Cook Islands, Nauru and RMI) are among the nine GCF projects approved from the Pacific. All eight SIS members have accessed GCF readiness grants.
15. Cross-cutting issues highlighted in CRGA 48 Paper no. 6.2 pertain to the focal areas of the SIS Strategy (marine, labour mobility, health). However, a more critical issue in this paper is the ongoing need for enhanced collaborative and consolidated efforts by all relevant partners identified under each action/activity/deliverable to effectively engage with one another to achieve the expected results that the SIS Leaders have endorsed, starting with CROP.
16. The monitoring of the Strategy's Implementation Plan will be strengthened to fully capture the efforts of all CROP agencies and relevant partners in carrying out SIS-related activities. Any identified gaps and new and emerging priority areas may be addressed in the upcoming mid-term review of the Strategy.
17. SIS member states took part in the recent in-country Regional Policy Consultation process led by PIFS. As part of this process, expressed views on the Strategy's priorities, other than labour mobility, from SIS governments, civil society organisations and the private sector were virtually non-existent. In public feedback received from the online questionnaire during the same process issues relating to rapid urbanisation, loss of cultural and traditional knowledge, and emergency evacuation of national populations in response to natural disasters emerged. PIFS also received feedback vis-à-vis the online questionnaire on labour mobility as a stand-alone Forum priority. However, this requires further analysis through an SIS lens.
18. Premised on the Strategy, the Joint CROP-SIS Attachment Programme, in which SPC will participate, is scheduled to commence later this year and to run for a minimum of three years. Through secured short-term placements for representatives of all SIS member countries across all CROP agencies in fields consistent with the five priority areas under the Strategy and Implementation Plan, the programme aims to (i) strengthen SIS capacity and understanding of the contribution of the regional agenda, through the Strategy and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, to national level outcomes; (ii) enhance CROP's ability to address SIS priorities under the Strategy through a 'whole-of-government' approach; and (iii) promote strategic and

coherent engagement between CROP and SIS government focal points, including SIS Regionalism Officers in-country.

Conclusion

19. The Pacific Community remains a valued, committed and important member of CROP. As the largest regional organisation supporting regional and national resilience and the sustainable development aspirations and objectives of Pacific Island countries and territories, SPC's technical assistance role and functions within the CROP and the broader regional governance and financing architecture are crucial.

Recommendations

20. CRGA is invited to:

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- iii. agree on activities within the SIS Implementation Plan where the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and SPC can build stronger partnerships in order to access the technical and financial assistance needed;
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