



Developments from The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States (ABAS) Conference and Implications for Jamaica



In 1992, the international community recognized Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as a unique case requiring special attention. This commitment was reaffirmed through the Barbados Programme of Action in 1994, the Mauritius Strategy in 2005, and the SAMOA Pathway in 2014. Despite progress, SIDS remain vulnerable to climate change, natural disasters, and economic shocks. Over the past three decades, they have demonstrated resilience and leadership, especially in climate action and ocean stewardship.

However, ongoing challenges necessitate continued and enhanced international support. The new 10-year plan, agreed at the fourth International Conference on SIDS in St. John's, Antigua in May 2024, aims to bolster SIDS' resilience and sustainable development. This plan emphasizes economic diversification, easier access to finance, and addressing climate and environmental threats, ensuring that SIDS can achieve a sustainable future.

In the case of Jamaica, the country has made notable strides in climate resilience, sustainable economic growth, and social development. However, this progress has yet to translate into a significant increase in its SDG score since 2015. The 2024 Sustainable Development Report shows that Jamaica's overall score in 2023 is slightly below its score in 2022. Clearly, much work lies ahead as Jamaica enters the second half of the SDGs. The 10-year plan will be instrumental in helping Jamaica diversify its economy, secure better access to finance, and confront environmental challenges, all aimed at achieving sustainable prosperity.

This Jamaica Economy Panel (JEP) Discussion will highlight what the SIDS4/ABAS Outcome document means for Jamaica and its progress on sustainable development in the coming years.

Priority Areas for SIDS Accelerated Sustainable Development

The ABAS Outcome Document outlines four key priorities for SIDS: resilient economies; safe, healthy, and prosperous societies; energy security; and environmental protection and sustainability. The JEP panellists were asked how well they feel these priorities align with Jamaica's national development strategies. All the panellists agreed that the four key priorities align well with Jamaica's National Development plan. Particularly, Brianne Houston, Economist noted, "The four priorities align closely with the development goals outlined in the Government of Jamaica's Vision 2030. A prosperous economy can only be achieved if it is resilient; a secure, cohesive, and just society will become safe, healthy, and prosperous;

a healthy natural environment results from prioritizing environmental protection; and together, these will ensure that Jamaicans are empowered to achieve their fullest potential.”

Panellists were also asked if they believed that there were any missing sustainable development priorities considering the four key priorities from the ABAS outcome document. While Keenan Falconer, Economist, agreed that “these four priority areas seem to cover the 15 National outcomes identified in Vision 2030,” others noted that Jamaica needs also to prioritize “Education/Human Capital Development and the responsible and efficient use of technology, especially Ai,” Dr. Patrice Whitely, Head, Department of Economics at UWI Mona; and that Jamaica should also “prioritize shifting its focus to digitization, research and development, and innovation in areas such as agriculture, transportation, and education to promote more sustainable and resilient economic growth,” Brianne Houston. Further, Dr. Christine Clarke, Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics, UWI Mona noted that “Understanding resilience will be critical going forward” for Jamaica.

Obstacles to Delivering on Priority Areas in Jamaica

Panellists then highlighted specific issues they think may arise in relation to the four priority areas, specifically, Dr Kevin Williams, Senior Research Fellow, SALISES noted that “Energy security, though important, is one area that Jamaica is not yet able to achieve in the medium to long run. The reason is that Jamaica relies on external sources to satisfy its energy needs, because it does not have the resources to harness energy from natural sources, such as water, wind, and sun.” Priyanka Mais, Junior Professional Officer at the RCO further emphasized that “Jamaica’s heavy dependence on fossil fuels (like oil and gas) that it imports to meet its energy needs leaves the Small Island Developing State vulnerable to external economic shocks, for example, fluctuation in oil prices and any interruption on the supply of fossil fuels such as natural disasters, overall hinders Jamaica’s ability to transition to more sustainable energy sources like wind and solar power.”

Action Plan For Delivery of SDGs for SIDS

Additionally, the ABAS document outlines a 10 point plan of action for SIDS to deliver on the four key priority areas previously highlighted and accelerate delivery on the SDGs which include; Building economic resilience, Scale up climate financing, Scale up biodiversity action, Conserve and sustainably utilize the oceans, Mainstream DRR, Promote safe and healthy societies, Science, technology, innovation and digitalisation, Productive populations, Promote partnerships, Data collection, analysis and use. Of these 10 point plans of action for SIDS, the JEP panellists were asked to rank the top three actions they feel should be prioritized for Jamaica. Promoting safe and healthy societies; Science, technology, innovation and digitalisation; and Building economic resilience emerged as top three priorities of the 10 point action plan by the panellists.

For each of these top three ranked priorities of the action plan, panellists pointed out the main obstacles that they believe would hinder Jamaica from achieving these outcome priorities. For promoting safe and healthy societies, Priyanka Mais noted that “citizens sometimes struggled to access adequate healthcare services as while some services are free, the actual delivery of these services is often compromised by a lack of necessary resources.”

As it relates to Science, technology, innovation and digitalisation, Dr. Patrice Whitely noted that Jamaica has “an educational base that is not strong enough. Therefore, we need a firmer foundation before our citizens can maximize the benefits of science, technology and innovation.” With regards to Building economic resilience, Keenan Falconer expressed that “The main challenge with building economic resilience is the lack of adequate buffers to respond to shocks, particularly natural disasters. Jamaica is susceptible to weather shocks for example, droughts and floods as well as hurricanes and other tropical cyclones.



This results in agriculture being vulnerable to these shocks in a context where agricultural prices are a significant part (34%) of the Jamaican CPI. Recovery and re-building would be efficient if these buffers both financial and infrastructural (related to irrigation and greenhouses) were available," Falconer said.

Role of Development Partners

Finally, the panellists were asked to comment on the most effective ways that they think Development Partners could support Jamaica's progress. Dr. Christine Clark said development partners could "support more detailed assessments of the contemporary issues in Jamaica's development." Additionally, Dr. Kevin Williams posited development partners could support Jamaica "through providing financial and human capital support." And Keenan Falconer noted that "Development partners can support Jamaica by: a) Building climate resilience through disaster fund, climate change funding or insurance; b) Technical support to build capacity to develop economic resilience; and c) By promoting science, technology, digitalization and innovation."

Dr. Nadine McCloud states:

Jamaica and the other Caribbean countries' most recent hurricane encounter with Beryl is a staunch reminder of the existential threat of natural disasters and climate change to SIDS' sustainable economic development, given their natural limitations and fiscal restraints. Post-disaster recovery efforts are usually sluggish or non-existent in specific affected SIDS communities, compounding their economic woes, thus making the development goalpost less reachable. Jamaica's development partners have a singular role in realising the 10-year ABAS action plan. The JEP panellists have highlighted several non-mutually exclusive areas where our development partners can have a material impact. Thus, if our development partners allocate resources to Jamaica through an efficient, intensive lens, such an overture will strategically assist Jamaica in checking the 10-year ABAS action plan boxes.



DR. NADINE McCLOUD
Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics, UWI Mona

Dr. Stuart Davies further explains:

Around the halfway point of the SDGs, the ABAS agreement provides a timely review and reset for SIDS. The unrelenting compounding impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, disasters and natural hazards, health and other social-related challenges together with economic vulnerabilities continue to beset SIDS development progress. Economic transformation and resilience building are core elements to the ABAS's plan and strategic investments to increase productive capacities are an important part to this. While a strong alignment with ABAS provides added comfort to Jamaica, there is still much to do to realise sustainable development in the years ahead.



DR. STUART DAVIES
Senior Economist, UN Jamaica

Conclusion

Following the completion of the SAMOA Pathway, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) met in May in Antigua for the 4th International SIDS conference to agree on a development pathway for the next 10 years. With the 2023 Sustainable Development Report highlighting an alarming lack of progress globally as countries pass the halfway point of the Sustainable Development Goals, the timing of SIDS conference allowed countries to reflect on their achievements, share their experiences and recharge their policy agenda's giving renewed impetus to policy and programmes drivers that can accelerate progress on sustainable development. In the case of Jamaica, it has made notable strides in climate resilience, sustainable economic growth, and social development but this has yet to translate into material progress to increase its SDG score. As displayed in the 2024 Sustainable Development Report, Jamaica's overall score in 2023 is slightly below what it was in 2022. There is much work ahead as Jamaica enters the second half of the SDGs.

