

Blog from Samoa - "Hot hot hot!"

Nicole Leotaud, September 1st 2014



The first day of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) was HOT! Delegates sweated as they rushed to catch buses, walk from taxi drop off points located what seemed like miles away from the entrance, moved in between sessions, and at many of the side events which were held in open tents in the midday heat. But the issues to be discussed were also hot. The official outcome document of the Conference - the [SAMOA Pathway](#) - had for the first time been negotiated in advance. With the long list of 17 sustainable development issues and text agreed upon, the underlying focus seemed to be on positioning SIDS with strong political statements and sharing experiences on some of the "hot" issues.

The tone was set early on by the President of the Conference, the Prime Minister of Samoa, during the formal opening when he opined that "we should send bold signals on what we can do, not what others can do for us" and "sympathy and pity will not provide solace nor halt the disastrous impacts of climate change." Although issues of the fragility and vulnerability of SIDS continued to be raised, international partners have tired of this message so throughout the conference SIDS are asserting what actions they are undertaking and calling for stronger actions by development partners.

The theme of the conference is on partnerships, and a series of "Partnership Dialogues" are being held where governments, UN agencies, and others are promoting new or existing partnerships. But the clear focus is on the strategic opportunity to develop new partnerships with the private sector for resourcing sustainable development initiatives.

We in civil society, who have of course long played a role in sustainable development and have the potential to play a more effective role, feel marginalised by this new focus on private sector. The strategic role of civil society is not really recognised in the SAMOA Pathway. A representative of the nine Major Groups recognised by the UN, which includes civil society, made a statement at the opening on behalf of the over 250 representatives who gathered at the Major Groups Forum held the previous week. The statement laid out key principles on partnerships, drawing from a [paper](#) prepared by CANARI. It also called on governments to implement a strong human rights and sustainable development framework and a people-centred approach. Major Groups recognised the core of sustainable development as human rights, gender equality, economic justice, and environmental sustainability.

Given the diversity across the nine Major Groups recognised by the UN system, very wide ranging priorities were identified which largely mirrored those identified in the official SAMOA Pathway, for example, calling for urgent and ambitious action on climate change. However, Major Groups were more ambitious on controversial issues, for example making a strong statement on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Major Groups were disappointed at the lack of attention paid to the role of civil society and the needs of indigenous people in the SAMOA Pathway and highlighted these in their list of priorities.

Also in the opening, the UN Secretary General noted concerns that SIDS are not on track in terms of achieving sustainable development targets, and some are even regressing. The President of the General Assembly noted that SIDS and their partners need to assert their priorities and make sure that these are reflected in the new post-2015 global development agenda being negotiated. Samoa is very much being seen as a strategic opportunity for SIDS to prepare to advocate their priorities in the post-2015 process and climate change negotiations in late 2014.

About CANARI

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute is a regional technical non-profit organisation which has been working in the islands of the Caribbean for more than 20 years. Our mission is to promote equitable participation and effective collaboration in managing natural resources critical to development. Our programmes focus on research, sharing and dissemination of lessons learned, capacity building and fostering regional partnerships.

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