PROFILE: Dr. Asif Chida, Regional Inclusive Growth Team Leader and Private Sector Development Specialist with the UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji

The COE spoke with Mr Chida, who has more than twenty years’ experience in 30 Small Islands Developing States in the Caribbean and the Pacific, and asked him about some of his key insights related to sustainable development for SIDS policy makers.

What do you consider the most critical component for implementing the SDGs in SIDS?

**Dr. Asif Chida:** “Achieving Agenda 2030 in SIDS will require an integrated approach that considers each of the three dimensions of sustainable development (Inclusive Economic Growth, Social Development and Environmental Protection) and is guided by the overarching aim of ‘leaving no one behind’, an imperative that necessitates a focus on ways to address inequalities and boost economic efficiency. It will also require collective action in every SIDS, making sure the agenda is tailored to local needs and priorities. This is essential because although the SDGs and targets are global in nature and universally applicable, each country will set its own national targets that will be guided by global ambitions but consider national circumstances. To make all this happen, the role and importance of SDG Financing is critical and cannot be overemphasized.

While the SIDS are countries and territories with differences in history, size, population, geographic make-up, natural resources and culture they also share common characteristics and challenges that distinguish them globally. These common characteristics include their vulnerability to the effects of climate change, relatively narrow economic bases, and a geography that limits participation in international trade. Given the high level of ambition of Agenda 2030, mainstreaming it into country strategies, plans, and budgets will require significant effort and support in the SIDS where capacities and resources are limited.

The most critical component of SDG implementation in SIDS will be financing. Huge investments are needed to attain the SDGs, and fulfil the aspirations of the SAMOA Pathway, over the next fifteen years. Such financing will come from a variety of public and private sources. Much of this will be debt finance which could pose a challenge for SIDS, especially those with already fragile debt positions. In addition, it will be vital to strengthen SIDS’ capacities to develop high quality “bankable projects” to take advantage of new financing opportunities in the post 2015 period.

Over the last decade, the financing for development landscape has changed markedly and many new sources of finance have emerged. This includes environment and climate finance, as
well as the expansion of private finance and South-South Cooperation. Yet often, SIDS have not been able to take advantage of some of these new opportunities. The climate finance landscape, in particular, has become more complex and difficult to navigate, especially for smaller countries. Apart from sovereign debt difficulties, some SIDS are constrained with their classification as “middle income” countries unable to access concessional finance.

The emerging development financing landscape also provides opportunities to SIDS which include an expansion in environmental and climate focused international public finance, the emergence of new and innovative financial instruments (green/blue bonds& investment, social impact funds, blended finance and an expanded donor and lender pool (including non-traditional donors). In addition, both domestic resources and international finance will be indispensable. Issues of remittances, foreign direct investment and domestic resource mobilization all make up the SIDS financing environment and need to be considered alongside concessional financing and ODA.”

If you could give 3 suggestions for SIDS policy makers to enhance their sustainable development, what would they be?

Dr. Asif Chida: “SIDS policy makers need to shift from reactive policies to more solutions based and transformative policies which can be achieved through collective action, peer reviews and south-south cooperation. Focus areas, among others can be:

- Localization of SDGs: Currently SIDS are at various levels in SDG localization. Key focus areas that need to be considered are: a) adapt policies, processes and systems to promote more equal influence over prioritization of needs, the allocation of resources and the monitoring of outcomes at national, sub-national and sector levels; (b) encourage and adopt evidence-based planning and budgeting and policy formulation, where national and sector plans and budgets are more closely aligned under multi-year frameworks; (c) strengthen accountability and demand for improved services by strengthening public and stakeholder consultation, engagement and information, and (d) promote the use of innovation and ICT to deliver national development objectives.

- Vulnerability index for SIDS to access concessional finances. SIDS need to reinforce their joint call to various multilateral financial institutions to consider additional metrics for concessional finances beyond income per capita, such as economic and environmental vulnerability, which is not a new call. SIDS vulnerability index can comprise of basket of indicators which in addition to income per capita includes: a country’s capacity to mobilize domestic resources; access to private finance; natural disasters/climate change vulnerability; debt levels; the level of human development; inclusive growth index and the type of programme being funded. This approach may provide a more holistic guide as to the types of financing most suited to a country’s circumstances and needs.

- Inclusivity of whole society for sustainable economic growth: Promoting community based social entrepreneurship involving youth and women can help in SIDS local economic
development. Sectors and target activities for social entrepreneurship in the SIDS are diverse, but can align with key areas of growth. Many of the social enterprises opportunities are related to the natural environment such as in marine and fisheries, agriculture, renewable energy/ green technologies, disaster resilience and recovery. Selected services sectors can be also considered high potential, particularly tourism; whilst there can be niche roles in social or government services (health, education, housing, water and sanitation) for inclusive partnerships involving community, public and private sectors.”

Can you give a few practical examples of inspiring development projects?

Dr. Asif Chida: “Yes, three projects come to mind that can be good to share:

UNDP’s Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme: UNDP’s Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme (pfip.org) is a Pacific-wide programme helping low-income households gain access to financial services and financial education which is jointly administered with UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and receives funding from the Australian Government, the European Union and the New Zealand Government. PFIP aims to add one million Pacific Islanders to the formal financial sector by 2019 by supporting policy and regulatory initiatives, funding innovation with financial services and delivery channels, disseminating market information, and empowering consumers

Among the many PFIP’s innovative initiatives linking ICT to ordinary citizens is the expansion of digital government-to-person (G2P) and person-to-government (P2G) transfers and payments as the single most important action that governments can take to introduce large numbers of people to digital financial services and hence financial inclusion, while also providing a critical mass of transaction volume and customers to enable sustainability of services.

In 2011, PFIP engaged with the Fijian Department of Social Welfare and Australian Aid Fiji to digitize welfare payments for over 20,000 very low-income clients, mostly women, the first successful G2P project in the Pacific. Following the success of the project, PFIP published a report with the aim of the Fiji case study to serve as a model for other countries in the region. The report highlighted several replicable steps for successful implementation of G2P initiatives (http://www.pfip.org/our-work/topic-areas/g2pp2g/government-to-person-g2p-payments/)

PFIP continues to advocate for partner governments to join the Better Than Cash Alliance (https://www.betterthancash.org/), committing to digitize government payments. In 2015, Papua New Guinea became the first country in the Pacific to do so, with Fiji to follow in 2016. For further information, see Westpac Digitizing Social Welfare Payments (http://www.pfip.org/our-work/work-streams/financial-innovation/westpac-digitizing-welfare-payments/).

Farm to Table, Engaging Youth in Organic Farming: Following a successful pilot project in Samoa wherein youth actively participated in the 2014 SIDS conference and served organic food
at the SIDS food court, the project had created keen interest in the region. The project involved youth farming in organic vegetables, herbs and fruits and later trained in creating organic menus. In 2015, UNDP secured two-year funding from SDG Fund of US$1.5 million for roll out and implementing Farm to Table Project: Engaging Youth in Organic Farming in three countries-Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu. One of the objectives of this initiative is to create employment opportunities for youth in organic agriculture through a value chain approach of public private partnerships in the key economic sectors of agriculture and tourism.

This system was first designed by chef and author Robert Oliver, who developed it in the Caribbean where he was the executive chef for three resorts. There he connected small family farms to the resort menus through the development of long-term supply agreements. Farm to Table operates a supply guarantee system where “consistency is our first product”. It aims to provide capacity across the value chain—from the certified organic farmers to Women in Business Development to restaurant owners and managers. Details of the project in Samoa can be seen in the link https://www.womeninbusiness.ws/farm-to-table.html.

**Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO)** ([http://www.pipso.org.fj/](http://www.pipso.org.fj/)) The Pacific Islands Private Sector Organization (PIPSO) is the premier private sector representative body in the Pacific Islands region. It was set-up through the mandate of the Forum Economic Ministers in 2005 to be the representative body of the Pacific region’s private sector and to ensure dialogue between public and private sectors for strengthening regional policy making. UNDP has been supporting PIPSO since inception by providing technical and financial support both for regional and national levels private sector strategies with a focus on inclusive SMEs and women in business.


PIPSO’s membership currently consists of the National Private Sector Organizations (NPSOs) of 15 Forum Island Countries (FICS) namely Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu. Among on the many PIPSO initiatives
Dr. Asif Chida is the Regional Inclusive Growth Team Leader and Private Sector Development Specialist with the UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji. He has more than twenty years’ experience in 30 Small Islands Developing States in the Caribbean and the Pacific. A pro-poor business expert, Dr. Chida focuses on development of knowledge products to support policy analysis and advisory services for job creation and poverty reduction; employment targeted economic programmes and frameworks; trade employment linkages; facilitation of public-private partnerships; improvement of business enabling environment; SME competitiveness and value chains, inclusive market development and sustainable enterprise development.

In addition, Dr. Chida’s has expertise in the field of informal sector and sustainable livelihoods; women’s economic security and rights; local economic development and diversification; poverty alleviation with cross cutting themes of gender and environment sustainability; investment promotion and facilitation; business incubation and entrepreneurship development.

In the Pacific, Dr. Chida’s major contributions have been in the establishment of Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO), Introduction of entrepreneurship and financial education in the school’s curriculum, and organisation of Trade Pasifika. In the Caribbean, he facilitated the establishment of Small Enterprise Development Units in various Organisations of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

Dr. Chida previously held the post of Commonwealth Secretariat’s Regional Private Sector Advisor with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat as well as numerous international assignments including, with NZAID, CIDA, ILO and UN Women. He was also Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor which focused on access to justice, property rights, labor & livelihoods rights within the informal economy. Dr. Chida is a visiting faculty to School of Business, University of South Pacific, specializing in Entrepreneurship and Innovation.

He holds a Masters of Commerce in International Trade and Banking, Masters of Phil. (Commerce) with specialization in Rural Banking and Local Economic Development and Ph. D (Commerce) with specialization in Economics and Corporate Governance.