***Capacity Development Webinar Series***

**“Building Back Better:**

***Leveraging Effective Governance & Spearheading Innovative Solutions to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic* *in the Pacific Small Island Developing States”***

Organized by

**United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)**

and

**United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)**

in collaboration with the

**Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF)**

and

**Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)**

**Wednesday, 12 August 2020 (TBC)**

**06:30 – 08:00 PM (EDT, New York Time)**

**7:30 – 9:00 AM (Korea and Canberra, Australia)**

**10:30 AM – 12:00 PM (Fiji and New Zealand)**

**11:30 AM – 1:00 PM (Samoa)**

**Background**

While there are more than 14.5 million confirmed cases and close to 467,000 death[[1]](#footnote-1) in the world from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDS) have been largely fortunate in averting the worst of the global health crisis. As of 12 June 2020, 312 cases of the COVID-19, including 7 deaths have been reported across the Pacific[[2]](#footnote-2). However, the pandemic and the measures put in place to contain the virus have taken a toll on the PSIDS’ economy. For example, the economic impact is serious in Fiji, Maldives, and Tonga where jobs are heavily dependent on tourism[[3]](#footnote-3). There are economic fallouts beyond tourism, such as disruption of international trade, drop in commodity prices where exporters like Papua New Guinea[[4]](#footnote-4) are affected, and reduction in remittances due to the shrinking global economy everywhere. Additionally, the small island economies are expected to experience a severe recession from reduced capital flows and growing debt servicing costs. Their dependence on food imports could add pressure to already afflicted system to ensure food security during the health and economic crisis.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The ongoing effects of climate change and the tropical cyclone season - including the recent devastation left by Tropical Cyclone Harold in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and Tonga - pose continued risks to these vulnerable economies as climate change induced disasters can exacerbate the COVID-19 crisis.

The COVID-19 has inflicted the most pain on those who are already marginalized and vulnerable in the first place. It is important to ensure that the needs of these groups are heard, recognized, and addressed so the recovery actions do not adversely affect people who are already affected. The principles of leaving no one behind and inclusion should be soundly integrated into recovery policies.

Effective governance and public institutions are central in promoting integrated policies and approaches to achieve long-term development goals in the face of immediate challenges. Though the PSDIS are still weathering the impact of COVID-19, when the recovery begins, the building-back endeavor could provide opportunities to build a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable governance system. It is an opportunity to examine and reassess the existing structural governance challenges, update national and local plans with risk-informed development in mind, and strengthen institutional coordination necessary for recovery and sustainable development. It is an opportunity to create momentum to bolster deeper partnerships between the public, private, civil society, at the national, regional, and international levels.

In building back better, effective governance, better coordination mechanisms, innovative practices, and ICT driven technologies, and people-centered recovery strategies will be crucial. The PSIDS will need to continue investment in preparedness to enhance resilience with a focus on the furthest behind to keep the promise of leaving no one behind. Partnership at the regional and international level will continue to play an important role in their collective efforts to build back better and ensure progress towards the 2030 Agenda remain on track.

Resilience must be put at the center of decision-making at all levels, such that the impact of future shocks can be absorbed more readily with less disruption to people’s lives and livelihoods. The COVID-19 has exposed the benefits of a stronger, flexible, and more responsive civil service that incorporates risk management to continue the delivery of essential public services.

**Organizers**

Against the above backdrop, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), through its Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) and its Project Office on Governance (UNPOG), and the SIDS Unit of the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG), in collaboration with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UN ESCAP) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF) as well as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) are organizing a webinar on “***Building Back Better: Leveraging Effective Governance & Spearheading Innovative Solutions to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Pacific Small Island Developing States***”.

This webinar is part of UN DESA’s Capacity Development Webinar Series on leveraging public governance and spearheading innovative solutions that addresses the COVID-19 pandemic in different regions of the world.

**Main Themes and Key Questions for Discussion**

**Effective Governance and Institutional Arrangements for Building Back Better**

Effective governance and resilience reinforce each other, and they are also key elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. National governments have been on the frontline in combating the COVID-19. The role of effective, responsive, and inclusive public institutions and service delivery have never been more important in building public trust and confidence in government. The health systems and relevant institutions also need further strengthening, not only to cope with the ongoing pandemic, but also to address climate-sensitive diseases exacerbated by climate change in PSIDS.

To effectively address challenges for transparency, participation and accountability during the COVID-19 responses and build back better, governments should undertake transformational changes in economic, environmental and social policies, in particular to reassess the existing institutional arrangements and revisit national development strategies with risk-informed strategies for building resilience. The following key questions will be addressed.

* The recovery process needs to be continuously adjusted to meet the changing conditions. How can governments improve their adaptive organizational capacity to respond to crisis and transition quickly to an effective recovery? How can a shift in mindsets be promoted?
* How can governments develop policies, institutions, and financial mechanisms for effective recovery and expand their risk reduction strategies for planning and implementation?
* How can PSIDS improve governance structures and institutional arrangements, especially in national-local coordination and public service delivery for emergency economic and financial assistance?
* Recovery depends on trust between citizens and the government, among other conditions. What can governments do to foster trust and build public confidence? What can be done to encourage participation from various stakeholders?

***Technology and Innovative Resilient Solutions***

Building back better aims to reduce future vulnerabilities and to bolster physical, social, environmental, and economic shocks. A key dimension for building back better in PSIDS is the continued commitment to address effects of the climate change and sustainable development. As the PSIDS are more vulnerable to climate change, building resilience to climate-induced disasters will continue to be a high priority. Additionally, the measures for scaling up green and blue growth as well as stimulus actions, including ODA and external funding that are aligned with sustainable growth could be specific aspects of improving overall resilience in the context of PSIDS.

In order to address the challenges of the COVID-19, innovation has become even more important for effective and inclusive public service delivery. Digital transformation, as part of public sector innovation efforts, also plays a significant role. At the national level, countries will need to invest significantly in information and communication technologies to increase digital and data capacity. They will also need to create stronger regulations, enhance workforce skills, and build institutional capacity and accountability to enable preparedness and resilience. Response and recovery as well as monitoring and evaluation efforts should be supported by timely data collection and data-driven analysis.

* How can governments promote and accelerate innovation and digital transformation for building a resilient and agile society?
* What can be done to strengthen legal, administrative, and technical measures to address the protection of privacy and personal data as well as cybersecurity?
* What are some of the policy options to foster immediate recovery without hampering long-term sustainable and resilient growth?

**Partnership and Multi-lateral Cooperation**

While the challenge of the COVID-19 has forced governments to look inward by closing borders and focusing on their own populations, the recovery will require solidarity, collective action by governments, civil society, the private sector and the international community on a global scale. For PSIDS, regional cooperation will continue to play a crucial role in greater cooperation and region-specific responses for the recovery. Official Development Assistance (ODA) will play an important role in supporting national responses to the pandemic and in recovering from it.

Building resilient societies will require multi-lateral cooperation as we are more interconnected than ever. Pandemics and climate change cannot be solved by one country alone and whole-of-society response at the national and international level is needed for meaningful recovery and development.

* What roles can partnership and multi-lateral cooperation play in recovery for more sustainable and resilient growth?
* How can governments bolster partnerships in times of the COVID-19 that can be extended to recovery and growth in a meaningful way?
* How can partnerships reinforce governments to institute effective governance practices to build an inclusive and equitable society, especially in building back better?

**Objectives**

1. Introduce national experiences in fighting COVID-19, including effective approaches and strategies, successes as well as challenges faced by governments from selected countries;
2. Enhance the knowledge and capacities of the PSDIS in strengthening public governance and exploring innovative solutions for pursuing resilient, inclusive and sustainable recovery in the post-COVID-19 era;
3. Address the unique challenges and vulnerabilities of PSIDS in disaster risk reduction and climate change; and
4. Provide a platform for effective partnerships.

**Expected Results**

The Capacity Development Webinar Series aim to strengthen effective governance by enhancing integration, collaboration, and cooperation among stakeholders through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches as well as national to local coordination. The webinar for PSIDS is cognizant of their unique and particular vulnerabilities and will provide:

(i) Resources and tools for possible application in the post-COVID-19 recovery;

(ii) Closer cooperation and partnership at regional and international level; and

(iii) Repository of lessons learned and knowledge sharing through UN DESA websites.

**Targeted Audience**

The target audience for this webinar includes national and local government officials, especially from the PSIDS, who are engaged in the post-COVID-19 recovery process in areas of healthcare, coordination, disaster management, immediate and long-term planning, national and local development strategies, ICT and digital government, and public financing.

The webinar also intends to involve the private sector, academia, research institutions, civil society, and regional/international organizations that are actively engaged in exploring and experimenting with innovative solutions to address the COVID-19 crisis and recovery.

**Format**

* This Webinar will be 1 hour and 30 minutes and include a panel discussion followed by an interactive Q&A session.
* It will be conducted in English via the Cisco WebEx platform. It will also be live streamed on UN DESA Facebook. [TBC]
* The webinar is open to all. Registered participants will receive the connection link via email.
* The recording, presentations, and report will be made available after the Webinar on the UN DESA and UN DESA/UNPOG website at <http://www.unpog.org/>.

**Draft Agenda**

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| 6:30-6:33 PM | **Welcome Remarks**   * + H.E. Mr. Satyendra Prasad, PR of Fiji to the UN, Chair of PSIDS [Moderator] |
| 6:33 – 6:39 PM  (2 speakers, 3 min each) | **Opening Remarks**   * + H.E. Mr. Solo Mara, Secretary-General, Pacific Island Development Forum [TBC]   + Mr. Zhenmin Liu, Under-Secretary-General, UN DESA [TBC] |
| 6:39 – 7:33 PM  (9 speakers, 6 min each) | **Panel Discussion**  **Speakers:**  ***Effective Governance and Institutional Arrangements for Building Back Better***   * H.E. David Kabua, President of the Republic of the **Marshall Islands** (TBC) * Hon. Josaia V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister of **Fiji** (TBC) * Hon.  Mr. Edgar Cocker, Chief Secretary & Secretary to Cabinet, **Tonga** (TBC)   ***Technology and Innovative Resilient Solutions***   * Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney General and Minister of Economy, Civil Service & Communications (**Fiji**) (TBC) * Mr. Howard Politini, Ex- Chairman, Pacific Island Private Sector Organisation (**PIPSO**) * Vincenzo Aaquaro, Chief, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, UN DESA (TBC)   ***Partnership and Multi-lateral Cooperation***   * Executive Secretary, UN ESCAP (TBC) * Speaker from New Zealand Government (PIDF – to arrange) * Ms. Emeline Siale Ilolahia, Executive Director, Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (**PIANGO**) (TBC) |
| 7:33-7:36 | **Open Discussion**   * + SG/Representative of the Pacific Island Forum (TBC)   + Ms. Adriana Alberti, Chief, Programme Management and Capacity Development Unit, DPIDG/UN DESA |
| 7:36 – 7:54 PM  (6 questions, 3 min each) | **Interactive Dialogue Q&A**   * + H.E. Mr. Satyendra Prasad, PR of Fiji to the UN, Chair of PSIDS [Moderator] |
| 7:55 – 8:00 PM | **Closing Remarks**   * Mr. Bokyun Shim, Head, UNPOG/DPIDG/UN DESA |

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1. John’s Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center as of 20 July 2020 <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. COVID-19 Health Sector Preparedness & Responses https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/wpro---documents/dps/outbreaks-and-emergencies/covid-19/covid-19-external-situation-report-19.pdf?sfvrsn=ea24f9e7\_2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ILO thematic brief: COVID-19 and employment in the tourism sector: Impact and response in Asia and the Pacific <https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/briefingnote/wcms_742664.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. International Monterey Fund <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/05/27/na-05272020-pacific-islands-threatened-by-covid-19> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. UN/DESA Policy Brief #64: The COVID-19 pandemic puts Small Island Developing economies in dire straits <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-64-the-covid-19-pandemic-puts-small-island-developing-economies-in-dire-straits/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)