

The Perspectives and Practices on Sustainable Development of SIDS

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to describe how Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) implemented the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the lessons learned during implementation, and to be applied when implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Methodology/Approach – For this study, a literature review was conducted and interviews were held with key figures. The draft version was sent to key persons for feedback in all the studied SIDS, and other researchers in the field of SIDS.

Findings – In general the Caribbean SIDS have not dealt well with the MDG. The MDG were inadequately institutionalized, and the statistical data to monitor the progress was insufficient. It does not look like they are applying lessons learned to the SDG process in a systematic way.

Originality/value of paper – The paper contributes to the analysis of policy implementation in Caribbean SIDS. It presents lessons learned that might make the implementation of SDG more successful.

Key words: Caribbean, Small Island Developing States, Implementation, Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, St. Maarten, Suriname, Barbados, Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), National Development Plan (NDP)

Paper type: Comparative study

Introduction

In September 2015, the member states of the United Nations unanimously adopted seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), offering a framework to guide national efforts until 2030. This framework, by its all-encompassing character, requires countries to engage in a national priority-setting process, identifying which goals to pursue to what extent, with a long-term vision in mind. It succeeds the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework, which was adopted in 2000 by 189 members of the United Nations (UN). The MDGs were plainer, and are generally considered as a success.

The eight MDGs are:

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. To achieve universal primary education
3. To promote gender equality and empower women
4. To reduce child mortality
5. To improve maternal health
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. To ensure environmental sustainability
8. To develop a global partnership for development

This article is exploratory, and focuses on the following aspects:

- Evaluation of national policies implementing the Millennium Development Goals, in a comparative approach;
- Analysis of the national priority setting processes regarding the Sustainable Development Goals framework;
- Identifying drivers for and barriers to development;
- Monitoring and follow up issues, especially collecting data and developing indicators;
- Development policies, more generally, with special attention for National Development Plan (NDP)

The questions addressed in this article are:

- What are the results of Caribbean SIDS implementing the MDG?
- How are these SIDS adopting the SDG?

The following practice focus is addressed: What has been learned from the implementation of the MDGs; what strengths and weaknesses have been identified? What are the next steps or the implications for future practice or for society?

Six Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) were selected, and their latest available progress reports were analyzed and their results compared. Based on that, we draw some conclusions. The six SIDS that are selected are:

- Aruba
- Bonaire
- Curaçao
- St. Maarten
- Suriname
- Barbados

Methodology

To answer the research question the progress reports of all the islands were traced and studied. We did this by searching the Internet and contacting experts in the field via ResearchGate. In searching for documents and experts we used the snowball method. This means that one source leads to another source. Second, the United Nations site for the MDG Indicators was consulted and scores for all the studied islands were examined. As a third step, general information on the development strategy of the islands was studied and conclusions were drawn. Based on these findings, key persons on the islands were consulted by asking them to provide feedback on the draft. The next draft version was presented to experts via ResearchGate. Their feedback was incorporated in the final version.

Literature review

Small Island Developing States

are low-lying coastal countries that tend to share similar sustainable development challenges, including small but growing populations, limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, excessive dependence on international trade, and fragile environments. Their growth and development is also held back by high communication, energy and transportation costs, irregular international transport volumes, disproportionately expensive public administration and infrastructure

due to their small size, and little to no opportunity to create economies of scale. (Wikipedia, n.d.)

The vulnerability of islands and coastal areas was recognized by the 44th session of the UN General Assembly in 1989. The group was first recognized by the United Nations in 1992 in Rio. In 1994 The Barbados Programme of Action was produced (BPOA) was produced, followed by Mauritius Strategy on Implementation (MSI) in 2005. In 2012 the conference Rio 20+ was organized and in 2014 the third conference on SIDS was held in Samoa. In this line the post-2015 development agenda was developed (CELAC, 2013) Also the United Nations conferences of Johannesburg 2002 and Stockholm 1972 should be mentioned. Stockholm was the first occasion when sustainability was addressed. And in 2002 the commitment to the challenges of SIDS was restated.

Although many publications claim that the MDGs were the biggest and most successful program in human history, there are not many publication substantiating this. The reported results are the following:

MDG 1: The number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day has been reduced from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015, although the target of halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger was narrowly missed.

MDG 2: Primary school enrolment figures have shown an impressive rise, but the goal of achieving universal primary education has just been missed, with the net enrolment rate increasing from 83% in 2000 to 91% this year.

MDG 3: About two-thirds of developing countries have achieved gender parity in primary education.

MDG 4: The child mortality rate has reduced by more than half over the past 25 years – falling from 90 to 43 deaths per 1,000 live births – but it has failed to meet the MDG target of a drop of two-thirds.

MDG 5: The global maternal mortality ratio has fallen by nearly half – short of the two-thirds reduction the MDGs aimed for.

MDG 6: The target of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/Aids by 2015 has not been met, although the number of new HIV infections fell by around 40% between 2000 and 2013.

MDG 7: Some 2.6 billion people have gained access to improved drinking water since 1990, so the target of halving the proportion of people without access to improved sources of water was achieved in 2010 – five years ahead of schedule. However, 663 million people across the world still do not have access to improved drinking water.

MDG 8: Between 2000 and 2014, overseas development assistance from rich nations to developing countries increased by 66% in real terms, and in 2013 reached the record figure of \$134.8bn (£80.3bn). (Galatsidas & Sheehy, 2015; United Nations, 2015)

Figure 1 illustrates the progress that has been made on MDG 1.

Global poverty by percentage

Share of population below \$1.9 a day (2011 PPP)

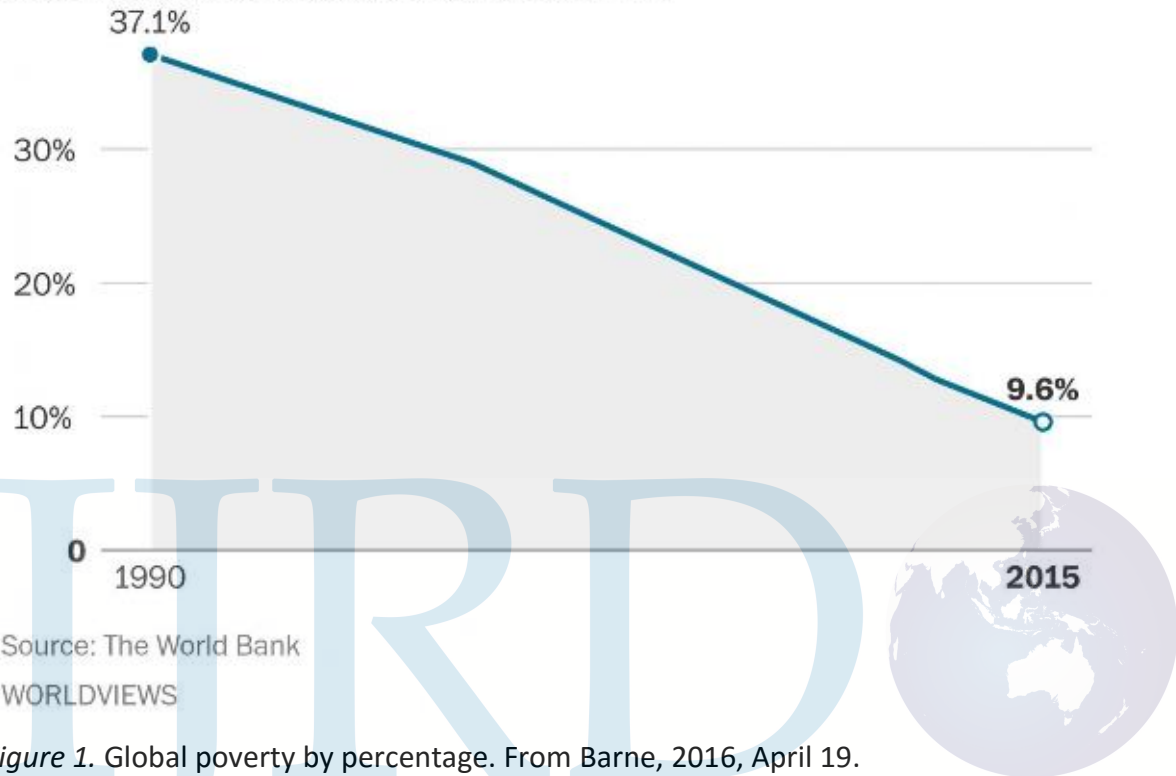


Figure 1. Global poverty by percentage. From Barne, 2016, April 19.

The MDG are followed-up by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to be achieved by 2030 (Thomson, 2015). These are presented in Figure 2 in a popular infogram:



Figure 2. Infogram for Sustainable Development Goals. 2016; Bendell, 2016; Thomson, 2015)

Achieving these SDGs is about getting from words to actions: implementation. It is about applying what has been learned implementing the MDG. The core values remain equality, respect for nature and so forth. The SDG are an umbrella of overarching flexible targets tailored to regional, national and sub-national levels. Although target-driven, the SDG project must not overlook the need for transformative changes. The targets must be formulated precisely and measured continuously (United Nations [UN], 2012).

A society implementing the SDGs is the process of moving beyond the knowledge economy, entering the era of sage government:

We are moving from a knowledge economy towards a wise society. Is wisdom a linear development that follows after knowledge? Is the old wise Indian in a primitive culture not wise, despite his lack of scientific knowledge? in 't Veld (2005) refers to the moral sense of the Indian, living sustainably in harmony with nature, and at the other extreme the Master of the Universe dominating nature. He advocates that we should be more Indian and less Master. (Goede, 2011, p. 43)

SIDS are specially at risk because of several factors, especially the lack of human capital. To explore the challenges of Caribbean SIDS, six were conveniently selected. The six SIDS that are selected are:

- Aruba
- Bonaire
- Curaçao
- St. Maarten
- Suriname
- Barbados

Aruba

Aruba is 178.91 km² big and has a population of 105,000 and has the second highest income per capita in the region. It welcomes about one million overnight and 700,000 cruise tourists per year (Nederlandse WindEnergie Associatie (NWEA), 2014). For over thirty years the debate has been how to diversify the economy that is mainly based on tourism, of which 70% is from the United States of America. This makes the economy extremely fragile. This was demonstrated in the aftermath of September 11. Aruba experienced a reduction in arrivals of 5%. Now there is the economic threat of the opening of Cuba to tourism, with it then becoming a competitor (Arends, 2008).

There is not much information regarding the MDGs in Aruba, but Aruba has adopted the SDGs and developed a local program. The island aspires a leading region role among SIDS (Prime Minister Mike Eman, 2016).

The development of islands like Aruba and Curaçao have been dominated by big oil refineries from the beginning of the 20th century. By the 1960s, tourism and financial services grew in strength. This lack of diversity created dilemmas. The refinery in Aruba has been closed for a while, for the second time. Should Aruba reopen the refinery a third time? In May 2016 an agreement was signed with Citgo to proceed with the reopening. During the last two government periods the government has implemented a green agenda. Aruba is striving to reach 100% green energy by 2020. Part of the strategy is the triangle of local business, knowledge institutes and government. Starting in 2010 Aruba hosted the 'Aruba Green' conference. A sub theme is "Where Europe meets the America's" Noticeable initiatives in the recent past were: Wind energy farms, solar energy farms, waste to energy projects, and an experimental smart community of twenty houses (NWEA, 2014). Part of the strategy is to work in partnership with institutes to apply technology to reach the objective of sustainability. Among these institutes are Harvard University, Carbon Room, Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) (Government of Aruba, 2015).

By 2020, Aruba's Smart Island Strategy will transition the island to 100 percent renewable energy, increase housing choices and neighborhood quality, strengthen social cohesion, reduce traffic congestion and improve mobility, reduce obesity and improve public health, improve water conservation, and diversify an expanding island economy.

Implementation methodologies

The Government of Aruba, Carbon War Room and the New America Foundation have launched the Smart Island Strategy for Aruba. This strategy will work with

Aruban citizens and stakeholders through social dialogue to identify a sustainable growth roadmap that will: create world-class walkable destinations for tourists and communities for residents; incentivize household retrofit and commercial energy efficiency; distribute a diverse mix of renewable generation technologies; and create a regenerative agriculture sector in Aruba. The strategy will harness commercial opportunities to drive a transition to sustainability that will benefit all Arubans while demonstrating a new model of growth for middle-income nations. (UN, n.d.)

TNO in collaboration with Arizona State University successfully started the Green Faculty in 2012. The Green Faculty offers trainings in support of Aruba's sustainable energy transition. Aruba realizes that in addition to technological innovation, local capacity building is of key importance. (Government of Aruba, 2015, p. 25)

Currently the island is implementing a National Development plan "Nos Aruba 2025" (Nos Aruba 2025, 2016). Also Aruba is facing challenges in its public finance, slowing down the realization of its ambitions. This underlines that good governance is a prerequisite for sustainable development. The reopening of the refinery is a deviation of the sustainable development objective.

Bonaire

The island of Bonaire is 59 km² with a population of about 18,000. On 10-10-'10 (10 October 2010) Bonaire became special municipality of the Netherlands, when the Netherlands Antilles was abolished. After 10-10-'10, Bonaire has adopted the US Dollar as their currency. This has led to the increase of prices, especially of food. More and more citizens, especially the elderly, report that they have trouble covering their expenses. As a consequence of the new relationship with the Netherlands, much was invested in education and in healthcare. This has positively impacted the following goals:

- To promote gender equality and empower women;
- To reduce child mortality;
- To improve maternal health;
- To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases;
- To ensure environmental sustainability.

Bonaire might well be the frontrunner in the race to renewables for electricity generation (Chatlein, 2014). The question is if this is still true, or if Aruba is now the frontrunner. The policy of the government is to reach 40% renewable energy. There is a regulatory policy framework in place, thanks to the Dutch parliament. The journey towards sustainability started long ago, when in the 1980s the government adopted sustainability as a precondition for economic and social development. In successive policies this principle was confirmed. Developing a global partnership for development after 10-10-'10 has become a co-responsibility of the Netherlands. The Netherlands has a good reputation in the area of partnership for development.

Due to the situation after the constitutional change described above, on 18 December 2015 a referendum was held in Bonaire. Sixty-five percent of the voters stated that they want to renegotiate the arrangement with the Netherlands. The essence of the problem is that citizens in Bonaire do not have the same social rights as those in the Netherlands, while they

are citizens of the same country. The politicians and voters particularly refer to social security rights; the monthly allowance paid to an unemployed individual in the Netherlands is much higher than in Bonaire (Posthumus, 2015). The Dutch argue that the social rights are better than in the region. Raising these will further increase the pull factor, attracting immigrants, legal and illegal, from the region to the island.

Curaçao and St. Maarten

Curaçao is 444 km² and has a population of about 154,000. St. Maarten is 34 km² with a population of 34,000. On 10-10-'10, Curaçao and St. Maarten became autonomous countries, part of the Dutch Kingdom, when the Netherlands Antilles was abolished. Curaçao and St. Maarten performed a baseline study in 2011, but there has not been a follow-up study (Governments of Curaçao and St. Maarten in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program, 2011). On that basis it is hard to conclude if there has been any progress. This problem was partially solved by comparing the results of the census 2001 and 2010.

Though the refinery is still operating in Curaçao, the contract for operating the refinery ends in 2019. What should the island do? Close down the refinery or sign a new contract and operate it in a cleaner fashion? The question for St. Maarten is how to reduce the impact of mass tourism on the island.

The standards of living on the two islands are high, but there are pockets of poverty; but 40% of the population in Curaçao does not have the income to live a decent live. Access to education is almost 100 %. There is however a small group of vulnerable people left out. Women have access to jobs, but still earn less. The economic position of women is vulnerable. Child mortality is one out of a thousand in the age of one to four. The frequency of teenage pregnancy and abortion is relatively high.

The number of HIV/AIDS patients is still rising. The goal to ensure environmental sustainability is also lagging. Part of the constitutional changes has been debt relief and on the other side gradual abolishment of development aid, so the development of a global partnership for development has altered radically.

According to the baseline, the goals that pose a challenge relate to:

- ensuring environmental sustainability;
- combating HIV/AIDS and supporting people living with HIV/AIDS and combating;
- other health related diseases like dengue fever, chikungunya and zika;
- eradicating poverty.

Curaçao and St. Maarten share a twin UNESCO university chair on Caribbean SIDS at the University of Curaçao and the University of Sint Maarten. St. Maarten is unaware of this fact. The chair started 2010 but has been dormant from 2013, after hosting two consecutive international conferences. In February 2016 the government of Curaçao has approved a National Development Plan 2015 – 2030 (Government of Curaçao, 2016) that was prepared with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The National Development program states:

As part of the process a focus on four of the seventeen SDGs was agreed upon:

- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4).
- Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (Goal 7).
- Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8).
- Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (Goal 14). (Government of Curaçao, 2016, p. 4)

It took almost five year to prepare this plan. A likely explanation for this delay is the lack of political will and a weak civil service. There was a team of civil servants working on the MDG but the politicians had other priorities. The constitutional change process started around 2005 and to this day demands too much attention, at the expense of the social and economic development of the islands. On the other hand there was a missed opportunity to incorporate the MDG into the newly designed and implemented government apparatus, although it was briefly tried. This was also the consequence of the intense political fight, between those in favor of more independence from the Netherlands versus those in favor of more collaboration. One of the main issues regarding sustainability in Curaçao is the future of the oil refinery. The refinery is leased to the Venezuelan etróleos de Venezuela, S.A (PDVSA), and the contract expires in 2019. The negotiations on a new contract started late, and the future remains unclear. The political and economic situation in Venezuela is very worrisome and there are concerns that the refinery will close down.

Suriname

Suriname is 163,821 km² and has a population of 573,311.

Suriname joined SIDS in 1981, but only became active in 2002 in the process of the evaluation of the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA). A National Assessment Report on the Barbados Programme of Action +10 Review was produced by Suriname in 2004. Suriname's MDG Progress Report 2009 was formulated to monitor progress and provide projections on what the situation was, regarding all relevant goals and how and when they might be achieved on a sustainable basis. The report provides an overview of data with regard to the Millennium Development Goals as of 1990 up to 2009. In the study conducted in preparation of Suriname's participation in the Rio+ 20 Conference, a number of studies and reports were produced over the years, which have identified the challenges that Suriname faces in trying to achieve sustainable development. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Institute for Environment and Development in Suriname [NIMOS], 2013, p.1.).

In a workshop on 19 June 2013, eight national priorities were initially identified for Suriname:

1. Agriculture and food security
2. Natural resources management, including fisheries management and oceans governance
3. Water resources management
4. Energy, incl. renewable energy and energy efficiency
5. Climate change and sea level rise

6. Biodiversity conservation
7. Waste management and chemicals management
8. Sustainable tourism (NIMOS, 2014)

Starting in 2016 Suriname began going through a crisis as a consequence of poor public policy and decline of the prices of resources, especially oil. The IMF got involved. Suriname has produced three national progress reports (Government of the Republic of Suriname, 2014) and a development plan 2012 – 2016. From these documents we develop the following picture.

To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger several policies have been put in place, but due to lack of data it is difficult to establish exact progress in this area. Policies and programs have been put in place to achieve universal primary education, and Suriname is approaching the target of 100 %. An obstacle to reach this final objective is geography. Part of the population lives in very remote and isolated areas. Women are making more progress than men; outperforming men in the education process. More women are entering the labor market but are still underrepresented. This is best illustrated by the underrepresentation of women in parliament.

Much progress has been made to reduce child mortality, but the target was not reached. Great progress has been made to improve maternal health. The spread of HIV has been reversed, but the treatment of those infected has deteriorated. Suriname has not integrated sustainability in its policies and programs. Suriname reports progress in the area of developing a global partnership for development.

Suriname suffers from the resource curse, as Venezuela (Farquhar, 2016, April 20). This means that the country has become increasingly dependent upon the income from crude oil and other natural resources such as gold and aluminum. After the dramatic drop of the price of crude oil, starting in 2014, austerity policy measures became necessary. As a consequence the economy has slowed down and social problems increased. This has further increased after currency was no longer pegged to the US Dollar.

The documents produced in Suriname are the result of a dedicated civil service. It illustrates that there was commitment to reach the MDG. This is contrary to the reputation of the civil service of Suriname, as being too big and for having a very low output. One possible explanation for this is that Suriname, which gained independence in 1975, has matured as a member of the international Caribbean community, CARICOM.

Barbados

Barbados is a small developing country which, by international standards, has performed very well over the past four decades. With a surface area of 432 square kilometers (166 square miles), a resident population of 276,000 in 2009 and a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of BDS \$23,822.8 in 2009, the country has achieved a 'very high human development' status according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Index (HDI). By 2007 Barbados had achieved four of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in

the areas of education, gender, child mortality and maternal health and had partially achieved the main goal of poverty reduction. (SALISES, 2012, p. 1)

Barbados economy, based on tourism and financial services, still has to recover from the global economic crisis of 2008. Barbados has produced the following documents, during the implementation of the MDG:

- The 1993-2000 Development Plan ;
- The National Strategic Plan 2006-2025 ;
- The Medium Term Strategic Plan 2010-2014.

In 2003 there was an evaluation of the MDGs in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. The conclusions were that there was some progress, but much room for improvement and that there was lack of data to measure improvement of some of the indicators.

Based on the Barbados report of 2013 (Government of Barbados , 2013) we developed the following picture. The government was committed to the MDG and this goes back to the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy on Implementation and the SIDS movement. However there were structural and institutional challenges. To overcome these there is a need for an adjusted institutional framework, a legal and regulatory framework, development of clean technology, finance and investments, education and capacity enhancement, improved statistics, and international cooperation. Upcoming issues include non-communicable diseases, blue economy, and the impact of globalization on finance, trade, and culture.

The priorities for the Government of Barbados include the issues of oceans, food security, social inclusion and energy. At the national level these have been incorporated under the following four areas:

- Socially balanced development;
- Economic viability;
- Sound environmental practices; and
- Good governance.

Conclusions

This study is exploratory, and more research is needed in this area. Inductively the following matrix was developed to compare the SIDS discussed in this article. The matrix addresses the following questions in a format where it is easy to compare the countries. The questions are: (a) How active is the country as a SIDS? That is, does the country attend the international SIDS meetings on a regular basis? (b) Does the country have clear vision on sustainable development? (c) Has the country developed a National Development Program (NDP)? (d) How does the civil service perform regarding the MDGs? (e) Is there data to monitor the progress? (f) Are there progress reports, and are these sent to the international entities? (g) Does the country evaluate the development process? (h) Has the country established priorities? (i) Are the universities involved?

Table 1

	Active as SIDS	Vision	NDP	Civil service	Monitoring	Progress reports	Evaluation	Priority setting	Universities
Aruba	+	+++	+++	+				+++	+
Bonaire		+++							
Curaçao	+	+	+++	+		+		+	+
St. Maarten	+	+		+		+			+
Suriname	+++	++		+++		+++	+	++	+
Barbados	+++	+++	+++	+++		+++	+	++	++

Figure: Summary comparative matrix of the six SIDS.

+++ Excellent

++ Very Good

+ Average

- Below Average

-- Failing

Blank Unknown

Suriname and Barbados are fully involved as SIDS. The other countries are barely aware of their SIDS status. Actually they have a foggy status as SIDS. On some list they appear and on other they are absent. Aruba, Bonaire and Barbados have strong vision pointing the direction of their development. Not much is known from Bonaire. One possible explanation for this is that Bonaire recently became a special Dutch island. The others lack vision or it is only on paper. The NDP of Barbados was the benchmark for Curaçao. It is unclear if Suriname has NDP. It is unclear if any of the countries have enough data to monitor the progress of the development process. Only Suriname and Barbados have more than one progress report. Suriname started only in 2002, although it had already been part of the SIDS for twenty years. Only Suriname and Barbados have evaluated the process. Aruba is clear about its priority: 100 % sustainable energy. The other countries are not that specific. For example, Curaçao only announced its priorities in 2016. Only Barbados has involved the university in the process. The university chair in Curaçao and St. Maarten is inactive. In Suriname the university offers some classes on the subject.

The Caribbean SIDS maybe have reached the phase of awareness regarding the MDGs. The challenge is to integrate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the policy cycle and the budget cycle. Part of the challenge is to produce data in the form of periodic reports to monitor the progress.

A critical element will be the means of implementation, an issue on which there have been many inputs. The two main criticisms of the MDGs have been that (a) they are too narrowly focused, and (b) means of implementation resources and modalities are vague or non-existent. This is to be rectified in the SDGs process, with considerable attention being devoted to means of implementation. Means of Implementation appears as the OWG's Goal 17: Strengthen the means of

implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. (Smith, 2015, p. 55)

Suriname has done relatively well. This might be explained by the fact that Suriname is an independent country, and a full member of the United Nations and CARICOM; it is a full member of the international community. This is also the case for Barbados. The maturity level is higher in independent countries. It's noticeable that Bonaire also made progress following an opposite road; more integration with the mother country, the Netherlands, while Aruba and Curaçao are working more autonomously.

Human resources and financial resources are limited, and there were not enough to allocate to the MDGs. The challenge is to dedicate more resources to SDG projects and processes. For example the constitutional changes of the former Netherlands Antilles depleted the human resources and lacked political focus. On the other hand, it was a missed opportunity to integrate the MDGs into the organization, operational processes and performance measures of the new developed civil services. Another aspect that needs much attention is statistics. Technology can help to gather and present more data and information to steer the process.

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