



# Libraries and the UN SAMOA Pathway

## Opportunities for libraries in Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

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The [SAMOA Pathway](#) aims to provide a comprehensive framework of actions to be taken in order to support the sustainable development of small island developing states (or SIDS). 38 United Nations Member States count as SIDS, alongside 20 other territories. There are SIDS either in - or overseen by countries in - every world region. See the list on the [UN website](#) for more.

The Pathway is built on the work of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, held in Apia, Samoa, on 1-4 September 2014, which brought together relevant governments, donors and the United Nations itself, and represents one of the [key framework documents](#) for the UN's wider work on sustainable development.

The Pathway itself was agreed just a year before the 2030 Agenda. The two documents both look to set out a range of actions, in different areas, which together have the potential to support successful and sustainable development.

Just like with the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the SAMOA Pathway includes a number of areas where there is clear scope for libraries to contribute, through helping individuals and communities to empower themselves with information and through informing better policy responses. Perhaps even more strongly than in the 2030 Agenda, there is a focus on building partnerships.

This briefing therefore looks at the logic behind the Pathway, the actions it contains that are relevant for libraries, its emphasis on partnerships, and finally on the opportunities that could exist for libraries.

## Why a Unique Framework for SIDS?

The existence of the SAMOA Pathway, as well as previous initiatives focused on SIDS reflects the view that countries in this position require a dedicated approach in order to help them overcome their challenges.

The SAMOA Pathway highlights a number of specificities, noting that ‘small island developing States remain a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities and that they remain constrained in meeting their goals in all three dimensions of sustainable development’.

For many such states, there are challenges around extreme poverty, often linked to limited economic possibilities, as well as the high cost of products that need to be imported (often over long distances). Indeed, small states can risk having significant trade deficits, relying heavily on buying products and services from other countries. This same distance can also make it more difficult to export goods in a competitive way, as well as to ensure good connectivity to the internet.

*"We also recognize that disasters can disproportionately affect small island developing States and that there is a critical need to build resilience, strengthen monitoring and prevention, reduce vulnerability, raise awareness and increase preparedness to respond to and recover from disasters"*

Paragraph 51, SAMOA Pathway

Furthermore, many SIDS also face particular threats from rising sea levels – even raising questions about their future existence – as well as extreme weather which can have a devastating effect on lives and livelihoods.

Despite these challenges, SIDS often have fewer resources available to combat the challenges they face, and can risk a brain-drain if young people seek work elsewhere, either on other islands or larger countries further away. In effect, there is a risk of a perfect storm of factors which require a dedicated response.

## Empowering individual and community development

Just like the 2030 Agenda, the SAMOA Pathway provides a useful framework both for thinking through how libraries can support development, and for explaining this to decision-makers and funders.

Under the major areas of action set out in the box on the right, there are the following actions where libraries are arguably well-placed to support success:

**Formal and informal learning:** the Pathway suggests that a key way of enhancing the growth potential of SIDS is to strengthen formal and non-formal education and training. It underlines in particular the importance of developing the education infrastructure, and of building skills for innovation, entrepreneurship, and citizenship, as well as facilitating school-to-work transitions.

### **SAMOA Pathway: Areas of Focus**

- Sustained, sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth
- Climate change
- Sustainable energy
- Disaster risk reduction
- Oceans and seas
- Food security and nutrition
- Water and sanitation
- Sustainable transportation
- Sustainable consumption and production
- Management of chemicals and waste, including hazardous waste
- Health and non-communicable diseases
- Gender equality and women's empowerment
- Social development
- Culture and sport
- Promoting peaceful societies and safe communities
- Education
- Biodiversity
- Desertification, land degradation and drought
- Forests
- Invasive alien species

These are all areas relevant to libraries. School libraries are of course a key pillar of the education infrastructure, helping not only develop literacies and research skills, but opening up a wider world to learners, both as citizens and future workers.

Similarly, public libraries can be hubs for non-formal learning, as well as portals towards more specialised training programmes for those who would benefit.

**Connectivity:** the Pathway notes that among SIDS' infrastructure challenges, good quality, reliable, and affordable connections to the internet are a key one, with citizens often facing high prices even compared to people in developed countries.

Clearly, in order to be able to offer public access to citizens, libraries themselves need to be connected. The emergence of technologies such as low-earth-orbit satellites



does offer interesting possibilities to do this without having to rely on undersea cables often having to cover huge distances.

Once online, libraries could have a key role to play in enabling people to get online at low cost, either to discover the internet for the first time, to provide for access they cannot afford themselves, or as a complement to home access. Libraries can also, potentially, serve as hubs for community networks.

Of course, in addition to providing basic access, libraries can be sites for more purposeful use of digital tools, to support education and citizen engagement.

**Employment and Entrepreneurship:** the Pathway highlights concerns about high unemployment, in particular among young people, as a challenge for SIDS, leading to a loss of potential and outflow of talent.

Again, this is an area where libraries have a proven track record around the world, from providing the connectivity and devices needed to prepare CVs and find jobs, to skills development, and even support for local entrepreneurship. In particular, the public nature of libraries can make them more suitable for helping otherwise disadvantaged groups, with the appropriate programme-design and support.

Inclusion: the Pathway places a strong emphasis on fighting discrimination and combatting inequality, notably to ensure fairer outcomes for women, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, and those facing poverty. In particular, promoting equal access to education and technology, as well as to economic opportunities and health, all appear on the agenda. Crucially, the Pathway underlines the need for action in order to eradicate poverty.

Again, libraries' unique characteristics can make them well

*"We support small island developing States in their commitment to an approach to development that is focused on poverty eradication, which should ensure that people, particularly those living in poverty, have equal access to education, health, food, water and sanitation and other public and social services and access to productive resources, including credit, land, training, knowledge, information and know-how. That approach enables citizens and local communities to participate in decision-making on social development policies and programmes."*

Paragraph 79, SAMOA Pathway

placed to help here, providing a one-stop-shop for information and support, provided in a way that matches individual needs.

**Health:** the Pathway underlines the need to work to promote health education and awareness, in particular around healthy eating and an active life. This should form a key part of strategies for addressing non-communicable diseases.

Libraries have an acknowledged role as part of the primary healthcare infrastructure, providing a source of reliable information, as well a supporting broader wellbeing. In some places, they are even venues for outreach by specialists, or places for accessing telehealth services.

**Climate Action and Resilience:** More than most, those living in SIDS will face new or intensified challenges linked to climate change. Individuals will need to learn new ways of living and working in order to manage.

Many SIDS also face challenges around tackling pollution or sustainable resource management which may also require new practices. A first step, in both cases, will be to build environmental consciousness.

Libraries have a strong potential role as a venue for creating this awareness, as well as engaging people in discussion and learning about how to respond.

*"We recognize that small island developing States possess a wealth of culture, which is a driver and an enabler for sustainable development. In particular, indigenous and traditional knowledge and cultural expression, which underscores the deep connections among people, culture, knowledge and the natural environment, can meaningfully advance sustainable development and social cohesion."*

Paragraph 80, SAMOA Pathway

**Culture:** Unlike in the 2030 Agenda, there is a specific focus on culture in the SAMOA Pathway, recognising both the richness of SIDS in this regard, but also their fragility.

It calls in particular for work to promote cultural diversity and engagement in international cultural cooperation, to develop and strengthen national and regional cultural activities and industries, as well as to conserve, promote, protect and preserve



their own heritage. This covers intangible heritage, including traditional knowledge, which can play an important role, and which is of course best managed by local institutions which understand best its significance and the preferences of its holders.

This is of course an area where libraries have a central role, not just as the guardians of documents and other materials, but also as places for celebrating and creating new forms of culture.

## Informing Policies

In addition to its focus on the various areas where libraries could act as delivery partners, the SAMOA Pathway also includes many references to the importance of information to support policy making and implementation.

With often very limited capacity, it is clear that governments themselves may often simply not have the ability otherwise to carry out studies or evaluations, and so rely heavily on information gathered by others.

This of course represents an area where libraries can play a key role, helping to ensure that decision-makers in SIDS benefit from effective access to information, in order to do the best for their citizens, as well as to manage datasets.

This is a theme that appears across the Pathway, arguably more so than in the 2030 Agenda! For example, it highlights the need for stronger collection and use of data around climate change and its impacts, energy, disaster risk, ocean health, food security, water resources, health and biodiversity.

The Pathway also encourages a strengthening of teaching and research around sustainable development questions in general, for example, as well as to get better at managing and using information. In both cases, effective libraries have great potential to be at the heart of delivery.

*"establish national and regional information and communications technology platforms and information dissemination hubs in small island developing States to facilitate information exchange and cooperation, building on existing information and communication platforms, as appropriate."*

Paragraph 109h, SAMOA Pathway



## Building Partnerships

As highlighted in the introduction, the SAMOA Pathway is not just about directing government policy or aid flows, but also about providing a framework for defining, establishing and expanding partnerships.

This is indeed at the heart of the section of the Pathway dedicated to the means of implementation, which (similarly to the 2030 Agenda) stresses the need to engage all actors – government at all levels, business, civil society and other stakeholders – in order to achieve success.

These are seen as key ways of bringing together local capacity and mobilising expertise and resources in a way that is sustainable, and relevant to local needs, while benefitting from outside support where possible.

Libraries are of course ideal potential partners, either in a leading or supporting role, for many of the actions already set out in this briefing. On the Partnerships Platform run by the UN, there are already a number of initiatives involving libraries, in particular in order to promote knowledge management and sharing.

For example, the Pacific Ridge to Reef project works through universities and libraries to support the uptake of regionally accumulated scientific knowledge in policy-making and planning. In Vanuatu, one partnership also focuses on centralising information and knowledge to support decisions.

Elsewhere, the need for more projects is highlighted, for example in the Caribbean, where access to information, managing data, and knowledge transfer are cited as areas where more work is needed.

As highlighted above, given the particular role of traditional knowledge, it is vitally important that this is handled sensitively, by trained professionals who are aware of and sensitive to its characteristics.

## Opportunities for Libraries

Just like the wider 2030 Agenda, there is an ongoing process around the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway. An overview of activities can be found on the dedicated section of the [UN's sustainable development website](#), which offer the following opportunities for libraries:

1) Libraries in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) could use the SAMOA Pathway as a framework for presenting their work and contributions, and share this information with governments and local United Nations offices.

2) Libraries in SIDS could record partnerships in which they are involved on the Partnerships Platform – this would be a great way of receiving profile for good work that is already taking place.

3) Libraries could use the Partnership Toolbox to reflect on where else there may be scope to form partnerships, and draw on it in order to build connections, potentially with the support of local UN offices.

4) Libraries could prepare inputs for SIDS-related sessions at the UN High-Level Political Forum and Regional Sustainable Development Fora. These could also be shared with the UN staff coordinating this work, for example to make clear what can be achieved through partnering meaningfully with libraries

5) Libraries could already prepare inputs for the review of the SAMOA Pathway in 2024, ten years after its agreement. This could work to reiterate or reinforce those elements of the Pathway which library experience shows are particularly important, as well as introduce new elements where these are necessary

