

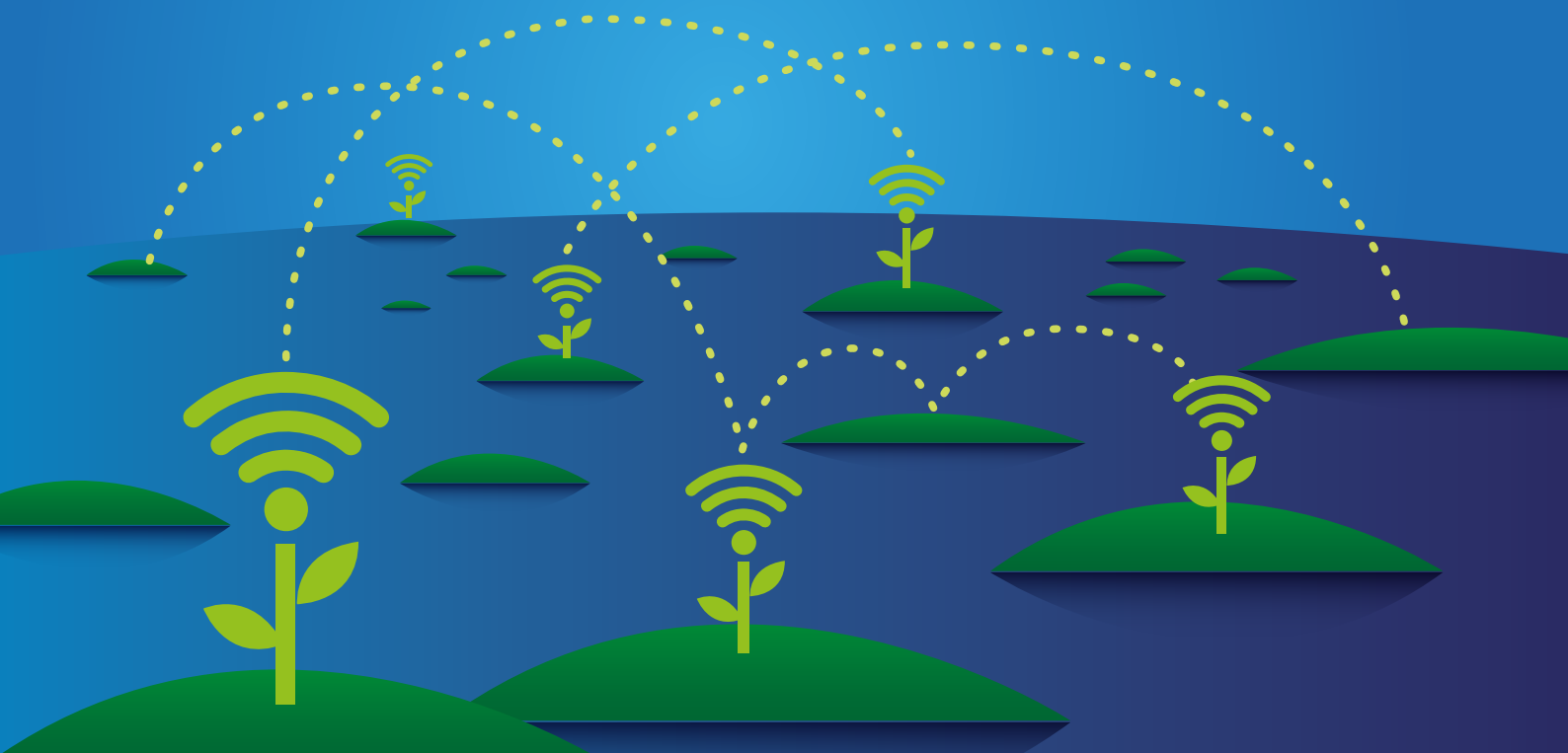


Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

SIDS Solution Forum 2021

Overview of existing knowledge
exchange platforms in Pacific
Small Island Developing States

30-31 August 2021



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Acronyms List

Food And Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Papua New Guinea (PNG)

Mediterranean and South China Sea (AIMS)

Partnership for skills in Applied Sciences, Engineering and Technology (PASET)

Global Dementia Observatory (GDO)

African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS)

African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP)

Pacific Week of Agriculture (PWA)

Pacific Resilience Meeting (PRM)

Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP)

Pacific Climate Change Centre (PCCC)

Secretariate of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

United Nations (UN)

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Introduction

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific is creating a Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Solutions Platform. The platform's objective is to enhance information and solution exchange that can facilitate development by incubating, promoting and scaling-up home-grown and imported solutions to accelerate achievements in agriculture, food, nutrition, health and environment as they relate to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in SIDS. The platform, which is being launched in the Pacific in 2021 with gradual expansion to all other SIDS, has two interlinked features:

SIDS Solutions Portal: An interactive knowledge exchange portal, specifically aimed at identifying, nurturing, promoting, scaling up and implementing development solutions.

SIDS Solutions Forum: A biennial forum to convene public policymakers, private-sector leaders, development partners, local communities and other key stakeholders to identify, discuss and prioritize local solutions to accelerate development. Planned for 30 and 31 August 2021, the first biennial forum's theme is the identification of innovation and digitalization to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the economy and to accelerate the achievement of SDGs related to agri-food systems, nutrition, health, the environment and climate change resilience.

Objective

This desk review provides an overview of the existing knowledge exchange platforms in SIDS, with a particular emphasis on identifying the gaps that the proposed FAO platform will fill as a complementary platform. This paper is neither an evaluation of the existing knowledge exchange platforms in SIDS nor an academic paper, which could easily provide critiques as an intellectual exercise. Instead, the paper is policy research driven for government, development partners and private-sector readership.

This paper complements the following papers, which were produced to contribute to the successful planning and delivery of the SIDS Solutions Forum:

- Profiling at least 20 solutions, analysis of their potential and opportunities for replicating and scaling up, and a plan with recommendations to countries;
- Overview of the challenges and opportunities associated with innovation and digitalization in Pacific Small Island Developing States;
- Poverty, malnutrition and food security in Pacific Small Island Developing States; and
- Gender, women and youth: Implications for innovation and digitalization.

Methodology

The analysis is a result of the reviews of professional and academic literature and consultations with relevant stakeholders including community, government, private-sector and development partner representatives.

Scope

Consistent with the theme of the August 2021 forum, this review is limited to the identification of existing knowledge exchange platforms promoting innovation and digitalization within the context of agriculture, food, nutrition, health and the environment. Conversely, to remain aligned with the phase approach of SIDS Solutions Platform development, the review is focused on the Pacific SIDS, as well as the Maldives because of geographic proximity. FAO intends to conduct similar reviews in the non-Pacific SIDS in the near future.

FAO works with 39 SIDS, which it has grouped into three geographic regions. The Pacific is one of the regions, which is home to 15 SIDS: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. There are eight SIDS located in the Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea (AIMS) region: Cabo Verde, Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Maldives, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, and Singapore. The Caribbean region is home to 16 SIDS: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Conceptual background

Knowledge exchange can be defined as a two-way exchange for sharing ideas, facts, experiences and skills between producers (researchers, innovators, etc.) and consumers (policymakers and practitioners who implement knowledge), largely for the purpose of offering routes to impact to increase the visibility and accessibility of innovative ways that maximize the chance of making a difference in society (London School of Economics, 2021). Within the context of development practice, knowledge exchange offers an invaluable opportunity for innovators, researchers and others to increase the impact—demonstrable contribution to changes that bring benefits to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life—of their work (Solent University, 2021). Knowledge exchange is about taking a systematic approach to sharing tacit knowledge—the knowledge that people acquire through their work experiences, successes and challenges around the world (UNICEF, 2021). One of the key ingredients for facilitating success in knowledge exchange is a platform, which is the focus of this review.

The concept of a knowledge exchange platform is not new in development practice; however, the functionality of knowledge exchange platforms is evolving with sophistication over time. For example, it would be safe to argue that early religious leaders and their followers exchanged knowledge in open places and did so verbally, but this evolved over time with the advent of physical worship centres and scholars who reduced knowledge into written products. One of the earliest improvements in knowledge exchange platforms took the form of cave drawings in 15 000 BCE, and the creation of the printing press in 1 440 marked the first time that knowledge exchange was facilitated by a print material platform (Alexander, 2017). About 400 years later, libraries were available to the general public as a platform, including in November 1731 in the United States (American Library Association, 2021). Governments, development partners, businesses and other institutions continue to seek and establish the most efficient platforms for knowledge exchange to address the rapidly shifting context of challenges and opportunities facing humanity. For example, in the current era of development practice, most knowledge exchange platforms are hosted through conferences and symposiums that gather hundreds of people, while others are hosted virtually by drawing on digital technologies. Productivity was a key rationale behind the creation of virtual knowledge exchange platforms as people could connect with others from different parts of the world without the physical challenge of geography.

The World Bank's (2021) Partnership for skills in Applied Sciences, Engineering and Technology (PASET) platform is an avenue for knowledge-sharing that brings together diverse stakeholders for a rich exchange of strategies and experiences to build high-quality technical and scientific capacity in the sub-Saharan African region. Since 2013, PASET has organized four forums around Africa that have seen the participation of heads of state, ministers and high-level officials from African governments, representatives from partner country governments, the private sector, universities, research agencies, academics and donor organizations. This platform is a perfect example of a conference/symposium platform that draws on people physically gathering. As an example of a digital platform that draws on using virtual participation for knowledge exchange, in May 2021, the World Health Organization (2021) launched its Global Dementia Observatory (GDO) knowledge exchange platform, which contains key resources to support the implementation of the global action plan on the public health response to dementia. GDO provides a space for stakeholders to share resources, such as policies, guidelines, case studies and examples of good practice, to facilitate mutual learning and promote the exchange of knowledge in the dementia field.

As indicated in the presentation of the platform:

Anyone can submit resources to the new platform. A comprehensive review process is undertaken for each new resource submitted before it is posted online to ensure that these meet quality and good practice criteria. Reviewers are dementia experts, people with lived experience of dementia and members of the WHO Secretariat. Users can search resources by country, region or language, and narrow down their searches by type of resources. Users of the platform are also invited to leave comments and rate resources to further enhance discussion about ways to promote and strengthen dementia practice (World Health Organization, 2021).

Therefore, this review of knowledge exchange platforms in Pacific SIDS will look at both physical and virtual platforms.

Existing knowledge exchange platforms

The Commonwealth: <https://www.thecommonwealth-educationhub.net/>: In recent years, the Commonwealth has embarked on creating knowledge platforms or knowledge hubs to facilitate development in its member states.

As indicated on the website:

The Commonwealth Secretariat launched an Education Hub at the 19th Conference of Education Ministers in The Bahamas in June 2015. The Hub provides a knowledge-sharing platform for education professionals across the Commonwealth to develop effective policymaking, improve practice and help countries achieve their education goals.

With more than 600 members, the online Community of Practice has access to relevant information and a discussion forum to address topical issues. The aim is to create a collaborative approach to tackling challenges in the education sector by sharing best practice and finding solutions. The high level of participation in online discussions on issues such as financing quality education and supporting the SDGs show that knowledge and information can be exchanged globally at a minimal cost. Discussions have included input from member countries across four Commonwealth regions. For example, the discussion on the use of information and communications technology in learning prompted contributions from Canada, Saint Lucia, Kenya, Samoa, India, the United Kingdom, Rwanda and Antigua and Barbuda. The Hub also plays an important role in connecting education experts from other key international institutions, such as UNESCO (The Commonwealth, 2021, pp.1).

The Commonwealth also has a Health Hub, similar to the Education Hub, but dealing with health issues as the name suggests.

As indicated on the website:

The Commonwealth Health Hub is a pilot initiative of the Commonwealth Secretariat to support the community of health professionals and policy-makers who are dedicated to improving the situation of Universal Health Coverage (UHC), in particular Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in Commonwealth countries. The support is provided through four key services (CONNECTION, CONSULTATION, COLLABORATION, and COLLECTION) available through the Service Centre on this website (The Commonwealth, 2021, pp.1).

Text taken from: <https://www.thecommonwealth-healthhub.net/>

The Commonwealth has a membership of 54 countries and classifies 32 as small states, and it states that:

- We push for international policies and rules to be more responsive to small states' needs; We help small states access financing, build resilience, and have a voice on the global stage; and we deliver our work through economic research and analysis, and put our ideas into action in toolkits for small states (The Commonwealth, 2021, pp.2).

These are excellent knowledge exchange platforms, but their outreach is limited by the Commonwealth's historical and geopolitical set up. For example, some Pacific SIDS, such as the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau, are not covered. The platforms also are limited to education and health. These distinguishing features leave room for a complementary platform, like the SIDS Solutions Platform that FAO is creating.

The Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS): <http://www.acp.int/>

The Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), formerly known as the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States, has an array of knowledge exchange platforms. These platforms include a business forum and a meeting for national and regional authorising officers. The meeting specifically focuses on information exchange with the European Union. However, like the Commonwealth, based on its historical and geopolitical set up, OACPS' membership excludes some SIDS, for example, the Maldives and Timor-Leste (OACPS, 2021), which points to a strong rationale for creating a more comprehensive knowledge exchange platform for all SIDS. Recognizing the opportunities to complement the OACPS platform, FAO has invited OACPS to speak at the August 2021 SIDS Solutions Forum.

The Pacific Week of Agriculture: In collaboration with national governments, FAO manages the biennial Pacific Week of Agriculture (PWA). Although one could question its financial sustainability, the platform is a success, largely because national governments have taken ownership. But as the name suggests, PWA is limited by its particular focus on agricultural policy and the exclusion of Timor-Leste, which is a Pacific SIDS in FAO's grouping of 39.

The Pacific Week of Resilience Meeting Platform: <http://www.resilientpacific.org/>

As indicated on the website:

The biennial Pacific Resilience Meeting (PRM) is a key component of the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) governance arrangements endorsed by the Pacific Island Forum Leaders in 2017 to support the effective implementation of the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Climate Change and Disaster (FRDP) 2017 – 2030. The PRM provides a platform that brings together all stakeholders within the resilience space to elevate and demonstrate relevant Pacific-led resilience actions that inspire genuine learning and connection through diverse and inclusive approaches from our home to the global stage (Pacific Resilience Week, 2021, pp. 2). Information taken from <http://www.resilientpacific.org/>.

Although efforts are increasingly being made to bring local communities to the forum, Resilience Week is largely a high-level policy forum of government and development partner personnel. There is also room for the FAO SIDS Solutions Forum to complement the discussions on resilience by contextualizing it into the implications for agriculture, nutrition and health.

The Pacific Islands Climate Outlook Forum: <https://www.pacificmet.net/about-us>

As indicated in the presentation of the platform:

The Forum's aim is to provide a platform to consolidate seasonal forecasts from multiple sources by issuing a consensus regional outlook statement. This process allows its participants to better understand the science behind seasonal forecasts and to better appreciate the related uncertainties that are relevant for the measures applied to adapting to and reducing risks of climate variations. This platform was created by the Pacific Meteorological Council (PMC), a specialized subsidiary body of SPREP [Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme], established at the Fourteenth Regional Meteorological Services Directors meeting in Majuro, Republic of Marshall Islands in August 2011 to facilitate and coordinate the scientific and technical programme and activities of the Regional Meteorological Services (PMC, 2021, pp.1).

The above example is an excellent platform for Pacific SIDS in the context of recurrent natural disasters, but because it primarily focuses on climate change, FAO proposed the SIDS Solutions Platform, which covers agriculture, food, nutrition, health and the environment and could be complementary to the existing platform. For example, the SIDS Solutions Platform could be a venue for bringing data from the climate outlook forum to diverse stakeholders in agriculture, nutrition and health.

The Pacific Climate Change Centre (PCCC): <https://www.sprep.org/pacific-climate-change-centre>

Created and managed by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the PCCC is a platform for information, training and research on climate change in the Pacific. A vital component of the PCCC's work and contribution to members and the public is its ability to provide, coordinate and facilitate capacity building and training. SPREP's creation of this platform reveals that many challenges come with inherent opportunities for innovation. "The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the ability of the Centre to deliver its regional and national workshops, which led to the PCCC exploring the viability and options of formalising an online e-learning platform, as part of its service" (SPREP, 2021, pp. 1). Drawing on the use of Moodle, the platform can accommodate about 1 000 users at any one time. FAO has already initiated discussions to collaborate by inviting the Director General of SPREP to the August 2021 SIDS Solutions Forum.

Pacific Farmer Organizations: <https://pacificfarmers.com/>

Created and managed by producer groups, the Pacific Farmer Organizations platform provides services to its members on various agricultural subjects, including breadfruit and seeds, women in agriculture and nutrition, policy engagement, partnership and development, youth in agriculture, and organizational capacity building. While it is an excellent platform, the membership only covers producers in Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, PNG and Timor-Leste, which opens up significant space for FAO's proposed SIDS Solutions Platform to fill.

UNDP Accelerator Lab Network: <https://acceleratorlabs.undp.org/content/acceleratorlabs/en/home.html>

Created in 2019, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Accelerator Lab Network has 60 lab teams covering 78 countries, and it is now expanding to 91 Labs covering 115 countries (including all Pacific SIDS).

As the programme indicates:

- The Accelerator Labs are designed to close the gap between the current practices of international development in an accelerated pace of change. They model a new capability to make breakthroughs on the future of development: inequality, decarbonization, the 4th industrial revolution and new forms of governance (UNDP, 2021, pp.1).

The accelerator lab presents an excellent opportunity to complement several other knowledge incubation and exchange platforms in SIDS.

Innov4AGPacific: A Value Chain Coordinating / Agricultural Innovation Platform in the Pacific Region:
<https://www.innov4agpacific.net/#main>

With funding from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other donors, the Innov4AGPacific platform was created through a partnership with the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO) and several other organizations in the Pacific to support communication, networking, knowledge exchange and interactive learning among multiple actors to enhance nutrition-sensitive value chain development and agribusiness performance in the Pacific.

As the programme indicates:

- The platform has grown into an interactive space with hundreds of community members who generate new ideas and together support collective action to trigger transformational change in policy and practice. Members represent government and other public-sector national and sub-regional agencies, international organisations, research institutions, private agro-enterprises, farmers and farmers' organisations, community-based organisations as well as other NGOs and financiers, involved in promoting and building nutritious food systems in the Pacific Islands (Innov4AGPacific, 2021, pp.3).

As the theme for FAO's proposed platform changes on a biennial basis, the potential to complement the Innov4AGPacific platform is very high. For example, the 2021 theme of innovation and digitalization provides an opportunity for digital agriculture and nutrition from which Innov4AGPacific's audience *can benefit*.

ILO-ESCAP South-South Knowledge Sharing Forum:

<https://www.unescap.org/events/2021/ilo-escap-south-south-knowledge-sharing-forum-what-works-e-formalization-asia-and>

Created by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), this platform notes: “The Knowledge Sharing Forum provides a platform for tripartite constituents in selected countries in Asia and the Pacific to engage in guided discussions on the potential of digital technologies” (ESCAP, 2021, pp. 2). The platform draws on the principles of south-south and triangular cooperation, and it favours peer learning and cross-country exchanges. “The virtual Knowledge Sharing Forum brings together governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations from six countries – Cambodia, China, India, Fiji, Mongolia and the Philippines – with subject matter experts from the ILO. Interested parties from other organizations are welcome to join” (ILO, 2021, pp.21.). FAO’s proposed SIDS Solutions Platform will complement the ILO-ESCAP platform by covering not only Fiji, but all Pacific SIDS regarding the potential of digital technologies to accelerate achievement of the SDGs. As part of efforts to build a partnership to complement this platform, FAO has invited the head of ESCAP to speak at the launch of the SIDS Solutions Platform.

Solevaka: <https://solevaka.org/>

As indicated on the website:

Designed as an unbranded platform owned by the Pacific development community, the platform supports the Pacific region, with an ambition to scale to the wider SIDS community, in an effort to accelerate SDG achievement and implement the SAMOA Pathway. We intend to support the development community by building genuine and durable relationships with traditional and emerging actors. Together we will facilitate knowledge exchange and south-south cooperation by leading, advocating & resourcing Solevaka. We believe that through a multi-stakeholder approach to partnership we can achieve the diversity of thought, expertise and access required to create and support a vibrant SDG community (Solevaka, 2021, pp 1-4).

Solevaka is similar to FAO’s SIDS Solutions Platform because it begins with the Pacific, but it will scale to all SIDS to accelerate achievement of the SDGs. The difference with Solevaka is that while it covers all SDGs, FAO’s platform specifically focuses on SDGs related to agriculture, food, nutrition, health and the environment as they relate to FAO’s comparative advantage. This difference between the platforms is an identified opportunity to complement Solevaka because FAO’s platform can feed Solevaka with specifics on agriculture and nutrition. This strategic partnership has already been initiated as FAO has invited UNDP’s administrator, a key proponent of Solevaka, to speak at the SIDS Solutions Platform launch.

Discussion and conclusion

The objective of this desk review is to provide an overview of the existing knowledge exchange platforms in SIDS with a particular emphasis on identifying the gaps that the proposed FAO platform will fill as a complementary platform. The review identified 11 knowledge exchange platforms with thematic and geographic gaps that FAO's SIDS Solutions Platform can fill. The review concludes that the arrival of FAO's SIDS Solutions Platform is not duplicating, but rather complementary to, existing efforts. FAO has already initiated this complementary role by engaging key proponents of some of the existing platforms, and some will speak at the August 2021 SIDS Solutions Forum.

Within the context of the foregoing conclusion, academics often critique development practice as duplicating, and thereby inefficient, in furthering development. Development partners, including FAO, should never ignore this argument. However, it is also true that development practice faces a plethora of increasingly complex, asymmetric and unprecedented challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic is a perfect example because much remains to be discovered about its causes and trajectories, and its impacts are numerous and cascading from health to economics, food security, nutrition, politics and so forth. What is also true is that the impacts are experienced differently according to varying national economic structures, coping capacities, etc. For example, as SIDS' economies rely heavily on tourism, they are increasingly experiencing the harsher economic impacts of COVID-19. This unique context for SIDS has always justified the need for multiple complementary interventions. Additionally, it is partly for this reason that the UN has a dedicated office for SIDS, and many UN agencies, including FAO and UNESCO, have dedicated divisions for SIDS. While these efforts may appear to be duplicating, they are only complementary because they intervene in SIDS from different thematic positions that contribute to the overall efforts of advancing development.

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