

The aim of all development efforts is to bring about sustainable improvements in human wellbeing.

This calls for a substantial transformation in approaches to development, one which merges society's progress, the sustainable management and conservation of its environment, inclusive and equitable growth ensuring that gender is mainstreamed, that persons with disabilities are included, that inequalities are minimised, which, has, for us in Seychelles, received renewed vigour with the introduction of our 'social renaissance initiative' since 2012. Therefore, the principles enunciated in the ICPD since 1994 still holds as true today as it did 20 years ago.

Our latest official statistics shows our population standing at 91,359 persons with a growth rate of 1.6%. To many, this figure which stands below 100,000 human beings, is in itself a major hurdle. However we are a resilient small island state, and a sovereign territory. As a country classified as one with a high human development index we are faced with the many challenges as others with a higher population rate.

Seychelles maintains its stance to ensure a people-centred development process as we seek to position ourselves even stronger post-2015, as we value the foundation on which this tenet has built and, continues to strengthen, our nation. We have signed all 8 core human rights instruments and are currently in the process of defining our national action plan to operationalise the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities.

We are nonetheless faced with the many vicissitudes of life, we strive to reduce poverty amongst those most vulnerable. Very often

we have found that this is not abject poverty but poverty derived from anti-social behavior brought about by substance abuse, violent behavior which finds persons left abandoned without those who love them to harbor and protect them.

A number of challenges remain, particularly linked to the country's status as a small developing island state. The small size of the country and its population, the environmental fragility characteristic of small islands, Seychelles geographical isolation, and its comparative economic vulnerability combined

The outcomes of the Rio+20 meeting in June 2012 agreed that the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) be universal which is acknowledged in its resolution 'The Future we Want'; it reaffirms the commitments made in the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy. Seychelles emphasizes the need to give due prominence to the special conditions of SIDS.

This was reinforced in the recent adoption of the SAMOA pathway, the outcome document of the third UN conference on small island developing states held in Samoa from 1-4 September 2014, where Seychelles' President James Alix Michel, advocated 3 key messages:

1- necessity for adoption of a Vulnerability Resilience index by a development agency

2- debt; promotion of innovative methods such as the "debt for adaptation swap"

3- the "blue economy" as holistic island development framework

which offer new opportunities for finding solutions and building on existing partnerships.

We strive to reduce gender inequalities in all facets of life and firmly adhere to Africa's Agenda 2063 strategy and support the AU's

theme for 2015 which is “Year of Women’s Empowerment and Development towards Africa’s Agenda 2063”.

Similar to many other states in the world, progress to reduce gender-based violence is slow. Strategies are developed yet we still see the manifestation of more gender-based violence. In our country context it is the issue of domestic violence which is more pronounced as more cases of violence within the domestic relationship continues to proliferate even resulting in manslaughter or murder.

We strive to render the lives of the physically and mentally challenged more inclusive and able to participate to the fullest extent in all forms of daily living activities.

As our population structure changes to that where we are also witnessing the developing of an ageing population, without the youth dividend, our Government will explore various avenues where it shall provide a better service to its older people.

Other ongoing challenges remain the need for improved data gathering and dissemination, the capacity to undertake sustained monitoring over time, the country’s limited pool of qualified and experienced professionals coupled with a small labour force, reduction in external development assistance, and the importance of addressing human development in terms of sustainable development.

Seychelles strives to strengthen its health systems in order to provide more quality and comprehensive services to reflect the ongoing changes in our society. Sexual & Reproductive Health, HIV/AIDS and NCDs continue to be the main areas of preoccupation especially the onrise of co-infection of HIV and Hepatitis C which

are predominantly concentrated amongst two specific target groups: Intravenous Drug Users and MSMs, We are working hard to reach the 3 zeros enunciated by the African Union by 2030.

As a resilient, African nation, and a member of the global community, we acknowledge that the future of our planet and its people depends on us and as enunciated by my President at the recent Samoa conference on small island states, "...Climate change is robbing island nations of their right to exist. We must save our future together..." So ladies and gentlemen, a multitude of challenges rest before us – let us not be fearful – where necessary, we must accept these challenges and adapt ourselves to help each other to survive and prosper.