



Opinion

# Seychelles and its neighbouring islands: Transformative moment in regional interdependencies beyond SADC and SAARC

by Dr. Srimal Fernando

The "neoliberal manifesto" of the Washington Consensus greatly influenced the economic reforms put into place by several states. A growing number of countries are using economic diplomacy to strengthen their foreign policy. Multiple phases of development have occurred in regionalism throughout the past century. Moreover, the phrase "regional integration" today has multiple connotations. Nations have shown to be able to grow and prosper through integration into the global economy. A handful of strong regional economies will control the majority of global trade in the near to medium term. These economies will benefit the economy of other Indian Ocean region nations that are connected to the global supply chain. More specifically, increased commerce between smaller countries will benefit from increased connectivity between large regional powers. The future of regional institutions is important for international relations theory as well as policy. It seems that regional integration facilitates trade and allows Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to focus on concerns pertinent to their current stage of development. In order to create a viable foundation for a new regional order in the Indian Ocean region, the proliferation of free trade agreements (FTAs) has made a fundamental reconciliation between economic liberalization and protectionism necessary. Through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and intraregional trade between SAARC member countries, the five Indian Ocean islands—Seychelles, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and La Réunion—have several opportunities under the current regional arrangement to demonstrate their symbolic reliance on regional development.

In addition to their existing role as regional growth pillars, the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) have the potential to become regional growth poles. The five Indian Ocean Islands' foreign policy has largely focused on supporting the multipolar system and finding a middle ground between reaching out to other areas, regional organizations and the increasing convergence of strategic interests among these island neighbours.

The Seychelles and SADC

In the context of regional affairs, Seychelles' distinct standing within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has influenced how other SADC members must respond to regional cooperation. In September 1997, Seychelles joined

the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It might be argued that Seychelles' foreign policy toward SADC and regional cooperation has functioned as a paradigm for an international approach to address regional concerns. Leading regional initiatives to advance sustainable fisheries management, Seychelles has been working with the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FITTI) since 2015. According to the May 2021 report from the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the nation of Seychelles, a member of SADC, holds the distinction of being the first in the world to submit a report to the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FITTI). At the SADC Council of Ministers Meeting in March 2024, Seychelles had beneficial exchanges. The main topics of discourse centred around mitigating concerns about peace and stability in the region and advancing SADC's development goal on behalf of its member nations. The Seychelles is viewed as a major player in the Indian Ocean region, especially in light of the growth of regional cooperation efforts.

UniSey - The Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage

The fact that Seychelles is a part of the tourism program of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) provides a framework for managing and directing the expansion of the sustainable tourism sector throughout the region. The University of Seychelles (UniSey) aspires to be acknowledged as the knowledge hub in the Indian Ocean region. The 360-credit BSc (Honours) in Travel and Tourism Economics (BTTE) degree is one of the most sought-after three-year degree courses offered by the Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage at the University of Seychelles.

In comparison to last year, there was a 100% rise in the number of students enrolling in the BTTE degree program this year.

Economic Union: Mauritius, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka

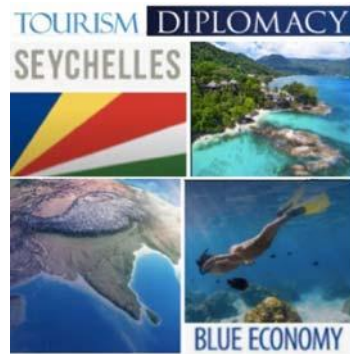
In 1995, Mauritius became a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The Maldives is part of both the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Sri Lanka benefits from preferential access to Member countries under the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA).

Intra-regional economic diplomacy

In conclusion, the prospects for gaining access to the vast markets of South Asia and Africa are optimistic because of the AfCFTA, SAFTA, and ISFTA accords. Thus, it is essential that the five islands in the Indian Ocean actively foster economic cooperation within and between regions.

About the author:

Dr. Srimal Fernando is a Senior Lecturer, Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage at the University of Seychelles. Dr. Fernando is the author of *Politics, Economics and Connectivity: In Search of the South Asian Union* and holds a PhD in International Affairs. (email [srimal.fernando@unisey.ac.sc](mailto:srimal.fernando@unisey.ac.sc))



## Education

# Minister Valentín highlights commitment to active learning

by J. Marie

The Ministry of Education, including the Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), has organised an event for a selected group of primary school students on Mahé. This event aims to showcase the students' abilities through various active learning exercises. "Some of the students here today struggle with integrating into traditional school learning, making this event an opportunity for the ministry to educate them in a recreational and active context," the Minister of Education, Dr. Justin Valentín, shared.

The Active Learning Adventures Event is the first of its kind

to be organised on the national level by the Ministry of Education. It took place at the Berjaya Beau Vallon Bay Resort on Saturday. All primary schools across Mahé were invited to participate, with each school selecting two boys and two girls from year levels P4 to P6, totalling 126 students.

The event aims to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion among learners facing additional challenges while also providing opportunities for social interaction and peer support. By encouraging collaboration and teamwork, the event strives to promote the development of social skills. It creates a platform for sharing experiences and learning from one another. These goals

were realised through a series of outdoor games designed to stimulate young minds through creative thinking, problem-solving, and critical reflection.

Furthermore, the Minister reaffirmed that since the beginning of his appointment, he has always believed in the holistic development of children, encompassing not just academics but also cultural, sporting, and artistic growth. "It is important for students to participate in recreational learning outside of the classroom. When they complete their studies, life will proceed outside of the classroom."

He further explained that students and the SENCOs learnt how new activities could be incorporated into the classroom. "I

believe today is a success, and I hope that the Berjaya Resort will collaborate with us again in the future through a shared compassion of child education," he added.

Participation in the event is designed to boost self-esteem and confidence through recognition, stimulating creativity, and problem-solving in a supportive environment. Furthermore, it promotes empathy and understanding among peers from different schools, empowering learners to showcase their potential, abilities, and strengths in a diverse setting. Ultimately, the event aspires to inspire a sense of accomplishment and pride in overcoming challenges together.



Dr. Justin Valentín

Ms. Renette Darko, the Senior Education Officer for Special Education Needs and Disabilities and program organiser, expressed that the approach of active learning aims to offer children a break from the often monotonous traditional classroom learning style. Apart from education, the multiple games and activities aimed to instill different skills and values within the children, including problem-

solving skills, confidence, and respect for others.

These activities highlight the essence of recreational learning and demonstrate how teachers can reconfigure their classrooms to achieve successful learning outcomes. The MOE hopes that by incorporating similar experiences in schools, they can break down barriers and reduce the stigma associated with learning differences.



Students playing a game



Participants during the opening of the event