

# A sustainable blue economy

By H.E. JAMES MICHEL

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**JAMES MICHEL** became involved in politics in the Seychelles before its independence in 1976 serving as a member of the Executive Committee of the Seychelles People's United Party from 1974. Following the coup by France-Albert René in 1977 he became Minister of Public Administration and Information and served in a variety of portfolios in successive governments before becoming vice-President under René in 1996. When the latter stepped down in 2004 he became President and subsequently won the presidential election of 2006. He was elected for a second full term as President in May 2011.

As an island nation, sustainable development is not a choice but an imperative which reinforces our awareness that our own existence is linked inextricably to global governance decisions.

As a proud member of the Commonwealth, Seychelles is encouraged by the proactive stance taken by the Commonwealth with regards to influencing positively the post 2015 development agenda.

The theme defined by our Sri Lankan hosts of this year's CHOGM: "Growth with Equity; Inclusive Development" is an apt rallying call for nations of the Commonwealth to put people at the centre of development. Too often, economic development is separated from the context of the peoples it is supposed to benefit, and from the natural environment on which its future depends.

As we unite in Colombo for our second successive CHOGM in the Indian Ocean, we are reminded of the importance of our oceanic spaces, as a space for sustainable development.

No other issue better illustrates the benefits of more commitment to sustainable development, and the risks of doing nothing, than questions surrounding our oceans – the space that connects us all in a fundamental way.

The Commonwealth itself extends its reach across all of the globe's major oceanic spaces. As islanders, we Seychellois have an affinity with the sea that surrounds our small masses of land. The vast ocean that stretches way beyond our shores is teeming with life and wealth which, if tapped sustainably, can sustain many generations to come.

Our exclusive economic zone comprises over one million square kilometres of ocean, giving Seychelles an enormous potential to develop the blue economy. The ocean is our lifeline. We earn our living from the ocean.

In the almost four decades since independence, Seychelles' progress has been rapid. Although we have reached the status of a middle income nation, still we feel that there are many more benefits to be derived from the prospects of the blue economy.

That is why we are investing in training, infrastructure and incentives in order to draw maximum benefits from these resources. We need to get more value-added products from our marine

resources, whilst also ensuring their long-term viability.

We started protecting these resources over 30 years ago; we continue to protect them today with added vigour.

In our endeavour to empower our people to own a greater share of our blue economy, we need to encourage joint ventures. We need foreign investment, experience and know-how. So that more of the dividends generated by the blue economy remain in the Seychelles. The Commonwealth can play a key role in defining how we sustainably manage this shared space.

This was illustrated through the Commonwealth-facilitated joint management of a continental shelf by Seychelles and Mauritius, whereby our two island states have defined a new co-managed zone of 394,000 sq km.

Trade in this region also depends on a stronger network that can connect our economies through the ocean. This CHOGM meeting in the traditional trading hub of Sri Lanka can re-dynamise our commitment to mobilise the positive potential for trade to be a mobiliser of development.

As President of the Seychelles, I will always argue on behalf of the Small Island Developing States in favour of increasing our share of benefits from the use of our marine resources, and building resilience of marine ecosystems to the impact of climate change.

The Commonwealth has adopted its new Charter earlier this year, which has explicitly defined its key role as a defender of small and vulnerable states, and in particular, Small Island Developing States.

We look forward to the 'Small States' meeting in Colombo which aims to turn our small size into an opportunity rather than a challenge.

Islanders are heavily dependent on the oceans not only for food security, but also for transportation and tourism activities.

The blue economy has contributed abundantly to the supply of protein, economic growth and the creation of jobs in most countries in the world.

In the future, it will further define our ability to sustain our planet.

The Blue Economy thus represents our opportunity to create wealth and preserve it for our children.

This is the essence of sustainability. And we believe this is at the heart of what it means to be a member of the Commonwealth.