Mr. Charles Allan Kwenin, the new Regional Director of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for Southern Africa, presented his letter of accreditation to Mr. Vincent Meriton, Vice President of the Republic of Seychelles and the Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs, today at the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Kwenin, a Ghanaian national, succeeds Mr. Josiah Ogina as the new Regional Director of the IOM for Southern Africa and has much experience in migration issues and IOM programs. He is accompanied on his first official visit to Seychelles by Ms. Céline Lemmel, Head of Office of IOM Mauritius which also covers Seychelles and the Indian Ocean Region.

Mr. Kwenin will be based in Pretoria, South Africa. Seychelles became a member of IOM on 5th December 2011 and has benefitted greatly from IOM-funded short courses in areas such as migration, border management and human trafficking.

In 2014, the IOM assisted Seychelles in launching a three month sensitization media campaign on Trafficking in Persons to further strengthen the country’s capacity to combat human trafficking.

Established in 1951, the IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration and, as of June 2018, is headed by Mr. António Vitorino who is the Director General.
The UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative for Mauritius and Seychelles, Ms Christine N. Umutoni and her team comprising of the Head of the RC Office- Ms Doorgawatee Ram-Gopal, UNAIDS Representative- Mr Jude Padayachy, UNFPA Representative- Mr Serge Bounda, UNDSS Security Advisor- Mr Abdoulaye Barry, had the opportunity to meet the Seychelles President Danny Faure at the State House whilst on official visit to Seychelles.

The main focus of discussion
was the first Seychelles Strategic Partnership Framework for the 2019-2023 period, which was just signed between United Nations (UN) and the Government of Seychelles. The Resident Coordinator also briefed President Faure on the work that the UN is doing in various fields including the support they are providing to Seychelles in areas such as in capacity building, policy-making, and technical support. She also commended Seychelles for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in its robust efforts in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This is an important milestone in the long-trusted partnership between the United Nations (UN) and the Government of the Republic of Seychelles. The signature of their first strategic partnership is a sign of growing cooperation at a time when all nations are ensuring greater efforts and robust efforts to achieve the SDGs. The SPF 2019-2023 is a collective, coherent and integrated


The Seychelles islands are home to some amazing species found nowhere else in the world, such as the curious flightless rail (Dryolimnas cuvieri aldabranus) on Aldabra (photo credit Janske van de Crommenacker)
Val D’Endorre farmers boost resilience through COMESA funded Climate Smart Agriculture Project

The Val D’Endorre Farming Community will benefit from the COMESA funded Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) program as part of a regional undertaking involving five (5) Member States. This 3 year project, with an estimated budget of Euro 400,000/- is designed to boost resilience in farming through climate-smart practices.
to improve food security and promote sustainable livelihoods. It is expected that 160 farmers at Val D’Endorre will benefit directly from the project. An additional 15 farmers from La Digue island and Bonne Espoir are also set to benefit.

In Seychelles, the project’s main focus is on ‘Water Smart Farms.’ It seeks to promote water efficiency on farms, reducing energy consumption, adopting smart agricultural techniques and controlling salt water intrusion through climate smart adaptive/ mitigative measures. The project will introduce crop varieties and adaptive species with the goal of improving food security. Use of solar energy will contribute to lowering the carbon footprint on the farms.

The project will be implemented directly by the UNDP in collaboration with the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture and the Val D’Endorre Farmers Association. The UNDP Resident Representative and UN Resident Coordinator Ms Christine Umutoni was present for the official signing ceremony of the project and commended the partnership between the EU, COMESA and UNDP for promoting sustainable practices especially at community level.

The Principal Secretary For Agriculture Mr Antoine Moustache commended the timeliness of the project, emphasizing the constraints of water availability for farming and the impact it had on agricultural produce. He commented that the project would rejuvenate the sector and re-engage farmlands that had been neglected.

The Chairperson of the Val D’Endorre Farmers Association Mr. Danny AGathine lauded the project as benefiting the entire community of farmers by ensuring equitable water distribution systems and that would help boost productivity in the farms.
The Republic of Seychelles hosts some of the most extensive and productive seagrass ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean. Seagrasses are flowering plants that grow and disperse their pollen and seed underwater. This is a rather unique feature among plants - even among aquatic plants most species disperse pollen and seeds above water. Some 60 species of seagrass belonging to five families have been described worldwide, with the highest levels of biodiversity in the Indo-Pacific. Seychelles may host as many as 12 species belonging to three families.

Seagrass meadows provide critical ecological services. They are highly productive and provide food and shelter for commercially important fish species, and habitat and forage for sea turtles. Because seagrasses take up carbon dioxide and give off oxygen they actively remove carbon dioxide from sea water, causing the water to become less acidic. In this way seagrass meadows serve as ‘blue carbon sinks’ that play a role in reducing climate change and protecting nearby coral reefs from acidification. Because tropical seagrasses are likely to tolerate higher temperatures, they may remain productive even as the climate warms.

Although seagrasses are a national treasure, they have so far been poorly studied in Seychelles. One of the goals of the GOS-UNDP-GEF Expansion and Strengthening of the Protected Areas subsystem of the outer islands of Seychelles and its integration into the broader land and seascape project (GOS-UNDP-GEF Outer Islands Project) is to focus attention on seagrasses. Target activities include assessment

Figure 1: Locations of seagrass quadrat sampling at Poivre Atoll in December 2017 (Google Earth image)
and monitoring of seagrass habitats at Poivre, Desroches, Alphonse/St. François, and Farquhar Atolls. The ecosystem assessments are being conducted primarily by personnel of Island Conservation Society (ICS), but training of young Seychellois personnel (e.g., from Department of Environment (MEECC)) is also a priority. The protocol was devised by ICS in collaboration with members of the Plant Conservation Action group (PCA). It includes: a) instructions on how to assess the health and status of seagrass beds using methods advocated by the “Seagrass Watch” programme (www.seagrasswatch.org), b) keys to seagrass identification, and c) instructions on how to prepare seagrass herbarium specimens. The Seychelles National Herbarium is building a collection of seagrass reference specimens.

A seagrass assessment was conducted on Poivre Atoll during a week-long expedition in early December 2017. Figure 1 shows the locations of the 475 quadrat points sampled at Poivre between 5 and 7 December 2017 on shallow water reef flats at low tide. Our methodology employs a 50cm x 50cm quadrat square that is thrown randomly onto the seabed. We then record percent total seagrass cover, which seagrass species occur in what proportions, whether macroalgae or invertebrates are present, and any evidence of seagrass cropping by animals such as green turtles. Figure 2 shows members of the Poivre expedition team checking out a seagrass quadrat, and Figure 3 is a photograph of a seagrass quadrat. At Poivre Atoll we were able to revise previous misconceptions about the species composition of seagrasses at that atoll and found the dominant seagrasses to be Thalassodendron ciliatum and Thalassia hemprichi, with occasional patches of Cymodocea rotundata. We found lots of evidence of cropping by green turtles (Chelonia mydas).

We surveyed remote Farquhar Atoll during 22 to 28 March 2018. Farquhar...
Figure 4. Locations of seagrass quadrat sampling at Farquhar Atoll in March 2018. Farquhar is a deep atoll that measures 20 km from end to end (Google Earth image).

is a very large atoll measuring 20 km from end to end. Surveying the seagrass habitats of Farquhar was much more difficult because the meadows are deeper and needed to be surveyed using mask and snorkel with constant boat cover. Figure 4 is a map of Farquhar that shows the locations of the points we surveyed. Figure 5 shows members of the Farquhar Expedition planning the locations of quadrat sampling. Some of the Farquhar survey points were chosen on site, while others were GPS locations known to be foraging sites of post-nesting female green turtles satellite tracked from Diego Garcia atoll in the Chagos Archipelago to their adult feeding habitat at Farquhar atoll. Most of the
seagrass on Farquhar comprised beds of Thalassodendron ciliatum without any other seagrass species present; but we did find patches of Thalassia hemprichii. In all cases, Thalassia was heavily cropped by green turtles. The turtles consume both species but prefer Thalassia when it is available.

The data gathered during our seagrass surveys are being incorporated into benthic marine habitat maps of Poivre, Desroches, Alphonse/St. Francois and Farquhar atolls under the GOS-UNDP-GEF-Outer Island project. These habitat maps are based on freely available satellite imagery, except for those of Farquhar after Cyclone Fantala that needed to be specially purchased. The habitat maps will depict seagrass beds, coral reefs and other submarine features and will provide a better understanding of these important ecosystems.

Family life on Farquhar Atoll - The challenge of being a Sooty Tern

By Licia Calabrese

When the South East trade wind starts to chill off sweeping the Seychelles beaches with strong and cold wind, Goelettes Island (part of the Farquhar Atoll) gets ready to host its annual visitors. Pest-free, treeless and carpeted with grass, Goelettes is the perfect place for ground nesting adults incubating in the colony.
seabirds such as Sooty Terns (Golet in kreo) and Brown Noddies (Makwa in kreo), which, starting from the end of April/beginning of May, gather in great numbers on the island ground and blacken the sky of this piece of paradise. More than half a million seabirds return to Goelettes once again with only one objective: find a mate and successfully rear a chick, which will carry their dynasty on to the next generation of birds.

Despite the welcoming environment of Goelettes island, rearing a chick is anything but easy for the Sooty Tern that have to face different challenges to successfully complete its breeding attempt. The first challenge the future parents have to face is to find a good place to lay their precious egg: the grass shouldn’t be too long and the location should preferably be at the centre of the colony to avoid disturbance from crabs and herons. Such perfect spots can be crowded and fights within neighbours are inevitable and can have unfortunate outcomes. Once the parents have found the perfect spot, the female can lay one single egg and now the couple have to alternate long days of incubation without food or water. The incubating parent can leave the egg unattended only for very brief flights to the sea to drink some water as more the egg stays by itself higher is the probability for it of being predated. While one incubating parent is facing hunger and thirst, the other one goes fishing and it has to eat enough food in order to increase its body weight and be able to sustain the next incubating shift. Ideally, he would find enough food in the short time as possible to be able to release his partner and allow her to go fishing herself. If fish is abundant and not too far from the colony the incubation shifts last 1 or 2 days and both parents can forage frequently. However, if the fish is scarce and far from the colony the partner out at sea fishing have to travel long distances to get little food and the incubation shifts can increase dramatically, reaching a duration of more than 10 days. In some years, the food is so scarce that the incubating birds have to give up and abandon their egg, in such cases the breeding attempt has failed and they will have to try again the next year. If the egg fails for other causes, the female can re-lay another egg but the second egg has less chance of surviving than the first one.

If the parents have been good enough in providing food for
Incubating adult with GPS device

themselves and incubate the egg properly, after about 28 days, a fluffy and brownish small chick finally get his way out of the eggshell into the outside world. The proud parents now have to feed it for about 2 months until he can finally fly and learn how to catch fish by itself. This is another challenge for the parents that live in a crowded colony like Goelettes where everyone has a mouth to feed. The food around the colony may be scarce after the colony fed during the incubation, therefore they push themselves even further, travelling day and night to reach spots with enough fish to sustain themselves and their chick. Such places can be up to 200 km away from the colony. The trips of foraging adults were revealed to the ICS Farquhar team thanks to the deployment of small GPS devices on 13 birds and they are astonishing. Luckily the parents are not alone in rearing their chick. When the chick is about 15 days old and able to walk around by himself the parents can leave him in a sort of kindergarten (called creche) where many chicks gather, he will return to the nesting area in the evenings. In this way the parents of the chicks in the creche can both go foraging and bringing food for their chicks. This system can decrease the risk of breeding failure during the chick rearing period. However, periods with extreme lack of fish in the sea can prevent the adults in finding food for their chicks and this can lead to the death of many chicks in the colony. Luckily, this season on Goelettes Island has been quite good for the chicks and the majority of them, after about 2 months from hatching, have reached the juvenile stage. They are fully equipped with feathers allowing them to fly and leave the colony. However, before reaching full independence, they have to learn how to fly and most importantly how to catch fish. Once again, the parents are here to help and tirelessly they teach their young how to practise this complicated task in the waters surrounding Goelettes Island, this process may last about 2 more months.

This season has been particularly good for the Sooty Tern’s parents that managed to raise a significant number of juveniles, which are now ready to make it to the air. However, the chicks still have a lot of challenges to face before reaching the adulthood, which is reached at about 4-5 years of age. The first obstacle is represented by the Giant trevally (Karan Ledan in Kreol), big fish that are not food for the birds but predators. A recent footage from BBC shows these big fish eating sooty terns’ juveniles that approach or sit on the water, relaxing or drinking is a deadly treat sometimes. After the juveniles are made it out at sea the parents leave them alone, now they have to show what they have learnt at the colony and survive with their own strength. Many will die, but the most skilful will make it to the adulthood and after 4-5 years on the wings wandering the Indian Ocean, they will touch the land of Goelette Island again with the goal of making their own family.

We wish the Goelettes Island’s juvenile good luck for the incredible journey they are going to undertake in a few weeks and we will wait for their return on the magical Farquhar Atoll.

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# Upcoming Events:

## DECEMBER 2018

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