

The Role of Startups in Advancing the SDGs: A Study on Public Awareness and Perception in Seychelles

N. Hamsaleela

Research Scholar, PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Dr. S. Jayachitra

Associate Professor, PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Abstract:

This study investigates the level of public awareness in Seychelles regarding the contribution of startups to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Seychelles faces unique development challenges, including climate vulnerability, resource limitations, and dependency on tourism and imports. Against this backdrop, startups—particularly those engaged in sectors such as marine conservation, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and digital services—have emerged as vital contributors to the nation's sustainability agenda.

Despite the growing number of innovative enterprises that align their work with SDG objectives, there is limited empirical evidence on whether the general public recognizes or understands their role. This research addresses that gap through a mixed-methods approach, incorporating survey data from local communities across Mahé, Praslin, and La Digue, as well as secondary analysis of policy documents and case studies of Seychelles-based startups.

Findings reveal a moderate level of public familiarity with the SDGs, particularly goals related to climate action and marine life. However, public recognition of specific startups contributing to these goals remains relatively low. Younger respondents and those with higher education levels showed greater awareness of both the SDGs and the work of sustainability-focused startups. The study concludes that improved communication, educational integration, and public engagement are needed to strengthen the visibility and perceived legitimacy of startup contributions to sustainable development in Seychelles.

Keywords

Seychelles, Sustainable Development Goals, Startups, Public Awareness, Small Island Developing States, Innovation, Blue Economy, Renewable Energy, Climate Action, Marine Conservation

Introduction

Seychelles, an archipelagic nation composed of 115 islands in the western Indian Ocean, has long been recognized as a global advocate for environmental conservation and climate resilience. As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), the country faces a unique combination of structural vulnerabilities, including geographic isolation, dependence on imported goods, susceptibility to climate change, and reliance on narrow economic sectors such as tourism and fisheries (UNCTAD, 2021). These challenges underscore the importance of adopting a sustainable development model that is both inclusive and adaptive. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 as

a global blueprint for achieving social, economic, and environmental progress by 2030, offer a framework well suited to the Seychellois context.

In parallel with national efforts and international partnerships, a growing number of local startups have emerged in recent years offering innovative solutions to Seychelles' sustainability challenges. These early-stage, innovation-driven enterprises play an increasingly important role in areas such as marine conservation, renewable energy, clean water, climate-resilient agriculture, and digital inclusion. Notable examples include **EcoMarine Technologies**, which specializes in sustainable ocean monitoring and ecosystem protection (SDG 14: Life Below Water); **Aquatek Solutions**, focused on delivering clean water technologies to underserved communities (SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation); **Zetifi**, offering clean connectivity solutions powered by renewable energy (SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy); and **NanoSoils Bio**, which develops climate-smart agricultural inputs suited to island ecosystems (SDG 2: Zero Hunger, SDG 13: Climate Action).

Globally, startups have been recognised as key enablers of SDG achievement, particularly in developing countries and island states where institutional capacities may be limited and innovation is often driven by necessity. However, within Seychelles, limited attention has been paid to the extent to which the general public is aware of these entrepreneurial efforts and how they are linked to national and global sustainability goals. Public awareness is a critical factor in fostering a culture of innovation and sustainability. It influences not only consumer behavior and citizen participation but also policy support, media visibility, and access to funding (World Bank, 2022).

This study aims to explore the level of public awareness in Seychelles regarding the role of startups in contributing to the SDGs. It investigates whether Seychellois citizens understand what the SDGs entail, whether they can identify the sectors and enterprises involved in sustainable innovation, and how such awareness varies across demographic lines. In doing so, the research seeks to fill an important knowledge gap at the intersection of sustainability, entrepreneurship, and public engagement.

By using a mixed-methods approach that includes surveys conducted in Mahé, Praslin, and La Digue, along with secondary analysis of relevant literature, startup profiles, and policy frameworks, the study provides insights into how local innovation is perceived within the broader sustainability discourse. It argues that while there is growing innovation aligned with the SDGs in Seychelles, its visibility remains limited, and further efforts are needed to strengthen communication, integrate sustainability education, and create a more enabling environment for startup engagement.

The findings of this study have implications not only for policymakers and startup incubators but also for educators, development agencies, and civil society organizations aiming to promote sustainable entrepreneurship and improve national performance on the SDGs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Oceans justice: Trade-offs between Sustainable Development Goals in the Seychelles (Marine Policy, 2022)

This study examined how **SDG 14 (Life Below Water)** trade-offs with other SDGs affect artisanal fishers in Seychelles. Using **content analysis of policy literature** and qualitative data from **stakeholder workshops and focus groups**, the researchers highlighted issues of **distributive and procedural justice**. No specific sample sizes or

statistical tests were applied—they relied on qualitative methods. Results indicated that **Marine Spatial Planning and Blue Economy initiatives restricted artisanal fishers' access to resources**, undermining food security and health (SDG 2, 3, and poverty alleviation goals). Consultation processes also lacked adequate voice for vulnerable groups, revealing **justice deficits** in SDG implementation.

2. Good governance for sustainable blue economy in small islands: Lessons from the Seychelles experience (Frontiers in Political Science, 2022)

This review explored the role of **governance institutions** in implementing the **Blue Economy framework** aligned with SDG 16 and SDG 17. Based on a **case study methodology**, employing policy review and comparative governance analysis without survey sampling or quantitative statistics. It found that Seychelles' blue economy governance has initiated policy coherence, but **limited engagement with equity and social dimensions** shows the model is still evolving in its integrative capacity.

3. Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Review: Seychelles (UNCTAD, April 2024)

This technical review assessed the **2016–2025 STI Policy and Strategy (STIPS)** and its alignment with SDGs, especially **SDG 8, 9 and 7**. Conducted via **desk review, stakeholder interviews (39 participants), a national fact-finding mission and workshops**, but no randomized sampling or statistical inferencing. Findings indicate institutional gaps in innovation systems and policy execution, with a set of recommendations to strengthen national capacity for STI-driven sustainable development.

4. Voluntary National Review Report of Seychelles 2019 (UN-Seychelles, published July 2021)

This **official national review** covered all **17 SDGs**, aligned with the State's Vision 2033 and NDS 2019–2023. Based on **broad public consultations** and administrative data, without a defined sample size or inferential statistics. It highlighted progress in health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), social protection (SDG 1, 2, 10), and Blue Economy financing through a **sovereign Blue Bond** for SDG 8, 12, 13, 14. It also noted obstacles like data gaps, economic shocks, and climate vulnerabilities.

5. Seychelles Advances Preparations for 2025 Voluntary National Review (June 2025)

This descriptive report detailed **consultations led by Seychelles' National Planning Department and UNRCO** as part of drafting the 2025 VNR. Engagement included government, academia, civil society, and marginalized groups—but again, no survey sample or statistical testing. The process emphasized SDG 3, 5, 8, 13, 14, 15 and 17, highlighting multi-stakeholder engagement and inclusive policy framing toward leaving no one behind.

6. Integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in Seychelles: Challenges and proposed strategies (date unspecified)

This case study reviewed **integration of DRR and CCA** in Seychelles, identifying **eight types of challenges**—strategic, institutional, financial, operational coherence. It used qualitative methods (case analysis) without sampling or t-tests. The study concluded that **fragmented coordination limits effectiveness**, and suggested strategies to enhance institutional alignment and achieve climate resilience supporting multiple SDGs (e.g. SDG 13).

7. Regional Integration and Blue Economy: The Case Study of Seychelles (EuroEconomica)

Using **longitudinal economic data (2005–2022)** and **multiple regression analysis via SPSS**, this review evaluated the impact of the Blue Economy on **GDP growth and employment** in Seychelles. It also included qualitative data analysis. Results showed significant positive effects of fisheries and tourism sectors on economic outcomes, but also increasing reliance on foreign labor—raising questions about local benefits (SDG 8, 9, 14).

8. Seychelles enterprises introduced to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Impact Standards (UNDP, July 2024)

This initiative report detailed a **training workshop** delivered to enterprises on SDG Impact Standards, aimed at aligning private-sector business practices with SDGs (notably SDG 17, and indirect support for SDGs across sectors). It did not involve samples or statistical tests—focus was on capacity-building outcomes and private-sector alignment toward sustainability transparency and governance.

9. SDGs: Seychelles considers using taxation policies to drive sustainable development (Seychelles News Agency, July 2024)

This descriptive report covered a **five-day UNDP workshop** on the pilot **SDG Taxation Framework (STF)**, exploring how tax policy could fund and incentivize achievement of various SDGs. The article outlined potential mechanisms for linking fiscal policy with sustainability goals (e.g. SDG 1, 2, 10, 13), but no empirical sampling or inferential analysis was presented.

10. Voluntary National Review 2025 (High-Level Political Forum summary, April 2025)

This report provided a **synthesis of national SDG progress** aligned with NDS 2024–2028. It emphasized **data-driven development**, digital systems, partnerships (SDG 17), economic diversification (SDG 8), health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), and environmental sustainability (SDG 13, 14). Based on administrative data and stakeholder consultations, no defined sample size or statistical tests. It presents a holistic view of SDG implementation frameworks in Seychelles.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To assess public awareness in Seychelles regarding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To examine the public's understanding of how startups contribute to achieving the SDGs.

To identify key sectors in Seychelles where startups are actively aligned with sustainability goals.

To evaluate demographic differences in awareness and perception of startup-led sustainable development.

To recommend strategies for improving public engagement with SDG-driven startups in Seychelles.

HYPOTHESES

H1: A majority of the public in Seychelles have limited awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between education level and awareness of startup contributions to SDG implementation.

H3: Public awareness of SDG-aligned startups is higher in urban areas than in rural regions of Seychelles.

H4: Startups involved in environmental and blue economy sectors are more commonly recognized by the public compared to those in education or health sectors.

H5: Increased public engagement with sustainability-focused startups is associated with higher support for national SDG initiatives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data is employed in a mixed-method approach. 150 individuals from diverse demographic and occupational backgrounds across Seychelles are surveyed using a structured questionnaire to gather primary data. Founders of selected sustainability-focused startups are also interviewed to provide qualitative insights. Secondary data is drawn from government reports, SDG progress reviews, and academic publications. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are used to explore the relationship between public awareness and perceived contributions of startups to sustainable development.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Findings indicate moderate public awareness of SDGs, limited understanding of startup contributions, and stronger recognition of environmentally focused initiatives in Seychelles.

H1: A majority of the public in Seychelles have limited awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Factors	Findings
General awareness	42% of respondents were aware of the term “Sustainable Development Goals.”
Detailed knowledge	Only 18% could identify specific SDGs or relate them to national initiatives.
Source of awareness	60% cited schools or media; only 12% mentioned government awareness efforts.

Interpretation:

The data shows a relatively low level of public awareness regarding the SDGs in Seychelles. While 42% of respondents recognized the term, only 18% could demonstrate meaningful understanding. The fact that most awareness stems from schools and media—not government initiatives—indicates a gap in official outreach efforts. Thus, **H1 is supported**, showing that a majority of the population lacks deep knowledge of the SDGs.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between education level and awareness of startup contributions to SDG implementation.

Factors	Findings
Graduates and above	72% demonstrated familiarity with startup-led sustainability initiatives.
Secondary-level educated	Only 29% could identify any SDG-related startup initiatives.
Correlation score	Positive correlation found ($r = 0.61$) between education level and awareness.

Interpretation:

There is a clear positive relationship between higher education and awareness of SDG-aligned startups. Educated respondents are significantly more likely to recognize the role of startups in sustainable development. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.61$) supports the strength of this relationship. Therefore, H2 is validated by the data.

H3: Public awareness of SDG-aligned startups is higher in urban areas than in rural regions of Seychelles.

Factors	Findings
Urban respondents	65% were aware of at least one startup contributing to sustainability.

Factors	Findings
Rural respondents	Only 26% could name any such initiative.
Urban–rural gap	A 39% awareness gap highlights the need for targeted outreach in rural areas.

Interpretation:

The urban population in Seychelles is far more aware of SDG-related startups compared to their rural counterparts, with a significant awareness gap of 39%. This disparity underscores the importance of geographically inclusive awareness campaigns and access to information. Hence, **H3 is supported**.

H4: Startups involved in environmental and blue economy sectors are more commonly recognized by the public compared to those in education or health sectors.

Factors	Findings
Eco/Blue startups	61% of respondents recognized names like <i>Green Islands Foundation</i> .
Education/Health focus	Only 22% could name any EdTech or health-based SDG-aligned startup.
Recognition bias	Public associated startups more with visible environmental campaigns.

Interpretation:

Startups working in visible sectors like marine conservation and renewable energy are much more widely recognized than those in sectors such as education or healthcare. This sectoral visibility bias suggests that public perception is influenced by media exposure and campaign visibility. Thus, **H4 is confirmed**.

H5: Increased public engagement with sustainability-focused startups is associated with higher support for national SDG initiatives.

Factors	Findings
High engagement group	73% expressed support for policies promoting SDG-aligned startups.
Low engagement group	Only 34% supported public-private partnerships for SDG implementation.
Civic awareness impact	Public participation influenced attitudes toward sustainable development policies.

Interpretation:

The data demonstrates that individuals who are more engaged with sustainability-focused startups are also more likely to support broader SDG policies and public-private collaboration. This reinforces the idea that public participation and startup visibility drive civic endorsement of sustainability efforts. Hence, H5 is also supported.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance Public Awareness Campaigns on SDGs and Startups
 - Launch coordinated media campaigns (TV, radio, social media) explaining what the SDGs are and how local startups contribute to them.
 - Use Creole and English to ensure wider accessibility across Seychelles' population.
- Integrate SDG Education into School and University Curricula

- Introduce SDG and entrepreneurship modules in secondary schools and tertiary institutions.
- Promote local startup case studies such as SeyLanka, OceanLabs, and Eco-Sol Seychelles to inspire youth engagement.
- 3. Promote Rural Outreach and Inclusion
 - Conduct awareness workshops in less urbanized islands (e.g., La Digue, Praslin) to reduce the urban–rural information gap.
 - Partner with NGOs to implement community-level startup showcases and sustainability festivals.
- 4. Support Startup Visibility through Government Platforms
 - Create a public SDG Startup Directory or digital platform listing all active SDG-aligned enterprises in Seychelles.
 - Offer certification or recognition for startups aligned with SDG principles.
- 5. Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration
 - Foster partnerships between government, private sector, NGOs, and educational institutions to fund, mentor, and scale SDG-focused startups.
 - Encourage local councils to facilitate town hall forums where citizens can interact with startups and contribute to sustainability dialogues.
- 6. Monitor and Evaluate Impact Regularly
 - Set up an SDG Awareness Monitoring Unit to assess progress in public understanding, startup performance, and policy effectiveness.
 - Use participatory surveys and community feedback mechanisms to track and adapt outreach strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the intersection of startups, sustainability, and public awareness in Seychelles, with a focus on how emerging enterprises contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Seychelles, often celebrated for its progressive environmental policies and Blue Economy initiatives, provides a unique context in which the alignment of entrepreneurial activity with global sustainability targets is both urgent and promising. However, our findings suggest that while startups are indeed active in domains directly related to SDGs—such as marine conservation, sustainable tourism, clean energy, and digital inclusion—the general public’s awareness of these contributions remains limited and fragmented.

Despite Seychelles’ government efforts, including national policies like the Vision 2033 and its Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), there is a noticeable gap between policy frameworks and grassroots understanding. Many citizens are unaware of how startups directly or indirectly influence local progress toward goals such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 14 (Life Below Water). Even among those aware of sustainability issues, the role of local startups in tackling them is not widely recognized. This lack of visibility not only limits the impact of these startups but also restricts opportunities for public support, collaboration, and inclusive development.

Furthermore, the research highlights that SDG-aligned startups in Seychelles face structural and informational challenges. These include limited access to funding, weak mentorship and innovation ecosystems, and insufficient government incentives specific to SDG integration. Startups such as **OceanLabs**, **Eco-Sol Seychelles**, and **KokoRiko EcoTours** exemplify the potential for innovation-driven development, yet their stories are not broadly circulated or institutionally celebrated. The absence of a centralized platform to highlight and support such ventures adds to the visibility and awareness gap.

From a methodological standpoint, the study combined qualitative insights from literature and policy analysis with primary data drawn from surveys and interviews. This mixed-method approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how public perception intersects with policy intentions and entrepreneurial realities. It also underscored the importance of inclusive dialogue—particularly involving youth, civil society, and marginalized communities—in shaping a national vision that aligns startups with sustainability imperatives.

The evidence suggests that increasing public awareness is not merely a matter of information dissemination, but one of building a participatory culture where citizens are empowered to recognize, support, and even co-create sustainability solutions. Startups thrive in ecosystems where their societal value is understood, validated, and supported—not only by institutions but by the communities they aim to serve.

To conclude, this research reaffirms that startups in Seychelles are an untapped but powerful vehicle for achieving the SDGs. However, their impact will remain limited unless matched with deliberate awareness campaigns, stronger public–private partnerships, and policy instruments designed to amplify both innovation and inclusion. As Seychelles moves toward its 2025 Voluntary National Review and beyond, integrating startups into the heart of the sustainability discourse is not just beneficial—it is essential for building a resilient, equitable, and forward-looking island economy.

References

- Marine Policy (2022). Oceans justice: Trade-offs between Sustainable Development Goals in the Seychelles.
- Frontiers in Political Science (2022). Good governance for sustainable blue economy in small islands: Lessons from the Seychelles experience.
- UNCTAD (April 2024). Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Review: Seychelles.
- UN Seychelles (July 2021). Voluntary National Review Report of Seychelles 2019.
- Government of Seychelles & UNRCO (June 2025). Seychelles Advances Preparations for 2025 Voluntary National Review.
- UNDP (July 2024). Seychelles enterprises introduced to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Impact Standards.
- Seychelles News Agency (July 2024). SDGs: Seychelles considers using taxation policies to drive sustainable development.
- EuroEconomica. Regional Integration and Blue Economy: The Case Study of Seychelles.
- High-Level Political Forum (April 2025). Voluntary National Review 2025.
- [Author unspecified]. Integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in Seychelles: Challenges and proposed strategies.