

Policy paths for Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

NEGOTIATORS NEED TO ENHANCE EFFORTS TOWARDS SECURING GLOBAL SUPPORT

- **Stronger collective representation** at a global level is needed to increase awareness and support for SIDS.
- **Securing financial pledges** agreed to in the Paris Climate Accord are necessary to mitigation and adaptation measures.
- **Securing additional funding arrangements within the UNFCCC framework** is necessary for increased capacity-building, protection of debt sovereignty, and coverage for loss and damage.
- **More needs to be done** to monitor and enforce greenhouse-gas emission reduction pledges if the global rise in temperatures is to be kept below 1.5°C.
- **Efforts towards enhanced data collection and ecosystem classification** should be increased to better communicate direct cause and effect of loss and damage associated with climate change.
- **The potential for Blue Carbon Markets** should be addressed to increase support for Oceanic systems and blue economies.
- **Radical action** may be necessary to meet SIDS needs.

What's the issue?

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) comprise 38 different countries that vary greatly in resources, environment, economy, and governance structure. They contribute less than 1% to global Greenhouse Gas emissions but are, and will continue to be, amongst the most affected nations for the climate crisis (UN-OHRLLS, 2015).

SIDS were officially recognized in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. Since then, there has been global policies developed to specifically address SIDS in recognition of their unique sustainable development needs. In 1994, the Barbados Programme of Action created a SIDS sustainable development plan to address the varied social, economic, and environmental issues that they face. Then, the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation was adopted in 2005 to cover any gaps that the Barbados Programme of Action did not. 2014 saw the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway to address SIDS' protection of health, food security, biodiversity, development needs, and economic well-being (UN-OHRLLS, n.d.). Finally, in 2012, the Copenhagen Accords were agreed upon, ensuring funding of \$100 Billion USD per year for climate crisis financing starting in 2020.

Despite early recognition and action, there has been little development in global policy since the Paris Climate Accord to continue SIDS support. Capacity-building and financial support mechanisms are necessary for SIDS to enhance their mitigation and adaptation measures. The 2020 deadline for the Copenhagen Accords financing has come and gone without a single Annex I nation fulfilling their climate financing pledge. Thus, the \$100 Billion USD funding has never come to fruition.

Why is this important?

Though SIDS comprise less than 1% of the global population, this still encompasses about 65 million people, all of whom are at risk

for climate related disasters (UN-OHRLLS, 2015). These countries are extremely vulnerable to external shocks due to their heavy reliance on the global supply chain, geographic remoteness, and environmental structures. In fact, SIDS reportedly lose 1-9% of their GDP every year to the climate crisis (UN-OHRLLS, 2022).

Because SIDS vary greatly in environment and location, they serve as a good indicator of overall planetary health (UN-OHRLLS, 2022). If any one of their systems become endangered, that means a mitigation or adaptation measure is needed. The effectiveness of these measures can also be assessed in real-time applications, educating other areas with similar issues about what works and what does not.

Due to their limited resources, SIDS often rely heavily on the Blue Economy. This is the name given to the resources and industries derived from the ocean. Thus, they are intimately aware of ocean health as they are reliant on its varied ecosystems for their livelihood. Many UNESCO World Heritage sites are in SIDS due to the high level of biodiversity often contained in their purview.

SIDS stand to lose everything for a climate crisis to which they contribute less than 1% of greenhouse gas emissions (UN-OHRLLS, 2015). Historically, these nations are economically depressed due to the legacy of imperialism and resource extraction. As the climate crisis increasingly affects them, there is a high probability of necessary relocation efforts and subsequent cultural loss. Many SIDS citizens do not have the means to make an easy emigration. Their absorption into other countries may strain welfare and legal systems globally. To combat this, SIDS are forced into debt financing that increasingly threatens their debt sovereignty (UN-OHRLLS, 2015).

What happened at COP 27 on this issue?

At COP 27, SIDS were present at nearly all negotiations tables, but were difficult to find and often not grouped as a collective decision-making body. Instead, they were represented individually or through smaller, geographically defined groups such as CARICOM or the Pacific Islands. SIDS heads of state did give speeches in the Plenaries and high-level meetings but were not specifically mentioned in the event's title or description.

On the Secretariat-General's daily schedule, African Nations were highlighted over 5 times the amount that SIDS specific events were. AOSIS, the Alliance of Small Island States, was only listed by name once on the schedule in the entirety of the 2 weeks in which COP 27 was in session. Often, SIDS specific events were held late at night if at all, rescheduled, or cancelled altogether. This made it difficult to follow this group of countries even though they face some of the most severe effects of climate change and therefore have some of the highest needs and best information to share about effective mitigation and adaptation efforts. SIDS did have a higher presence in the pavilion space of COP 27, but again were typically not highlighted as a collective body and instead were represented individually or by geographic location. Additionally, there were also times in which discussions were held on topics specific to ecosystem well-being in SIDS for which no SIDS representative for present. For instance, a high-level panel on Coral Reef Systems held during week 2 of COP 27 featured Ellie Goulding, a singer, an open water swimmer, and three European panellists, but not one islander.

Issues such as Loss and Damage, ocean health, Sea Level Rise (SLR), and similar topics of interest were official items in the final decision document produced at COP 27 called the Sharm el Sheikh Implementation Plan, Loss and Damage funding was promised but not specifically created, and ocean health was made an official agenda item to be discussed at every future COP (Sharm el Sheikh Implementation Plan Draft Decision, 2022). Further climate funding was secured by enhanced pledges from countries like the United States and Denmark as well as from third-party intermediaries such as the philanthropic bodies of the Bill Gates Foundation and the Bezos Fund. However, the \$100 Billion USD has still not been secured.

Finally, nothing was done to ensure compliance with Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) pledges (Sharm el Sheikh Implementation Plan Draft Decision, 2022). These are essential to keeping the planet warming to 1.5C. Scientific analyses predict a SLR of 2-4 feet by the end of 2100 (IPCCC, 2019). This will put many SIDS at risk of sever flooding, at increased risk for weather related disasters due to a loss of environment, and/or an extreme economic disadvantage due to a loss of port delivery systems and resources. More must be done globally to hold all nations accountable to their NDC pledges with consequences for noncompliance.

Policy recommendations

1) Insist on representation of all SIDS at UNFCCC Conferences.

The United Nations (UN) officially recognizes 197 countries. However, FIFA recognizes 211 countries, and many estimates claim there are more (FIFA, 2022). This is correlated by the UN recognizing that though there are 38 officially recognized SIDS member states, there are 20 more non-member SIDS nations that are not represented (UN-OHRLLS, n.d.). SIDS are not only some of the least developed nations in the world, but they are some of the lowest emitters, face some of the worst and most immediate effects of climate change, and are heavily dependent on the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), or the ocean, and are therefore intimately aware of its needs. Thus, all SIDS should be represented at UNFCCC Conferences. Without representation, not all of the SIDS' needs are accurately assessed, funding is not made readily available to all nations and the people therein who need it, and the ocean is missing major stakeholders to champion its health and well-being.

2) Increase collaboration and joint efforts as a collective governance body representing all SIDS to enhance visibility, unity, and power at UNFCCC conferences.

The SIDS do meet in the summer before the COP, but this effort should be continued at the COP to speak as one unified body (UN-OHRLLS, n.d.). As individual states, negotiation power is limited. However, as a collective governance body, SIDS could be more successful in securing needs that all SIDS require. A unified request may be simpler for policy application purposes as well.

3) Enhance efforts in education both domestically and abroad to increase understanding, support, and awareness.

Many SIDS populations lack the educational support necessary to understand the connection between the changes in environment and the greater global connection. Community outreach efforts can increase this awareness as well as bring civil society into the general conversation. With greater participation by the populations who directly interact with their ecosystems, early warning efforts can be enhanced, and mitigation and adaptation measures can be implemented with greater ease.

- 4) Consider breaking into smaller governance bodies with more specific classification status to enhance funding opportunities.**
Taking an example from Kiribati who voluntarily classified as a Large Ocean State, it may be beneficial to SIDS to break into smaller classification groupings specific to their ecosystems. This helps in directing funding and resources due to better categorization of the issues (Hume et al., 2021).
- 5) Enhance mitigation efforts by insisting on the enforcement of funding pledges as agreed under the Copenhagen Accords.**
\$100 Billion USD yearly starting in 2020 was agreed upon in the Copenhagen Accords but has not been delivered upon. While funding was increased at COP 27, the amount still falls short of the yearly contributions (AOSIS, 2022). These are necessary for capacity-building in SIDS. Without them, SIDS must rely on third-party loan structuring which increases their risk of default and credit downgrades (UN-OHRLLS, 2015; Slany, 2020).
- 6) Protect debt sovereignty through the development of a debt relief funding mechanism.**
If the yearly contribution will not be enforced, measures must be taken that allow SIDS to maintain their debt sovereignty through a debt relief program (UN-OHRLLS, 2022). The structure of this program can take many forms from direct relief to debt swaps. SIDS loan default would lead to an inability to finance capacity-building or mitigation and adaptation measures (Slany, 2020). This will lead to disasters including the death of SIDS citizens or a sudden shock to another country's welfare and legal systems.
- 7) Enhance adaptation efforts through the creation of a Loss and Damage funding mechanism within the UNFCCC framework.**
While it is beneficial that Loss and Damage is officially part of the UNFCCC COP agendas going forward, the Warsaw Implementation Mechanism has been discussed since 2013. More action is needed. This includes the actual establishment of a grant-style funding program that exists within the UNFCCC structure (Liao et al., 2022). As it stands, this funding could take the form of another loan program through a third-party intermediary (Sharm el Sheikh Implementation Plan Draft Decision, 2022). This just compounds SIDS' current debt sovereignty risks (Slany, 2020).
- 8) Enhance mitigation efforts through increased data collection and classification of ecosystems.**
All SIDS, UN members or not, should start specifically classifying every ecosystem within their purview (Larue, 2022). They then should note all industries that interact or depend upon these ecosystems. Data collection should be enhanced to the highest possible degree to monitor these systems. With that data, ecosystem needs can be put in a hierarchal order based on immediacy of the biodiversity loss, extent of damage, and potential loss to livelihood. This will assist SIDS in securing funding related to Loss and Damage (Liao et al., 2022).
- 9) Enhance mitigation efforts by insisting on robust monitoring systems, compliance mechanisms, and stricter enforcement measures of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as outlined in Article 2 of the Paris Climate Accord.**
Only 27 countries out of 197 have even remotely met their pledged emissions goals. More must be done to hold countries accountable to their NDCs (AOSIS, 2022).
- 10) Enhance mitigation efforts by working toward a global carbon price with consideration of the Blue Carbon Market potential.**
One method by which SIDS could secure financing outside of traditional funding mechanisms is to work on a global carbon price under Article 6 of the Paris Climate Accord, advocating for the inclusion of the Blue Carbon Market. The Ocean is responsible for 50% of the world's oxygen, and SIDS are heavily reliant, and thus knowledgeable of its mechanics. The inclusion of Blue Carbon would allow them to participate in the global carbon market while also increasing protection for a vital ecosystem.
- 11) Enhance mitigation efforts by issuing Blue Bonds.**
If negotiations on a global carbon price are not delivered upon or developed with the speed needed by SIDS, Blue Bonds should be issued to secure more climate financing outside of the UNFCCC framework (UN-OHRLLS, 2022). Blue bonds are debt instruments issued to support investment into sustainable ocean life, healthy ocean ecosystems, and support of blue economies.

12) Enhance mitigation efforts by increasing capacity-development.

SIDS have an opportunity to harness the Blue Economy to increase fishery well-being (further enhancing food security and ecosystem health), increasing their value chains and economic diversification. This increases SIDS economic resiliency and provides home-grown financing for climate measures (UN-OHRLLS, 2022).

13) Enhance mitigation efforts through early warning systems.

Early warning systems will be necessary to understand, adjust to, and plan for shocks to the systems (Larue, 2022).

14) Begin to develop plans for worst case scenario disaster planning with a focus on cultural preservation and potential migration.

Cultural identities are already being affected by the climate crisis. Traditional foods and practices are disappearing due to decreased biodiversity and resources. As such, SIDS should begin to document cultural practices so that these traditions do not become lost to history. This cultural preservation can be used to educate other nations about the people and potentially ease migration transitions into other cultures. Additionally, migration plans should be developed for worst-case scenario disaster planning. This will assist in determining financing needs, and adaptation capacity.

15) All heads of state should attend COP28 to demonstrate the seriousness with which the climate crisis is affecting their individual countries. This includes non-member SIDS states of which there are 20.

As previously discussed in policy recommendation 1), all SIDS should be in attendance at the UNFCCC COPs as the climate crisis puts every SIDS in danger. The inability for 20 of these nations to advocate for their people or secure climate financing is not appropriate. Imperialist history has limited their ability to interact on the global stage and continues to haunt them by affecting the potential outcomes of the climate crisis. All SIDS heads of state should go to COP 28 as a unified body, standing in solidarity to demonstrate the seriousness with which this issue must be taken.

16) If by the end of the first week of COP28, there are not enough actionable steps made towards implementation of agreed upon Paris Climate Accord pledges, SIDS heads of state should stage a sit-in in one of the plenary rooms. This sit-in should include non-member SIDS heads of state and an invitation should be extended to Least Developed Nations (LDNs) heads of state and party delegates as well.

COP 27 ended in lacklustre outcomes. This is particularly true in the case of SIDS and LDNs who are heavily reliant on climate financing to drive their capacity-development, mitigation, and adaptation. If COP 28 looks to be on the same trajectory, SIDS should react radically to shock the UNFCCC framework into more effective outcomes. The framework is still the best global governance system by which SIDS and LDNs have to secure climate policy. However, the wheels of bureaucracy are slow, and the climate crisis is not. The UNFCCC must deliver on more pledge agreements and must do so as soon as possible.

17) Attempt to estimate how much the Colonizing Economies made during the heyday of imperialism and deliver the bill as an alternative to the \$100 Billion USD pledge.

Though this would never be acted upon, it may put the lack of action in perspective for the global community.

18) Increase transparency and visibility through unified press releases and educational programmes to communicate to the global community the issues that SIDS face and why it is necessary for the global community to enforce and deliver on the funding pledges set and agreed upon in the 2015 Paris Climate Accord.

SIDS must become better at managing their own communication to enhance awareness and support globally. This can be done through increased coordination of press releases and educational efforts. For instance, rather than having 15+ pavilions and events, coordinate a unified one. Insist on more visibility in the COP and schedule regular press briefings to deliver opinions on the status of negotiations, informing the public whether SIDS are being served by the COP proceedings.

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