

Forum:	Environmental Committee (ENV)
Issue:	Examining the impacts of climate change small island states and coastal regions
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Introduction

An accelerating rise in sea levels, along with ocean acidification, is threatening the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and coastal regions that are located throughout the world. The SIDS are some of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations on the planet. Almost 65 million people, which is little bit less than 1% of the world's population, is living in SIDS, and 90% of SIDS are in the tropics. In 1992, the situation of environment and socio-economic challenges in SIDS was acknowledge at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Hence, governments agreed that concerted actions was needed to address development to protect future generations (“About Small Island Developing States (SIDS) | Department of Economic and Social Affairs”). In 1994, in Barbados, the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States include specific actions and measures at the national, regional and international levels in support of sustainable development. Currently, 41 SIDS are parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), many SIDS are members of Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), and 11 are listed as least developed countries (LDCs) (Martin-Luther-King). These regions are facing significant risks to their socio-economic stability and even the very existence of their communities due to climate change (such as rising sea level and extreme weather) which may further cause various natural desasters such as tropical storms, hurricanes that further damages infrastructure, housing, and agriculture. As a result, the annual cost of damages from natural disasters in SIDS can range between 1% to 8% of their entire GDP (“About Small Island Developing States (SIDS) | Department of Economic and Social Affairs”).

Although Small Island Developing States (SIDS) contribute less than 1% of global greenhouse gass emissions, they are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. In fact, from 1970 to 2020, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) states that SIDS lost \$153 billion just from weather, climate, and water related hazards. The loss is considered significant as the average GDP for SIDS is \$13.7 billion. Furthermore, the cost of adapting to these climage change in SIDS is estimated to be between US \$22 bilion and US \$26 bilion per year, which is approximately 4-5% of their combined GDP. These challenges underscore the urgent need for global climate action, such as the Paris Agreement. Under this agreement, nations have committed to limiting global temperature rise to below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels, aiming to keep it below 1.5 °C. However, despite this, SIDS and coastal reasons continue to face disproportionate risks despite their minimal contribution to global

emissions; therefore, showing how crucial it is for corporations to take responsibility and be accountable for their actions in addressing these challenges.

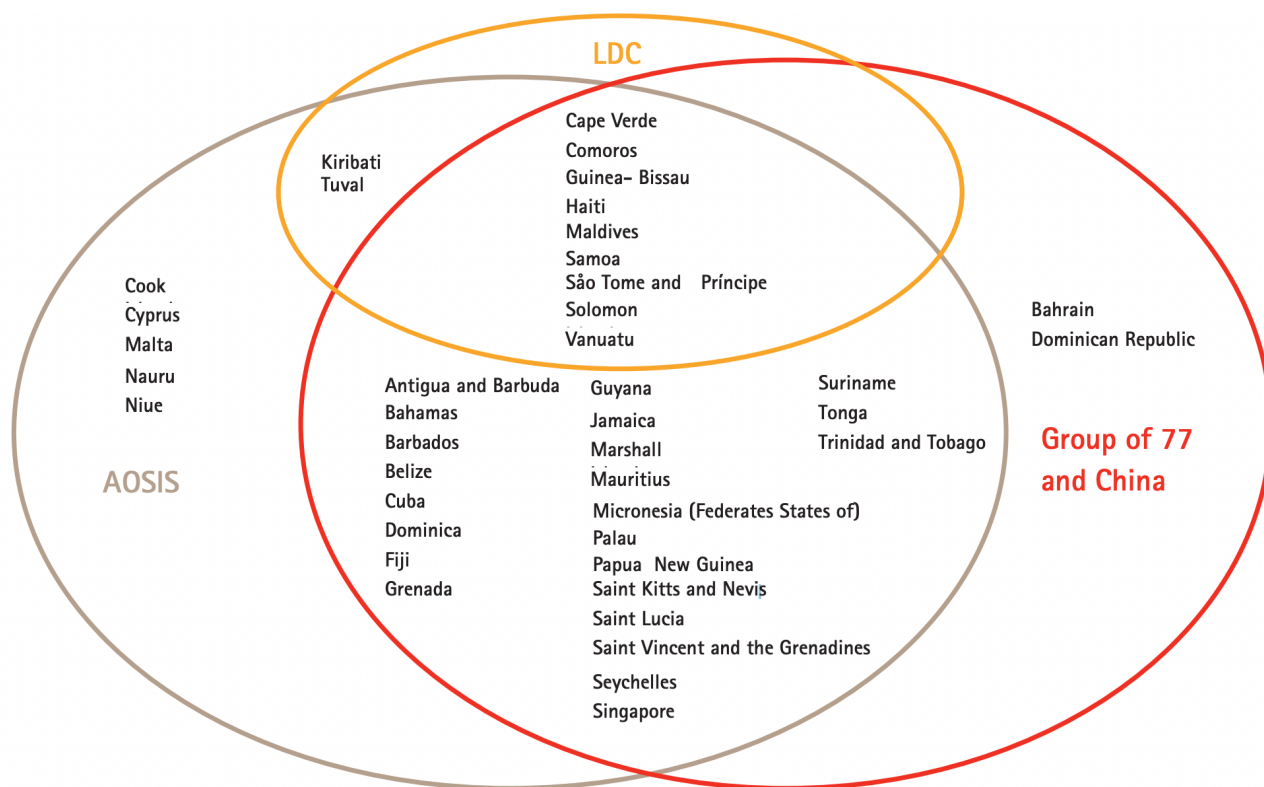


Figure 1: List of SIDS in UNFCCC

Definition of Key Terms

Accountability

Accountability refers to the obligation of individuals or organizations to take responsibility for their actions. They are expected to be responsible, aware, and trustworthy where they are able to provide accurate and accessible information about their actions, decisions, and the impact of their activities.

Coastal region

Coastal region is Local administrative units (LAUs), which are low level administrative division of a country below that of a province, region or state, that are bordering or close to a coastline – the line where land and water surface meet.

Climate change

Climate change refers to long-term changes in the Earth's climate patterns, which affect local, regional, and global climates. While it is often used interchangeably, climate change and global warming are distinct concepts. Global warming specifically refers to the rise in Earth's average surface temperature, while climate change encompasses not only warming but also the associated "side effect," which includes but is not limited to glaciers, heavier rainstorms, or more frequent drought ("What Is Climate Change? - NASA Science").

Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

SIDS are a group of low-lying island nations that are home to approximately 65 million people who live across more than 1,000 islands, many of them in the Caribbean ("Small Island Developing States"). They are small island countries and territories that share similar sustainable development challenges and face similar social, economic and environmental vulnerability. Despite their names, not all countries belonging to this group are islands. Belize, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana and Suriname are also included because of their common characteristics. Some of the common characteristics of SIDS are remoteness, small population, dependence on ocean resources, reliance on imports, limited access to finance, debt pressure, and vulnerability to climate change ("Small Island Developing States Are on the Frontlines of Climate Change – Here's Why | UNDP Climate Promise").

Background

Rising sea level

Water and climate change are closely linked. Rising sea level makes all SIDS at risk of losing land.

The 1994-1995 Saltwater Intrusion Crisis in the Pacific

It is often assumed that water is not a scarce resource in the Pacific Islands. However, many of the Pacific islands are facing significant water scarcity. Saltwater intrusion is the situation where saltwater moves onto the land due to the rise in sea levels. It also happens when saltwater seeps into freshwater aquifers, which is an underground layer of water, and causes the groundwater level to rise. As a result, the freshwater that people use becomes contaminated with salt, making it undrinkable or unusable. Not only that, other natural disasters such as cyclones and flash floods caused by climate change can also give severe damage to the SIDS and coastal region's water supply. As lands become unproductive due to saltwater intrusion and other issues, many people were forced to migrate.

Rising Sea level in the Maldives

In light of the evidence from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) it has stated that "The Global mean water level in the ocean rose by 0.14 inches per year from 2006 to 2015." The Maldives, located in the north-central Indian Ocean, has been a symbol of the vulnerability of SIDS to climate change. Rising sea levels, exacerbated by global warming, threaten to submerge the low-lying islands. So far, due to sea erosion and natural disasters, 14 islands have already been deserted. Over the

years, the Maldives has experienced increasing coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion into freshwater sources, and the loss of land.

Higher ocean temperature

In 2020, the temperature of the ocean has reached its highest. As a result, while coral reefs and ecosystems that are critical for the Pacific regional economy and people's livelihoods as Pacific SIDS are economically extraordinarily dependent on the products, high ocean temperatures are threatening almost 90 percent of marine ecosystems and food security. This can further effect on ocean productivity, its' biodiversity and the marketability of the Pacific's essential and growing tourism industry.

The 1997-1998 El Niño

The term El Niño refers to a warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. This phenomenon gave severe impacts among the vulnerable populations, such as SIDS and coastal regions, where natural disasters can disrupt their fragile livelihoods. In countries like Ecuador, Peru, Somalia, and Kenya, heavy rains and flooding have led to thousands of deaths, significant losses of crops and household assets, and widespread damage to infrastructure.

In Indonesia, El Niño related droughts caused a cereal shortfall of over 3.5 million metric tons, and uncontrolled fires in 1997 led to large scale environmental degradation. As a result, food prices skyrocketed, making basic goods unaffordable for many countries. The drought also contributed to economic and political instability in Indonesia.

In countries like Peru, Ecuador, Papua New Guinea, and Kenya, the most significant impacts of El Niño have been felt at the community and household levels, especially among vulnerable populations. Natural disasters often strain traditional coping mechanisms. For example, in Somalia, unexpected flooding in 1998 destroyed stored harvests and seeds, worsening food insecurity.

In southern Somalia, heavy rains brought the worst flooding in 40 years, displacing over 200,000 people. Fields, homes, and roads were inundated, severely limiting access to food, clean water, healthcare, and sanitation in the Juba and Shabelle valleys. The flooding also increased vulnerability to infectious diseases such as cholera, malaria, and Rift Valley fever.

Climate-related disasters

The Pacific SIDS and coastal regions, such as Cook Island, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and so on. are the most highly exposed countries in the world to natural disasters such as droughts, floods, etc. From 2019 to 2021, within the three years, a single tropical cyclone crisis have caused losses of up to 64% of GDP for some Pacific Island nations, which includes Vanuatu and Fiji.

The 2019 Hurricane Dorian

On 1 September 2019, Hurricane Dorian struck Abaco Island with maximum sustained winds of 280km/h and wind gusts over 335km/h. By 2 September, the storm had moved to the eastern side of Grand Bahama. However, Hurricane Dorian was not an isolated occurrence but part of a growing trend of extreme climate events that have reshaped the Bahamian's landscape and economy. Rise in sea temperatures likely contributed to tropical storms. The Bahamas landscape is highly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters, with more than half of its landmass lying within 5 feet of sea level. The damage from high winds, storm surges, and flooding further weakened the country's economy, highlighting the urgent need for climate resilience in coastal areas – which hold the majority of the population and economic activity.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The UNFCCC, established in 1992 with the purpose of preventing dangerous human interference with the climate system, is one of the most successful multilateral environmental treaties in history. (Will add more...)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

The UNEP is an environmental authority within the UN system. By leveraging its expertise, UNEP works to strength environmental standards and practices, helping countries at national, regional, and global levels meet their environmental commitments. It's goal is to promote collaboration, inspire action, and empower nations and communities to improve their quality of life while protecting the well-being of future generations.

Greenpeace

Greenpeace is a global network of independent campaigning organizations that informs environmental problems and solutions through peaceful protest and innovative confrontation. Greenpeace helps financial support in the New Collective Quantified Goal's (NCQG), where this funding specifically targets countries that are most vulnerable to climate change, such as the least-developed countries (LDCs) and SIDS.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

The IPCC, founded in 1990 by the UN, is a scientific that assess the science related to climate change, its impacts, and other potential future risks. The IPCC reports are neutral, policy-relevant, playing an important role in highlighting the vulnerabilities of SIDS to climate change. In 2022, IPCC reported impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability confirmed that SIDS are increasingly affected by tropical cyclones, storm surges, droughts, changing precipitation patterns, coral bleaching and invasive species.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1980-1990	<p>The 1980s was a huge turning point for our planet Earth. The 1982 volcano eruption (El Chichon) created a massive shift in the Earth's biophysical systems. One of the SAHFOS reports recorded various related incidents resulting from the change. There was a 60% rise in winter river discharge into the Baltic Sea to a 400% surge in the average length of wildfires in the Western United States. It also indicates that climate change can happen suddenly and randomly rather than gradually.</p>
1990-2000	<p>During this period, people have noticed and taken action about climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its First Assessment Report in 1990, cautioning the potential for a significant increase in global temperatures as a result of higher carbon dioxide emissions. After 2 years, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) had a convention agreement in Rio de Janeiro. They aimed to create a comprehensive plan and a fresh strategy for global efforts on environmental and development concerns to direct international collaboration and development policy in the twenty-first century.</p>
2000-2010	<p>On December 26, 2004, a massive undersea earthquake in Indonesia triggered one of the worst tsunamis in recorded history. The earthquake was 9.1 to 9.3 on the Richter scale and the waves reached 30m high in some areas. The destruction scale has brought the vulnerability of coastal areas to natural disasters. This has caused coastal erosion and some shorelines to disappear into the ocean. Furthermore, in some areas, coral reefs have risen above the surface. This has led to discussions on how climate change will increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.</p>
2010-current	<p>The global average surface temperature has increased sharply with estimates showing an increase of 0.92°C since 2010. This is part of a longer trend driven by climate-forcing emissions from burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and other human activities since 1880. According to NOAA, it mentions that the global land and ocean surface average temperature anomaly for 2011–2020 was the hottest decade ever recorded worldwide, with a global temperature increase of +0.82°C (+1.48°F) compared to the 20th-century average. This exceeded the previous decade's record of +0.62°C (+1.12°F) above the 1961-1990 average. This reference point represents a period of relatively stable climate before the rapid increase in human-caused changes.</p>

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,

The UNFCCC was established in 1992 to address and respond to climate change issues. Their last conference meeting was during COVID-19 in 2021. Its previous resolutions were the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Agreement in 2015. Those agreements were both based on resolving climate change worldwide.

The Kyoto Protocol, 11/12/1997

The Kyoto Protocol was one of the first global agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It required developed countries to cut their emissions by an average of 5% below 1990 levels from 2008 to 2012 with binding targets. But its impact was limited by the fact that major polluters like the US didn't participate and developing countries were exempt from targets.

The Paris Agreement, 22/4/2016

The Paris Agreement has brought together nearly all the countries to tackle climate change. Countries had to submit an outline to reduce emissions to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, with efforts also being made to limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC),

The IPCC was set up by the United Nations in 1988. Its job is to provide policymakers with regular, comprehensive reports on the science of climate change.

The Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), 2/11/2014, was published in 2014. One of the key findings of AR5 was extremely likely that human activities have been the main cause of the warming since the mid-20th century. AR5 looked at various climate change impacts such as sea level rise and huge cuts in greenhouse gas emissions etc.

The Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), 20/3/2023 released in 2023 was more detailed and built on the findings of AR5. AR6 presented updated projections of future warming scenarios based on different levels of emissions cuts. It said every fraction of a degree matters when it comes to avoiding the worst impacts of climate change.

Possible Solutions

1. Mitigation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions

One of the most critical solutions to address rising global temperatures is aggressive mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions. This involves transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources:

solar, wind, and hydroelectric power. The burning of fossil fuels for energy is the primary source of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, which trap heat in the atmosphere (and) contribute to global warming. To effectively mitigate emissions, delegates should consider implementing policies that promote energy efficiency. For instance, enhancing building codes to require better insulation with energy-efficient appliances can significantly reduce energy consumption. However, investing in public transportation systems can decrease reliance on personal vehicles, further reducing emissions. Although some may resist change, this approach is essential to combat climate change. Because of the urgency of the situation, action is needed now.

Another essential aspect is the promotion of carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies. These technologies can capture CO₂ emissions from industrial processes before they enter the atmosphere and store them underground or use them in various applications. Supporting research and development in CCS can provide a dual benefit: it helps industries transition towards cleaner practices, however, maintaining economic stability. The necessity of this solution lies in its potential to stabilize global temperatures by reducing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

2. Adaptation Strategies for Coastal Communities

As sea levels continue to rise due to melting ice caps and thermal expansion of seawater. Adaptation strategies for coastal communities become increasingly vital. Delegates should focus on developing comprehensive adaptation plans that include infrastructure improvements, ecosystem restoration, and community engagement. One effective approach is investing in resilient infrastructure that can withstand flooding and storm surges. This includes constructing sea walls, and flood barriers designed with future sea level projections in mind. Moreover, retrofitting existing structures to enhance their resilience against extreme weather events is essential. Ecosystem restoration plays a crucial role in adaptation as well. Coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, wetlands, and coral reefs act as natural buffers against storm surges and erosion while also providing critical habitats for biodiversity. Protecting and restoring these ecosystems will not only help mitigate the impacts of rising sea levels but also enhance carbon sequestration capabilities. Nevertheless, because of these strategies communities can better prepare for the challenges ahead. Although some may find the changes difficult, this is necessary for a sustainable future.

Community engagement is another vital component. Involving local populations in decision-making processes ensures that adaptation strategies are culturally appropriate and meet the specific needs of those affected by climate change. Education programs about climate risks can empower communities to take proactive measures to safeguard their environments. However, the urgency for these adaptation strategies stems from projections indicating that millions of people will be displaced due to rising sea levels by 2050 if no action is taken.

By addressing both mitigation through emission reductions and adaptation through resilient planning, delegates can create a comprehensive approach that addresses both immediate challenges posed by climate

change while working towards long-term sustainability. (This) is important because the future of many communities depends on it. Although challenges exist, the potential for positive change is great.

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Appendix or Appendices

1. <https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/about-small-island-developing-states>
 - This website provides examples of how UN helped support SIDS and also possible solutions in the future.
2. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/outreach/IPCC_AR6_WGII_FactSheet_SmallIslands.pdf
 - This is a fact sheet provided from IPCC. It gives general information about our topic.
3. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/chapter-15/>
 - This website is useful as it gives a common knowledge about SIDS, focusing on the impacts, impacts, etc.