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# Climate Change Vulnerabilities of SIDS and Potential for South-South Cooperation



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## Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN in 2015 dwelt on the impact of climate change on sustainable development. Recognizing climate change as one of the “greatest challenges of our time” with its adverse impacts undermining the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development directly and indirectly, and noting that the “survival of many societies and the biological support systems of the planet” are at risk, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include a dedicated goal of taking urgent action on climate change and its impacts.<sup>1</sup>

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are a distinct group of 38 UN Member States and 20 Non-UN Members/Associate Members of United Nations regional commissions that face unique social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities. For SIDS, the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is, on average, 28 times the country’s land mass. Thus, for many SIDS the majority of the natural resources they have access to comes from the ocean. Factors like small population size, remoteness from international markets, high transportation costs, vulnerability to

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exogenous economic shocks and fragile land and marine ecosystems make SIDS particularly vulnerable to biodiversity loss and climate change because they lack economic alternatives.<sup>2</sup>

The SIDS are the least responsible for climate change, however they are among the most vulnerable to its impact. They are dependent on others for significant action to be taken to tackle climate change at an international level. Due to their circumstances the international community has recognised the special situation of SIDS in the context of climate change impact. This paper intends to highlight the vulnerabilities of SIDS and the potential of South-South Cooperation, especially in the light of the COP26<sup>3</sup> Summit in November 2021 in Glasgow, UK.

South-South Cooperation is a “broad framework of collaboration among countries of the South in the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and technical domains. Involving two or more developing countries, it can take place on a bilateral, regional, intraregional or interregional basis. Developing countries share knowledge, skills, expertise and resources to meet their development goals through concerted efforts”.<sup>4</sup>

Triangular Cooperation involves ‘Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries, supported by a developed country(ies) or multilateral organisation(s), to implement development cooperation programmes and projects.’<sup>5</sup>

The SAMOA (SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action) Pathway, outcome of the Third International Conference on

SIDS (Apia, Samoa, 1-4 September 2014) articulates the sustainable development pathways and aspirations for SIDS over the period 2015-2025, and promotes international assistance to address challenges faced by small islands.<sup>6</sup>

## **SIDS Vulnerabilities**

For SIDS, small, dispersed populations hamper the creation of sizable domestic markets and lead to capacity constraints. Their remoteness determines that as a group they are less than one third as well connected as other developing countries (OECD report: Making Development Cooperation Work For Small Island Developing States<sup>7</sup>), and this reduces their access to international markets and competitiveness. As a result, most SIDS rely on small, undiversified economies and often face high debt levels, many of them also relying on the rest of the world for remittances, official development assistance (ODA) and financial services. These economic vulnerabilities are interrelated and reinforced by the climate and environmental challenges, such as increasingly frequent extreme weather events, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, loss of ocean oxygen and ecosystem degradation.<sup>8</sup>

Rising sea levels as a result of climate change not only pose the threat of submergence of coastal areas, and in some cases entire islands, but also affect their economy and livelihoods of people highly dependent on the ocean. The increasing frequency of climate change induced disasters would have severe implications for adaptive capacity and socio-economic stability in these nations. Single disasters often have widespread

and long-term effects for SIDS, eroding adaptive capacity and socio-economic stability. An example is Hurricane Maria in 2017 that caused damages in Dominica totalling over 225 per cent of the country's GDP, and displaced the entire population of Barbuda. Such disasters make it harder for SIDS to allocate resources and finances to sustainable development, and increases vulnerability to other climate impacts.<sup>9</sup>

## COP 26

The 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, UK in November 2021 has not led to a sense of achievement that we had seen after the Paris Agreement in 2015. While the Glasgow Climate Pact and the frenzy of pledges during the first week clearly signal that a decarbonised future is on its way, they are almost certainly too little too late to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.<sup>10</sup>

Speaking at COP26, Barbados Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley called for the global average temperature increase to be limited to 1.5° C adding that a 2° C increase is a death sentence for several countries. "We do not want that dreaded death sentence. We've come here today to say 'try harder, try harder' because our people, the climate army, the world and planet need our actions now, not next year, not in the next decade".<sup>11</sup>

Finance was extensively discussed and there was consensus on the need to continue increasing support to developing countries. The call to at least double finance for adaptation was welcomed by the Parties. The duty to fulfil the pledge of providing 100 billion

dollars annually from developed to developing countries was also reaffirmed. And a process to define the new global goal on finance was launched.<sup>12</sup> Parties collectively agreed to work to ensure that the rise in the average temperature is limited to 1.5 degrees. Alok Sharma, UK President of COP26 said: "We can now say with credibility that we have kept 1.5 degrees alive. But its pulse is weak and it will only survive if we keep our promises and translate commitments into rapid action. I am grateful to the UNFCCC<sup>13</sup> for working with us to deliver a successful COP26."<sup>14</sup>

Developed countries came to Glasgow falling short on their promise to deliver USD 100 billion a year for developing countries. Voicing "regret," the Glasgow outcome reaffirms the pledge and urges developed countries to fully deliver on the USD 100 billion goal urgently. Developed countries, in a report, expressed confidence that the target would be met in 2023. The Glasgow Pact calls for a doubling of finance to support developing countries in adapting to the impacts of climate change and building resilience. This won't provide all the funding that poorer countries need, but it would significantly increase finance for protecting lives and livelihoods, which so far made up only about 25 per cent of all climate finance (with 75 per cent going towards green technologies to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions).<sup>15</sup>

## SIDS Actions

Despite making negligible contributions to global greenhouse gas emissions, SIDS have also focused on mitigation. The

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of many SIDS focus on shifting to renewable energy, an opportunity to reduce emissions while also reducing risk to extreme events and moving toward energy sovereignty. Some SIDS have developed ambitious mitigation plans to become carbon neutral or even carbon negative. However, the need for human, technological, and financial support to achieve mitigation goals will need to be addressed.<sup>16</sup>

SIDS used COP26 to highlight their conceptions of the climate emergency, including its existential threat, loss and damage due to climate change impacts, and the need for increased financial commitments to mitigate the effects of climate change.<sup>17</sup> SIDS leaders expressed the growing need for action through international cooperation, because SIDS alone cannot address the crisis - global action is needed for their survival.<sup>18</sup>

SIDS are taking bold stances on the sustainable ocean economy and are calling on the international community to support their ambition. SIDS have identified sustainable ocean economies as an SDG accelerator, considering that investments in the sustainable ocean economy will have large multiplier effects across many other economic and social areas. Many SIDS also have developed blue economy strategies. Cook Islands declared its entire exclusive economic zone (EEZ), equivalent to 1.9 million km<sup>2</sup>, a multiple-use marine protected area - the world's largest. Palau established its entire EEZ as a fully protected marine reserve, making it a no-take zone and banning all fishing and mining activities.<sup>19</sup>

## SSC and SIDS

Enhanced international cooperation is crucial for all countries to combat climate change. As a complementary way to address climate change, South-South Cooperation (SSC) on climate change is gaining momentum with an increasing number of developing countries undertaking traditional and innovative SSC modalities. The UN Action Plan on South-South Climate Cooperation (2017 -21) aimed to:

- Maintain and strengthen the political momentum on climate change
- Strengthen knowledge, awareness and understanding of South-South climate cooperation
- Accelerate United Nations system-wide efforts and enhance coordination to support South-South climate cooperation
- Engage multi-stakeholders of the South for global climate action<sup>20</sup>

There is growing recognition of the potential of SSC and Triangular Cooperation (TrC) to facilitate technology development and transfer for climate action in developing countries under the Paris Agreement. The thematic areas identified as most promising for technology cooperation via South-South and triangular channels include agriculture, disaster risk reduction, renewable energy and energy efficiency, forestry, transport, water resources and waste management.<sup>21</sup>

## Cooperation among SIDS

Knowledge sharing and solution exchanges are bread and butter for South-South cooperation.<sup>22</sup> SIDS have been engaged in cooperating and collaborating

among themselves in tackling climate change. One early example of regional cooperation on climate change was the Caribbean Planning for Adaptation to Climate Change (CPACC) programme (1997 -2001). With resources obtained from the GEF (Global Environment Facility) trust fund, Caribbean SIDS cooperated in identifying strategies to cope with adverse effects of climate change, particularly sea level rise, to develop an integrated management and planning framework for cost-effective responses and adaptation to climate change in coastal and marine areas, to provide training and institutional strengthening that could enhance regional and national capacities, and to identify and assess policy options.<sup>23</sup> At present the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre as an inter-governmental Caribbean Community (CARICOM) institution, maintains the Caribbean's repository of information and data on climate change specific to the region.

In the Pacific, the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) - a technical, intergovernmental organisation, has become a central actor in the Pacific to promote co-operation in the South Pacific region and improve sustainable development. SPREP also receives and channels international financial support. Since its establishment in the early 1990s SPREP has supported the capacity of national departments and environmental strategies.<sup>24</sup> The Pacific Climate Change Centre at SPREP set up in 2019 in partnership with the Government of Japan delivers capacity development programmes in adaptation, mitigation, climate services

and project development. The Centre's mandate includes to "Deliver capacity development programmes in adaptation, mitigation, climate services and project development" and "promote and foster applied research, drive innovation and build capacity in these areas".

The initiative SIDS DOCK set up in 2015 as a "DOCKing station," to connect the energy sector in SIDS with the global markets for finance and sustainable energy technologies, is a SIDS-SIDS institutional mechanism established to facilitate the development of a sustainable energy economy within the small island developing states, with its secretariat in Belize. It announced a Global Ocean Energy Alliance (GOEA) with international partners on the sidelines of COP26. The Prime Minister of Tonga, as President of SIDS Dock Assembly, announced that the partners will officially launch the GOEA at the UN Oceans Conference, scheduled for July 2022, in Lisbon, Portugal, and asked the international community and the private sector to join the Alliance. "We are seeking partners and we are looking to our oceans and in particular, ocean energy, as the principal source of energy to help a number of islands survive and thrive. Ocean energy is the big game-changer to turn the tide on climate change and get to Net Zero. This is the only option left for our children's survival and our future."<sup>25</sup>

There has been cooperation between Pacific and Caribbean SIDS in the South-South framework. These countries and local communities have a range of capacities and practices for effective disaster prevention and management, as well as for coping with and adapting to

climate change. There is great potential for exchange of ideas, experiences and best practices between SIDS in the Pacific and the Caribbean, in order to find suitable solutions and replicate best practices for addressing the various threats posed by climate change and disasters. Under this initiative, UNDP, as a neutral broker with long-term presence on the ground in both regions and their member countries, plays a facilitation role to lay the groundwork for sustained South-South cooperation on these urgent development issues.<sup>26</sup>

The Steering Committee of the SIDS Partnership Framework (established by UN following the 2014 SIDS Conference in Samoa) in 2019 launched the SIDS Partnership Criteria and Norms. A genuine and durable partnership for SIDS is one that strives to follow the SIDS Partnership SMART criteria - a partnership that is SIDS-Specific, Measurable and monitorable, Achievable & Accountable, Resource-based & results focused, Timeline for implementation & transparency by all parties.<sup>27</sup>

Singapore, itself a SIDS, has offered special technical assistance packages for SIDS since 1999. The latest package - the "Singapore Partnership for the SAMOA Pathway (SPa)" - was launched at the 74<sup>th</sup> UNGA in September 2019 and extends to 2024 to support SIDS' implementation of the SAMOA Pathway. It offers targeted and tailor-made programmes, particularly on climate change and disaster risk reduction. Some of these programmes will be organised through enhanced partnerships with the UN and other international organisations.<sup>28</sup>

## India and SIDS

India has a coastline of over 7500 km, including about 2000 km along its 1382 islands. Climate change and the vulnerability of coastal areas is, therefore, a common concern between India and the SIDS, and India works closely with them on international climate change issues.

In 2007, a workshop on Sustainable Development, jointly organised by the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and Indian Mission in Suva, Fiji in association with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) of India, provided training on sustainable development for PIF member countries, covering themes such as renewable energy, rainwater harvesting, and waste management and treatment. In 2017, Government of India (GOI) organised the India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference (IPISDC) at Suva under the FIPIC (Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation) framework, in partnership with TERI, business chambers and the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF). During the two-day conference, India and the PICs discussed the blue economy, climate change adaptation, mitigation practices, disaster preparedness.<sup>29</sup> An Indian delegation from the Ministry of Earth Sciences visited PNG in 2019 on a scoping mission to establish the Institute for Sustainable Coastal and Ocean Research in Pacific region and network of marine biology research.<sup>30</sup>

GoI and the Barefoot College in Tilonia, India partner in a programme that trains elderly rural women from SIDS and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to become solar engineers,

innovators, and educators. The Barefoot College has worked with local CSOs, such as the Locally Managed Marine Area Networks in Pacific Countries.<sup>31</sup>

## Indonesia

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic state, consisting of more than 17,500 islands with over 81,000 km of coastline. Indonesia is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, including extreme events such as floods and droughts, and long-term changes from sea level rise, shifts in rainfall patterns and increasing temperature.<sup>32</sup>

One of the priority sectors for the current Indonesian G20<sup>33</sup> Presidency is 'Energy Transition'. The Indonesian Presidency will promote energy transition toward new and sustainable energy by prioritizing energy security, accessibility, and affordability. This will ensure a green and sustainable future and manage the climate change issues more effectively.<sup>34</sup>

Indonesia is committed to increasing its role in the global community to overcome development challenges using the framework of international development cooperation. It is an embodiment of the commitment to the Bandung Spirit of the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference. The South-South and Triangular Cooperation programme is a part of national development priority.<sup>35</sup>

Indonesia is a partner country of the P4G (Partnering for Green Growth and Global Goals 2030) that invest in Start Up and Scale Up partnerships for sustainable development. According to Minister of National Development Planning of Indonesia Suharso Monoarfa, these

partnerships are concrete examples on how the government, private sector and civil society can work collaboratively to help Indonesia reach its SDGs and climate goals.<sup>36</sup> This experience could be useful in P4G and Indonesia partnering with the private sector in SIDS particularly in the Pacific.

In addition to cross-sector approaches, cross-country approaches may be needed due to the transboundary nature of natural marine assets. A positive example is the Coral Triangle Initiative, a partnership between the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste with support from GEF, Australia, the United States, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other development partners. The Coral Triangle is one of the greatest centres of biodiversity on Earth, containing more than 75 per cent of the known coral species and home to 363 million people, of whom 141 million live within 30 kilometres of a coral reef (Indonesia Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, 2019[11]). The work of the Initiative is organised around the themes of assessment and action for threatened species, climate change adaptation, ecosystems-based management of fisheries, and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).<sup>37</sup>

## CDRI and IRIS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) at the UN Climate Action Summit 2019. It is a partnership of "national governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks, financing mechanisms, private

sector, and knowledge institutions for promoting the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks in support of sustainable development.” The CDRI aims to “promote rapid development of resilient infrastructure to respond to the Sustainable Development Goals’ imperatives of expanding universal access to basic services, enabling prosperity and decent work.” Its strategic priorities include technical support and capacity-building, research and knowledge management, and advocacy and partnerships.<sup>38</sup>

To strengthen resilience, disaster risk reduction seeks to (i) prevent new disaster risk, (ii) reduce existing disaster risk, and (iii) manage residual risk. The business case for resilience investments is compelling with an average \$1 spent saving \$4-\$7 in response.<sup>39</sup>

The Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS) initiative, launched on 2 November 2021 on the sidelines of COP26, is a joint programme between the CDRI member countries and SIDS. Speaking at the IRIS launch in Glasgow, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that through IRIS it will be easy and faster for SIDS to mobilize technology, finance, and necessary information. India’s space agency, ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) will build a special data window for SIDS to receive timely information about cyclones, coral-reef monitoring, coast-line monitoring.<sup>40</sup>

## Corporate Global Responsibility

Energy and major industries around the world have been major GHG emitters. Heat and electricity generation is responsible for most emissions (31.9

per cent of total GHG emissions in 2018), followed by transportation (14.2 per cent) and manufacturing and construction (12.6 per cent).<sup>41</sup>

Major corporations have been engaged in some efforts to address concerns relating to GHG emissions and also contribute to mitigation and adaptation measures. The Rockefeller Foundation and its partners are investing \$10 billion to establish The Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP) launched at COP26. Led by The Rockefeller Foundation, GEAPP will benefit from the resources, networks, influence, and dedication of a consortium of partners, including the Bezos Earth Fund and the IKEA Foundation. Several international finance corporations and multilateral development banks also are providing financing. GEAPP aims to extend clean, productive-use energy to 1 billion underserved people, create tens of millions of green jobs, and avoid and avert over 4 billion tons of emissions. It will build a transformational pipeline of projects by supporting the decommissioning and repurposing of fossil fuel plants, utility-wide adoption of renewable energy, and reliable, productive-use power for off-grid and underserved communities.<sup>42</sup>

## ISA

The International Solar Alliance (ISA), conceived as a joint effort by India and France, is an action-oriented, member-driven, collaborative platform for increased deployment of solar energy technologies as a means for bringing energy access, ensuring energy security, and driving energy transition in its member countries.<sup>43</sup>



The ISA and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at COP26 to collaborate and support the Parties in the implementation of ambitious national action in line with global efforts. As part of the agreement, the two institutions will jointly organize activities to facilitate the implementation of mitigation action in the energy sector, implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions and Long-term Low Emission Development Strategies. This will also lend support to developing country stakeholders including SIDS and LDCs in accelerating the adoption of policy options and approaches for decarbonization technologies.<sup>44</sup>

## ISA - GEAPP

At COP26, ISA and GEAPP announced a partnership for accelerating energy transition in SIDS and LDCs. The partnership will champion significant solar capacity generation globally while supporting grid-based and distributed renewable solutions. Over the next decade, it aims to unlock US\$ 100 billion in public and private capital and tackle three profound human problems simultaneously: (1) POWER - reaching one billion people with reliable, renewable energy; (2) CLIMATE - avoiding and averting four billion tons of carbon emissions; and (3) JOBS - building an on-ramp to opportunity by directly creating more than 150 million jobs. As part of the engagement, ISA will act as a global delivery partner for GEAPP, providing project development

and policy support across distributed renewable and grid-based energy transition in LDCs and SIDS member countries.<sup>45</sup>

## IORA

Blue economy is one of the focus areas of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) which was established in 1997 to promote sustained growth and balanced development in the Indian Ocean Region. Disaster risk reduction is also one of the priority areas of IORA. On the basis of the strategic location of the Indian Ocean region, IORA has emphasised on growing the Blue Economy in a sustainable, inclusive and people centred manner. IORA's Indian Ocean Blue Carbon Hub aims to build knowledge and capacity relevant to protecting and restoring blue carbon ecosystems (which include mangroves, seagrasses and tidal marshes) throughout the Indian Ocean in a way that enhances livelihoods, reduces risks from natural disasters and helps mitigate climate change.<sup>46</sup> Renewable Ocean Energy is one of the priority pillars of IORA's vision of a blue economy. The ocean offers vast potential for renewable "blue energy" from wind, wave, tidal, thermal and biomass sources.<sup>47</sup>

Comoros, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Singapore are the SIDS members of IORA. The IORA Sustainable Development Program (ISDP) was introduced in 2014 dedicated for the least developed countries (LDCs) that require assistance and support to conduct projects, and with the main purpose to promote sharing experiences and best practices among IORA Member States.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

There is a greater need for rejuvenation and innovation in SSC and TrC with SIDS as these countries strive to recover from the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Not only is the ocean important to SIDS, they are important to the ocean and the benefits that all humankind derives from it.<sup>49</sup>

To further increase the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of SSC and TrC projects to facilitate climate technology development and transfer and their contribution to the implementation of NDCs and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), future projects could include such components as research and development, adoption of policies and regulations, and creation of local value chains. Countries and multilateral organisations could consider increasing their engagement in TrC on climate technologies to support developing countries to expand the sharing of knowledge, practices, technologies and know-how in this area.<sup>50</sup>

South-South development partnerships with SIDS has gradually expanded in recent years. Hopefully with the COVID 19 pandemic appearing to be ending, and in the context of the COP26 initiatives, such cooperation would expand further to deal with climate change ramifications. Developing countries which have been dealing with the impact of climate change in their own small islands, such as India and Indonesia among others, could collaborate more with SIDS in South-South and TrC frameworks. Those countries among SIDS which have developed experience and expertise in tackling climate change may share it

with others, including with financing and technical support from TrC partners.

The United Nations and international communities can play an important role in promoting SSC on development and climate actions, further unleashing its potential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Although SSC has gained momentum in recent years, challenges to scaling up remain due to limited operational capacity in the developing world. International communities, and in particular the United Nations system, have enormous knowledge, expertise and experience in supporting development cooperation that can be deployed to realize these global goals. The United Nations system could further enhance its role as a conveyor and facilitator of South-South cooperation in order to help developing countries overcome their shared challenges related to sustainable development pathways, including ambitious climate action goals.<sup>51</sup>

As mentioned in the paper, the global industry has been responsible for much of the GHG emissions, which in turn pose a serious threat to the SIDS. It would therefore be imperative for the industry to not only reduce their GHG emissions, but also contribute towards adaptation and mitigation measures. Governments may consider the possibility of requiring major corporations to make a contribution, linked to their GHG emissions, specifically towards adaptation measures in SIDS.

The global community also needs to make serious lifestyle changes for the sake of our children's future. India at COP26 conveyed the message that the world needs mindful and deliberate

utilisation, instead of mindless and destructive consumption. The mantra of LIFE- Lifestyle for Environment to combat climate change was also shared in COP 26.<sup>52</sup>

To conclude on a note of cautious optimism, a few lines from Rilee O'Neill:

Can't do it by myself So I'm asking for your help

Together we can change the world

Sail past where it's been charted

Roll your sleeves up, let's get started

Together we can change the world.

## Endnotes

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