



Small Island Developing States and the Threat of Anthropogenic Climate Change

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Abstract

Anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) and toxic chemicals in the atmosphere are causing increasing levels of contamination, pollution, and warming of the Earth's surface at an unprecedented rate. Because of their intrinsic vulnerabilities, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are particularly susceptible to the impacts of global climate change. Despite recent accomplishments and progress in achieving climate neutrality and ocean conservation, this research argues that SIDS continue to suffer severe impediments in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Small Island Developing States

AIMS REGION*	CARIBBEAN REGION	PACIFIC REGION
Cape Verde	Antigua and Barbuda	Cook Islands
Comoros	Bahamas	Fiji
Guinea Bissau	Barbados	Kiribati
Maldives	Belize	Marshall Islands
Mauritius	Cuba	Federated States of Micronesia
São Tomé and Príncipe	Dominica	Nauru
Seychelles	Dominican Republic	Niue
Singapore	Grenada	Palau
	Guyana	Papua New Guinea
	Haiti	Samoa
	Jamaica	Solomon Islands
	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Timor-Leste
	Saint Lucia	Tonga
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Tuvalu
	Suriname	Vanuatu
	Trinidad and Tobago	

* (Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, and South China Sea)

Source: UN-OHRLLS

Small Island Developing States

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are a distinct category of developing islands and archipelagos sharing specific social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities undermining development. Common challenges faced by SIDS include:

- small size, insularity and remoteness;
- limited natural resource endowments;
- high dependency on export markets;
- precarious fiscal finances;
- problems of public administration;
- reliance on foreign sources of finance;
- little resilience to natural disasters;
- fragile natural environments.

Therefore, SIDS are highly disadvantaged in their development process and require special support from the international community.



Global Climate Change

The impacts of global climate change and the resulting threats it poses for international governance have raised political and academic attention since the late 1980s.

SIDS are particularly susceptible to global climate change, climate variability, and sea-level rise. As SIDS are lying only a few meters above the level of the sea, a projected rise in sea levels would signify erosion of land, total disappearance of coral reefs, and eventual submergence with huge consequences on food and water security, health and sanitation, and ultimately displacement and migration of inhabitants.

Table 1. Highest and lowest share of land area within 5m above sea level

COUNTRY	% OF LAND AREA WITHIN 5M ABOVE SEA LEVEL
Maldives, Tuvalu	100%
Marshall Islands	99%
Kiribati	96%
Cook Islands	88%
Average	26%
Haiti	4%
Suriname, Timor-Leste, Guyana	3%
Papua New Guinea	2%

Source: UN-OHRLLS, *Small Island Developing States in Numbers*, 2013.

Considering the magnitude of climate change and its associated impacts, pathways for adaptation, mitigation, and sustainable development have been advanced to avoid pervasive and, in most cases, irreversible detrimental effects, including biodiversity loss, reduction of renewable surface water, and complete submersion.

KEY POINTS

1. The climate is already changing and SIDS area already feeling the impacts
2. Further climate change is inevitable in the coming decades
3. Climate change is affecting SIDS' growth and development
4. Climate change poses an existential threat to some SIDS
5. Adaptation can reduce the impacts of climate change, but there are limits and risks involved
6. The economic cost of adaptation to climate change is high in SIDS relative to the size of their economies
7. SIDS stand to benefit from further integration of climate adaptation, mitigation and development approaches
8. Transformation to a low-carbon economy implies new patterns of investment
9. International cooperation is vital to avert dangerous climate change and SIDS governments can promote ambitious global action

Source: Adapted from: *Climate and Development Knowledge Network*, 2014.

Conclusion



View of the plenary hall in the World Conference Center, Bonn, 2014
Source: UNFCCC

Although several initiatives to address climate change have been launched, the sustainable development agenda has not been met.

SIDS have lacked the ability to implement policies towards sustainable development while the international community has failed to fully concretize its commitment.



Basis for action:

- provide SIDS with the necessary funding to adapt measures and efforts;
- commit to reducing GHGs emissions to internationally agreed levels within a specific time frame;
- continue to develop integrated coastal area management strategies.

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