



## Small Island Developing States: A Strong Interest Group on Climate

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Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are an important and formalised group of interests in international climate negotiations. Although they contribute very little to climate change, they are the most vulnerable to its effects. That is why they urge developed countries to take responsibility for this global problem and to increase financial aid to its victims. Although SIDS face opposition to their position, their consistent lobbying may lead to a modification of perceptions of climate change.

SIDS is a group of 38 developing countries and 20 overseas territories lying on islands and low coasts. They are located in three geographic areas: the Caribbean; the Pacific; and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS). Their combined population constitutes less than 1% of the world total. The geographic location of SIDS and remoteness from other lands make it difficult for them to integrate into global supply chains, while the costs of importing products and services are high and their competitiveness is limited. Many of the SIDS's economies rely on tourism. Some SIDS are poor (Haiti) and some relatively rich (Maldives), agricultural (e.g., Papua New Guinea) and some in which agriculture plays a minor role (e.g., Bahamas), recently decolonised (e.g., Vanuatu in 1980) and those that have never been colonies (e.g., Tonga). They also differ in their level of dependence on international development aid.

Although their economic and political importance is marginal on a global scale, since 1992 SIDS have been recognised by the United Nations as a separate and quite strong group of interests, especially in climate issues. Their position during international negotiations is represented by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), although not all of them are affiliated with it. The group's main problem is that while they are responsible for less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions, they suffer the most severe consequences of climate change.

**Problems.** For several years, SIDS have been urging the adoption of an upper limit of 1.5°C, not 2°C, on the permitted global average temperature increase, which,

according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), will translate into an increase in sea levels by 11-77 cm by 2100 (for 2°C, the estimates are 10 cm higher). For SIDS, of which about a third of the population lives on land less than 5 m above sea level (e.g., 80% of the Maldives territory is less than 1 m above sea level), sea level rise is an existential threat. The resulting sea flooding, erosion of coastal areas, and degradation of groundwater resources will lead to a significant reduction of SIDS territory and limitation of access to fresh water and food, among others.

The expected effects of sea level rise will further aggravate these countries' current climate change-related problems. SIDS are already struggling with intensifying weather phenomena such as heavy rainfalls, prolonged droughts, destructive cyclones, as well as ocean acidification, destruction of coral reef ecosystems, and rising ocean surface temperature. These are associated with a general degradation of the environment, loss of biodiversity, an increase in the number of human and other victims and damage after extreme weather events, increasing people's susceptibility to disease, and ultimately hunger, loss of homes and the need to migrate.

While similar phenomena are observed all over Earth, due to their location, isolation, and small size, SIDS are particularly and severely affected by the effects of climate change. Among the examples is Tarawa, the capital city of Kiribati, which suffers from a consequent shortage of drinking water, exacerbated by overpopulation. Another

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example is the 2015 tropical storm Erika, which caused, in just a few hours, damage to Dominica estimated at around 90% of its GDP, as well as Hurricane Maria in 2017, which caused losses estimated at 224% of the island state's GDP. And yet another is Mauritius, which, as a result of erosion, in the last 50 years has lost several kilometres of coastline and many beaches, affecting its key tourism sector. The situation of SIDS is aggravated also by their susceptibility to global financial and health crises, such as COVID-19.

**Adaptation, Mitigation, and Loss and Damage.** In response to these problems, SIDS have undertaken efforts to adapt to climate change. The key areas for adaptation is coastal zone management (e.g., construction of coastal dikes), food security (e.g., crop diversification), and water security (e.g., construction of seawater desalination plants). Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), SIDS have prepared National Adaptation Plans, including sectoral strategies for enhancing resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change. They also try to strengthen cooperation with each other (e.g. in regional structures, as well as under AOSIS), share experiences, and work together on threats monitoring, crisis management, and innovation in adaptive solutions. SIDS are also trying to mitigate climate change through reforestation, reduction of the use of fossil fuels, the development of renewable energy installations, and other strategies.

The scope of the challenges faced by SIDS, combined with their economic constraints, make their adaptation to climate change difficult without external help. Therefore, they are waiting for the fulfilment of promised aid from developed countries, which in the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit pledged to mobilise \$100 billion annually by 2025 for developing countries. They are also beneficiaries of many other aid programmes, including the UN Green Climate Fund, the EU GCCA+, and the Pilot Program for Climate Resilience subsidised by one of the Climate Investment Funds. In the years 2003-2020, nearly 400 projects worth more than \$2 billion were planned under these programmes, of which more than half was allocated to adaptation measures. However, many SIDS do not have access to financing due to heavy debts or failure to meet International Monetary Fund criteria, as well as the limited bureaucratic capacity of the SIDS themselves to apply for subsidies. Attracting private capital is also difficult

due to, for example, the lack of credit or investment ratings, or political instability.

The implemented projects, although important on the scale of a given country (such as renewable energy micro-installations in the non-electrified south of Haiti), constitute only a fraction of the activities needed for the survival of the SIDS. That is why, in the climate negotiations, this group has long asked for financing of loss and damage (L&D), defined as the effects of climate change to which adaptation is no longer possible. Despite the inclusion of the Warsaw International Loss and Damage Mechanism established at COP19 in 2013 and in the Paris Agreement (Article 8), L&D was again the subject of intense discussions at the recent COP26 in Glasgow. Developing countries (including SIDS) demanded reparations from developed countries in the name of climate justice. The latter, led by the EU and the U.S., do not want to be held accountable for historical CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or for massive claims for damages, rejected the G77+ calls, and agreed only to continue the dialogue and support the development of technical assistance for L&D under the Santiago Network framework established for this purpose in 2019.

**Conclusions.** Despite their small size and low economic importance, the SIDS have a significant impact on international climate policy. Their problems serve as a demonstration of the challenges that the entire planet will face if CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are not reduced quickly. The lobbying by SIDS will therefore be targeted at changing the traditional donor-recipient relationship between developed and developing countries into a partnership to respond to a common threat.

Help to SIDS is also a matter of credibility for the EU's global climate leadership, according to which no one should be left behind. The new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, created under the European Green Deal assumes intensification of external action, also towards SIDS. It is also worth remembering that adaptation financing for SIDS is in fact an investment in one's own future. The rising sea level constitutes a threat also to EU countries, including Poland. According to various scientific scenarios, the areas around the mouths of the Vistula and Oder rivers to the Baltic Sea may be underwater by the end of the century. Relations with SIDS can therefore be a valuable opportunity to transfer knowledge and raise awareness of the effects of climate change.