

Committee: Environmental Commission

Issue: Limiting the impact of climate change and sea level rise on Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

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Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

It is my greatest pleasure to welcome you to the Environmental Commission of this year's 7th ACGMUN Conference, with the theme Reaching Net-Zero. My name is Vivian Lialiou, I am a year 10 student in Campion school, and I will be serving as one of your Deputy Presidents.

Nevertheless, it is my utmost pleasure to serve as one of the Deputy Presidents in this year's conference. So far, MUN has been highly effective in educating me and developing my political and social awareness – 2 things of which I consider highly important. I hope it has a similar effect on you. MUN allows you to explore topics and issues that aren't widely showcased in the media, a part of education which is crucially important. As the next generation, we have been assigned with the responsibility of looking after the state of our world and reconstructing it to potentially higher standards, through MUN, one can acquire a major part of those skills.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me through my email vlialiou@campion.edu.gr. I am excited and looking forward to seeing you all in March!

Kind Regards,

Vivian Lialiou

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

In the midst of global challenges, an increasingly concerning issue is the growing threat of climate change. As our planet grapples with unprecedented environmental shifts, the urgency to address this pressing problem has never been more critical. Climate change, characterized by rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and melting ice caps, is not merely an abstract concept but a tangible and immediate danger.

With regard to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) the detrimental effect of climate change cannot be overestimated. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are some of the planet's most vulnerable and affected areas to climate change, despite being responsible for less than 1% of greenhouse gas emissions.¹ Most SIDS sit only 3-4 meters above sea level meaning that they are a lot more prone to floods and coastal erosion. Also, along with the sea level rise come ocean acidification and coral bleaching which have impacted fisheries in SIDS. What is more the aforementioned have also taken a massive toll on the availability of clean, portable water.

The main reasons for this extreme vulnerability are due to the fact that they have access to more ocean than they do to land, which means that they have a higher exposure to maritime phenomena like rising sea-levels. As a result of this, they are often the victims of floods, coastal erosion and more. Being Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), most SIDS lack the funds and resources to restore biodiversity loss and combat the effects of climate change such as rising sea levels, severe weather phenomena, and ecosystem loss. Overall, most SIDS are lagging behind in technological, social, and economic advancements, making the effects of climate change even more difficult to deal with as they lack the proper developments to do so.

All in all, urgent international cooperation is essential to address the disproportionate impact of climate change on SIDS. These vulnerable regions, despite contributing minimally to greenhouse gas emissions, face severe challenges, emphasizing the need for collective efforts to ensure a more resilient future.

¹ "About Small Island Developing States (SIDS) | Department of Economic and Social Affairs." Sdgs.un.org, www.sdgs.un.org/smallislands/about-small-island-developing-states.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

“Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are a distinct group of 39 States and 18 Associate Members of United Nations regional commissions that face unique social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities.”² Most SIDS are located in the Caribbean, the Pacific and the South Atlantic Ocean.

Climate change

“Climate change is the significant variation of average weather conditions becoming, for example, warmer, wetter, or drier—over several decades or longer.”³ Nowadays, climate change is considered to be a product of human activities and, in general, of humans exploiting nature. Climate change is to blame for the extreme weather conditions faced.

Coastal erosion

“Coastal erosion is the process by which local sea level rise, strong wave action, and coastal flooding wear down or carry away rocks, soils, and/or sands along the coast.”⁴

Sea-level rise

“Sea level rise is an increase in the level of the world’s oceans due to the effects of global warming.”⁵

Natural catastrophe

The term natural catastrophe refers to a “violent, sudden and destructive change in the environment without cause from human activity, due to phenomena such as floods, earthquakes, fire and hurricanes.”⁶

² United Nations. “About Small Island Developing States | Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.” www.un.org, 2023, [www.un.org/ohrlls/content/about-small-island-developing-states#:~:text=Small%20Island%20Developing%20States%20\(SIDS](http://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/about-small-island-developing-states#:~:text=Small%20Island%20Developing%20States%20(SIDS).

³ World Bank. “World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal.” [Climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org](http://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org), 2021, www.climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/overview.

⁴ US Climate Resilience Toolkit. “Coastal Erosion | U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit.” Climate.gov, 1 Apr. 2021, www.toolkit.climate.gov/topics/coastal-flood-risk/coastal-erosion.

⁵ National Geographic Society. “Sea Level Rise.” National Geographic Society, 27 Mar. 2019, www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/sea-level-rise/.

⁶ “Natural Catastrophe — European Environment Agency.” www.eea.europa.eu, www.eea.europa.eu/help/glossary/semide-emwis-thesaurus/natural-catastrophe. Accessed 23 Dec. 2023.

Coral bleaching

“Coral bleaching is the process when corals become white due to various stressors, such as changes in temperature, light, or nutrients.”⁷ Coral bleaching harms ecosystems and ruins coral reefs, which are some of the most important species in combatting climate change.

Global warming

“Global warming is a gradual increase in the overall temperature of the earth's atmosphere generally attributed to the greenhouse effect caused by increased levels of carbon dioxide, CFCs, and other pollutants.”⁸ Though it has been occurring naturally, human activity has been a deadly catalyst to it.

The greenhouse effect

“The process through which heat is trapped near Earth's surface by substances known as 'greenhouse gases’.”⁹

El niño

“An irregularly recurring flow of unusually warm surface waters from the Pacific Ocean toward and along the western coast of South America that prevents upwelling of nutrient-rich cold deep water and that disrupts typical regional and global weather patterns.”¹⁰

Deforestation

The cutting down and removal of all or most of the trees in a forested area,¹¹ usually for industrial use.

Drought

“A drought is a period of time when an area or region experiences below-normal precipitation.”¹²

⁷ National Ocean Service. “What Is Coral Bleaching?” Noaa.gov, 4 Oct. 2023, www.oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/coral_bleach.html.

⁸ Oxford Languages. “Oxford Languages and Google - English -.” Languages.oup.com, 2023, www.languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en.

⁹ NASA. “What Is the Greenhouse Effect?” Global Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet, NASA, 2019, www.climate.nasa.gov/faq/19/what-is-the-greenhouse-effect/.

¹⁰ “Definition of EL NIÑO.” Merriam-Webster.com, 2019, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/El%20Ni%C3%B1o.

¹¹ “Deforestation Definition & Usage Examples.” Dictionary.Com, Dictionary.com, www.dictionary.com/browse/deforestation. Accessed 22 Dec. 2023.

¹² National Geographic Society. “Drought.” National Geographic Society, 12 Sept. 2013, www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/drought/.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The effect of climate change on SIDS

Undeniably, climate change poses a significant threat, primarily driven by global warming and the associated greenhouse effect. The key factors contributing to this phenomenon include the escalated use of gases like methane, carbon dioxide, and nitrous oxide, predominantly originating from human activities such as fossil fuel combustion and deforestation.

SIDS are some of the most vulnerable areas of the world to climate change. This is primarily because they are densely populated, have limited resources, and thus often have inadequate infrastructure, and they are surrounded by water, which makes them prone to flooding and other catastrophes caused by the sea level rise. One of the main threats of climate change on SIDS is sea-level rise, which is caused by global warming through the melting of polar ice caps. In the Maldives, 80% of its land area lies less than 1 meter¹³ above sea-level.

Sea level rise

The sea level rise is caused by the increasing global temperatures. As fossil fuels continue to be burned and forests continue to be depleted, global temperatures rise. As a result of this, the global ice sheets and glaciers melt, adding excess water to the world's oceans and causing sea levels to rise. Since 1950, sea levels have risen by 6.5 inches,¹⁴ a number that, , is having a massive effect on our planet and its citizens.

Due to the fact that a lot of the land area of a lot of SIDS is fairly close to the sea-level, flooding occurs much more easily and frequently. As sea-level rises, so do flood rates. These floods contribute to biodiversity-loss, infrastructure damage and coastal erosion. Coastal erosion destroys animal habitations, infrastructure and harms coastal communities. In Seychelles, 80% of infrastructure and population are found near the coast, so it can be concluded that people are really affected by this. Sea level rise also, through animal-habitat loss, harms fisheries and, consequently, depletes SIDS of a stable food source since many rely on fisheries for food. Due to the fact that most SIDS are developing nations, they lack the funds and resources to recover from infrastructure loss and update their infrastructure to be able to cope with these consequences.

¹³ https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/publications/cc_sids.pdf

¹⁴ First Street Foundation. "Sea Level Rise." Sea Level Rise, 2018, www.sealevelrise.org/.

Drought

Another effect of climate change on SIDS is drought. Since many SIDS rely on rainwater as their main source of water, they are depleted of that during prolonged periods of drought. SIDS specifically affected by this include Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Federated States of Micronesia. Drought was a weather phenomenon that was severely brought on by El Nino (a climate pattern that is linked with the warming of the Pacific).

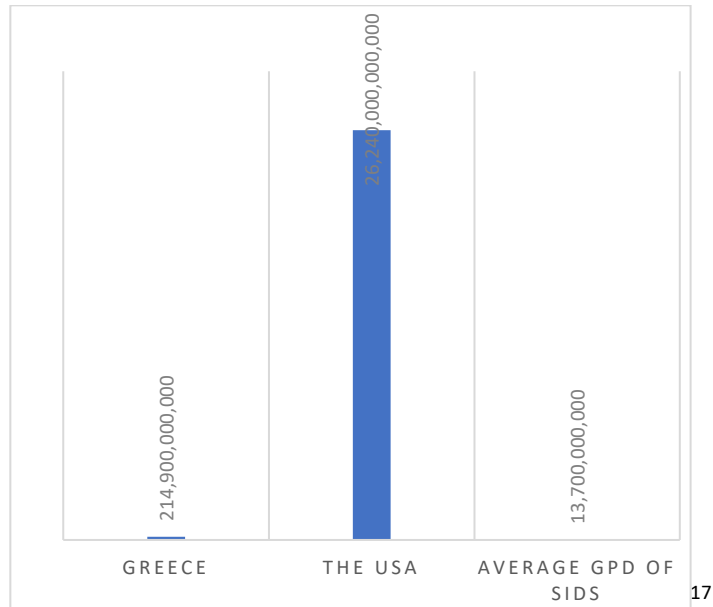
Coral Bleaching

Yet another effect of climate change on SIDS is coral bleaching. Coral bleaching kills coral reefs, which are crucial to SIDS as they act as natural breakwaters. They help protect coastlines and reduce the effects of coastal erosion, which SIDS are particularly vulnerable to. Coral bleaching is caused by ocean acidification, meaning a change in the oceans' pH and by a change in the ocean's temperature – a consequence of climate change. Additionally, coral reefs provide a food and material source for many SIDS. When corals are bleached, this food and material source is eliminated and the ecosystem around said corals dies with them, further contributing to ecosystem destruction, which directly links to food source depletion on which many citizens of SIDS are reliant on.¹⁵

Vulnerability of SIDS to Climate Change

Though the above issues affect other non-SIDS as well, SIDS are more exposed to these effects for a number of reasons. Firstly, because they lack the financial resources to deal with such effects; their economies are not widely developed. The average GDP of SIDS is approximately USD 13.7 billion.¹⁶ The graph below shows the GDPs of 2 countries in comparison with the average GDP of SIDS. It shows that, in comparison to other nations, SIDS have significantly less funds and money available.

¹⁶“Snapshot: Small Island Developing States.” UNDP Climate Promise, www.climatepromise.undp.org/research-and-reports/snapshot-small-island-developing-states.



Secondly, SIDS have significantly smaller land area, which leaves a lot of their population very close to coasts. This means that a lot of their population can be severely affected a lot more easily, as disasters and climate catastrophes are spread over a smaller area. It also means that a lot of their population lives near the coast, which, as previously mentioned, means that they are affected by coastal erosion and floods. In other nations, which are not entirely surrounded by water or have a larger land mass, natural catastrophes do not take such a big toll on their infrastructure and welfare of people. SIDS are also located very close to the sea-level, making them more frequent victims of floods and hurricanes, in comparison to other nations.

¹⁷ Bureau of Economic Analysis. "Gross Domestic Product | U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)." Bea.gov, 2 Nov. 2023, www.bea.gov/data/gdp/gross-domestic-product. – USA
World Bank. "WDI - Home." Worldbank.org, 2022, www.datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators. - GREECE

Thirdly, in most cases, the economy of a number of SIDS depends on one factor or sector, which is typically severely affected by climate change. For example, Seychelles and the Maldives, heavily depend on tourism but, as the sea-level rises, the beaches which attract tourists on a mass-scale, start to disappear. This takes away a significant part of their income, thus taking a larger toll on their already poorly developed economies. Another sector which some SIDS depend on is fishing and agriculture, all which are disrupted by ecosystem loss through coral bleaching and ocean acidification. Most non-SIDS don't solely depend on one sector to provide all forms of financial stability and, in the rare cases which they do, said factor isn't a target of climate change.



¹⁸ UN Photo/Logan Abassi - Les Cayes, Haiti after Hurricane Matthew hit the Caribbean nation in October 2016.

Additional challenges for SIDS

Climate change doesn't only geographically harm SIDS, it also hinders social development. This is because it causes the displacement of a significant number of people - 3.4 million people were displaced in the Caribbean SIDS from 2014-2018¹⁹. This means that SIDS' society has no room to develop as their people are being constantly displaced and relocated. In addition to this, climate change – specifically flooding and rising sea levels – severely affect the people's health within the nation. The water in flooding often carries bacteria and viruses. Due to the fact that they lack funds and resources, SIDS' healthcare systems are unable to sufficiently combat and treat the affected people, making them lag behind in health development.

¹⁸ Akiwumi, Paul. "Climate Finance for SIDS Is Shockingly Low: Why This Needs to Change | UNCTAD." Unctad.org, 24 May 2022, www.unctad.org/news/blog-climate-finance-sids-shockingly-low-why-needs-change.

¹⁹ <https://www.unicef.org/media/62836/file/Children-uprooted-in-the-Caribbean-2019.pdf>.

Another part of social development which is affected by climate change in SIDS is the educational sector. Since many children are being displaced and since floods are destroying educational facilities, citizens of SIDS often lag behind in terms of education. In 2012, 1 in 6 children of primary age were not in school. Their governments have insufficient funds to develop their educational systems and weather phenomena are continuously destroying all that is left of educational facilities. In relation to this, flooding and coastal erosion also destroy heritage sites, thus minimizing the importance of culture within SIDS' societies. Aside from all this, children are also more vulnerable to the effects of displacement, especially since they are commonly separated from their parents (who might possibly be dead in some occasions). Thus, they are at a higher risk of trafficking and exploitation. Since young children often lack the body systems development, they are exposed to diseases such as measles and infections, which can have a detrimental effect on their health²⁰

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

The Maldives

The Maldives are one of the most severely affected SIDS by climate change. Whilst the largest part of its land area is only 1 meter above sea level, scientists predict that by 2050, 80% of the Maldives will be uninhabitable due to rising sea levels.²¹ In order to try and save the nation from sea level rise, the Maldives are building a sea wall around Male, the capital and renovating ports and coastal infrastructure as to be able to withstand the rise. The Maldives are also attempting to increase the islands' landmass, using sand.

Seychelles

Seychelles are also one of the most affected SIDS by rising sea levels, due to the fact that 80% of its population live near the coast, is in danger from floods and coastal erosion – all products of rising sea levels and climate change. To combat this issue, Seychelles are monitoring sea grass and mangrove ecosystems, which absorb carbon and secure coasts. Seagrass and mangroves are known to be major aquatic carbon sinks, as well as good protection against coastal erosion, so Seychelles are expanding and conserving their mangrove and seagrass forests.

²⁰ "Children Uprooted in the Caribbean | UNICEF." Wwww.unicef.org, www.unicef.org/child-alert/children-uprooted-caribbean.

²¹ Manzo, Daniel, et al. "Facing Dire Sea Level Rise Threat, Maldives Turns to Climate Change Solutions to Survive." ABC News, 3 Nov. 2021, www.abcnews.go.com/International/facing-dire-sea-level-rise-threat-maldives-turns/story?id=80929487.

Kiribati

Kiribati is located in the Micronesia region Oceania. It is one of the SIDS most prone to drought and, as a result, water depletion. To solve this issue, Kiribati supports the building of desalination plants that will supply more water to help meet demands and increase the countries drought resilience – by 2040. It is also updating a city's, South Tarawa's, water supply and pipe network system to deliver water directly to homes.

The Bahamas

The Bahamas is one of the SIDS located in the Caribbean on which climate change is having a major negative impact on. The Bahamas have been experiences a myriad of natural phenomena; in particular hurricanes and storm surges, all who's frequency and intensity has increased over the years. To combat this, the Bahamas have adopted the National Climate Adaptation Policy (2006) and a National Energy Policy (2013), all which plan to minimize the negative effects of climate change in the following years.

Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC)

The Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) coordinates the Caribbean's response to climate change²².It provides information and advice on climate change policies, how climate change affects Caribbean Nations. It reports said advice on climate change policies to other organizations such as Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and even the UNEP.

Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

Caribbean Community is an organization made up of 15 member states, and 5 associate states. Its main aim is integration throughout SIDS, whether that is in the form of economic integration, social and human development, foreign policy coordination and security.²³

Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA)

Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) is a “regional inter-governmental agency for disaster management in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).”²⁴It is the primary organization that coordinates and is responsible for managing emergency responses in the Caribbean. Its main aim is to reduce the risks

²² “About Us.” Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC), 16 Mar. 2017, www.caribbeanclimate.bz/about-us/.

²³ CARICOM. “Who We Are.” CARICOM, 2021, www.caricom.org/our-community/who-we-are/.

²⁴ “What Is CDEMA? - CDEMA.” Www.cdema.org, www.cdema.org/about-us/what-is-cdema.

and effects of climate change in order to further allow regional development within Caribbean SIDS.

Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)

The Alliance of Small Island States “represents the interests of the 39 small island and low-lying coastal developing states in international climate change, sustainable development negotiations and processes”²⁵It is essentially the voice of SIDS and amplifies the voices of marginalized communities who cannot be heard themselves.

International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)

The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) is an organization that supports and encourages the sustainable development of nations. It “promotes the widespread adoption and sustainable use of all forms of renewable energy”²⁶ It focuses mainly on sustainable technology and renewable energy, encouraging “investment flows” to further accomplish innovation in said fields. It is made up of over 168 countries and of the European Union, collaborating with them to increase the establishment of “renewables-based energy transitions worldwide”.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| Date | Description of event |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 11 December 1997 | Kyoto Protocol was adopted at COP 3 in Kyoto, Japan |
| 2005 | UNFCCC on SIDS |
| September 4 th 2014 | S.A.M.O.A Pathway was adopted during the third International Conference on SIDS in Samoa. |
| November 2 nd 2014 | IPCC Fifth Assessment Report was released |
| 22 April 2016 | Paris Agreement signed |

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- S.A.M.O.A Pathway (SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action) - Third International Conference on SIDS 2014²⁷ (69th session of the GA, agenda item 13a) - September 4th 2014

²⁵ “Chair of AOSIS.” AOSIS, www.aosis.org/about/chair-of-aosis/.

²⁶ “Vision and Mission.” Wwww.irena.org, www.irena.org/About/Vision-and-mission.

²⁷ <https://www.un.org/ohrlls/sites/www.un.org.ohrlls/files/samoa-pathway-overview.pdf>

- IPCC Fifth Assessment report (AR5) 2014²⁸ - Section 29 of Part B (Regional Aspects) - November 2nd 2014
- UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change)²⁹
- UN A/RES/70/1 - Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development³⁰ - September 25th 2015
- Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) - A/RES/69/313 – July 27th 2015

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement, signed on 22 April 2016, attempted to address the issues of SIDS under climate change and advocate for climate related losses in SIDS through article 8 of the agreement. It was adopted in COP21 on December 2015. It recognized that SIDS are sufficiently more vulnerable to climate change and supported sustainable development and sought to promote it. It acknowledged that there needs to be an increased support for SIDS and further supported the idea of financial aid to SIDS. The Paris Agreement is considered to be one of the most successful global climate action attempts.

The Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was a treaty established in 1997, which aimed to deal with and reduce the effects of greenhouse gases. It recognized the vulnerability of SIDS and the need for special protection measures. It could be said that the Kyoto Protocol was effective due to its role as the first climate initiative, which further encouraged and manifested other significant climate agreements like the Paris Agreement.

The lighthouse initiative

The Lighthouse Initiative is the “the framework of action for SIDS' energy transition and climate action” It is what led to the establishment of critical organizations like the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) which support sustainable development in SIDS and aid SIDS in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Drawing from all this, we could conclude that the

²⁸ <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar5/>

²⁹ https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/publications/cc_sids.pdf

³⁰ “United Nations Official Document.” Un.org, 2019, www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E.

Lighthouse initiative was highly effective as it paved the way for the creation of other aforementioned organizations.

National Climate Adaptation Policy (Bahamas)

The National Climate Adaptation Policy was established in 2006 and is an assessment meant to show case the Bahamas vulnerability to climate change. It examined the impacts on aspects including but not limited to: “coastal and marine resource and fisheries, terrestrial biodiversity resources, agriculture and forestry, human settlements and human health, water resources, energy and transportation sector, the finance and insurance sectors”³¹ It is considered the main “plan of action” of the Bahamas for dealing with said impacts. It provides the framework needed for the Bahamas to conserve and preserve the ecosystems and natural resources. From all this, we can conclude that, being the main plan of action, the National Climate Adaptation Policy of the Bahamas is highly effective.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Investing in climate smart agriculture

Climate Smart Agriculture is an approach that manages all aspects of agriculture to increase food security and tackle climate change and the issues caused by the agriculture industry which affect this. It reduces carbon emissions, increases productivity, and reduces crops’ vulnerability to extreme weather phenomena such as drought, floods and viruses, which SIDS are prone to. Climate Smart Agriculture also enhances food security, which means that SIDS can develop to adapt to climate change and its consequences. It also reduces SIDS reliance on exports which makes them more environmentally independent. This is a solution that can be introduced to an international scale.

Providing aid to SIDS

Providing financial aid to SIDS will help them enhance and advance their technological systems, which will help them cope with ongoing climate change-caused issues like floods and coastal erosion. It will also allow them to repair the damage already done so the effects of future weather phenomena can be minimized. Financial aid is also needed to help SIDS cut reliance on fossil fuels. In order to accomplish this, private investors will be needed and crucial. Providing aid through technical expertise would allow SIDS to be aware of what measures they should take in order to deal with climate change.

³¹ NATIONAL POLICY for the ADAPTATION to CLIMATE CHANGE. 2005. (READ FOR THE FULL POLICY)

Introducing coastal protection measures

Coastal protection measures, such as the installing of sea walls, can help protect the coasts of SIDS from coastal erosion caused by rising sea levels. Another way which SIDS could take coastal protection measures to ensure their coasts are protected from floods and coastal erosion is by restoring mangroves and sea grass, both which are important carbon sinks and protect coasts.

Setting up renewable energy projects

Most SIDS rely on exported fossil fuels. By allowing SIDS to shift to renewable energy they are not only emitting less carbon dioxide but also becoming independent. This means that they can invest the money they used in fossil fuels for other causes such as but not limited to developing coastal protection measures, enhancing their education and healthcare system to allow further social development and for the restoration of biodiversity. Renewable energy projects may encompass solar energy, utilizing technologies such as solar panels, and wind energy, where wind generators are advantageous due to their minimal space requirements. Additionally, wind generators have immense potential to be installed off-shore, thus utilizing the amount of sea surrounding SIDS and taking into account their small size.

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