

**AIS SIDS Regional Preparatory Meeting  
24-26 July 2023  
Balaclava, Mauritius**

**Session 3: Environmental Considerations and Priorities**

**25 July 2023, 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM**

**Background Note**

**Executive Summary**

Climate change poses one of the biggest threats to the sustainable development SIDS, on the one hand due to its impacts on their fragile ecosystems, and on the other due to its effects including *inter alia* ocean acidification, sea level rise, coastal degradation, and loss of marine biodiversity. To address these issues, policymakers in SIDS are prioritizing climate change adaptation in key areas such as freshwater management, food security, sustainable use of marine resources, and infrastructure resilience. The green and blue economy is also seen as an opportunity to adopt adaptation and mitigation measures while at the same time pursuing economic diversification. This session will focus on three main issues related to environmental factors that are highly relevant for AIS SIDS and which deserve more attention and more coordinated action: (i) adaptation to climate change; (ii) biodiversity preservation, ecosystem services and new financing instruments; and (iii) sustainable blue economy models to harness the potential of the ocean. The session will also explore those entry points for SIDS to harness their unique advantages to capture the potential of high sea oceans opportunities, while at the same time strengthening resilience and exploring bold financing mechanisms to protect fragile land and sea ecosystems.

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### **Introduction**

AIS SIDS are on the frontline of the triple planetary crises -climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution- which exacerbate their vulnerabilities and undermine their efforts to achieve sustainable development. Despite the breakthrough agreement on the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund at UNFCCC COP27, the international climate finance architecture still remains insufficient to address the needs of SIDS. Climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction is a priority for SIDS policy makers including in key areas such as management of available freshwater resources, food security, sustainable use of marine resources and resilient infrastructure. The green and blue economy is also seen as an opportunity to adopt adaptation and mitigation measure while at the same time pursuing for economic diversification.

### **Ecosystem based climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction:**

SIDS are disproportionately affected by climate change and struggle to find the necessary resources and technological capabilities to implement adaptation measures. In the coming decades, the combination of a changing climate, growing global population, and heightened environmental stressors will bring significant and highly uncertain impacts on food security and human wellbeing. Adaptation strategies and science-informed policy responses are urgently needed, in particular in the areas of water security and food systems. Enhancing coastal resilience is also particularly vital for SIDS and investing in both climate resilient infrastructure and ecosystem based approaches such as mangroves and seagrass beds are vital.

Due to their inherent limited water storage capacity both on the surface and subsurface, SIDS face challenges in ensuring water availability. Compounded by inadequate wastewater treatment and water pollution from anthropogenic activities (industrial activities, agricultural runoff etc.), the consequences extend beyond impacting human and ecosystems health to hindering overall development.

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**Land and ocean biodiversity :**

SIDS harbor unique biodiversity in the world: endemic mammals, plant species and also marine biodiversity in exclusive economic zones. The health and integrity of fragile terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems are crucial for supporting their livelihoods. Meanwhile, the sectors that rely on these ecosystems are the main contributors to the degradation of the ecosystems, which are not sufficiently protected.

In addition to the marine resources in exclusive economic zones, the open ocean is the treasury of irreplaceable biodiversity, offering vital ecosystem services and directly supporting the livelihood of about 500 million people. Ocean economies provide huge economic benefits to many sectors of great economic value including fisheries, transport, biotechnologies, seabed resources, tourism etc.. However, it is estimated that the ocean is now 30 percent more acidic, hotter and less oxygenated than ever recorded since the start of the Industrial Revolution, stressing species - from microorganisms to large fish - and risking the collapse of complex food webs and entire ecosystems. Furthermore, with the aid of technological advances , there has been an unprecedented exploitation of high seas.

In June 2023, the agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) was approved under the UN convention on the law of the sea, a milestone treaty to protect biodiversity on the high seas and to ensure the equitable sharing of marine genetic resources, that is crucial for the long-term survival of SIDS ecosystems. Innovative approaches, funding mechanisms and sharing lessons learnt are key to guarantee the protection of fragile ecosystems of SIDS, in line with the conclusions of the recent COP 15 meeting on the global Kunming-Montreal biodiversity framework.

**Sustainable blue economy:**

The development of the sustainable blue economy is key to both sustainable employment as well as food security in SIDS. The sustainable blue economy sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, marine biotechnology, sustainable coastal tourism maritime transport and ocean renewable energy, could profoundly impact national development agendas of SIDS. If managed effectively, these sectors can be game-changers for SIDS, leading to transformative growth while

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protecting the environment and ecosystem. It requires integrating sustainable resource management, innovative financing, capacity building, and fostering international cooperation.

It is vital to ensure that public and private investment are channeled to sustainable blue economy sectors which bring inclusive economy growth while protecting the ocean, instead of to those ocean industries that are environmentally destructive and increase social inequity.

### **The Need for Continued Dialogue**

Regional and international collaboration, including regional SIDS-SIDS peer-learning and cooperation, is essential for sharing knowledge, best practices, and resources. SIDS should actively engage in forums and partnerships, including those for the implementation of the BBNJ agreement, and the three Rio Conventions (Climate, Biodiversity and Land Degradation). Capacity building and education for local communities and stakeholders in sustainable fishing practices, marine conservation, and entrepreneurship in blue economy sectors are also vital.

Addressing lack of high-quality, disaggregated data and insufficient use of already available data to guide the formulation, implementation and monitoring of sustainable ocean economies is crucial. Also related to data and knowledge more broadly, it is important to also increase national capacities for science-policy interface, national environmental accounting systems, and valuation tools for ecosystem services. SIDS should establish robust monitoring systems and databases for marine resources, which will facilitate informed decision-making and ensure compliance with international standards<sup>1</sup>.

Partnerships and joint initiatives play an important role in advocating for SIDS 's needs and priorities as means of implementing biodiversity objectives, such as the SIDS Coalition for Nature, which is a platform for gap-bridging partnership around three specific priorities of its Call for Action : (i) financing for nature, (ii) knowledge for nature and (iii) biodiversity mainstreaming and synergies amid environmental Conventions.. The SIDS Coalition is promoting SIDS-SIDS peer-learning and cooperation around these three priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/SIDS\\_Biodiversity\\_and\\_Means\\_of\\_Implementation-Gap\\_Assessment.pdf](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/SIDS_Biodiversity_and_Means_of_Implementation-Gap_Assessment.pdf)

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**Proposed Guiding Questions for the Discussions**

- What are the entry points for SIDS to improve access to climate financing instruments, in particular to fund the adaptation of systems and infrastructure to guarantee water and food security?
- What are entry points for SIDS to mobilize support for a better protection of fragile biodiverse ecosystems on land and at sea ?
- How can sustainable blue economy models that are sufficiently resilient, become a more central theme for SIDS ?
- How can we address the capacity gap through for example ocean literacy, ocean science and innovation, technology transfer, ESD, citizen science, greening education, Open Educational Resources, Digital Open School models; Education, School Safety & built environment; University Consortium of Small Islands States (UCSIS)?
- What recommendations can be provided for follow-up and greater SIDS collaboration, including around SIDS AIS collaborative platforms, international community involvement, access to climate financing instruments, data and information sharing, BBNJ etc.?