

Women's Major Group

Deep Water, Daring for Shore: SIDS Feminist challenges and priorities in implementing a SIDS4 Roadmap

Statement of the Women's Major Group - SIDS.
Antigua and Barbuda, 26 May 2024.

Constituency: SIDS4 Women and Gender

This statement is made on behalf of the Women's Major Group (WMG) with drafting/organising work by SIDS feminist and gender justice groups including DIVA for Equality; Regions Refocus; PANG; Pacific Islands Feminist Alliance for Climate Justice (PIFA4CJ); Pacific Feminist Community of Practice; Qaqa Grassroots Young Feminist Network; Pacific Feminist SRHR Coalition; Brown Girl Woke, Association pour l'Intégration et le Développement Durable au Burundi (AIDB), Indigenous Peoples Global Forum for Sustainable Development (IPGFforSD), Pacificwin Pacific, PAWA, Pacific Australian Women's Association, IWDA, and other SIDs led and allied feminist, gender-equality and women's rights advocates represented in Antigua and Barbuda by an intergenerational team working across many areas of gender, social, economic, ecological and climate justice and human rights.*

Small Island States (SIDS) across the Caribbean, Pacific and AIMS regions are in a time of ecocide. This is fueled by extractivism, militarism and warfare in the longtime colonial and imperialist interests of those holding most globalised power and their transnational allies. We see the links from this flawed heteronormative, patriarchal, neoliberal capitalist development through to the unlimited growth systems that prioritise private profit over people, other species and the living Planet. SIDS feminists and WMG are furious that in this insatiable greed for profit, **six of the Earth's planetary boundaries have now been transgressed** and this pressure is increasing on all nine boundary processes except ozone depletion. The danger is profound.

The living planet moves quickly now toward the safety guardrail of 1.5 degrees rise in global temperature. Species extinction rates are at unprecedented levels. 2024 sees the latest

scientific estimates revealing an exceptionally rapid loss of biodiversity - 100+ times over the extinction background rate and indicating that a sixth mass extinction is already underway. Averting catastrophic decay of global systems, biodiversity destruction, damage to our own species, loss of Commons and subsequent loss of ecosystem services is possible only through massive, intensified efforts. That window is closing fast.

There is such an unprecedented urgency at SIDS4 that Island states must be far clearer on the difference between white noise and useful discussions. Over the past 30 years SIDS are clearer on our needs, complex local to global context and conditions, and we have hard-won examples of negotiations for the best outcome for Caribbean, AIMS and Pacific Small Island Developing States. It is still not enough. There is much work to do in the Gender Equality Forum, other Pre-Conferences and the SIDS4 Conference to show bold ambition, reject false solutions, and to demand reparative and adequate climate finance for the ecological crisis brought about by neoliberal capitalist greed. WMG is working to break any corruptive collusion in States, UN agencies, technical institutions, civil society, business sector, academia; and co-create alternatives for free, balanced and just futures.

Let us call time on SIDS work that does not work.

WMG are dismayed at many silences and obstacles in the way of SIDS civil society trying to engage in the SIDS4 process. We see regression in ways that States and UN agencies have worked with civil society and feminist groups in particular, in this process. There have been issues in travel and funding arrangements that have not adequately supported grassroots and Indigenous women activists. We observe a lack of clarity about the structure, process and content of the Preconferences and SIDS4, In particular, CSOs have been confused by lack of information about the ways that the SIDS4 Implementation plan or Roadmap will be designed and supported. By what process will our issues feed from the Preconferences including GEF, into the SIDS4 main Conference? **We have not had any access to the Communique process. This is unacceptable.** Considering the adoption of SIDS4 text prior to the Conference, where are the substantive ways in which we ensure that Women Human Rights Defenders, Indigenous peoples, civil society and social movements are fully engaged as active partners?

We call for recognition, solidarity and resources for SIDS governments and civil society that are doing significant, targeted, fierce and accessible work. We applaud collaborations toward deeper democracy, human rights, Gender/SRHR/SOGI/ESC and economic, ecological and development justice. For that work to grow, SIDS4 will need an accountable, effective and gender-just, well-resourced Roadmap.

Gender policies or action plans are not enough, on their own, but a **SIDS4 Gender Action Plan** is now necessary, to keep us accountable and on track. Added to this, we need systematic integration of gender equality and human rights considerations in the political and technical governance of each SIDS State; coherent foreign and domestic legislation, policy and procedures; responsive regional architecture; gender expertise in regional and national technical bodies; intersectional composition of advisory bodies and decision-making structures; and best practices in public service management and organisational culture.

SIDS Women Responding to Disasters

SIDS Women are powerful leaders and our participation in decision-making processes is pivotal; including disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate justice strategies within and beyond States. We are co-creating ecosystems of resilience, support, networking and mobilising, organising and campaigning for change, in a time of unparalleled ecological damage and climate change. We expect the solidarity of small island governments and territories in this crucial work for ourselves, other species and the living Planet. SIDS must commit to addressing the structural barriers, capacity gaps, discriminatory attitudes, and stereotypes that restrict women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes. The **Women's Resilience to Disasters (WRD) programme** implemented in the Pacific and other regions by UN Women and Pacific women's gender and feminist networks are co-leading disaster risk reduction and climate resilience building at all levels whilst challenging underlying patriarchal gender norms, roles, and relations that contribute to the disproportionate disaster impacts for women, girls and people with disabilities and their exclusion from decision making.

In work on climate, DRR and biodiversity protection, SIDS4 must emphasise the collection and use of gender data to understand the differential impacts of disasters on women and to inform policy and program development. This must also extend to gender-responsive and inclusive Early Warning messages and systems. SIDS must prioritise the development of gender-responsive and inclusive laws, policies, strategies, and plans that prioritise gender equality, women's human rights and leadership in disaster risk reduction and resilience building; ensure dedicated financial resources, foster gender-responsive coordination, ecosystems of care and wellbeing and monitoring and accountability mechanisms and partnerships, in addition to supporting targeted actions to increase women's resilience to disasters and climate change. One of the most important SIDS4 Roadmap Commitments must be the **implementation of the Gender Action Plans (GAPs) for the UNFCCC, Sendai Framework** and other climate and biodiversity agreements, in collaboration with local, national, regional, and global stakeholders. The Roadmap must enable all dimensions of implementation to be examined through a comprehensive feminist lens; grounded in anti-coloniality, gender justice, SOGIESC, disability justice and universal human rights.

How SIDS measure

To inform this change work, the call for better data and analysis is part of all SIDS review reports, and in SIDS4 it is a central issue. No development and transfer of climate technology without sound evidence can address SIDS peoples' fundamental social, economic, ecological and climate needs, much less enable the next decade of work on micro, meso and macroeconomic dimensions of basic needs, and some recently expressed SIDS needs; including but not limited to: an end to all forms of gender-based violence including against women, and SIDS Islanders with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); the right to food, water and sanitation, health including SRHR, housing, climate mobility - internal and external displacement and relocation, trade, debt justice, decoloniality and decolonisation, sovereignty and autonomous decision making, regional cooperation, economic diversification, productive transformation, digitalization, disaster risk reduction, women, peace and security and more. There is a need for accurate, innovative and timely data and analysis so SIDS governments must seek and use feminist, heterodox resources beyond those of mainstream International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Bretton Woods Institutions in measuring, analysing and responding to poverty, human rights, gender justice, climate change, biodiversity protection and development challenges. The resources are here. Let's share them in this time of great need.

Disaggregated data is crucial in SIDS overall, especially where rates of gender-based violence are double the global average and where for example in Fiji, a recent groundbreaking national study showed violence against children at a rate of 4 in 5 children. There are a majority of SIDS countries where women are still in very low to medium representation in national legislative bodies; with 30-50% rates of unmet contraception uptake and urgent sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) gaps; rapidly rising HIV and TB infection rates combined with low testing rates, poor commodities procurement and crumbling hospital infrastructure due to under-capitalisation and loss and damage; and where the ILO shows women doing 80% of all unpaid work (with a global average of 76%).

There is a move toward the **Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI)** being included in the ABAS for the possibility of ensuring more equitable access to concessional finance. However it is important to note that there are significant risks, especially in relation to exacerbating inequitable distribution of vulnerability. We need indicators that reflect a more thorough understanding of SIDS vulnerability and of key vulnerable populations within SIDS. This would include SIDS exposure to international financial flows, total debt service as a composition of exports, indicators for slow onset events, populations concentrated in low coastal zones, areas of high poverty, particular socio-economic problems including illicit drug use, pockets of higher violence against women and girls.

At the centre of this work is a contextualization of vulnerability and marginality. Any feminist-informed strategy for assessing vulnerability holds that the costs of not assessing individuals and issues of concern for smaller groups of the population are significant in terms of development targeting and effectiveness. In this time of rising risk, economic and non-economic loss and damage, cyclical disasters and human rights violations, there is a need for robust, effective measures for individual-level development, human rights and gender justice concerns. Investment in the collection, analysis and use of **individual-level data on multidimensional poverty and inequality** is crucial. It is a foundation for the visibility of lived realities and accelerated action to address the implications of gender, age, disability, geographic location, and other relevant characteristics, and intersections of these, on the rights and opportunities of women and girls in their diversity. Some SIDS Governments including Solomon islands, Tonga and Fiji are leading globally in demonstrating the potential and relevance of individual-level data on multidimensional poverty and inequality, including, providing insights into the relationship between deprivations linked to changing climate and natural hazards and other areas of life. This is a potential focus area for a SIDS4 roadmap.

SIDS Women, Peace and Security

Women mediators remind SIDS4 of our substantive leadership and resources and that a foundational pillar of peacebuilding and conflict transformation must underpin the entire SIDS4 roadmap. We must ensure at regional and national level, equitable resource allocation and redesigned political processes toward full, equal, effective and meaningful leadership and participation of women peacebuilders and women-led mediation and diverse youth-led networks at every stage of peacebuilding, prevention and resolution. Sustainable development justice for SIDS amid intersecting crises requires a shift from militarised notions of security toward prioritising political self-determination and human security for all in SIDS. This must be the aim of the entire Roadmap, to ensure equitable and safe implementation, to do no harm.

SIDS and Climate Finance

While the ABAS roadmap includes climate finance, it is not in the form we demand, nor includes our needs for safety, effectiveness and adequacy. The document underscores excessive reliance on debt-based instruments, such as credit products and bonds. This will worsen SIDS' existing debt burdens; and in particular, compound economic pressures on women, familial responsibilities, communal duties and other.

The push must be to prioritise **grant-based finance and highly concessional loans accessible to all SIDS**, including **debt suspension after natural disasters**, with a focus on climate justice recognizing the historical responsibility of high emitters, avoiding reliance on private sector

finance and market mechanisms which can be unpredictable and potentially exploitative. A 'risk-informed approach to investment and financing' is inadequate: development finance must be aligned with local priorities, reducing conditionalities, enhancing efficiency and transparency, and focusing on long-term sustainable development.

The SIDS4 Roadmap must explicitly state that loss and damage is the third UNFCCC pillar of climate action and must be reflected as such in the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) for Climate Finance. The roadmap must include a strong emphasis on the long-fought and newly won Loss and Damage Fund, adequately capitalising it with grant based finance and operationalized with consideration for SIDS and other States with special circumstances. **Polluter Pays Mechanisms such as the Climate Damages Tax** propose a tax on fossil fuel extraction in wealthy nations to raise \$720 billion USD by 2030 for the new Loss and Damage Fund, assisting developing countries facing climate impacts. The tax would start at \$5 USD per tonne of CO₂e and increase annually, with 80% going to the fund and 20% as a domestic dividend for climate transition in the taxing countries. This should be integrated into the workplan for SIDS4.

We must urgently focus now on raising SIDS-friendly climate finance flows through a combination of mechanisms and taxes, subsidies and Funds. An innovation in SIDS is the long-awaited **Pacific Resilience Fund**, endorsed by the Pacific Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM) and as a resourcing mechanism for the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent Implementation Plan. However, the Fund is but a drop in an ocean-deep debt owed for loss and damage in the Pacific; and similarly for SIDS regional partners. We need more.

Cancelling SIDS Debt

Climate-just finance requires **comprehensive debt cancellation**, which is essential to free up public resources for investment in critical areas like water and sanitation, food sovereignty, housing, health, education, and ecological and climate action without the burden of repayments. Analysis of World Bank and OECD figures show that **countries in the global south are likely to pay out \$50 billion more in 2024 than they receive in grants and loans.**

The 2024 Financing for Sustainable Development report notes that, "challenges are particularly pronounced for countries that are most vulnerable to climate shocks. They face high borrowing costs and— when hit by extreme weather events—high recovery costs, which increase debt vulnerability." The report goes on, "debt in small island developing States (SIDS) rose from 42.3 percent of GDP in 2000 to around 60 percent of GDP in 2022, after peaking around 2020, as countries...were severely impacted by the pandemic. SIDS also saw liquidity buffers erode, making them even more vulnerable to external shocks."

While SIDS4 takes a positive step towards the establishment of a dedicated **SIDS Debt Sustainability Support Service**, this must be complemented by broader systemic changes such as debt cancellation across all creditors without austerity conditions, preventing the exploitation of natural resources to repay debt, compelling private lender participation through legislative reforms in major jurisdictions, promoting a UN-led legal framework for debt restructuring and cancellation, and overhauling the debt sustainability analysis approach of the IMF and World Bank to ensure it is independent and inclusive of development, human rights, and climate crisis considerations. There are many who speak plainly now of **Debt Repudiation** in SIDS because the time has come to remove the spectre of illegitimate small island debt burden once and for all, as we squarely take on the issue of continued imperialism and coloniality, historical responsibility, as loss and damage rises and cyclical disasters overwhelm resilience strategies - and when survival is at stake for all people of small island States.

SIDS and Oceans

It is our deep concern that ABAS invites the private sector to capitalise on the Ocean as a 'new frontier' of extraction, as well as through green and blue bonds, and the carbon market. Reliance on carbon markets will ensure we do not stay within the 1.5C warming threshold and as a mechanism will further fossil fuel use, endangering the survival of SIDS. Reliance on carbon markets will also shift the responsibilities of climate change impacts from the polluters to communities facing the adverse impacts of climate change. The race for critical minerals held in the vast exclusive economic zones of SIDS (16% of the world's EEZs) is an area of growing concern. In this critical decade, the SIDS4 Roadmap must lead a global call for a moratorium.

This work is supported by negotiations toward the '**Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction**' or **BBNJ** that has been negotiated with significant SIDS leadership. As observed in the concluding session, Small island developing States championed the process for decades because the connectivity of the ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction and those within exclusive economic zones has severe potential consequences on marine resources. The Ocean also plays an integral role in regulating the global climate. As AOSIS States are the countries most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change the resilience of the Ocean is clearly central to SIDS survival. There is an urgent call for a **full needs assessment for SIDS**, as soon as possible, in order to identify BBNJ gaps, and ways to address all identified issues.

Through the tenacity and leadership of SIDS leaders, there is also now an historic agreement at the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)**, the **UN maritime climate regulator**, to achieve

zero-emission maritime transport by 2050 and ongoing policy work by 175 member states of the IMO to fulfil this commitment. SIDS of the Pacific and Caribbean regions now propose a **concrete and binding measure for global shipping to pay for maritime industry pollution**, through what would be the first global Greenhouse Gas price for any international industry, as part of an equitable and just transition in maritime shipping.

In line with the importance of SIDS leadership on Oceans, there is now a groundbreaking **ITLOS TIDM advisory opinion** with significant leadership of AOSIS with G77 and China, that finally **recognises human-made greenhouse gases as a source of marine pollution**. The Opinion clarifies that countries must take all necessary measures to reduce, control and prevent climate change. This comes at a time when the world is witnessing the fourth pan-tropical coral bleaching event in 2023-2024 and wealthy countries should be leading the charge to protect reefs from greenhouse gas pollution. As Oceanic people, one role of SIDS must be to lead and demand urgent accountability.

As useful and important as these normative breakthroughs are, the proof is always in the implementation. WMG calls for urgent, resourced work towards gender-just and human rights-based SIDS development, articulated through a SIDS4 Roadmap with predictable, adequate, new resources for SIDS. This includes gender-responsive funds directly provided to feminist groups, Indigenous and local communities, women and girls, children and all HIV affected key populations, as well as gender machinery and gender justice focused institutions.

As SIDS women of the Ocean, we close with two further Calls:

One call arises from the inter-generational activism of **SIDS women and small-scale fisher movements and organisations** who make five core demands: i) Urgently secured preferential access and co-management of 100% of coastal areas; ii) guaranteed participation of women and support of their roles in innovation; iii) protection of small-scale fishers from blue economy sectors; iv) transparency and accountability in fisheries management; and v) building resilient communities and offering opportunities in fisheries to young people.

Secondly, In this time of extraordinary challenge and change for SIDS, can we adapt this powerful SIDS mechanism to the full urgency of the moment?

Is a SIDS meeting every 10 years enough? We say NO.

Do we need the first-ever SIDS4 Gender Action Plan? We say YES.

***Who we are:**

The Women's Major Group has the responsibility to facilitate women's civil society active participation, information sharing and input into the policy space provided by the United Nations (e.g., participation, speaking, submission of proposals, access to documents, development of sessions). The WMG is self-organised and open to all interested organisations working to promote human rights-based sustainable development with a focus on women's human rights, the empowerment of women and gender equality.

The Women's Major Group (WMG) was created at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where governments recognized Women as one of the nine important groups in society for achieving sustainable development. The WMG is an official participant in the United Nations processes on Sustainable Development.

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