



4TH INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON
**Small Island
Developing States**
27-30 MAY, 2024
ST. JOHN'S, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

SIDS4 Conference Side Event

Importance of UNESCO-designated sites (World Heritage sites and biosphere reserves) for diversified and sustainable economic development in SIDS

Thursday 30 May, 12:00 - 1:30 pm Location: Room 3

Organized by: UNESCO and the Government of Antigua and Barbuda

Background on the event (one paragraph)

SIDS are home to invaluable assets that hold significant cultural and natural importance. This side event showcased the importance of UNESCO designated sites - UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS) and Man and the Biosphere (MAB) reserves - in promoting sustainable economic diversification in SIDS. It highlighted the experiences from four SIDS: the MAB reserves in São Tomé and Príncipe and in Guinea-Bissau in the AIS region, the MAB Reserve in Saint Kitts and Nevis and the World Heritage Site (WHS) in Antigua and Barbuda, in the Caribbean.

Key Issues discussed (5-8 bullet points)

Country representatives presented the different sites: the island of Principe and several islets, that with an extensive marine area from a MAB reserve; St Mary's MAB Reserve in Saint Kitts and Nevis. The Nelson's Dockyard, a WHS in Antigua and Barbuda and Bijagos Archipelago MAB Reserve in Guinea Bissau which is proposed for world heritage status.

- These examples demonstrated how having the status of protected areas contributes to inclusive and resilient green and blue development, livelihoods promotion, nature conservation

and culture preservation as well the development of ecological and cultural tourism. As such they have substantially contribute to sustainable socio-economic development and prosperity of surrounding communities and the country as whole and can be considered as ideal model for socio-economic, cultural and ecological development.

- The presentations raised awareness about the contribution of these sites to the diversification of the tourist product and sustainable management of environmental and cultural spaces.
- Challenges and opportunities about having UNESCO-designated sites were also discussed. Some challenges included; a lack of trained personnel ,excessive tourism that does not match sometimes the sites capacity, risks to natural and cultural sites due to seawater rise, Illicit traffic of natural species and illegal constructions in natural sites. Some opportunities mentioned include; more and more general concern toward the protection of cultural and natural site vulnerable to Climate Change, ecological tourism is also more and more popular including the full participation of the local communities ,MAB Reserves and world Heritage sites are very attractive sites for sustainable tourism and can generate jobs for local populations

Key recommendations for action (5-6 bullet points)

1. The broad-based sharing of experiences about the value added of UNESCO designated among more SIDS in an effort to encourage more member states to apply for UNESCO designated sites.
2. Mobilization of donors to support the application of SIDS for UNESCO sites.
3. It is recommended to improve communication amongst world heritage site and MAB reserves managers in SIDS in order to share experiences and similar challenges.
4. Intersectorality is the key to success, Education, Science, Culture and Communication must go hand in hand in the successful development of World Heritage sites and MAB reserves as proud place for each country where biodiversity is respected and indigenous, afro-descendants and all local people are included in the development framework.
5. Locals must be consulted about their needs and aspiration and also to learn from their ancestral knowledge of the environment
6. Disaster Risk Reduction initiatives should be launched in a general manner in all SIDS State Parties to move from vulnerability to resilience.
7. UNESCO-IOC Ocean Literacy schemes should be expanded in more SIDS to strengthen youth empowerment, capacity building, international collaboration, and awareness of the ocean's fragility.
8. Collaboration between the scientific, political, and community sectors should be encouraged

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