

Attaining the SDGs for SIDS & LDCs

Background

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is hampered by the problems of waste, inequality, biodiversity loss and Climate Change (UN Independent Group of Scientists 2019). Climate Change is a major barrier to development in SIDS and an existential threat to living standards (Commonwealth Secretariat 2022). Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) likely contribute very little to the climate crisis, since their emissions are low (e.g. Caribbean SIDS contribute 0.36% of global carbon emissions (Bárcena Ibarra et al. 2020)). However, SIDS and LDCs in the tropics will experience unprecedented climates before countries at higher latitudes (Mora et al. 2013). Many of these countries contain valuable ecosystems, some of which have worldwide significance in terms of Biodiversity, their ability to sequester carbon and support livelihoods.

Tourism in most tropical SIDS is dependent on healthy coral reefs. These ecosystems will reach a “tipping point” if temperatures rise more than 1.5°C above historical norms, causing 70% to 90% loss of reefs (Mora et al. 2013), (Hoegh-Guldberg et al. 2019) and (McKay et al. 2022). SIDS are among the most tourism-dependent countries worldwide; within the Americas, the 14 most tourism-dependent countries are SIDS (Mooney and Zegarra 2020). COVID-19 affected the economies of tourism-dependent countries badly, suggesting that changes in the structure of those economies are needed to increase their resilience (Gounder and Cox 2022).

However, significant funds are required to build resilient structures and economies and to repair damage from catastrophic events such as cyclones. A single storm can cause damage and loss of over 200% of GDP (Bárcena Ibarra et al. 2020) and repeated events increase inequality (Miljkovic and Miljkovic 2014). Access to finance to retool economies, replace lost or damaged infrastructure and adapt to climate change, though vital for SIDS, is hard to access. Access to concessional developmental finance is determined by *per capita* GDP, although this is not a measure of wellbeing (Sen, Fitoussi, and Stiglitz 2010). A recent study on Climate-Related Expenditure in the Jamaican Government’s Budget indicated that more than 50% came from Government funds, with the remainder from overseas sources.

Recommendations

- SIDS & LDCs need to diversify their economies to increase resilience and improve human wellbeing
- Consequently, they should invest heavily in increasing human capital through skills training and education, while increasing tertiary enrolment and access to education
- Building a culture of science and evidence-based policy would increase resilience
- SIDS should be allowed concessional access to funds from development banks and funders to pay for adaptation to climate change and build resilience
- Developed countries should increase investment in SIDS and LDCs to ensure the sustainability of ecosystems that play a role in carbon sequestration

References

- Bárcena Ibarra, Alicia, Joseluis Samaniego, Wilson Peres, and José Eduardo Alatorre. 2020. *The Climate Emergency in Latin America and the Caribbean: The Path Ahead – Resignation or Action?* ECLAC. <https://repositorio.cepal.org/handle/11362/45678>.
- Commonwealth Secretariat. 2022. *Socio-Economic and Financial Implications Assessment of Climate Change on Jamaica*. Commonwealth iLibrary. <https://doi.org/10.14217/ComSec.970>.
- Gounder, Aruna, and Carmen Cox. 2022. ‘Exploring the Role of Tourism Dependency on COVID-19 Induced Economic Shock in the Small Island Developing States’. *Current Issues in Tourism* 25 (7): 1151–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1989386>.
- Hoegh-Guldberg, O., D. Jacob, M. Taylor, T. Guillén Bolaños, M. Bindi, S. Brown, I. A. Camilloni, et al. 2019. ‘The Human Imperative of Stabilizing Global Climate Change at 1.5°C’. *Science* 365 (6459): eaaw6974. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaw6974>.
- McKay, David I. Armstrong, Arie Staal, Jesse F. Abrams, Ricarda Winkelmann, Boris Sakschewski, Sina Loriani, Ingo Fetzer, Sarah E. Cornell, Johan Rockström, and Timothy M. Lenton. 2022. ‘Exceeding 1.5°C Global Warming Could Trigger Multiple Climate Tipping Points’. *Science*, September. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abn7950>.

- Miljkovic, Tatjana, and Dragan Miljkovic. 2014. 'Modeling Impact of Hurricane Damages on Income Distribution in the Coastal U.S.' *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science* 5 (4): 265–73. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13753-014-0030-5>.
- Mooney, Henry, and Maria Alejandra Zegarra. 2020. 'Extreme Outlier: The Pandemic's Unprecedented Shock to Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean'. Inter-American Development Bank. <https://doi.org/10.18235/0002470>.
- Mora, Camilo, Abby G Frazier, Ryan J Longman, Rachel S Dacks, Maya M Walton, Eric J Tong, Joseph J Sanchez, et al. 2013. 'The Projected Timing of Climate Departure from Recent Variability'. *Nature* 502 (7470): 183–87.
- Sen, Amartya, Jean Paul Fitoussi, and Joseph Stiglitz. 2010. *Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up*. The New Press.
- UN Independent Group of Scientists. 2019. 'The Future Is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development (GSDR 2019) | Department of Economic and Social Affairs'. 2019. <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/future-now-science-achieving-sustainable-development-gsdr-2019-24576>.

David C. Smith, Institute for Sustainable Development, The University of the West Indies
2022-10-26