Working Group 2:

SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS)

Extract from:

Planetary Security:

Peace and Cooperation in
Times of Climate Change and
Global Environmental Challenges

Conference Report

2 and 3 November 2015
Peace Palace, The Hague

WORKING GROUP 2

SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS)

This Working Group focused on climate change and its effects on Small Island Developing States (SIDS). More specifically, the workshop focused on the following questions: Is there a future for SIDS? What does a comprehensive climate security strategy look like? This was one of two Working Groups in which sea level rise was one of the central themes.

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1. CHALLENGES

According to the United Nations (UN), there are 39 Small Island Developing States (SIDS) with a combined population of over 50 million people. Amongst them, 37 are Member States of the UN, comprising one-fifth of the total UN membership. Among the SIDS there are countries that are relatively wealthy by developing country standards, such as Singapore and the Bahamas, but also some of the poorest countries in the world, such as Comoros, Haiti and Timor-Leste.

Like many developing countries, SIDS are susceptible to a range of security challenges. These include problems of law and order, with seven of the Caribbean SIDS having the highest murder rates in the world according to the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Their small size and capacity limitations make SIDS ideal targets for transnational criminal networks, including those involved in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, and the smuggling of drugs, arms and people.

SIDS also experience political instability, with 13 SIDS being countries of concern in the Fragile State Index. Yet among the developing countries the SIDS are not exceptionally insecure, as the principal factors influencing insecurity such as poverty, inequality, and restricted social opportunities and no more or less prevalent in SIDS.

VULNERABILITIES

I. When tropical storm Jeanne hit **Haiti** in September 2004, nearly 3000 people lost their lives even though the winds were not deemed hurricane force.

II. In **Kiribati**, a 16-month drought forced the government to deliver drinking water by boat to remote islands that depend on rain for freshwater.

III. The recent cyclone in **Vanuatu** caused 360 million US Dollars' worth of damage - about 45% of Vanuatu's GDP and Hurricane Sandy cost 315 million US Dollars across the **Caribbean**.

However, SIDS do face unique sustainable development challenges. Few SIDS are able to achieve economies of scale, few have competitive advantages, and most are dependent on imports that are subject to high transport costs. The formal economies of most SIDS are heavily dependent on natural resources, as are the livelihoods of most people living in them. Tourism, agriculture and fisheries are critical sectors that are vulnerable to environmental change. Most SIDS have large

Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), but minimal capacity to conduct proper surveillance of their maritime zones. In 2014, the value of the tuna caught in the EEZ of Pacific countries was 3.4 billion dollars – double the development assistance to the region from all sources. Around an additional 400 million dollars of tuna was estimated to have been taken from the zone illegally or through under-reporting.

SIDS are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards, which can affect their entire territories and economies. Most SIDS are located in zones of tropical cyclone activity and their high ratio of coastline to land area makes them particularly vulnerable to storm surges and wind damage. Many are also highly exposed to drought. Their high dependence on natural resources means such events can have disproportionate impacts on economies and livelihoods, and government spending and revenue (see the text box for examples).

These sustainable development challenges make SIDS highly vulnerable to climate change. Climate change will bring sea level rise, warming sea and air temperatures, an increase in cyclone and storm intensity, and changing patterns of rainfall. These will in turn cause coastal erosion and inundation, coral bleaching and associated impacts on near-shore fisheries, changing patterns of pelagic fish stocks, declining agricultural productivity, increased infrastructure damage, increasing risks to water systems, and increases in morbidity and mortality due to vector and water borne diseases and extreme events. Given the dependence of SIDS economies and livelihoods on natural resources, these impacts will undermine economic growth and livelihoods. Not only are SIDS highly exposed and sensitive to climate change, their capacity to adapt is constrained by their generally small economies and limited technological capacities.

However, SIDS are not all equally vulnerable, and most have considerable capacities that offer a foundation for adaptation. SIDS are typically characterised by high degrees of social capital rooted in kinship structures that extend across countries, and which provide important sources of income, information, and social support. Many SIDS societies have persisted for thousands of years, living sustainably in marginal and fragile environments through periods of changes in climate and sea levels, and these cultural repertoires continue in many small island societies. Information and communications technologies are helping to overcome the barriers of distance, as are falling transport costs. Finally, SIDS engage extensively with international partners in their pursuit of security and sustainability. These characteristics suggest that with careful and sustained efforts to facilitate adaptation, coupled with reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases that slow the rate of climate change, SIDS can persist, and future generations of people living in SIDS can continue to lead dignified lives.

2. RESPONSES

It is important to stress that SIDS are the principal agents of their own security, and will always be so. Nevertheless, the global forces that act on SIDS can overwhelm their local resources, and so support from the international community can significantly assist SIDS to manage their security.

Since at least 1992 international institutions, policies and conventions have consistently recognised that SIDS face acute sustainable development challenges, and are particularly vulnerable to climate change. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) has charted some of the main developments in international action to support sustainable development in SIDS, as shown in the following figure.

Figure 1: *1992 to 2015 Milestones*

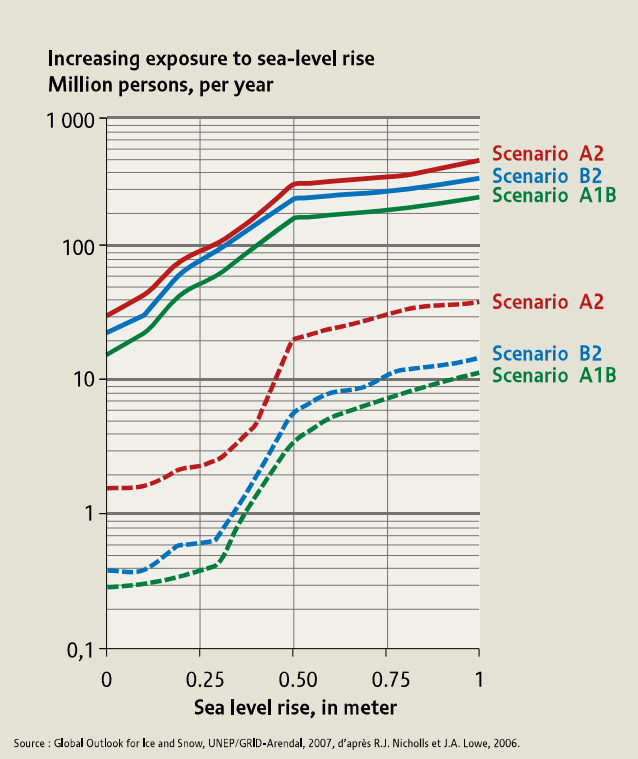
Most recently, in September 2014, the Third International Conference on SIDS was held in Samoa. The SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway (SAMOA Pathway) was adopted at the conference. It addresses priority areas for SIDS and calls for urgent actions and support for SIDS' efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Many United Nations agencies are engaged in the implementation of these agreements and strategies, including: the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Multilateral and regional development banks such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank also play key roles. SIDS are also engaged in extensive bilateral arrangements, including with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, who, in association with the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education jointly launched the project "Strengthening Small Island Developing States" capacity in the water sector to cope with the effects of climate change'.

SIDS are typically grouped into three geographical regions: the Caribbean, the Pacific, and the Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea (AIMS). Each region has its own regional cooperation body in the Caribbean Community, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Indian Ocean Commission respectively. There is also the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), of which 44 SIDS are members.

3. FURTHER READING

- Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), 'Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform' *https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/*
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Working Group II, *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, Chapter 29, Small Islands* *http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/WGIIAR5-Chap29_FINAL.pdf*
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 'SIDS' *http://www.unep.org/regionalseas/partners/interagency/SIDS/default.asp*
- United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (1994)* *http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_sids/sids_pdfs/BPOA.pdf*



Source : Global Outlook for Ice and Snow, UNEP/GRID-Arendal, 2007, d'après R.J. Nicholls et J.A. Lowe, 2006.

Protection level:
Poor
High

IPCC scenarios:

The graph shows projected increases in the number of people worldwide who will be exposed to sea-level rise under certain scenarios, with and without coastal protection.

For each of the three IPCC scenarios displayed the dashed and solid line of the same colour indicates the degree of reduction in exposure given coastal protection

The A1 storyline and scenario family describes a future world of very rapid economic growth, global population that peaks in mid-century and declines thereafter, and the rapid introduction of new and more efficient technologies. Major underlying themes are convergence among regions, capacity-building, and increased cultural and social interactions, with a substantial reduction in regional differences in per capita income. The A1 scenario family develops into three groups of which the A1B scenario representing a balance across all sources - renewable and non renewable (and where balanced is defined as not relying too heavily on one particular energy source, on the assumption that similar improvment rates apply to all energy supply and end use technologies).

The B2 scenario describes a world in which the emphasis is on local solutions to economic, social, and environmental sustainability. It is a world with a continuously increasing global population, but at a slower rate than other scenarios, intermediate levels of economic development, and slow but diverse technological change. Society is oriented towards environmental protection and social equity, and focuses on the local and regional level.

The A2 scenario describes a very heterogeneous world, based on the continued separation and preservation of local identities. Fertility patterns across regions converge very slowly, which results in a continuously increasing population. Economic development is regionally oriented and per capita economic growth and technological change fairly fragmented and slow.

4. ANALYSIS

Higher rates of warming pose increasing levels of security risk to SIDS. Warming in excess of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels poses critical risks to SIDS, and to avoid this early and deep cuts in emissions are critical.

SIDS are playing their part in the clean energy transition. All SIDS are very small emitters on an aggregate or per capita basis, yet many have plans for large-scale renewable energy systems. For example, Saint Vincent and Grenadines have begun to look into geothermal energy and are aiming to launch a major project by 2018; Tonga has well developed plans for a large investment in solar energy; Mauritius is planning for clean and adaptable smart cities; Antigua and Barbuda are investigating solar-powered desalination systems. Nevertheless, the cost of such green technologies remains a barrier to ambitious action in SIDS.

In many SIDS the impacts of climate change are being felt. There are concerns about the effects of climate change on population movement. For example, there are increasing requests from communities in Fiji for relocation due to coastal erosion (thus far 45 communities have requested this). In Barbuda population movement into urban areas is compounding impacts from the erosion of the lagoon. Climate impacts on rural livelihoods may accelerate urbanisation, and the pace of change may outstrip the capacity of public services and markets to meet people's needs. Population movements such as these could lead to urban unrest, and disputes and low-level conflicts about access to land and other forms of property.

Climate change could also lead to increased burdens on public services such as health services and water and sanitation systems. Impacts on incomes, degradation of natural resources degradation, water scarcity, food shortages and the depletion of fishing stock are also issues of critical importance and priority areas for adaptation.

Adapting to climate change is critical to the security of SIDS, even if warming stabilises at 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. SIDS have significant capacities for adaptation, but the extent of the task will require meaningful and genuine partnerships with a range of actors in the international system. High-level international conferences and organisations are not affecting changes at the local level.

Adaptation and mitigation are to be implemented in SIDS, are intended to serve the needs of SIDS, are to be owned and sustained by SIDS. Yet climate change solutions in SIDS are too often prescribed and controlled by donors. SIDS have very different geographies, cultures, political systems and economies, and so universal solutions rarely suit any given country. SIDS must drive climate responses in their own countries, with international actors assisting in these processes.

At present, the systems for supporting adaptation in SIDS are excessively complicated, cumbersome, slow, and difficult for SIDS to navigate. When SIDS have secured support from abroad, there have been significant problems with implementation, management, monitoring, ownership and the sustainability of projects. It is common for people in SIDS to feel that international actors undermine their local capacities and ownership.

From l. to r. Jon Barnett, H.E. Pa'olelei Luteru, Patrina Dumaru, H.E. Inga Rhonda King

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Deep and rapid cuts in emissions are required to secure the future of SIDS, and all SIDS should be very strong advocates for an ambitious, global and binding agreement to reduce emissions. Lifestyles in the more industrialised nations imperil the future of SIDS, and ethical behaviours and decarbonising technologies and practices are required to change these.

SIDS are raising their own levels of ambition in decarbonising their economies, and the international community can support this through transferring technology and knowledge, and through support to sustain these systems over long periods of time.

Adaptation is also critical. Adaptation is a policy agenda for SIDS to be controlled by SIDS, with support from international actors through meaningful and genuine partnerships. These partnerships will require greater effort to understand and reconcile the expectations of SIDS and their development partners. The processes through which international assistance for SIDS is determined and provided require simplifying and mainstreaming. SIDS should own the objectives, processes, and outcomes of mitigation and adaptation in their countries.

The Samoa Pathway is a well-considered and broadly supported strategy for action and its implementation should be supported as a matter of priority.

Adaptation will require innovation, such as in technologies for water and sanitation, and sustainable transport systems to better facilitate the movement of people and goods and services between islands within SIDS. The development and implementation of these technologies will require sustained and committed support from the international community.

Most SIDS have large diasporas, and these represent a large pool of human resources that can assist SIDS to adapt. Innovative programs to harness the skills of the Diaspora are required.

Many people in SIDS share communal values, resources, and practices. This makes community based adaptation (CBA), which works with local and customary governance structures, an important and effective approach to adaptation in rural areas. CBA is a proven approach, and the time has come to invest in systems to upscale its application across a larger number of rural communities.

Adaptation is a process of learning, and systems for monitoring and evaluating activities and goals are required. This includes evaluations of the success of projects based on the views of the most vulnerable people, and monitoring of resources committed to adaptation activities. Education more broadly is also important, and awareness programmes at the grassroots level can help build a mandate for change. Formal education is also a powerful tool to reach and engage future generations (for example through school curriculum on climate change).

Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessments are important processes for mainstreaming adaptation and long-range planning. Improving local capacity for such processes can help reduce vulnerability to climate change. The Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment is working to improve these skills in various developing countries, and this could be a model for SIDS.

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Editors: Shirleen Chin and Ronald A. Kingham, Institute for Environmental Security

Published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands P.O. Box 20061 | 2500 EB The Hague | The Netherlands
January 2016 | 90147

Infographics: Philippe Rekacewicz, Visionscarto.net

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