

Foreword



A decade after the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados in 1994, sustainable development in small island developing States (SIDS) poses not only the challenges of that time but also new ones.

UNEP SIDS state of the environment reports and the UNEP Third Global Environment Outlook of 2002 showed indisputable evidence of continuing and widespread environmental degradation in SIDS, relating to all the priority environmental issues identified in the 1994

Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States—climate change and rise in sea level, natural and environmental disasters, waste management, tourism, and coastal and marine, fresh water, land, energy and biodiversity resources. Factors that include high population densities and socio-economics have brought about these changes. All three SIDS regions—the Caribbean; the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Seas (AIMS); and the Pacific—faced similar environmental challenges, although the magnitude and extent of the problems varied among them. As the last century drew to an end, SIDS continued to face problems of environmental degradation, increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, habitat destruction, and depletion of natural resources. Associated with these problems were negative health and social effects, loss of life, and substantial economic loss.

Nevertheless, significant achievements have been made in environment management; for example, governments have strengthened environmental policies through institutional changes and legislation, the number of global and regional environmental agreements have increased, and the public participated more than ever before in environmental management and decision making. These initiatives, however, have not significantly slowed the pace of

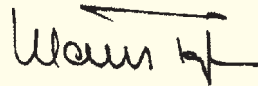
environmental degradation or improved the environment—their impacts were isolated and their achievements slow in coming. Analysis of implications for the future reveals that “business as usual” will exert immense pressures on the environmental and natural resource base of SIDS.

The SIDS reports and the Third Global Environment Outlook recognized the need for new and alternative policy responses that are integrated across sectors, for greater political determination, financial resources, institutional capacity, and involvement of all stakeholders in environmental management.

New challenges for SIDS include trade liberalization and the environment, health-related issues such as SARS and HIV, and security-related issues such as terrorism. The Millennium Development Goals (2000), as well as the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) are ambitious agendas for reducing poverty and improving lives that SIDS have also committed to undertake.

The preparatory process for the full and comprehensive review of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States has provided UNEP with another opportunity to show its commitment to the sustainable development of SIDS.

This publication highlights UNEP efforts since 1994, with emphasis on the last five years of assisting SIDS in implementing the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Preparing for the International Meeting in Mauritius in 2004, it outlines a renewed way forward. UNEP is confident that joint efforts with governments, regional organizations, institutions and civil society in SIDS and with the international community at large, in the years ahead, will yield the yearned fruits of well-being for present and future generations in SIDS.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Klaus Toepfer', with a horizontal line above the name.

Klaus Toepfer
Executive Director
United Nations Environment Programme

Why UNEP Is Focusing on Small Island Developing States

The natural, biological and genetic resources of small island developing States (SIDS), although varied, are unique. The particular circumstances of these islands have led them to develop their own cultures, distinctive and rich. Many of these small States themselves comprise not one but a number of islands. They are resilient and independent in spirit—and that spirit should be further supported in economic, social and environmental spheres.

Vulnerabilities

As a group, SIDS have special needs that must be addressed if they are to develop in a sustainable way. They share characteristics that make them economically, environmentally and socially vulnerable to shocks over which they exercise little or no control, placing them at a distinct disadvantage in comparison with larger countries.



SIDS are rich in culture—a major attraction in tourism, Seychelles

They are economically vulnerable because of their geographic dispersion, small domestic markets, low economic diversification, high dependence on traditional primary exports, and inability to capture economies of scale in industry, education, health, public utilities, public administration, and other infrastructure.

They are environmentally vulnerable because of their extremely fragile natural ecosystems that include coral reefs, wetlands, freshwater, coastal and marine areas, and forest and soil resources. And they are socially vulnerable when external forces bring stresses and hazards, with which they have less capacity to respond.

The interdependence between economic activities and ecology is evident throughout these island States. In one out of every four, agriculture contributes more than 20% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Agriculture ranges from plantations of sugarcane and banana to subsistence crops of roots and tubers. It is the major source of income and export earnings. Now indiscriminate trade liberalization is threatening the future of the main export crops of sugar and banana.

Tourism is by far the fastest-growing economic sector in all SIDS regions. Earnings from tourism as a proportion of total exports exceeded 20% in 19 SIDS, 30% in 13, and 40% in 8. In Antigua the proportion is 86%, in Bahamas 84%, St Lucia 75%, Maldives 70%, Barbados 59% and St Kitts and Nevis 52%. Yet tourism as currently developed often spoils the very environment on which it depends—development destroys mangroves and wetlands, yachts and divers damage coral reefs, and hotels and cruise ships may discharge raw sewage into the sea.

In principle, SIDS exercise control over extensive ocean areas in their exclusive economic zones (EEZ). Although the rich fishery resources that they harvest are only a miniscule proportion of these areas, others who overfish them need to be monitored and the areas managed. Managing the vast EEZs is especially vital in an archipelago like Kiribati, for instance, where the EEZ is 3.6 million square kilometres and the country's total land area is less than 1000 square kilometres.

Where agriculture is the dominant economic activity, its present and future productivity will be determined by soil quality and freshwater resources. Where tourism and fisheries are the major industries, the States must use their marine and coastal environments intensively. It is therefore clear that further tourism, agricultural or fisheries development without the necessary environmental and social safeguards will be destabilizing. Already, high population densities in many SIDS have increased pressure on land resources and wildlife; intensified demand for facilities to deal with waste on both land and sea; contributed to coastal areas being degraded, adversely affecting beaches, mangroves and coral reefs; and unsustainably used scarce freshwater resources.

Building Resilience

Biodiversity, in which SIDS are rich, is the very basis for sustainable development. Their genetic diversity, if sustainably used, will contribute to the global pool by producing goods—food, medicines to improve human health, building materials—and by delivering services—purifying air and water, detoxifying and decomposing wastes, stabilizing climate, moderating floods and droughts, dispersing seeds and pollinating plants, renewing soil fertility and recycling nutrients. SIDS thus contribute to the world at large, and it behoves the world to help maintain the richness of their environment. Moreover, their genetic diversity should yield benefits to the SIDS populations themselves.

Cultural identity in SIDS accounts for distinctive music, gastronomy, traditional knowledge, customs and particular social institutions. These are foundations upon which SIDS can further build their resilience.



Some land-use practices such as cutting slopes have resulted in massive soil erosion...



...polluting rivers (above) that ultimately wash into oceans and seas, causing sedimentation (below)





How UNEP Comes In

Over the past decade “sustainable development” has occupied centre stage when development strategies are being discussed. Sustainable development as an ideal was endorsed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also referred to as the Earth Summit; it was reiterated in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, at the United Nations Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in Barbados in 1994; and it was further promoted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, convened in South Africa 2002.

The role of UNEP, as the UN agency responsible for the environment, is described in the SIDS Programme of Action (SIDS/POA) thus: “UNEP, taking into account development perspectives, should continue to provide policy guidance and coordination in the field of environment, including in the implementation of the SIDS/POA.” UNEP has perspectives that can efficiently address the sustainable development needs of SIDS. Its Regional Seas Programme links it with all SIDS. UNEP can build an effective and productive work programme for SIDS.

Policymakers, practitioners and the general public must fully comprehend that economic development is inextricably linked with environmental sustainability. This relationship is critical since the evidence suggests that in most countries handling of the environment and natural resources has

worsened as traditional measures of economic development have indicated progress. But economic development as a measure of human welfare is unsustainable if the environment and natural resources are steadily deteriorating. Small island developing States are particularly conscious of their environment since it is so vital for their endeavours such as fishing and tourism. They are aware also of their responsibility to the world's environment by preserving their biodiversity and managing their coastal and marine resources.

International Agenda

Within the United Nations, the 1994 Barbados conference led to the Programme of Action (POA) for the Sustainable Development of SIDS (SIDS/POA) being adopted. It identified UNEP as one of the key UN organizations for implementing its activities. A number of multinational environmental agreements and protocols, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, have also explicitly recognized the special sustainable development needs of SIDS.

UNEP's Regional Presence

To help carry out its global mandate on environmental stewardship, UNEP has taken the strategic decision to operate through six regional offices, one each in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, West Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and Europe. This regional presence works two ways; it ensures that regional priorities are represented in the UNEP work programme and that the regions are kept fully aware of global concerns. Also, through its Regional Seas Programme UNEP can act within and among regions.

All SIDS participate in the Regional Seas programmes:

- Barcelona Convention / Mediterranean SIDS
- Cartagena Convention / Caribbean SIDS



The UNEP Regional Seas

- East Asian Seas Action Plan / Singapore
- Kuwait Convention / Bahrain
- Nairobi and Abidjan Conventions / African SIDS
- Noumea Convention / South Pacific SIDS
- South Asian Seas Action Plan/ Maldives



UNEP's contribution towards the management of freshwater resources has positive impacts on agriculture, economy, environment, health and industry in SIDS

The global and regional scientific authority of UNEP is bolstered by its policy decision to build and sustain a large network of research and monitoring centres with demonstrated competency in their areas of specialization. Through this network UNEP carries out environmental capacity-building activities at global, interregional, regional and national levels.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in 2002 the international community was encouraged to assist SIDS in managing their coastal areas in a sustainable manner. This assistance would come within the context of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Priority issues identified at that summit included sustainable tourism, marine and coastal biodiversity, fisheries, exclusive economic zones, fresh water, waste and pollution, natural disasters, trade, vulnerability indices, climate change, intellectual property, energy and health care. The summit called for an international meeting for the full and comprehensive review of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action in 2004. When the UN General Assembly decided to convene this

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