United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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4TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON Small Island Developing States 2024

4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4)

Global Online Stakeholder Consultation

This summary report reflects inputs collected from stakeholders during a global online stakeholder consultation in preparation for the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4). The consultation was convened by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in partnership with the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

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Background

The **4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4)** will be held in Antigua and Barbuda from 27 - 30 May 2024. It will aim to assess the ability of small island developing States to achieve sustainable development, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. The SIDS4 Conference will bring together leaders to agree on a new programme of action for SIDS with a focus on practical and impactful solutions and to forge new partnerships and cooperation at all levels.

To create a space for stakeholders, especially those in SIDS countries, to contribute to the substantive preparations for the SIDS4 Conference, UNDESA, in collaboration with UN OHRLLS, convened a **global online stakeholder consultation** between 13 June and 7 July 2023. Respondents were asked to identify key challenges, game-changing actions and policy recommendations as informal inputs to the SIDS4 preparatory process.

Information about the consultation was broadly disseminated through mailing lists, UN official websites and social media.

This report presents the main outcomes of the inputs received in the global online stakeholder consultation.

All inputs are made publicly available here.

A total of **170 inputs** from interested stakeholders were received for the global online consultation. These included organizations actively contributing to sustainable development efforts in small island developing States across all three SIDS regions: **Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS), the Caribbean** and the **Pacific regions**.

Inputs were received from stakeholders contributing to sustainable development efforts in: **Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti,** **Jamaica, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia (Federal States of), Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Suriname, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.**

Contributing stakeholders originated from all regions of the world, with the following distribution: Africa – 33.7%, Latin America and the Caribbean – 19.5%, Europe – 19.5%, Asia – 16%, North America – 7.1% and Oceania – 4.1%.


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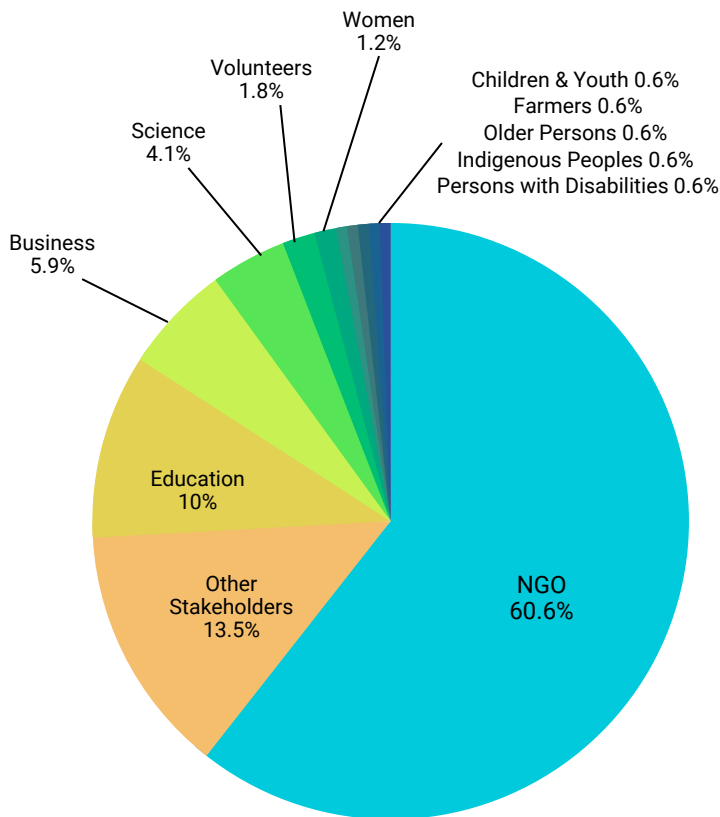
Stakeholder Sectors

The majority of stakeholders contributing to the online consultation self-identified as representing **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)** – 60.6%. Other sectors contributing inputs included: **Other stakeholders active in areas related to sustainable development (Other Stakeholders)** – 13.5%, **Education & Academic Entities (Education)** – 10%, **Business & Industry (Business)** – 5.9%, **Science & Technological Community (Science)** – 4.1%, **Volunteer Groups (Volunteers)** – 1.8%, **Women Organization (Women)** – 1.2%, **Children & Youth** – 0.6%, **Farmers** – 0.6%, **Older Persons** – 0.6%, **Indigenous Peoples** – 0.6% and **Persons with Disabilities** – 0.6%.

Stakeholders represented all age groups. Approximately 20% fell within the youth category (ages 18 to 34), spanning the various different sectors.
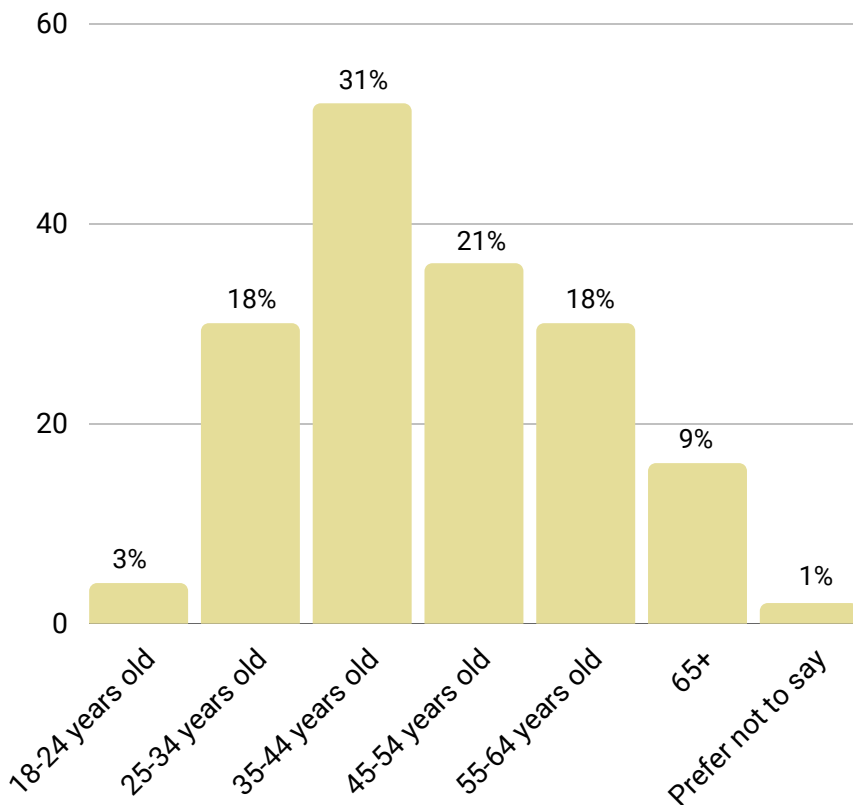
Three regional snapshots were prepared as inputs to the regional preparatory meetings:

- <u>Atlantic, Indian Ocean & South China Sea Region</u> (Mauritius, 24 – 26 July 2023)
- <u>Caribbean Region</u> (St. Vincent & the Grenadines, 8 – 10 August 2023)
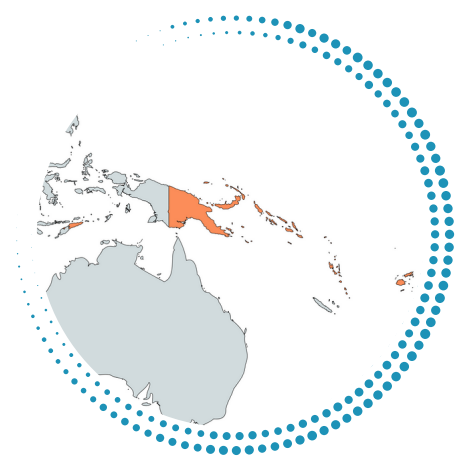- <u>Pacific Region</u> (Tonga, 16 – 18 August 2023)

The regional snapshots reflect the responses from stakeholders working in the respective regions and were published on the Conference website in advance of each of the preparatory meetings.

Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) Regional Map. Source: UN DESA

Caribbean Regional Map. Source: UN DESA

Pacific Regional Map. Source: UN DESA

Questions

The online stakeholder consultation was held through an open online form which included five substantive questions.

1 Key challenges that SIDS face in achieving their sustainable development priorities.

2 Policy recommendations to support SIDS in overcoming these challenges and to accelerate progress towards achieving their sustainable development priorities.

3 Examples of game-changing actions and/or innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships that are making an impact towards helping SIDS implement their sustainable development priorities.

4 Main message to world leaders and other stakeholders meeting at SIDS4.

5 Potential actions that could be taken to facilitate more meaningful, diverse and effective stakeholder engagement during SIDS4.

Key Challenges for SIDS

Stakeholders working in all SIDS regions were asked to identify the key challenges that SIDS encounter in their pursuit of sustainable development priorities. Stakeholders identified the **adverse effects of climate change** (15.1%), **loss of biodiversity** (11.7%) and **accessing financing for the SDGs** (11.3%) as priority challenges for all SIDS regions.

Other challenges highlighted include **natural disasters** (9%), **poverty and hunger** (8.1%), **education** (7.7%) and **health** (5.6%). The chart presented represents the major themes identified by stakeholders throughout the consultation.

Digital divide 1.8%
Access to technologies 2.6%
Access to data 1.8%
Long-term capacity building 3.6%
Adverse effects of climate change 15.1%
Access to opportunities 5.3%
Gender equality 4.5%
Unemployment 2.9%
Loss of biodiversity 11.7%
Education 7.7%
Natural disasters 9%
Health 5.6%
Poverty and hunger 8.1%
Graduation from LDC status 1.7%
Accessing financing to SDGs 11.3%
External financial and economic shocks 4.2%
Achieving debt sustainability 3.2%

Policy Recommendations

Respondents were asked to **select key policy priorities** they would like SIDS leaders to focus on. The options included:

- **Youth-related** policies and engagement;
- **Gender equality** and empowering women and girls;
- **Social issues** (e.g., ending poverty and hunger, improving access to health services and education);
- **Climate change mitigation and adaptation,** disaster risk reduction and resilience;
- Protecting the **ocean** and promoting the blue economy;
- **Financing** for sustainable development;

- **Digitalization** and meaningful transfer of technology;
- Long-term **capacity building;** and
- Strengthening **follow-up and review**, including through supporting data access and capacity.

The graph below reflects the key priority areas identified by stakeholders.

Stakeholders further had the opportunity to provide written inputs on **policy recommendations** that can be leveraged to help SIDS achieve their sustainable development priorities.

| Social issues 16% | Financing 13.7% | Ocean 10.7% | Gender equality 9.2% |
| Climate change 13.2% | Youth engagement 12% | Review 8.8% | Digitalization 8.5% / Capacity building 7.9% |
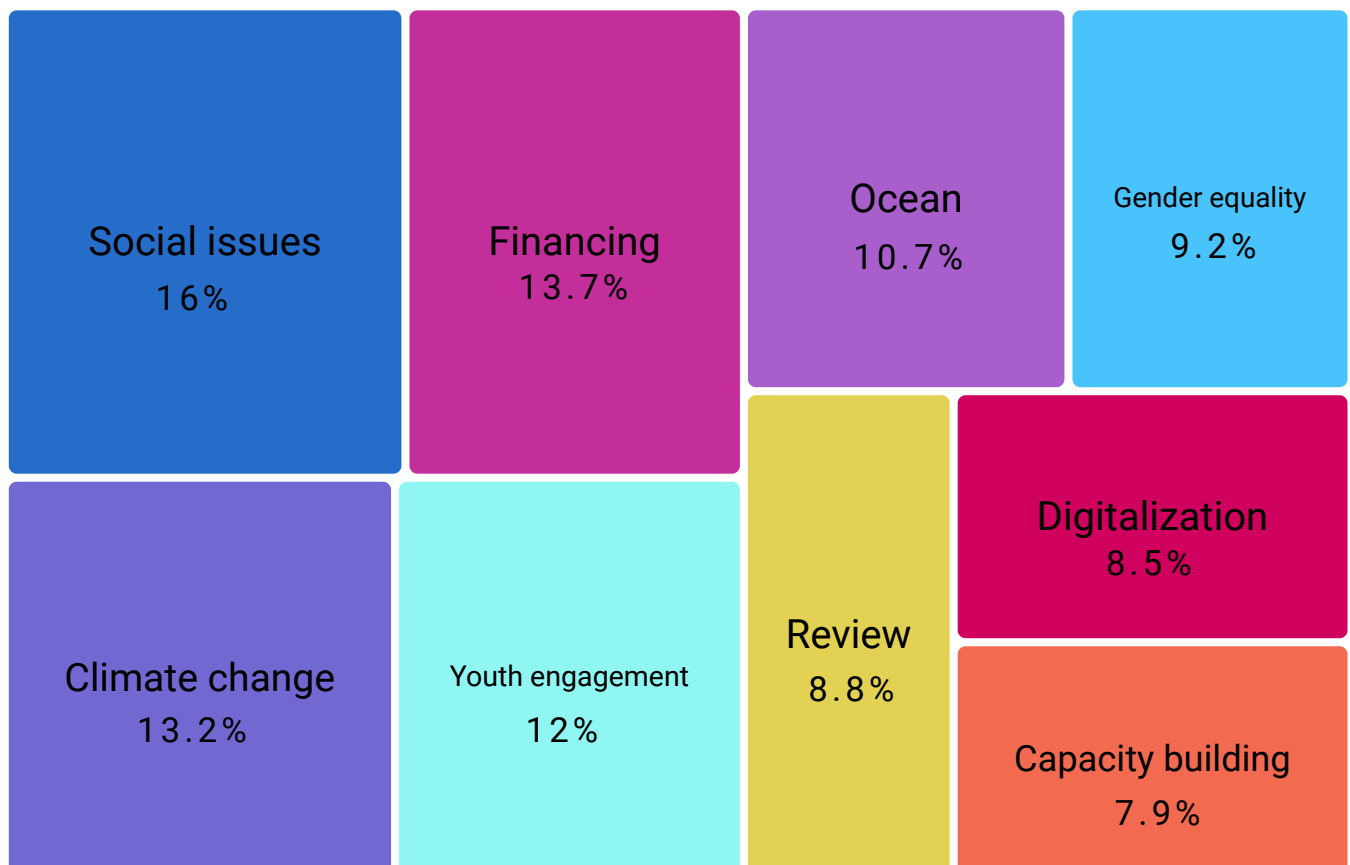
Climate change and related issues ranging from **protecting the ocean and ecosystems** to **resilience to natural disasters** were among the top priorities in the written submissions alongside policies focused on **empowering young people, digitalization** and **energy**. At the same time, stakeholders outlined key means of implementation such as **financing for sustainable development** and **capacity building** across policy areas.

The summary below reflects the main inputs received from respondents to the survey.

Climate change adaptation and mitigation emerged as a priority policy area for stakeholders. Respondents said that SIDS require **harmonized legislative policy frameworks** that can help to identify exposure, allow for the development of appropriate actions and identify costs and sources of financing. Such climate change policies should consider the specific situation of each country while integrating commitments made at the international level.

In this vein, respondents further called on SIDS leaders to ensure that climate change considerations are **integrated into all sectors of development planning**, including infrastructure, agriculture, tourism and urban planning and to foster the capacity and technical expertise to do so.

Stakeholders noted the **close relationship between climate change and the intensity and frequency of natural disasters**. They thus called for attention to strengthening SIDS' **resilience and disaster management capacities**.

Respondents encouraged SIDS leaders to conduct **comprehensive climate risk and disaster assessments to understand their**

vulnerabilities, exposure and potential impacts. This would include the development of robust early warning systems and investing in risk prevention and advanced meteorological monitoring. Equally important is the establishment of **effective communication channels** and **public awareness campaigns** based on these assessments.

Increasing SIDS' resilience also requires **a focus on critical infrastructures** such as roads, bridges, hospitals and schools as well as **protecting access to water** in the aftermath of disasters. Technical solutions range from studies on water demand to improve water management and assess remaining availability to improving building storm drainage systems and retention reservoirs as well as the implementation of flood management measures and the promotion of construction practices that reduce the impact of flooding. Stakeholders underscored the **centrality of technology and knowledge transfer** in facilitating these changes.

Multi-level cooperation will be key to addressing the challenges posed by climate change and disasters. On the one hand, this means that all measures should **directly involve local communities** to ensure that they can adapt disaster and climate change policies to their needs and develop community-based early warning systems and local response mechanisms.

On the other hand, stakeholders called on governments to **collaborate with regional and international organizations** to share knowledge, experiences, technical assistance and financial resources. This could include building platforms for SIDS to share their experiences, best practices and lessons learned and to promote partnerships between SIDS, other countries, international organizations as well as science and academia.

Stakeholders underscored that **access to financing for climate change adaptation and mitigation** will be crucial to enabling SIDS to address the challenges posed by climate change.

They called for the **establishment of a dedicated fund for climate change adaptation in SIDS**, with support from the international community. Such a comprehensive financing mechanism could **combine climate change adaptation and mitigation funding and disaster risk reduction and recovery funding** into one platform and focus on key priority areas such as climate-smart agriculture, sustainable utilization of marine resources and renewable energy projects. This could include creating a simplified application process, providing technical assistance for project proposal development and creating flexible funding criteria that acknowledge the unique vulnerabilities of SIDS.

Another option that emerged from the responses is **strengthening the financing mechanisms already established**, including the Loss & Damage Fund established at COP27.

Given the **high debt burden** of many SIDS, the pressure of which becomes even more acute when disasters strike, respondents proposed to redirect the payment for foreign debt to biodiversity conservation and environmental conservation through **debt-for-resilience or debt-for-nature swaps**. Another option would be to **strengthen disaster insurance** which would cover SIDS' debt payments after disasters so they can continue to provide basic services and focus on rebuilding. A global fund that pools risks could be established to make disaster insurance more affordable.

Focusing on the potential fallout from climate change and natural disasters and how they will affect SIDS, respondents suggested that island countries should be assisted to **record and archive as much as possible of their cultural heritage, language and the characteristics of their national territory**. As the adverse effects of climate change might lead to higher number of refugees, existing laws should be adapted to recognize climate refugees as a legal category.

Photo by Vincent_St_Thomas from Getty Images Pro

Key to any sustainable development policy in SIDS is the **protection of the ocean**. Integrated ocean governance frameworks that are in line with existing international agreements can help promote collaboration among all relevant government agencies, stakeholders and local communities to ensure the **coordinated management of marine resources, marine spatial planning and effective enforcement of regulations**.

To promote sustainable ocean management, SIDS could **strengthen marine protected areas** which should be designed in consultation with local communities, **taking into account traditional knowledge and sustainable resource use practices**. These would promote the **resilience of marine ecosystems**, **protect critical habitats** and ensure the **sustainability of fish stocks**. MPAs could also include a focus on enhanced impact analyses of deep seabed mining to gather information on areas that should be protected from it and to build a knowledge and information base for informed decision-making in relation to blue carbon, its potential uses and environmental impacts.

Fostering **sustainable fishing practices** was another suggestion, which could include implementing science-based quotas, implementing effective monitoring and control measures to tackle unregulated fishing, promoting responsible fishing methods and supporting small-scale and artisanal fishers, benefitting both the environment and local communities.

SIDS should also focus on **protecting ocean ecosystems** such as mangroves and coral reefs and to **prevent ocean pollution**, including through the development and implementation of an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution and by tackling the disposal of hazardous waste into

the ocean, a practice widespread among actors across the world.

Stakeholders highlighted that **protecting terrestrial ecosystems** was as important as protecting the biodiversity of the oceans. This includes **establishing nature reserves, tackling deforestation and building wildlife sanctuaries**. To protect SIDS' rich biodiversity, stakeholders suggested expanding existing databases and establishing a SIDS Biodiversity & Conservation network that is accessible to all.

Fostering sustainable economies emerged as a core element of tackling climate change. In this regard, stakeholders foregrounded the need to apply and implement the key principles of the **Blue Economy.** Economic development should also focus on **rural development** that provides farmers with access to credit, land and modern agricultural technologies that facilitate the use of sustainable agricultural practices. Finally, shifting towards a more sustainable economic future will require economic diversification, especially by supporting small and medium enterprises.

Similarly, stakeholders highlighted the **potential of ecotourism** to generate income for local economies without compromising the health of SIDS' ecosystems. Investing in ecotourism in SIDS could include a focus on preserving the cultural heritage of SIDS and accessing it in a respectful manner. This could ensure that tourism benefits local communities and does not interrupt local ecosystems as well as minimize the negative environmental impact of tourism.

Stakeholders highlighted the **transition to renewable energies and green technologies** as a pathway to a greener future. Stakeholders called on leaders to prioritize the transition to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and hydropower which would allow SIDS to

reduce their dependence on expensive and environmentally harmful fossil fuels that need to be imported.

Concrete steps to promote the **green energy transition** can entail establishing renewable energy targets, developing enabling policy and regulatory frameworks, enhancing capacity building and technology transfer, strengthening energy efficiency measures, promoting awareness-raising campaigns and providing incentives such as tax breaks and feed-in tariffs for renewable energy developers. Stakeholders noted that fostering renewable energies could also help create new economic and employment opportunities.

To do so, SIDS will **require international assistance to close the digital divide**. As stakeholders put it, "in a world increasingly defined by technology, the digital divide is a silent barrier that compounds the challenges faced by SIDS." The **digitalization of SIDS will rely on multi-stakeholder partnerships** that can facilitate the required technology transfers, the building of the required technical infrastructures, including internet connectivity, and the required capacity building through **fostering digital skills training and education**.

More specifically, **technology transfers should correspond with the needs of SIDS**. Assistance should be provided in areas such as marine research, monitoring and surveillance systems and sustainable aquaculture practices. Local communities should be **empowered as creators of digital solutions** tailored to their unique realities in the design and implementation of any digital initiatives.

Photo by Nikada on Getty Images Signature

According to stakeholders, **youth** – if empowered – can be at the forefront of digitalization and shifting towards more sustainable economies. This will **require fostering innovation and entrepreneurship through business incubators, financing for young entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship training**. It should also include enhancing access to life-long quality education and skills development programs that align with the needs of the global job market, with a particular focus on STEM fields. At the same time, stakeholders called on SIDS leaders to provide **youth education and employment programs tailored to the needs of the Blue Economy**.

In addition, stakeholders called on governments to actively **involve youth in decision-making processes at all levels**, including through youth councils, advisory committees, supporting youth-led initiatives and by creating opportunities for engaging youth in conservation action through volunteering programs, academic exchanges and university projects. Youth can also be engaged in environmental communication campaigns through street art, visual art and social media.

Stakeholders further identified a range of crucial policy recommendations on other sustainable development issues. These include a **renewed focus on poverty eradication and tackling hunger and malnutrition** through social protection systems, safety measures and access to universal healthcare. They argued that **affordable health care services** should be made available to all. **Financial inclusion** was another priority area respondents listed. The financing for these social development priorities could be generated through the mobilization of domestic resources through progressive tax systems and taxing the Blue Economy.

Respondents prominently reflected on one of the key guiding principles of the SDGs, namely

'**leaving no one behind**.' They called for the urgent need for governments to combat systemic discrimination through legal frameworks, affirmative action and initiatives that promote inclusivity and diversity. The **exclusion of persons living with disabilities** was outlined as a specific challenge. Respondents suggested developing and enforcing comprehensive disability rights legislation which would ensure that public spaces, transportation, buildings and services are accessible to all.

Another key priority outlined by stakeholders is fostering **gender equality**. This should be done by **promoting the economic empowerment of women and girls**, supporting women's participation in leadership and decision-making processes at all levels, fostering collaboration and networking among women and girls and enhancing women's access to financial resources. Key to enhancing gender equality is the **tackling of gender-based violence** and the recognition of how women are disproportionately affected by disasters and other events. Respondents further recommended that dedicated curricula can be used to educate young people in tackling gender-based discrimination and violence.

All stakeholders highlighted the **transformative power of partnerships** between different stakeholders and among SIDS countries. They called on SIDS leaders to **strengthen regional cooperation and partnerships** by forming SIDS networks and participating in regional and international organizations and networks to access knowledge and experience sharing as well as funding opportunities, capacity building and technical assistance. A renewed emphasis on partnerships should also include **public-private partnerships** that create shared value while mitigating the risk of 'greenwashing' and 'bluewashing.'

Implementing these strategies **requires political commitment, financial resources and sustained efforts over the long term**. To do so, stakeholders called on SIDS leaders to adopt a **whole-of-government approach**, for example by setting up issue specific task forces that bring together representatives from different departments. This will allow governments to design and implement cross-cutting solutions. Stakeholders further suggested putting in place **mechanisms for regular follow-up and review**, establishing evaluation mechanisms and

ensuring open access to high-quality data. One suggestion was to establish **citizen participation mechanisms** by creating spaces for dialogue and public consultations.

Finally, stakeholders highlighted the importance of **using the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to build back stronger** with more resilient systems and by tackling inequality, fostering digital and green transformations and strengthening international cooperation.

This word cloud represents responses from all stakeholders on policy recommendations to support SIDS in overcoming the challenges they face and achieving their sustainable development priorities.

Stakeholder Engagement Opportunities at SIDS4

Respondents outlined multiple ways in which stakeholders could be meaningfully engaged at the SIDS4 Conference:
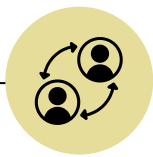
Diverse stakeholder engagement

- Including all groups, especially women, youth and indigenous peoples
- Equal representation of women
- Dedicated stakeholder spaces for informal networking, knowledge-sharing and collaboration
- Future exchange programs between stakeholders across all SIDS regions

Involving those who cannot attend

- Virtual participation for those unable to travel
- Engaging island media channels
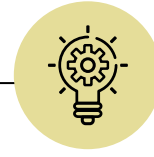
New ways of engaging stakeholders

- Innovation challenges
- Involving youth through mini conferences, Hackathons, essay competitions or a podcast
- A SIDS investment forum
- Capacity-building workshops and training programs before and after the Conference

Photo by urf from Getty Images

Messages to World Leaders

Stakeholders shared messages to world leaders which included priorities on how to strengthen the ability of SIDS to achieve their sustainable development priorities and to renew the political commitment of the international community to support them in this undertaking. The highlighted quotes below are examples of the received submissions. All inputs are made publicly available here.

"Continue to provide a limelight to programs and initiatives that are successfully implemented and improve prioritization of projects by accelerating local and regional workshops by interacting with on the ground populations." – Assemble Teams & AI For Rural

"Equitable and affordable access to technologies that promote meaningful connectivity are essential for enhancing access to education; building local/indigenous skills and capacity; facilitating access to data and service platforms, that drive digital entrepreneurship and build diversified resilient economies."
– Caribbean Telecommunications Union

"The key to unlocking SIDS' immense potential for SDG achievement lies in creating a transformative, robust enabling environment via adequate and accessible international support that empowers innovation and drives implementation."
– Climate Analytics Caribbean

"As world leaders, we must prioritize digital services and talent development in small island developing States, harnessing the power of technology and nurturing local talent to drive sustainable development, foster innovation, and unlock economic opportunities for the benefit of SIDS and the global community." – Creative Tech Hub Caribbean

"To come up with binding agreements coupled with a time frame on staff training and technology transfer to strengthen the ability of SIDS." – DION, NGO Network of Small Island Developing States

"Building paths between the islands for a more sustainable global future."
– Early Career Ocean Professionals Cabo Verde

"Transform education to transform the future. Responsible education plays a crucial role in strengthening the ability of SIDS to achieve their sustainable development priorities in every way and every day." – Green Mentors

"Going to the rural communities to connect directly through community-based groups can be a huge changer for rural communities." – Guadalcanal Provincial Youth Council (S.I) Solomon Islands

"The ocean is where all life begins. And the Ocean determines all factors of life on land and subsequently how all life in future will be" – Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), Columban Mission, Fiji

"Promoting the potential development of the blue economy by enhancing partnerships"
– Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL), Timor-Leste

"Prioritize ending poverty and the impact of climate change for SIDS by financing debts, quality education and involve youths and women in decision making."
– Voice of the Vulnerable

Game-changing actions and partnerships

Respondents operating across SIDS regions were asked to share examples of game-changing actions and/or innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships that are making an impact towards helping SIDS implement their sustainable development priorities. The highlighted actions and partnerships below are examples of the received submissions. All inputs are made publicly available underline here.

The Caribbean Climate Justice Academy focuses on elevating the role of Caribbean youth in climate action. The Academy aims to create an inclusive environment and enhance the capabilities of young professionals, eligible students, and emerging community leaders striving to improve the Caribbean regions' future. This encompasses regular training sessions, networking events and a mentoring initiative known as the Caribbean Climate Justice Mentoring program.

The Caribbean Climate Justice Alliance seeks to build a regional coalition and grassroots movement to transform policy and practice and catalyse action for climate justice and a just transition. The goal of the Alliance is to bring together the diverse and often disconnected efforts of CSOs and other non-state actors on climate justice to leverage synergies, enhance knowledge sharing and facilitate joint learning and action to build a strong regional movement by and for rights holders.

The Global Island Partnership (GLISPA) is a multi-stakeholder partnership working to ensure sustainably managed and resilient island ecosystems. GLISPA unites governments, NGOs, research institutions and the private sector to create models of how to safeguard island biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods for island communities, including those in SIDS. GLISPA is guided by the Barbados Declaration, which calls for a shared vision of conservation and sustainable development in SIDS.

UNESCO's Global Youth Grant Scheme for Small Island Developing States & Least Developed Countries is part of UNESCO's dedicated efforts to support sustainable development in SIDS and LDCs. The aim of this programme is to provide grant funding to young people and youth organizations as well as mentoring and capacity development to support youth climate innovations in SIDS and LDCs.

The Local2030 Islands Network is a global, island-led peer-to-peer platform dedicated to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals through locally driven solutions. It provides a peer-to-peer platform for engagement amongst and between islands to share experiences, spread knowledge, raise ambition, promote solidarity and identify and implement best practice solutions.

The Metabolism of Islands (MoI), a counterpart to the Metabolism of Cities (MoC), is a network of scholars conducting policy-relevant research to support island economies achieve resource security and self-reliance and build resilience to the impacts of climate change. MoI provides a wealth of data to aid researchers, policymakers and local enterprises in advancing island economies towards a circular resource model.

The Pacific Islands Renewable Energy Project (PIREP) brings renewable energy infrastructure including solar panels and wind turbines across the Pacific Islands, drastically reducing their dependence on imported fuels. It collaborates with governments to establish renewable energy policies, fosters local expertise through technician training and engages communities through awareness campaigns. The project's participatory model holds inspiration for similar efforts in other SIDS and beyond, emphasizing the significance of collaborative partnerships tailored to local contexts.

The 100% RES (Renewable Energy Sources) Islands Initiative emphasizes the vital role of renewables for island energy security and sustainable development. The Greening the Islands (GTI) Foundation aims to identify and implement the optimal mix of renewable electric energy systems in close cooperation with local entities and stakeholders, towards the complete decarbonization of the electric power sector. The RES Initiative will present their preliminary findings during COP28.

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