



Small islands ready for global spotlight and accelerated action at Antigua and Barbuda conference

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face major challenges—climate change, geographic remoteness, a narrow export base—that make them vulnerable to external economic, environmental, and social shocks.

But they also have innovative solutions, dynamic populations, and people ready to act.

Despite their challenges, SIDS have been moving forward with their sustainable development guided by the commitments of previous programmes of action, the SAMOA Pathway, and the Sustainable Development Goals. Now it's time for these islands to take the global spotlight and inspire a revitalized jolt of investment and commitment. The upcoming Fourth International Conference on SIDS (SIDS4), taking place in Antigua and Barbuda from 27 to 30 May, will bring together world leaders from SIDS and partner countries to tackle these pressing issues.

“Small Island Developing States represent a small percentage of the world’s population, but their fate has consequences for all of us,” said Li Junhua, the head of UN DESA who will serve as the Secretary-General of the SIDS4 Conference.

The 39 SIDS are small in size but big in ambition.

The major outcome of the conference will be an intergovernmentally agreed outcome document: The [Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS \(ABAS\)](#)—a Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity. This document will set out the sustainable development aspirations of small islands for the next 10 years and the support required from the international community to achieve them.

Their priorities include building resilient economies; fostering safe, healthy and prosperous societies; achieving water, food and energy security; conserving biodiversity; protecting and sustainably using the ocean and its resources; and halting and urgently mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change.

To help SIDS meet these ambitions, the ABAS declaration will contain commitments to facilitate access to affordable and concessional finance, increase effectiveness of development finance, as well as scale-up biodiversity finance and climate action and support, including climate finance, in line with existing obligations and commitments.

In addition to eight plenary meetings, there will be five interactive dialogues, and five high-level special events focused on children and youth, gender equality, business networks, the private sector, and civil society.

All of these events aim to underscore the importance of small island countries and their people and set them on a path toward sustainable development. SIDS countries provide the world with culture, innovations, natural resources and Indigenous knowledge that play a critical role in the health of our shared society. Ensuring their resilient prosperity benefits us all.

The SIDS4 Conference, Mr. Li said, “is a pivotal moment for small islands and the whole world.”

For more information:

[4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States](#)





“Forests play a pivotal role in addressing the triple planetary crisis”

Forests cover nearly one-third of all land on Earth. They sustain us in numerous ways and are critical in global efforts to address the triple planetary crisis. Ahead of the UN Forum on Forests and the 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) this month,

we asked UN DESA’s Peter Gondo about the Forum, the role of forests in small islands and why we need healthy forests for our survival.

Can you tell us more about this year’s UN Forum on Forests and what outcomes we can expect?

“Sustainable forest management is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda, which recognizes forests are critical for life on land. The UN Forum on Forests is the only intergovernmental body within the UN system that deals with all aspects of forests and has universal membership. The Forum’s annual sessions take stock of the implementation of the [UN Strategic Plan for Forests and its six Global Forest Goals](#) and identify policy measures needed to accelerate progress towards sustainable forest management worldwide.

The year’s nineteenth session (UNFF19) will be held from 6 to 10 May, with a High-Level Segment on 9 May. This is a milestone meeting at which the Forum will undertake its midterm review of the International Arrangement on Forests. By assessing progress made and identifying gaps, the midterm review will chart the course towards 2030 – to ensure the achievement of the Global Forest Goals and accelerate progress towards the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). The key outcomes will be a High-Level Segment declaration and an omnibus resolution, which will include the outcome of the midterm review and the Quadrennial Programme of Work of the Forum for 2025-2028.”

One of the sessions will focus on forest-based solutions to the triple planetary crisis. Can you describe what some of these solutions are?

“Forests play a pivotal role in addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. When forests are healthy and well managed, they provide a myriad of ecosystem services, from regulating climate and providing habitat for 80% of terrestrial biodiversity, to cleaning and filtering our air and water and providing livelihoods and food security. Investments in forest-based solutions offer a cost-effective way to generate multiple biodiversity and social benefits. The triple planetary crisis is interconnected, and forests offer integrated solutions to address all three of the crises. For example, forest landscape restoration has countless benefits from reducing CO2 emissions and land degradation to increasing agricultural productivity and habitat for biodiversity.”

Later in May, the world will gather for the SIDS4 Conference. Can you share with our readers why forests are important for SIDS and how UN DESA is supporting efforts towards forest management in SIDS?

“Forests and trees are extremely important for the well-being of SIDS. They play a critical role in the availability and quantity of freshwater, in coastal protection (from waves caused by extreme weather such as hurricanes), in the conservation of biological diversity, in

particular endemic species and genetic variability, and economic development through trade in wood and non-wood forest products.

The [Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network](#), managed by UNFFS in UN DESA, has supported several SIDS in strengthening their capacity for sustainable forest management. This has included support in designing national forest programmes and national forest financing strategies aligned to national sustainable development frameworks, as well as strengthening the capacity of national experts in accessing forest financing from multi-lateral and other sources. To date, the Network has supported Jamaica, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Dominica, St Kitts and Nevis, and St. Lucia and is currently working with Suriname and will commence support to Comoros soon.”

For more information:

[UN Forum on Forests \(6-10 May\)](#)

[Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States \(SIDS4 Conference; 27-30 May\)](#)

Photo Credit: Forestry Department, Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change, Malawi



THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



4 opportunities for science, technology and innovation in Small Island Developing States

The challenges of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are well-known: their relatively small size, undiversified

economies, distance from large markets and trade routes, as well as extreme vulnerability to external shocks.

In the world of science, technology and innovation (STI), SIDS also face low levels of investment in research and development, inadequate access to financing, underdeveloped STI infrastructure, lack of high-quality disaggregated data and limited budgetary resources for education.

But these vulnerabilities have a flip side. Here are four STI-related challenges that can become opportunities for SIDS:

1. **The lack of “legacy” infrastructure can be a benefit when countries are seeking investment in new, green infrastructure.**

2. **The small size of SIDS governments and populations can make forging new partnerships and collaborations relatively simple, and awareness of new initiatives and approaches can spread relatively easily.** The [Union Island Environmental Alliance](#) in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, for instance, is mobilizing local communities to co-create strategies that build environmental and social resilience.

3. **SIDS innovation – inspired by necessity, developed over generations, and rooted in local and indigenous knowledge – can provide homegrown solutions.** In Vanuatu, for example, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme links local and traditional knowledge with technology, inviting communities to [track indicator species](#) on their smart phones and monitor climate change and biodiversity loss.

4. **Citizen science initiatives can fill gaps left by international research and data sets.** During the COVID-19 pandemic, the [Maua app](#) by SkyEye Pacific Limited, allowed local artisans and farmers to participate in the global market.

Partners can support organizations that are already capitalizing on these strengths. These are just four stars in a constellation of efforts.

Opportunities for collaboration, support and investment in STI in SIDS will be addressed in the upcoming Fourth International Conference on SIDS (SIDS4) in Antigua and Barbuda in May 2024. In addition, the upcoming STI Forum from 9 to 10 May 2024 with its focus on AI, climate and the SDGs, presents a critical opportunity to look toward the future and align global efforts towards sustainable development.

Learn more about the [STI Forum](#).

Learn more about the [SIDS4 Conference](#).

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Charting the course to a resilient and prosperous future for Small Island Developing States at the SIDS4 Conference

By Li Junhua, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs; Secretary-General of the SIDS4 Conference

This month, the island nation of Antigua and Barbuda will host the [Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States \(SIDS4\)](#) – a pivotal moment for the international community to join in partnership with Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and work toward a more sustainable, prosperous and resilient future.

SIDS are home to more than 50 million people. Their livelihoods and identities are intertwined with the ocean, as stewards of its biodiversity and resources.

While rich with cultural heritage and natural diversity, SIDS face structural vulnerabilities that constrain their sustainable development. For them, climate change, weather-related disasters, and economic and ecological vulnerability are much more than theoretical concepts, and they demand urgent action.

The haunting spectre of rising seas, the trail of devastation left by hurricanes and cyclones that are increasing in intensity and frequency, and the burden of scarce resources and fragile ecosystems paint a sobering picture not only for the future of small islands, but for us all.

We will gather in Antigua and Barbuda – a nation on the front line of the climate crisis – to listen to the voices of SIDS and to join their push for transformative change.

Since the adoption of the [SAMOA Pathway](#) in 2014, SIDS have carved an inspiring path, pioneering renewable energy solutions, championing sustainable tourism, and spearheading marine conservation efforts. Yet, significant obstacles remain for these countries to achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) by 2030. Chief among these challenges is the rapidly accelerating impact of climate change.

The SIDS4 Conference is our chance to take stock of hard-won progress and develop SIDS-specific solutions to the world's most pressing problems.

The Conference will adopt the [Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS](#), which sets the SIDS' development objectives for the next ten years and outlines the support required from the international community to achieve them.

The outcome and implementation of this fourth SIDS Conference will build on previous SIDS development frameworks including the SAMOA Pathway, the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation, and Barbados Programme of Action.

Among the objectives set for the decade are a focus on urgently mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change, building resilient economies capable of weathering future crises, fostering safe, healthy, prosperous and productive societies, and conserving biodiversity. Improving access to concessional finance is also a major objective that would enable them to invest in their future without crippling debt burdens.

The Conference will also push for action towards genuine gender equality, affordable and sustainable energy for all, with a focus on safeguarding the future for young people in SIDS.

The event will also shine a spotlight on the innovations and best practices borne from the ingenuity and determination of island communities in the face of adversity. We will learn from the experiences of SIDS and their partners in overcoming challenges, inspiring us all to redouble our efforts.

While the international community gears up for the [Summit of the Future](#) in September and its focus on a renewed multilateral system, SIDS4 offers a moment to foster global solidarity, strengthen international cooperation, and mobilize resources to address the unique vulnerabilities faced by SIDS.

As SIDS4 Conference Secretary-General, I reaffirm the United Nations unwavering commitment to SIDS.

We must use the Conference as a catalyst for renewed partnerships, innovative financing mechanisms, and concrete actions that will allow these extraordinary island nations and their people to build a more resilient and sustainable future. A future that leaves no island behind.

This is a moment of real possibility. For over thirty years, SIDS voices have resonated from Barbados to Mauritius and Samoa. The aspirations of SIDS have risen with every programme, strategy, pathway, and agenda that the world has adopted. The waves of hope that started on those faraway shores will carry us to Antigua and Barbuda as we set sail into the next chapter of the SIDS story.



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