



**Wilton
Park**

Report: SIDS Future Forum 2026

Tuesday 13 January – Thursday 15 January

In partnership with
Foreign, Commonwealth
and Development Office;
and Resilient and Sustainable
Islands Initiative at ODI
Global



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Executive summary

The SIDS Future Forum 2026 brought together policymakers, academics, and development partners to collectively diagnose the challenges and opportunities for implementation of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS). The Forum also served as a critical consultation on the inaugural State of SIDS Report, compiled by ODI Global's Resilient and Sustainable Islands Initiative (RESI), which will be published in 2026.

The discussions highlighted several core messages:

- Small Island Developing States (SIDS) need to transition by 2034 from survival-mode to self-sufficiency and long-term resilience, building on their assets, especially their ocean spaces and human capital.
- The ABAS implementation phase must move from advocacy to solutions, with institutions, mechanisms and financing structures designed “for SIDS, by SIDS”.
- Strong, well-resourced institutions – including a fully operational SIDS Centre of Excellence, a revitalised SIDS university consortium, and an institutionalised SIDS political platform – are essential to turn commitments into outcomes.
- Digital transformation and data systems should sit at the centre of development strategies, not at the margins, enabling new economic models, better services and more effective international engagement
- Structural reforms to the international financial architecture, including use of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI), SIDS-sensitive debt reform, and a climate exception for ODA graduation, are critical to unlocking finance at the scale and terms needed.
- Collective and individual efforts across SIDS regions are needed to defend and reassert the SIDS special case, focusing on the value SIDS offer to humanity.

[Click here](#) to review recorded sessions

1. Background and objectives

The SIDS Future Forum is a biennial event, run by RESI at ODI Global. It brings SIDS stakeholders together to collectively reflect on common challenges and propose pathways that will help to advance sustainable development and resilient prosperity in SIDS.

Discussions were based on the latest scientific and policy research, compiled in a draft flagship ‘State of SIDS Report’, which will provide a baseline understanding of common challenges—identified 30 years ago — that are still present in SIDS; emerging issues affecting SIDS due to geopolitical shifts, accelerating climate change and other global and regional trends; advances and lessons from progress in sustaining development across SIDS regions; and opportunities for SIDS created by new technologies and institutions.

During the SIDS Future Forum, stakeholders sought to identify actionable next steps and critical points for engagement over the next two years, including to align support from development partners with SIDS priorities.



2. SIDS in a changing world order

SIDS face a complex “polycrisis” of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, economic shocks and rising debt burdens, all in a context of weakening multilateralism and geopolitical fragmentation. Their small size, exposure to climate hazards and limited diversification potential, are structural vulnerabilities that limit development opportunities and drive high costs, even where headline income levels appear relatively high. These challenges define the special circumstances of SIDS. At the same time, the extent of their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) make many SIDS large ocean states with unique environmental, cultural and strategic assets.

The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), adopted at the Fourth International Conference on SIDS (SIDS4), sets out a comprehensive framework for achieving sustainable development in the decade ahead. The agenda emphasises resilience, justice, partnerships and the need to reform global rules so that they recognise and respond to SIDS’ special circumstances. The ABAS calls for a ‘10-year sprint’ with the planet reaching critical thresholds and tipping points, there is a sense of urgency for SIDS to invest in action now that will safeguard their islands for decades to come.

The post-war liberal international order is increasingly under strain. This shift is deeply consequential for SIDS who have long relied on predictable trade routes and a rules-based multilateral system. It creates both risks and opportunities. There is a risk that their voices are drowned out as multilateral institutions become less relevant. There is an opportunity for SIDS to use digital tools and AI to tell their own stories, generate their own data and shape global narratives on climate, oceans, justice, health and trade.

The SIDS special case for sustainable development has been repeatedly affirmed, yet a question that was repeatedly raised was: “what is the ‘special’ in the special case?” amidst geopolitical competition, shrinking development assistance, and the claims of other groups to special treatment. Speakers stressed that SIDS cannot simply wait for the international system to adapt. They must continue to shape narratives, invest in partnerships that deliver, and be agile in the way they implement the ABAS and other international commitments. They acknowledged the important but changing role of international organisations that support SIDS, as they face deepening global changes.



3. Reaffirming SIDS special circumstances

Plenary and group discussions at the SIDS Future Forum were organised around the five themes of the ABAS, which are also the chapters of the State of SIDS Report 2026 (to be published later in the year). Lead authors presented the main findings from their chapters, as a starting point for joint reflection and analysis.

3.1. Resilient economies

The upcoming State of SIDS Report sets out an agenda for SIDS economies to shift from short-term survival to long-term resilience and prosperity. SIDS face structural challenges – such as high trade costs, narrow economic bases, and vulnerability to external shocks – but also see emerging opportunities in ocean-based sectors, sustainable tourism, aquaculture, agriculture, digital services and the creative economy.

Resilience will not be built through isolated innovations or projects; it requires coherent systems that connect initiatives into a durable economic architecture. Participants pointed to tools such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)'s Productive Capacities Index as a method of understanding the depth and

breadth of SIDS' options, but cautioned that any framework must fully reflect SIDS' realities.

SIDS should use their constraints as a design brief, developing economic models that work with smallness, remoteness and environmental limits, instead of trying to mimic large economies. This could mean focusing on high-value niches, regional value chains, digital platforms and knowledge-intensive sectors, supported by strong education systems and local innovation ecosystems.

Breakout discussions focused on what SIDS should aim for, with a focus on promoting greater economic self-sufficiency, gradually reducing the reliance on aid through partnerships, regional integration and SIDS-SIDS collaboration - focusing on what SIDS can do amongst themselves to promote their own goals. The development of comprehensive and shared regulatory and planning frameworks in key areas (including potentially a shared ocean strategy), was identified as an important enabling step.

The group identified some incremental and transformative changes needed to build resilient SIDS economies:

- The importance of regional integration as a tool to overcome some structural constraints, particularly in economies of scale, by pooling markets, regulatory capacity and infrastructure.
- Use inter-regional information sharing and institutional development to create an enabling environment for investment in SIDS.
- The significant potential of digital and technology powered growth in SIDS, as an avenue to overcome some structural challenges, and leapfrog development.
- The importance of building strong, context-appropriate education systems and non-traditional learning pathways to support local innovation ecosystems.
- The centrality of the ocean as a shared asset and source of future economic opportunity, requiring coherent regional and inter-regional strategies and governance.

Overall, discussion emphasised that SIDS should not treat digital technologies as add-ons, but build economic models with technology at the centre, including strategies for digital skills, data governance and platform development.



3.2. Safe, healthy and prosperous societies

Chapter 2 of the upcoming State of SIDS Report analyses social development in SIDS, including health, education, inequality, social protection and governance, all framed through a gender lens, and acknowledging the colonial legacies that have perpetuated specific inequalities. The chapter's strong opening and focus on persistent challenges was welcomed and called for further analysis of the political will, institutional capacities and broader governance environment in which social policies are advanced. Resilience and agency was also recognised, noting that SIDS societies remain vibrant, with communities caring for elders, raising children and sustaining cultural life, despite adversity.

Participants also questioned the ability of state institutions to effectively maintain governance, and drew attention to demographic dynamics, including ageing populations, youth out-migration, small domestic labour markets and the complex role of diaspora communities. These trends have major implications for social protection systems, health services, education planning and economic viability, yet are often poorly measured or discussed.

The breakout group on Chapter 2 emphasised the importance of centering social issues in development conversations within SIDS, which can often have a narrow focus on economic factors and climate change. The importance of enhancing SIDS self-sufficiency was also discussed: breaking the geographical and colonial barriers to become inter- and intra-regionally integrated.

There is a high level of heterogeneity on social issues across SIDS, with some facing ageing populations, while others have youthful populations and growing concerns about high youth unemployment levels. This diversity in experience adds complexity to discussions around achieving safe and healthy societies and makes lesson-learning across SIDS more difficult. Nonetheless, some common social issues were identified as being in need of increased attention across all SIDS:

- The cost and design of social protection systems in small, ageing societies where many people migrate for work and return later in life.
- New approaches to gender-based violence and criminal violence that are culturally sensitive and community-driven, including public health approaches (adopted in parts of the Caribbean).
- The burden of non-communicable diseases, brain drain among medical professionals, and emerging infectious disease threats.
- The situation of persons with disabilities, including genetic factors in small populations and the role of cultural attitudes.
- Growing SIDS job markets and increasing the number of attractive jobs for young people, as an avenue to both decrease brain drain and youth unemployment.

More purposeful data collection and analysis on these topics was called for, as discussion still heavily relies on anecdotal evidence.

Social welfare and support systems are particularly complex in SIDS due to cultural expectations around caring for oneself and community care structures. SIDS governments struggle to allocate funds to social protection systems, and regional or SIDS-wide social welfare and insurance schemes could help achieve scale and risk-sharing that individual states cannot achieve alone.

Overall, the group felt that many of the social challenges raised in the State of SIDS Report are well-known, but not always recognised or prioritised. Imaginative solutions and SIDS collaboration is needed to build advocacy and concrete action.



3.3. A secure future

The State of SIDS Report adopts a systems approach to security in energy, water, transport and critical infrastructure, seeing these as interconnected domains where risks and failures can cascade. Infrastructure in SIDS is largely concentrated along vulnerable coasts. Limited fiscal space means SIDS remain locked-in to expensive and fossil-fuel-dependent systems, with little room for experimentation.

The chapter on infrastructure positions energy as a cornerstone of security and self-sufficiency, noting that while many SIDS are investing in renewable generation, challenges remain around storage, grid planning and reliability, and the cost and availability of technology. Examples such as the Maldives – heavily reliant on imported diesel, yet exploring floating solar due to land scarcity – illustrate how geography, land constraints and legacy systems shape the pace and pathways of transition.

The importance of avoiding a narrow, siloed approach that treats each sector separately was stressed. SIDS need to cement planning and investment in health, emergency response, transportation, water, food and digital infrastructure systems. They also emphasised the need for legislative and regulatory reform to modernise outdated frameworks, and for better communication with citizens about the costs and benefits of energy and other transitions that may take years to materialise.

The breakout group emphasised the importance of focusing on forward-thinking solutions, based on information sharing, knowledge building, and innovation to leapfrog solutions for SIDS. However, there are difficulties in making development choices in SIDS - smaller economies make trade-offs and risks more significant. While less data, and heterogenous societies limit fully informed decision-making.

A number of opportunities were highlighted:

- The potential of private sector investment in sustainable development projects
- The importance of involving youth in decision making, knowledge sharing, and sustainable development
- Information sharing across SIDS, as well as with other nations in the Global South
- Developing SIDS-owned, inter-regional tools and institutions, including revitalising the SIDS university consortium to enable a re-imagining of SIDS futures

Overall, concerns were raised that current smaller-scale, gradual changes in energy systems and infrastructure are seeing SIDS falling behind. The need for substantial and transformative change to leap forward in sustainable development was emphasised.

3.4. Environmental protection and planetary sustainability

The State of SIDS Report frames SIDS as both acutely vulnerable to climate and biodiversity crises and as leaders in global environmental governance. It highlights SIDS' role in driving climate justice narratives, championing the establishment of a loss and damage fund, pushing for stronger language on common but differentiated responsibilities, and advancing legal strategies through the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion on state responsibility for climate change.

The chapter on environmental protection and planetary sustainability explores ocean governance and the blue economy, noting global governance gaps and market failures around overfishing, plastic pollution and emerging activities such as deep-sea mining. SIDS have called for precautionary moratoria on deep-sea mining, global caps on plastic production, and a carbon levy in international shipping to fund a just transition, underscoring their role as custodians of large ocean areas.

Plenary discussions centred around the heterogeneity within the SIDS group, including the particular challenges of atoll states, and the complexity and capacity demands of

innovative finance instruments such as blue bonds, debt swaps and biodiversity credits. SIDS emphasised a stronger focus on nature-based solutions, the integration of indigenous and local knowledge, and procedural justice – ensuring that rights-holders are meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lands and seas.

The breakout group discussed the importance of nuancing and balancing conversations around SIDS, ensuring they are not defined by vulnerability but there is a clear case for heightened support. SIDS were cast as major drivers of environmental solutions, whose stewardship benefits the entire planet. SIDS provide both moral guidance and policy innovation in international environmental and sustainability dialogues, but they cannot be solely responsible for solving global crises they did not cause.

There was strong interest in a range of action agendas:

- Further development of innovative financial mechanisms that work for SIDS including through SIDS cooperation and information sharing so they can learn from each other's experiences.
- Properly recognising and reflecting SIDS special circumstances, and using the recent ICJ Advisory Opinion to improve access to finance for resilience.
- Strengthening data systems and digital tools for environmental monitoring.
- Expanding nature-based solutions as a tool to address multiple issues facing SIDS, by supporting disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Building SIDS capacity to reduce reliance on external advisers, integrating local and indigenous knowledge, and involving local civil society actors in developing solutions.

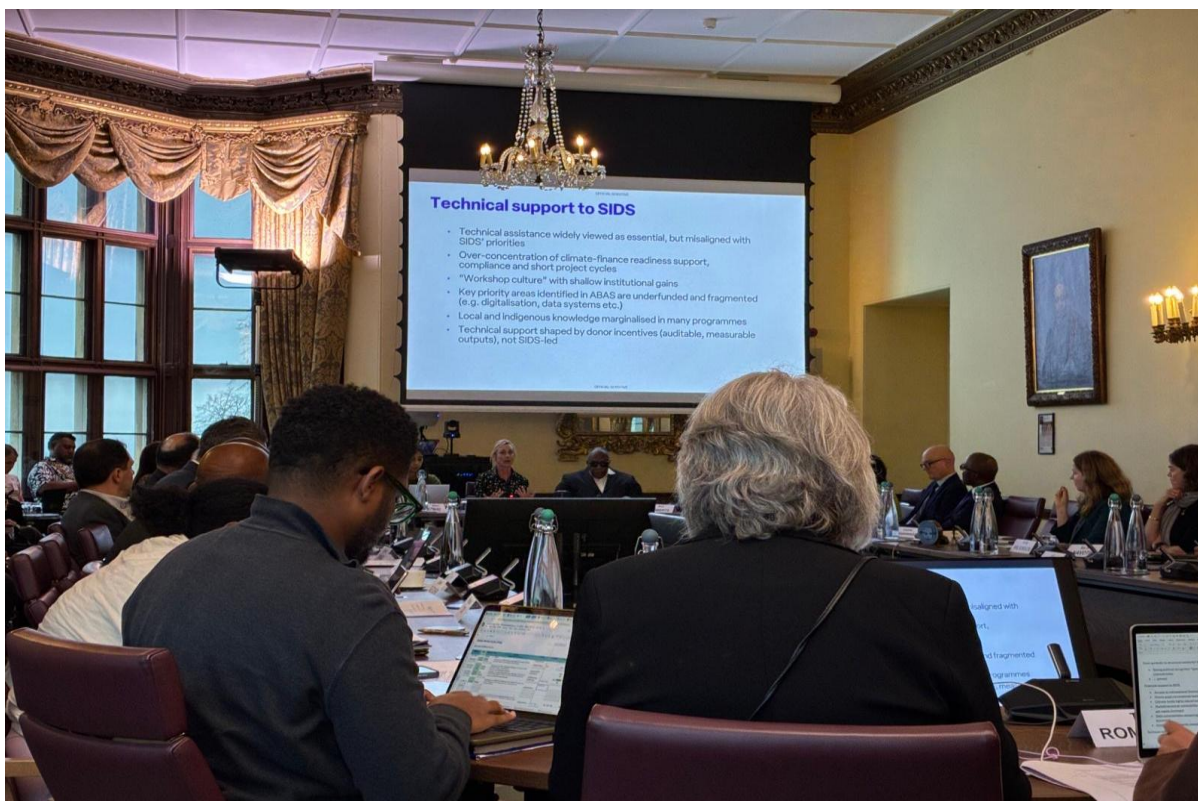
Overall, it was agreed that there is a growing number and diversity of examples of progress in sustainability and environment from across SIDS. New institutions or spaces may be needed to ensure that important conversations happen, and lessons can be taken from these examples.



4. Progressing the means of implementation

The State of SIDS report examines the means of implementation for SIDS to achieve their goals, primarily focusing on development partner support, and how this can be optimised in four key areas: financial, technical, political, and data and technology. The Report draws on findings from the [SIDS Perception Survey](#), which assesses SIDS' views of their development partners and types of support received.

The transition from symbolic support to structural solidarity was emphasised as an important next step for SIDS development partners. Moving beyond supportive statements and donor-led initiatives to substantial and structural reshaping that are SIDS-led.



4.1. Financial support

Financial support discussions focused on concerns around access to concessional finance, and growing debt crises in SIDS. Official Development Assistance (ODA) to SIDS is limited and decreasing, while at the same time needs are rising. Concessional finance is crucial, but many SIDS struggle to access it due to eligibility criteria based on gross national income and complex application processes.

Several priorities were proposed:

- Decolonising financing and disaster support, prioritising facilities and funds designed by SIDS for SIDS
- Operationalising the MVI for allocation and eligibility decisions, so that structural vulnerability conditions are reflected.
- Developing a SIDS-sensitive sovereign debt architecture, including climate- and disaster-linked instruments, debt pauses after shocks, and targeted debt reduction.
- Exploring carbon taxes, financial transaction taxes and solidarity levies that could create predictable funding streams.
- Simplifying and standardising access to climate and development funds

Innovative instruments such as blue bonds, debt-for-nature swaps and biodiversity credits were seen as promising but challenging. They often depend on high transaction capacity, complex structuring and significant external advisory input, which many SIDS cannot sustain. Participants stressed the need to share experiences – including failures – across SIDS and to build in-house capacity so that SIDS can design and manage instruments on their own terms.

4.2. Technical support

Responsive technical support can help to reduce reliance on expensive, external experts; instead, creating SIDS experts with greater local knowledge.

Several concerns were raised with the way capacity support is currently delivered:

- A strong concentration of support for climate finance access, neglecting other important areas for technical support
- Marginalisation of Indigenous and local knowledge
- A workshop culture, created through the prioritisation of donor objectives, such as reporting and timelines, rather than genuine focus on SIDS needs

SIDS-SIDS cooperation was emphasised as an avenue for hope, decreasing reliance on external technical support, and allowing SIDS agenda prioritising.



4.3. Data and technology support

SIDS limited access to localised data restricts their ability to implement evidence-based policy planning. While many collect substantial amounts of data, they face gaps in standardisation, storage, analysis and policy use. The SIDS Centre of Excellence, and in particular its Global Data Hub, was identified as a key instrument for improving this landscape.

Participants proposed that the Centre should:

- Support SIDS in building interoperable national data systems aligned with global standards but tailored to local needs.
- Rapid operationalisation of the Centre, as well as seeking formal legal recognition as an international institution
- Provide shared analytical tools, including AI-enabled platforms, that SIDS can use to plan investments, assess risks and monitor ABAS implementation.
- Facilitate training and peer-learning for national statisticians, planners and innovators.
- Integrate qualitative and indigenous knowledge alongside quantitative data.

Digital transformation more broadly was seen as an opportunity to redesign economic and social systems. A need to improve climate-related data was also identified, both to predict climate impacts, and improve loss and damage tracking, particularly through capturing secondary losses or those from smaller scale disasters. Developing greater ocean research and governance initiatives across SIDS was highlighted as another important area. Improved data quality will allow SIDS to better show their progress, and attract outcome-based financing.

3.4. Political support

Discussions on political support focused on trade and finance, climate change, oceans, and biodiversity. SIDS recent diplomatic wins and moral leadership across these areas was emphasised. However, translation of these diplomatic wins into consistent, clear, and practical support remains a challenge. While SIDS have secured significant support and achievements in principle, the practical outcomes of these are lacking. These moral victories and innovations should also be emphasised to make clear the value SIDS provide to the rest of the world.

The need to strengthen SIDS voice in the international community was emphasised, through greater collaboration across geographical regions. This provides the

opportunity for SIDS to set their own norms within the international system. Including institutions and the private sector will lay the foundation for this development. However, questions around balancing collective action and self-determination for SIDS were raised.

The “special circumstances of SIDS” must be more explicitly operationalised in global regimes, not just acknowledged rhetorically. This may require re-branding, better evidence on the unique cost structures SIDS face, and a more strategic approach to coalition-building within and beyond the G77 group.

Questions were raised about how the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and other SIDS platforms should evolve: whether to remain primarily advocacy-focused or to develop more formal institutional roles, and how to avoid duplication with regional organisations. There was also interest in proposals for a permanent SIDS presence on the United Nations Security Council and for new political spaces, including outside New York, where SIDS can regularly coordinate on ABAS implementation.



5. Priorities for the next two years of ABAS implementation

Discussions identified critical points for engagement to keep ABAS on track. Participants considered what they would like to see over the next two years, and what

concrete, actionable steps they plan to take over this time. In particular, participants wanted to see:

- Clear monitoring and reporting on the ABAS
- Revision of the ODA criteria for SIDS, with MVI being used in place of Gross National Income (GNI)
- Operationalised and internationally recognised SIDS Centre of Excellence
- Increased accessibility and amounts of financial support for SIDS
- International financial architecture reform, particularly around debt systems
- Greater SIDS collaboration, particularly building inter-regional cooperation
- A political platform for SIDS, not only in New York, but in other parts of the world
- Support SIDS university collaboration and introduce a SIDS-based curriculum in schools

Some actionable next steps were also put forward:

- Continue advocating for the use of MVI
- Propose an exemption for UN SIDS to allow continued ODA eligibility
- Increase government collaboration with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the private sector, as partners in sustainable development
- Incorporate data from CSOs into frameworks
- Integration of the ABAS implementation into national plans of SIDS and their partners
- Support the SIDS data hub, and share national data to contribute
- Leverage existing partnerships and introduce new partners to the SIDS agenda
- Strengthen the role of AOSIS, potentially into something more formal

6. A summary and transformative agenda

When considering what the future may look like for SIDS, several more transformative agendas emerged. These included:

- **From advocacy to solutions:** The core problems facing SIDS have been documented for decades; the task now is to build and scale SIDS-led institutions and mechanisms to tackle structural vulnerabilities.
- **Greater SIDS self-sufficiency:** Through SIDS-SIDS cooperation, with a focus on diversification and de-extractivisation, to allow SIDS to dictate their own sustainable development futures.

- **Centering SIDS in global institutions:** SIDS shaping key institutions, and increasing influence in global decision making.
- **Stronger cross-regional collaboration:** Focusing particularly on greater knowledge sharing and cooperation, through strengthened and potentially new institutions.
- **A sense of urgency:** The importance of significant and urgent action by SIDS as overshoot and tipping points approach.

Referred to by some as the ‘Davos for Small Island Developing States’, one outcome of the SIDS Future Forum was clear: the SIDS ‘special case’ for sustained development is under threat and needs defending. The State of SIDS Report 2026 will provide the evidence to do so, with greater clarity and focus, thanks to these discussions at Wilton Park. It will emphasise the need for improving resource flows to SIDS for the protection of global public goods; rectifying some of the most damaging pathologies of global extractivism; maximising opportunities presented by new technologies and AI; and enhancing cross-regional collaboration.

As one participant noted, the SIDS Future Forum, held at Wilton Park, follows “a tradition of listening as much as speaking, of valuing substance over spectacle, and of trusting that progress often comes not from grand declarations, but from sustained, thoughtful engagement.”

[Eliorah Malifa and Kira-Lee Gmeiner](#)

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enquiries@wiltonpark.org.uk

Switchboard: +44 (0)1903 815020

Wilton Park, Wiston House, Steyning,
West Sussex, BN44 3DZ, United Kingdom

wiltonpark.org.uk

