



CTA-019- Small Island Developing States (SIDS), -Worlds Oceans

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Vic Ferguson

The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation

281.886.7428

P.O. Box 311117

Houston Texas 77231

2.14.13

Oceans play an invaluable role to support the livelihoods of everyone on this planet. Their importance cannot be emphasized enough, as they provide us with priceless amounts of goods and services. They also play a vital role in the health of our planet and its capacity to adapt to climate change. Here are some quick facts to consider:

- Marine activities account for US\$ 2.7 trillion per year (about 5% of our global GDP)
90% of all goods around the world are shipped by sea
- The weather prediction networks depend on ocean information for their projections
- More than half of the human population lives in the coastal zone (within 100 km of coast); By 2025 this is projected to reach 75%
- Fisheries provide 1 billion people with their main source of animal protein
- 49 World Heritage sites are inscribed for their coastal or marine values
- Coral reefs provide protection against strong tides, tropical storms and hurricanes
- Oceans have absorbed 50% of human emissions of CO₂, but the rate of absorption is slowing
- CO₂ is making oceans more acid with consequences on marine ecosystems like coral reefs



Photo Credit: Steve Conry

Oceans play a particularly important role for small island developing states (SIDS), which are low-lying islands or coastal countries in the Caribbean, South Pacific, Indian Ocean and off the coast of Africa. You can find a list of SIDS [here](#). While small islands depend greatly on oceans for food and economic activity,



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oceans also pose a looming threat to the very survival of many countries (hurricanes, sea level rise, ocean acidification, etc.)

SIDS will be disproportionately affected by climate change since they contribute the least to greenhouse gas emissions, yet do not have the capacity to deal with worsening climactic events. Namely, their geographic, political, economic and social structures make them unable to adequately cope. SIDS are generally vulnerable to external global economic factors, such as economic and natural shocks beyond their control. They also lack economies of scale, are excessively dependent on international trade, have relatively high costs for transportation and energy services and have limited human, institutional, and financial capacities to manage and use natural resources sustainably. On top of these factors are the ever increasing population and pressures on vulnerable natural resources.

SIDS are scrambling to create better national policies, development plans for sustainable development and adaptation plans to climate change, but generally lack the technical capacity. Obtaining ocean data (temperature, sea level, salinity, marine life, geophysical qualities, etc) is critical to be able to make informed decisions. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO has many programs underway to facilitate the collecting and sharing of ocean data, but progress is slow and there is still much to do.

SIDS have been lobbying their case at international meetings in an effort to lower carbon emission standards, and increase awareness of their particular situation. Unfortunately, SIDS have a small voice during climate negotiations, and are generally unable to influence the decisions at large international meetings. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) – or more commonly RIO+20 – will be held from June 4th to 6th 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. SIDS will have the chance to make their case on the global platform, which you can follow here. Hopefully leaders of developed countries will recognize the situation and concede to make a change.

About the author:

Lauren Donnelly earned her B.Sc in Biology and International Development Studies from Dalhousie University and her M.Sc. in Integrated Water Resources Management from McGill University. She has vast work experience, most recently working in capacity building, climate change and ocean conservation in



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Jamaica. Lauren enjoys discussing and debating environmental issues, and translating scientific information for non-scientists.

- [Greenhouse gases at record high – Oceans and Forests can't take much more](#)
- [Exploring Ocean Acidification](#)
- [Cool It \(2010\): A MUST See Movie on Adapting to a Changing Climate](#)
- [Fertilizing the Oceans: Is it a Good Thing?](#)
- [Danielle Meitiv Explains Sea-Level Rise](#)