



PSA-023- Small island developing states (SIDS)-Worlds Oceans

How do we save coral reefs?

Vic Ferguson

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## **Small island states told to build wider ocean expertise**

*Image credit: Greenpeace/Daniel M Ocampo*

Speed read

- Small island nations must think beyond their coastal waters and help manage oceans



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- Collaboration could bolster their marine science to prevent ocean degradation
- Next year's UN conference will hear recommendations for strengthening science in island state

With rising concern about ocean degradation and the sustainable use of ocean resources, small island states must build scientific expertise that goes beyond their national needs and that benefits the oceans generally, a meeting of UN scientific experts has heard.

Small island developing states (SIDS) are the custodians of vast ocean spaces that are important for global [food security](#), [biodiversity](#), natural resources and [carbon sequestration](#), and broader sustainable ocean policies will in turn enhance their own economic development, say experts.

Developing such policies will require a new approach to ocean resources that goes beyond the current focus on coastal development and [fisheries](#) in individual countries, and will require a significantly higher marine science capacity, the meeting, held last month (14-17 May) in New York, United States, heard.

Most [small island] states have a territorial focus. More value must be put on the oceans around them, Patrick McConney a senior lecturer in marine resource management planning at the University of the West Indies, tells *SciDev.Net*.

The meeting noted a lack of ocean experts in SIDS, meaning there was insufficient expertise to strengthen their ocean policies.

Venugopalan Ittekkot, former director of the Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Ecology in Bremen, Germany, says: There are still very few SIDS with a national ocean policy, and they need scientific advice to develop that.

Ittekkot carried out a survey on small island states marine science capacity and marine [technology transfer](#) for UN scientific body the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), which was presented at the New York meeting.

According to Ittekkot, most ocean-related programmes are focused on [climate change impacts](#), but there is also a need for monitoring, mapping and management of ocean and coastal space.

Collaboration was a running theme at the meeting, with the consensus that small island states ability to use marine technology will need to be enhanced through [cooperation](#) with each other and with other developing countries.

[States] with 50,000 to 60,000 people cannot be expected to have a large team to manage their resources. In these cases, they will probably need to have programmes as a consortium with other countries nearby, Mitrasen Bhikajee, IOC director/deputy executive secretary tells *SciDev.Net*.

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His country, Mauritius, is already collaborating on ocean policy initiatives with neighboring Indian Ocean state the Seychelles.

But for countries to be able to receive and use marine technologies from other countries, they need to develop their capacity to use and to manage them, he says, adding that this is particularly the case in the Pacific.

There is also a need for additional resources, particularly if data must be gathered on the open sea, as ocean research is costly. You need infrastructure such as research labs on land. You need research vessels and these are extremely expensive, Ittekkot says.

Ittekkot adds that the SIDS will need not only technical assistance, but also help in building local capacity in ocean science, policymaking and legal affairs pertaining to law of the sea though an international cooperation by donors, the UN and other countries.

And such collaboration has other benefits.

SIDS are moving towards being a bloc. They can use this to negotiate technology transfer, says Nanjundappa Srinivasan, in charge of innovation management at the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology of the UNs Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

He says that pure science is a luxury for many small island states and that marine science needed to be linked to technologies that were adapted to local conditions.

Among the recommendations of the experts at the New York meeting that will be presented at regional meetings prior to the UNs Third International Conference on SIDS in September 2014 in Samoa is the option of establishing regional IOC centers, closer to the SIDS, with science and legal training related to law of the sea a major component.

However, one of the strongest recommendations is likely to be the need to develop scientific expertise with the backing of regional institutions and the IOC to help strengthen national ocean policies and to help SIDS understand the value of their marine resources and how to maintain them.

The New York meeting was organized by the IOC and the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

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