



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

2005

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Sustainable Development in Small Islands

Representing 20% of UNESCO's Member States, small islands are recognised as some of the most vulnerable countries in the world.

Spread across the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans, and the Caribbean and Mediterranean Seas, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) form distinctive groups. Each has its own unique characteristics, yet they share many common features. Recognised as some of the most biologically and culturally diverse countries in the world – they are also extremely vulnerable. They face multiple challenges including, but not limited to, small land size, large exclusive economic zones, vulnerability to natural hazards and disasters, limited natural resources, heavy dependence on imports, isolation from markets, and increasing tourism pressures. Many SIDS also figure in the list of Least Developed Countries. However, despite the many challenges, the people who call these islands home are resourceful, adaptable and resilient.

UNESCO undertakes many activities within its mandates and fields of expertise that focus on SIDS. Subsequent to the Barbados Conference on the Sustainable Development of SIDS (1994), the different sectors and units reviewed their programmes of work relating to SIDS, with the goal of contributing to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. Relevant activities and projects have spanned a wide range of technical fields and areas of concern, including distance education, basic and life-long

education, environmental education and education for sustainable development, freshwater resources, global sea-level monitoring, renewable energy, natural hazards and disasters, coastal area management, local and indigenous knowledge, biodiversity conservation, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, poverty alleviation, national and regional enabling environments and use of modern communications technologies to mitigate problems of geographic isolation.

Recognising the special importance of inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary action for coastal regions in general and for islands in particular, the Environment and Development in Coastal Regions and Small Islands (CSI) Platform was established by UNESCO in 1996. The objective of CSI is to contribute to environmentally sustainable, socially equitable, culturally respectful and economically viable development in coastal regions and in small islands. Since its inception, CSI has promoted collaborative work among the five Programme Sectors, including the field offices and functions as the UNESCO focal point for the review and further implementation of the UN Programme of Action for the sustainable development of SIDS.

Some specific projects led by CSI that promote sustainable island living include (i) Small Islands Voice, (ii) Youth Visioning for Island Living, (iii)



Fishing village
(©Ismail Abdulla/Maldives)

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The Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the Mauritius Strategy

Following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the special circumstances of SIDS have increasingly gained global attention. The 1994 United Nations Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados, established a Programme of Action addressing 15 priority areas for sustainable island development. Ten years later, a United Nations International Meeting was held to review progress and refine further implementation of this Programme of Action (Mauritius, January 2005). The main outcome was the Mauritius Strategy – a document that reaffirmed the continued validity of the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action while identifying new priorities and emerging issues. This review process also highlighted that while several SIDS are effectively addressing and managing some aspects of their vulnerability with progress in many priority areas, much remains to be done. UNESCO will continue to mainstream the needs of SIDS in all the Organization's activities; and promote the holistic, integrated approach to sustainable island living and development, through intersectoral action with an intergenerational perspective at the interregional level

Sandwatch and (iv) Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

Launched in 2002, **Small Islands Voice (SIV)** (www.smallislandsvoice.org) is a cross-cutting project involving small islands in the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. Small Islands Voice focuses on sustainable living and development activities at the local level through 'Communities in Action', and sharing of these experiences interregionally via exchanges and the media: print, radio, video, television and the internet.

Youth Visioning for Island Living (www.youthvisioning.org). Supported by many organizations at the national, regional and inter-regional level, Youth Visioning seeks to build capacity among island youth; to give youth a voice in sustainable development matters; and to make positive changes at the local and national level. From creating awareness about substance abuse in the Solomon Islands to starting a children's environmental programme and playground in Jamaica and integrating disabled youth into society in Mauritius, the list of creative, dynamic Youth Visioning projects underway around the world is growing.

Sandwatch (www.sandwatch.org) started in the Caribbean in 1999 as an initiative of UNESCO Science sector (SC/CSI) and the Education sector (ASPNet). With the help of UNESCO Field Offices and National Commissions

around the world, NGOs, schools and community members, Sandwatch has become a global activity involving islands as far apart as Cook Islands in the Pacific, Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, and the Bahamas in the Caribbean. Sandwatch provides a new vision of education, one that seeks to empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future. In particular, it develops skills relating to critical thinking and conflict resolution, and instills a sense of caring for beaches and the environment

The LINKS initiative (www.unesco.org/links), which has evolved from a cross-cutting project to a regular component of the Science programme, seeks to empower local and indigenous communities by advocating local knowledge and practice as key resources for sustainable development. The project reinforces the role of local communities in biodiversity governance and ensures the continuing dynamism of indigenous knowledge by strengthening its transmission from elders to youth. LINKS activities address Pacific and Indian Ocean islands with a particular emphasis to date on the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Mauritius, Rodrigues and La Reunion.

To Find Out More

Coastal Regions and Small Islands Platform:
www.unesco.org/csi/

UNESCO and small islands developing States:
www.unesco.org/en/sids