



# Small Islands **Voice**

the **word** on the

# street





# What is Small Islands Voice?

**Simply, people from small islands speaking their mind and making a difference.**

**F**or thousands of years, islands have inspired writers, poets and painters, and are seen by many as paradise on earth.

While it's true that there are many positive aspects about islands, the people who live on islands cope with a range of daily challenges, such as limited access to goods and services, high costs of living, limited job and schooling opportunities, and inadequate health services. And issues like improper waste management, fragile ecosystems, over-dependence on tourism, loss of traditional values, and increased crime and violence, add to the pressure of small island living.

However, islanders have a lot to say on what it's like to live in a small island - the good and the bad - and the kind of things that could be improved.

Through Small Islands Voice (SIV), which has been running since 2002, islanders from the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific have been speaking out about changes that have been taking place in their countries and how they would like to see their islands develop in the future.

Ongoing and planned activities of Small Islands Voice, ranging from HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns to helping communities plan the future of their neighbourhoods, aim to encourage islanders to play an active role in determining their islands' progress.

And enhancing channels of communication, at all levels, from the personal to the international, and from simple speech to high-tech transmissions, is crucial to this goal. In these ways, islanders can directly contribute to positive, long-lasting development in their islands for themselves and the generations to come.





# How Small Islands Voice works



**obtaining** islanders' views on environment and development issues at the **local** level through meetings, opinion surveys, talk shows and other activities. These are supported by radio, television and print media

**encouraging** young islanders to discuss environment and development issues among themselves using new technologies

[www.sivyouth.org](http://www.sivyouth.org)

username: *view*, password: *only*

[www.islandyouth.org](http://www.islandyouth.org)



**identifying** key issues emerging from these debates and channelling them back to the **local** level for action on-the-ground, and towards the **global** level, especially international programmes dealing with sustainable development of small islands

**debating** these issues **regionally** and **globally** through internet-based discussions

[www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)





# Voice

**“I thank you for the forum as I think it gives a great insight into the concerns of us all in small island territories.”**

*Anthony Garland, Turks & Caicos Islands, June 2003, [www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)*

## Do you live in a small island?

Tell us what you think, at SIV global forum:  
[www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)

**J**udging how the broader community feels on a given topic can often be hard to gauge. One way is to take the time to talk with individuals and record their responses.

Key issues covering environment, health, culture, tourism, development and others, are discussed in detail on the SIV global internet forum ([www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)) with many thousands of readers from islands in the three regions and beyond.

Opinion surveys have been conducted in Cook Islands and Palau in the Pacific, Maldives and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, and St Kitts & Nevis and St Vincent & the Grenadines in the Caribbean; 1% of each territory's population was sampled. The issues identified were then listed in order of priority.





# of the people

## Issues common to all three regions (Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific), expressed by islanders themselves:

**Economy:** high cost of living, high taxes, reduced spending power, increased poverty, sluggish economy, economic stress, national debt, economic stability, shortage of foreign exchange, foreign investment

**Increased crime and violence:** increased crime rates especially violent crime (a majority of forum respondents considered that societal changes including education were necessary to solve the problem), public safety, revised penalties for criminals

**Employment:** lack of jobs, little job security, low wages and salaries, unfair hiring practices, increased number of foreign workers

**Tourism:** over-dependence on tourism and foreign ownership of tourism enterprises (65% of forum respondents considered that large-scale foreign investment does not benefit small islands)

**Health care:** inadequate public health facilities, little attention devoted to mental health, increasing rates of HIV/AIDS

**Education:** schools and facilities in need of upgrading, expansion of educational opportunities at all levels, access to tertiary education in islands, vocational training and special needs education

**Decline in moral and/or traditional values:** breakdown in moral fibre of society, eroding traditional values and practices, decline in traditional leadership

**Infrastructural development:** upgrading and construction of new houses, roads, airports, seaports, and telecommunication facilities are much appreciated but still not sufficient for growing needs

**Environment:** waste management, pollution, deforestation, drainage, coastal erosion (most respondents to the global forum consider that, provided environmental concerns are taken into account, new infrastructure is beneficial)

**Good governance:** political corruption, political greed, political victimization; as well as events in larger countries, and a desire for international peace



# Young islanders...

“Through the process of open discussions and free exchange of ideas we can all work together to make our island and our nation a better place – to live and to visit.”

*Students from Nukutere College, Cook Islands, [www.sivoyouth.org](http://www.sivoyouth.org)*

## Young and living on an island?

Check out: [www.sivoyouth.org](http://www.sivoyouth.org)  
username: *view*, password: *only*  
and [www.islandyouth.org](http://www.islandyouth.org)

Young islanders have specific and very real concerns of their own. Through talking and listening, via workshops, national surveys and an internet forum, the concerns of youths are taken into account.

The Small Islands Voice youth internet forum is a way for young islanders to share ideas, discuss and learn about each other's way of living across the three regions. The forum involves 38 schools in 12 islands throughout the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Students have been discussing subjects ranging from hydroponic agriculture and teenage pregnancy to the dangers of asbestos and the loss of island traditions.

Some of the main issues of concern expressed by young islanders are:

- teenage pregnancy
- health, especially HIV/AIDS
- young males at risk
- violence in the community
- substance abuse (alcohol, smoking, drugs)
- unemployment
- education
- lack of entertainment and sport facilities
- solid waste disposal





# Speak up and be heard!

## Sexual issues

Early sexual activity is often seen as prestigious among young people and this exposes them to grave health risks. HIV/AIDS is a serious concern in all the islands.

“In Palau, teenage pregnancies are almost a tradition – the kids are then raised by the grandparents. This has to change, starting with the (grand)parents.”

*Jonathan Isechal, Palau, November 2002*

Other aspects of sexual behaviour that are of concern include incest, molestation, prejudices with regard to homosexuality, indecent dress and a rise in prostitution among schoolgirls.

The islands are attempting to tackle these problems in a variety of ways through youth activities, education and family life programmes. For instance, in Seychelles, the government provides some measure of support to young girls after having a baby so that they can continue their school studies.

“In St Kitts & Nevis, and in other Caribbean islands also, parenting leaves much to be desired. Parents often focus on protecting girls and they leave boys to their own devices; young men are lured to drugs by promises of money and material goods.”

*Dauna Manchester, St Kitts & Nevis, November 2002*

## Young males at risk

The issue of young males at risk received great attention in the forums and surveys. Young males are more likely to drop out of the education system especially after the age of about 14 years.

In outer islands where there may be no secondary schools, e.g. Maldives and Cook Islands, students have to move to a more central island for secondary education, and then the dropout rate among males and females may be very high.

Various efforts are being made to target males at risk, but with limited success. This is due to the fact that often the males who abandon the school system do not take part in organised youth activities or sports. Technical and vocational courses, special skills training, acting and music groups are all being tried in an effort to address this problem.

## Youth Visioning for Island Living

Young islanders are invited to take part in the ‘Youth Visioning for Island Living’ process, whereby they can articulate how they want their islands to develop in the future and how they plan to help make this happen. Launched in 2004, the visioning centres around three broad themes:

- Life and love in islands: island lifestyles and cultures
- My island home: safeguarding island environments
- Money in my pocket: economic and employment opportunities

For more details, see: [www.islandyouth.org](http://www.islandyouth.org)



# Action

**“When small island issues are presented in international fora, they take on a glossy, non-urgent character. They don’t have the same impact anymore. I am hoping that Small Islands Voice can help take us back to basics.”**

*Lolita Gibbons, Palau, November 2002*

Over the years there’s been a lot of talk at the international level about small islands and the kind of challenges they face, ranging from rising sea levels to the limitations of small market economies.

In response, an international conference was held in Barbados in 1994 so that small islands could better plan for their future. This event resulted in a Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

In 2005, the international community is meeting in Mauritius to review progress since 1994 and to plan future action. In this regard, Small Islands Voice is playing an important role by ensuring that the collective concerns of the general public of small islands are given due consideration in the 2005 meeting, and in the all-important follow-up phase.







# in small islands

## The future is in our hands ...

**A** sentiment expressed by islanders across the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific (via national opinion surveys and internet discussion forums at [www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org) and [www.sivyouth.org](http://www.sivyouth.org)) was that the general public should take an active role in planning for their island's future development.

"We are starting the programme with a pilot group of seven volunteer hotels, ranging from veterans like the Northolme and Coral Strand on Mahe to newcomers like Lemuria on Praslin. They will help us establish a more integrated, proactive approach to beach management by regularly measuring the profiles of their respective beaches."

*Ronny Jumeau, Minister of Environment, Seychelles, July 2003*

An 'active role' need not involve lots of money nor resources. Passion, creativity and commitment to a vision for a desirable long-lasting island existence are essential. Small Islands Voice has highlighted many positive examples of local action.

"We are now swimming in excessive garbage, with the threat of epidemics that will be harmful to our children, youth and older people without any appropriate management in sight. For this reason, I ask 'Isn't there some way in which, especially the Caribbean islands, could work together and cooperate in solving the threatening garbage problems in our islands?'"

*Dulph W. Mitchell, San Andr s Archipelago, Colombia, May 2004, [www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)*

"We do some recycling of our own by reusing glass bottles found around the school compound to make benches and we also make use of salvaged wood to make the back and sitting rest for these benches. These benches are made simply from crushed glass, cement and cinnamon wood. They are used by students for eating lunch, studying or just to relax. We also use plastic bottles from soda beverages to mark the perimeter for the athletic track for sports."

*Students from Bequia Community High School, St Vincent & Grenadines, April 2003, [www.sivyouth.org](http://www.sivyouth.org)*



# Caribbean

**“Parents have a pivotal role to play in helping us to reclaim our country. They need to talk to their children and encourage non-violent methods to resolve differences.”**

*View from a Caribbean island, July 2003, [www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)*

**A**s a part of Small Islands Voice, specific activities have been taking place in The Bahamas, Cuba, Dominica, St Kitts & Nevis, St Vincent & the Grenadines and the San Andrés archipelago of Colombia, with the assistance of local co-ordinating committees. And through the Small Islands Voice global forum ([www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)), all the Caribbean countries have been exchanging and discussing ideas.

In the Caribbean region, the main priority concern – based on opinion surveys, meetings and internet forums – was identified as a group of social issues covering drug abuse, crime, violence and especially gang violence, and unemployment. Another important issue is the sale of land to foreigners.

**“As more and more of our island’s land is sold to foreigners, we are pushed out. Building their homes and acting as property rental caretakers for these homes does provide an income for islanders - but we want to be able to have some land for ourselves and our grandchildren, too!”**

*Students from Hopetown School, Abaco, The Bahamas, March 2004, [www.sivyouth.org](http://www.sivyouth.org)*

**“From the establishment of the Dubique telecentre to its operation today, great progress has been made. Individuals and the community have benefited by learning, in this ever changing world, about basic computer skills. The joy of learning these skills has been expressed by the recipients through their constant use of the equipment.”**

*Jerminia Dennis, Dominica, December 2003*

Besides collecting grassroots opinions on environment and development issues, and involving the islands in the youth internet forum, several activities have been organized in each island, including establishing and strengthening internet centres in San Andrés, Dominica and St Kitts & Nevis; conducting a youth visioning activity in The Bahamas, and collaborating with the Hotel and Tourism Association in St Vincent & the Grenadines to monitor marine activities in Admiralty Bay, Bequia.



# voices

## Key issues in the Caribbean region\*

- ! social issues: drug abuse, violence especially gang violence, unemployment
- ! economy: high cost of living, high taxes, national debt
- ! health care and HIV/AIDS
- ! education
- ! impacts of development on the environment, e.g. habitat destruction, pollution, foreign ownership of beachfront land

\*As determined by opinion surveys, local meetings and forum discussions

"We agree with you that drug abuse is a very serious issue that needs a lot of attention. Here in Bequia illegal and legal drugs are no strangers to our land. The use of marijuana and cocaine are becoming very rampant each and every day in a small society like ours."

*Form 4, Bequia Community High School,  
St Vincent & the Grenadines, June 2003,  
[www.sivyouth.org](http://www.sivyouth.org)*



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# Indian Ocean

**“By using the concept of ‘sustainability’ in every approach to social and economic development, small island states will be able to address the issue of illegal long-line fishing in their territories successfully.”**

*Alex Perrine, April 2004, Rodrigues, [www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)*

Various Small Islands Voice activities have been taking place in four Indian Ocean islands: the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Zanzibar with the assistance of local co-ordinating committees. And other islands have been exchanging views and discussing ideas through [www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org).

In Mauritius, a civil society workshop was held in late 2003 to review progress on the Programme of Action for Small Island Developing States. This was organized by the Centre for Documentation, Research and Training on the South West Indian Ocean and involved representatives from Comoros, Maldives, Mauritius, RŽunion and Rodrigues. Participants from trade unions, fisher associations and human rights groups, among others, pledged to play an active role in the Programme of Action.

Discussions and consultations have also been held in the Seychelles and, in addition, hotels have been involved in implementing a national beach monitoring programme, and newsletter and pamphlets have been published. A workshop was organised with youth workers to find out the most pressing issues facing young islanders of today. These included sex, access to recreational activities and facilities,

“Development should be done in harmony with the environment and also take into account the social fabric and culture of the country. A very good example is the Seychelles where the environment is of prime importance and development projects are implemented in harmony with nature.”

*Rasack Nayamuth, Mauritius, October 2002, [www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)*

drugs and alcohol, employment, politics, culture, education and the environment.

Activities in the Maldives have focused on Baa Eydhafushi where waste management has been identified as a major problem. Before deciding on the most appropriate action, young people on the island will undertake a survey of the types of waste produced.





# voices

## Key issues in the Indian Ocean region\*

- ! health facilities
- ! sanitation and waste disposal
- ! social issues: loss of community spirit, substance abuse and violence, unemployment
- ! economic concerns: foreign exchange, the need to attract more investment and industry
- ! environmental concerns: beach erosion, drainage, pollution

\* As determined by opinion surveys, local meetings and forum discussions

"A large number of islanders leave the islands every year to find work and a better lifestyle overseas. Many of them never return to reside. The key to technical and skilled jobs lies fundamentally in the educational system; people have to be brought in from overseas to play these roles. Industries and factories are lacking, so every consumer good is imported, and therefore tends to be very expensive."

*Students from Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll Education Center, Maldives, November 2003, [www.sivyouth.org](http://www.sivyouth.org)*

### AIMS region: Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea

The international community has come to know this group of seas and oceans as the 'AIMS region'. While the focus of Small Islands Voice activities has largely targeted the Indian Ocean, people from the other areas are involved in online discussions via the global forum: [www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org).

Indian Ocean

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# Pacific

**“... I am very much for improving the quality of life for those who choose to live on Aitutaki, Cook Islands. For me the issue is more about sustainability in 20 years time when I still intend to be here.”**

*Michael Henry, Aitutaki, Cook Islands, November 2003, [www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)*

**S**mall Islands Voice has been active in the Pacific in a number of ways: the establishment of island committees in Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, and Samoa to co-ordinate and implement actions on-the-ground; country-wide opinion surveys on environment and development issues; and inventories of existing communication channels. And through the Small Islands Voice global forum ([www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)), the exchange of ideas has involved islanders in many other Pacific islands as well.

In the Cook Islands, the participation of the outer islands in the youth internet forum has proved a real success. In particular, Mangaia College (the island of Mangaia is 200 km from the main island of Rarotonga) became the first school without internet access to participate in the forum by fax. According to the school's Principal, Ms Sue Ngatokorua, "Our students are gaining a lot from the Small Islands Voice project and it is a tremendous educational opportunity for them."

In Fiji, the Pacific Centre for Sustainable Development at the University of the South Pacific has developed a partnership with Small Islands Voice, the Chemistry Outreach

to Schools and the Ocean Futures Society, to find out community concerns and assist with appropriate activities, e.g. 'Clean X concept' where X may be a school, a community area, or a park.

Another partnership, also in Fiji, has been established with Live and Learn Environmental Education, an organization focusing on 'education through participation' in Fiji and several other Pacific islands.

The Palau Conservation Society, with the support of Small Islands Voice, is undertaking a process of community visioning. The idea is that each community participates in 'visioning' the type of development it wants to see in the future. Then, through a collaborative process involving government and communities, master land-use plans will be prepared and implemented with the support of the community.



# voices

## Key issues in the Pacific region\*

- ! economy: high cost of living, economic downturns and migration, jobs and foreign workers
- ! eroding traditional values and leadership, loss of respect
- ! health care
- ! education
- ! environment: solid waste and pollution, deforestation, erosion

\*As determined by opinion surveys, local meetings and forum discussions



“At least 40-50% of people in Raki Raki receive dirty water daily. Some health effects derived from this are skin diseases such as scabies, which is very quick to spread. Another problem is that villagers often wash their clothes in the river, which flows towards the water pump. For the past few weeks a body of a dead man was found decaying and floating in the same river. After two days we came to know that we actually have drunk that water.”

*Students from Raki Raki Public High School, Fiji, September 2003, [www.sivoyouth.org](http://www.sivoyouth.org)*

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# Turning talk into action

**“... now is the time to act and to stand up to save our islands.”**

*High Chief Vaasiliifiti Moelagi Jackson, Savaii, Samoa, April 2003, [www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org)*

In November 2002, the Small Islands Voice inter-regional workshop was held in Palau, bringing together islanders from the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific - representing government, non-governmental organizations, youth, schools, and community groups. Together, they developed key elements for *turning talk into action* ...

## **Present a unified front for small islands**

Small islands need to present a strong, unified front with a shared voice, while also respecting differences and diversity

## **Implement good governance**

This requires a shared vision and a framework for collaborative decision-making for government and the general public, and should include educating and empowering women, youth and children as part of the process

## **Promote greater self-sufficiency**

In a world undergoing globalization, promote an overall ethic for greater self-sufficiency in relation to population growth, economic consumption and energy use

## **Strengthen social responsibilities and ethical codes**

Halt the decline in the moral and social fabric of society by developing, strengthening and enforcing social responsibilities, codes of conduct, and codes of ethics

## **Preserve traditions and culture**

Maintain and, in some cases, restore identity, dignity and self-esteem, by ensuring traditions and culture are upheld and citizenship is respected

## **Improve education systems**

Improve and strengthen job training modules, job placement programmes, mentoring, career guidance programmes, and school curricula

## **Address environmental issues at a local level**

While there are many environmental issues requiring attention, solid waste disposal was identified as common to all small islands. Effective action at the local level can reduce the scale of this and other environmental problems, although in the small island context it is not always possible to be profit-driven.

## **For more information:**

[www.smallislandsvoice.org](http://www.smallislandsvoice.org)

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To view this booklet online, please see:

<http://www.unesco.org/csi/smis/siv/pub/WordStreet.htm>

[www.sivglobal.org](http://www.sivglobal.org) and [www.sivyouth.org](http://www.sivyouth.org) have been established with the assistance of Scotland On Line.

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