



SIDS SUMMIT FOR HEALTH:

For a healthy and resilient future
in Small Island Developing States



World Health
Organization

28-29 June 2021

POLICY BRIEF

Climate Change and Health

The Challenge

Climate change undermines the environmental determinants of health, that is, clean air and water, sufficient food and adequate shelter, and increases the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events. Although all populations are at risk, some are more vulnerable than others; Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are at the front lines, experiencing a range of acute to long-term risks, from more extreme heatwaves, floods, storms and drought, to increased risks of communicable and non-communicable diseases, including the emerging issue of the mental health impacts of climate change. Additionally, sea-level rise threatens fragile healthcare facilities, which are often located in coastal or low-lying areas, the lives and livelihoods of people, and, ultimately, the very existence of some island nations.

SIDS are uniquely vulnerable, making up two thirds of the countries that suffer the highest relative losses from disasters each year. They constitute less than 1% of the global economy and contribute less than 1% global greenhouse gas emissions. SIDS also face challenges of providing effective, affordable and climate-resilient health systems to serve populations which are often highly geographically dispersed, living in precarious environmental and social conditions, and exposed to increasingly extreme weather events. Despite these threats, most of the SIDS are classified economically as middle-income or above, excluding those external support available to lower-income nations.

In the face of all these challenges, SIDS have shared strengths. They are leaders in the international negotiations on climate change, working collaboratively through regional and global groupings of SIDS. Political leaders and the general public in SIDS possess a high awareness of the close relationship between environmental and social determinants and health, reflected, for example, in the Healthy Islands approach in the Pacific. They also have well-established regional support mechanisms, through the bodies of the respective economic groupings for the Caribbean and the Pacific, and regional and subregional offices of the UN system.

The challenge is two-fold: firstly, to raise the health voice of SIDS, along with allies across the world, to reduce global carbon emissions so as to mitigate climate change related impacts and allow the people of small island nations to survive and thrive; and secondly, to strengthen the resilience of health systems and health-determining sectors such as food and nutrition, water and sanitation, and social protection, to protect and enhance the health of SIDS populations in the face of a changing climate.



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Commitments made

The first World Health Assembly Resolution on “Climate change and Health” (61.19) recognizes the particular vulnerabilities of SIDS, alongside those of Least Developed Countries.

To address the severe and urgent threats to the health and wellbeing of the people of SIDS, WHO launched a *Special Initiative on Climate Change and Health in Small Island Developing States* at the 23rd UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP23) held in Bonn in 2017, in collaboration with the UNFCCC Secretariat and the Fijian Presidency of the COP23. The initiative is considered one of the main outcomes of COP23. It was included as a platform in the WHO Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023.

During the course of 2018, WHO organized the Third Global Conference on Climate and Health as a regionally dispersed conference with a focus on SIDS, which featured Ministerial meetings to develop Regional Plans of Action held in: Fiji, for SIDS in the Western Pacific Region; Mauritius, for SIDS from the African and South East Asia Regions; and Grenada for SIDS in the Region of the Americas. The recommendations from the meetings informed the development of a Global Plan of Action, which aims to provide the support necessary to deliver on regional and national level actions. The WHO Executive Board and World Health Assembly adopted the global plan of action in 2019.

The plan envisions that all health systems in SIDS will be resilient to climate variability and change by 2030 and sets out four strategic lines of action, namely: (i) Empowerment: Supporting health leadership in SIDS to engage nationally and internationally; (ii) Evidence: Building the business case for investment; (iii) Implementation: Preparedness for climate risks, adaptation, and health-promoting mitigation policies; (iv) Resources: Facilitating access to climate and health finance. The regional and global plans include indicators of success, and progress against the global indicators is included in progress reports to the World Health Assembly.



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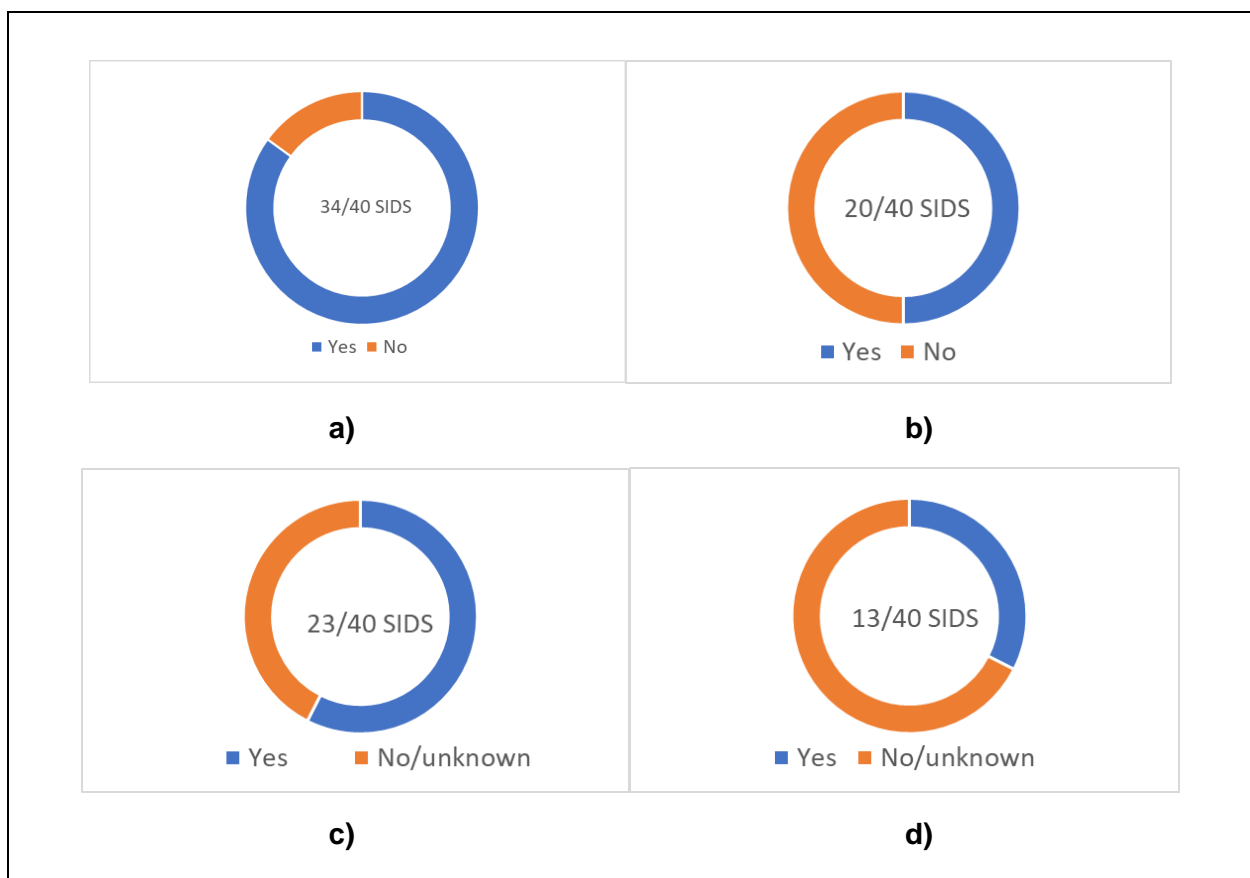


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Recent and ongoing actions

Important progress has been made on climate change and health in SIDS, summarized in the most recent report on the global initiative to the 74th World Health Assembly. SIDS have continued to show leadership on the global stage, for example, in leading the launch of the new UNFCCC COP26 initiative on “Building Climate Resilient Health Systems”, in launching the “Race to Zero Emissions for health”, and in requesting the first ever health report to the UNFCCC climate negotiations, delivered in 2018.



a) Empowerment: Including Health in Nationally Determined Contribution to Paris Agreement; b) Evidence: Completion of climate/health country profiles; c) Implementation: Implementing activities on climate-resilient environmentally sustainable healthcare facilities; d) Finance: Accessing international climate finance for health.

Source: Progress report to the 74th World Health Assembly on the Global Plan of Action on Climate Change and Health in Small Island Developing States.



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In the field of evidence, approximately half of SIDS have completed climate and health country profiles, carried out vulnerability and adaptation assessments, and developed a health adaptation plan. Most SIDS are now implementing work on building climate resilient and environmentally sustainable healthcare facilities, and, following the approval of WHO as a “readiness partner” for the Green Climate Fund, are being supported to carry out planning and capacity building to prepare for larger scale interventions. WHO has also worked with several countries and external partners to mobilize a total of over US\$40 million in committed or approved funding from multilateral and bilateral donors since 2018 – although this is only a fraction of the investment needed to meet the scale of the climate change challenge to health in SIDS.

Ongoing challenges:

Neither the voice of SIDS, nor the issue of health, is given the appropriate weight within climate change negotiations and support mechanisms. While the community of SIDS countries have stepped up to opportunities to raise the close links between health and climate, climate change is still not universally recognized as a health and survival issue for the small islands. Other common challenges are the following:

- Limited coherence between climate change and health objectives. There are only limited connections between health and climate change governance, policy and planning, both at national level and between international institutions. This holds back implementation and misses opportunities to take actions that are good for health, resilience, and reduced carbon emissions.
- There is an urgent need to consider how investments to support and revive the economy of SIDS following the COVID pandemic can reinforce the transition to a greener, more resilient and healthier future.
- In terms of implementation, SIDS cooperate effectively through regional institutions and UN agencies, which support sharing of knowledge, capacity and expertise to overcome the challenge of limited and geographically dispersed human resources. Both national and regional institutions require continued strengthening to meet the additional challenges of climate change and to keep building human, technical and financial capacity in the SIDS.
- Access to climate finance for health is extremely low globally, with less than 1% of multilateral climate finance allocated to projects that explicitly aim to protect and enhance health. This is a particular problem in SIDS where needs are very high. Health partners in SIDS report challenges in terms of a need for: information on how to apply for climate finance; clear and efficient institutional mechanisms at national and international level; capacity and technical support to prepare proposals; and availability of health expertise among the agencies that are accredited by the multilateral climate funds.
- External funding is typically project based rather than programme or system based. This results in uneven distribution across countries based on their eligibility for specific funds and can lead to implementation in silos rather than integration into holistic health and development programming.



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Recommendations and deliverables: 2021- 2022

Governments, supported by WHO and the wider development community, are encouraged to:

- Make health and climate change a whole-of-Government priority, rather than the remit of individual Ministries, at national and international fora.
- Work together across the SIDS, both within and between regions, with a consistent narrative that for the SIDS, staying within the 1.5C limit of global warming is an issue of human survival, i.e., “1.5 to stay alive”.
- Make use of the political opportunities that are presented in the run up to UNFCCC COP26, including the new initiatives launched by the Presidency of COP26 on Building Climate Resilient Health Systems and Developing Low Carbon Sustainable Health Systems.
- Complete health vulnerability and adaptation assessments and Health National Adaptation Plans and ensure that they are fully integrated within both Health Sector Development Plans and whole-of-government National Adaptation Plans for climate change.
- Work with bilateral development donors, development banks and the Secretariats and Boards of multilateral climate funds, in order to identify and remove any barriers which may be hampering access to finance for the protection of health in SIDS.

WHO and other health and development partners should improve alignment and coherence of financial and technical support for integrated programmes that respond to the needs articulated in the Country Support Plans under WHO's 13th Global Programme of Work (GPW13).



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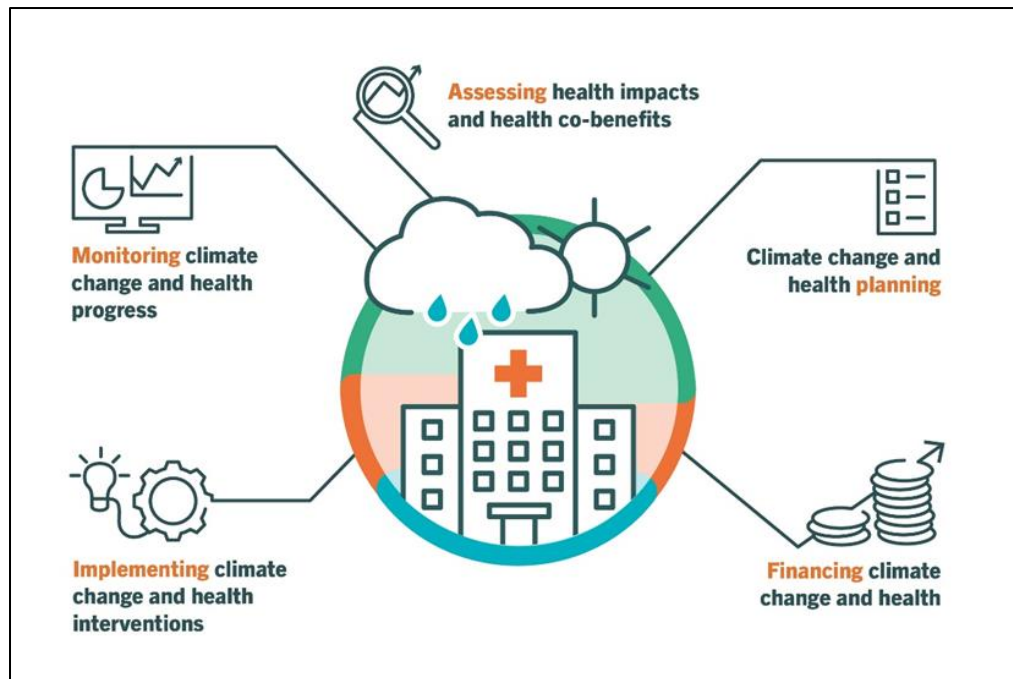


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Additional information and Resources:

- [Climate and health country profiles for SIDS](#)
- [SIDS dynamic data dashboard on health and climate change](#)
- Regional and global action plans on climate change and health in SIDS:
 - [Regional Plan of Action for SIDS in the African and South East Asian Regions](#)
 - [Regional Plan of Action for SIDS in the Pacific Region](#)
 - [Caribbean Action Plan on Health and Climate Change](#)
 - [Global plan of action on climate change and health in small island developing States](#)
- Toolkit of technical resources:
 - [Vulnerability and Adaptation \(V&A\) assessments](#);
 - [National adaptation strategies and plans](#);
 - [Building climate resilient health systems](#);
 - [Climate-informed health surveillance and early warning systems](#);
 - Climate-resilient [water](#) and [sanitation](#) safety plans;
 - [Capacity building for climate change and health](#);
 - [Climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health care facilities](#); and
 - [Health co-benefits of climate action](#).
- [COP26 Initiatives](#) on building climate-resilient health systems and leadership in emissions reduction.



[Technical support functions](#) provided by WHO to SIDS on climate change and health.