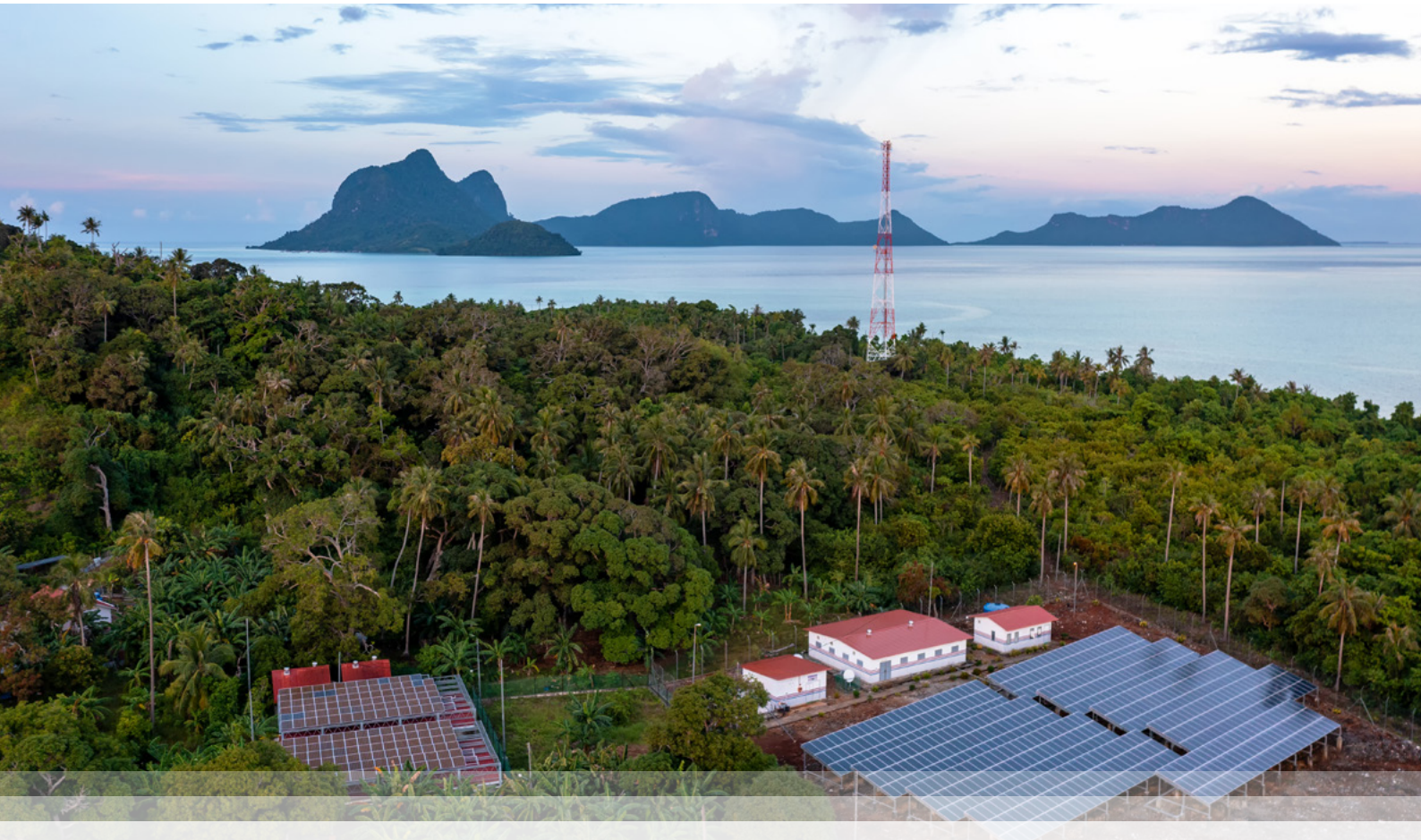
Report

The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) vision for the energy transition

A legal analysis

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C2LI



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Acronyms

ABAS	Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS
BPOA	Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS
GHG	greenhouse gas
LDC REEEI	Least Developed Countries Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Initiative for Sustainable Development
LDCs	least developed countries
MSI	Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the BPOA
NDC(s)	nationally determined contribution(s)
SAMOA Pathway	Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

Executive summary

This report reviews the negotiated text of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), focusing on sections related to the energy transition, to identify priority areas and the types of support that are being called for.

Five recommendations can be drawn from a legal analysis:

1. The international community should work with SIDS to better understand what a 'just', 'inclusive' and 'resilient' energy transition means in each country. This recommendation calls for research to be carried out (preferably by SIDS-based organisations) to understand the needs of specific SIDS' energy sectors.
2. The international community should co-develop bespoke renewable energy technologies and applications with SIDS stakeholders. Where possible, these should be adaptable for use across SIDS, as well as in non-SIDS countries.
3. The international community should work closely with local education and training institutions to provide workforce analysis data to enable re-training and the expansion of broad-based and specialist skills to the local workforce, as required for the renewable energy transition. This should include training at the regional level, to develop skilled workforces across SIDS regions.
4. The international community should support state and traditional institutions to actively engage citizens, and enhance participation in the development of projects for the energy transition.
5. The international community should help SIDS to develop enabling environments and policy, legal and regulatory frameworks to attract renewable energy finance, while at the same time supporting SIDS advocacy with a view to improving access to the climate funds.

1 Introduction

Climate change is threatening the very survival of SIDS (Nurse et al., 2014), with several at risk of islands sinking and many more facing irreversible damage to coastlines and coastal livelihoods.[1] Not only are SIDS the least responsible for climate change – contributing to less than 1% of global GHG emissions (IRENA, 2024) – they are also fully aware that the current efforts of the international community to keep warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels are failing (ABAS: para. 28; UNFCCC, 2023). Against this background, this report reviews the negotiated text of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), focusing on sections that relate to climate change mitigation, to identify where priorities lie and to determine where (and what kind of) support is being called for. Based on this analysis, the report makes robust recommendations that will help ensure the ABAS can be fully implemented.

The report is structured in the following way. Section 2 provides a summary of the ABAS, including a consideration of its legal nature, and focuses on its goal of achieving 'sustainable development and resilient prosperity' in SIDS. Section 3 analyses the language of the ABAS in relation to the promotion of an energy transition vision for SIDS and briefly considers how this compares to recommendations being made for least developed countries (LDCs). Section 4 compares the language used in the ABAS to other internationally negotiated agreements in relation to climate mitigation in SIDS. In Section 5, the authors put forward concrete recommendations for the international community to support low-carbon development in SIDS.

1 See UNGA (2024), 'We acknowledge that the widespread, rapid and *adverse impacts of climate change continue to pose increasing risks to SIDS* and their efforts to achieve sustainable development, while representing, the greatest threats to the survival, and viability of their people and natural ecosystems. Even with limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, SIDS will continue to incur severe loss and damage' (para. 27, emphasis added).

2 The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS

2.1 The Fourth UN SIDS Conference (SIDS4)

SIDS face a unique set of challenges, compounded by the increasing negative impacts of climate change (ABAS: para. 6). Their particular vulnerabilities (para. 5) and special circumstances have been recognised by the UN and through a series of ten-year international agendas, aimed at charting the way forward for their development. SIDS4 is the latest of these efforts, building on the outcomes of three preceding international conferences in Barbados (1994), Mauritius (2005) and Samoa (2014).

The ABAS was adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in July 2024. While not legally binding on member states, resolutions of the UNGA carry strong symbolic and political importance.

The ABAS reaffirms the commitment to the previous outcomes and declares that 'the next ten years are critical for SIDS' (para. 12). It comprises two key sections: what SIDS want (Section II) and how to get there (Section III).

Figure 1 Summary of SIDS conferences and outcomes

	Conference	Outcome
1994 Barbados	**Global conference on the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States**	Barbados programme of action for the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States (BPOA)
2005 Mauritius	**International meeting to review the implementation of the BPOA**	Mauritius strategy for the further implementation of the BPOA
2014 Samoa	**Third international conference on Small Island Developing States**	Small Island Developing States accelerated modalities of action (SAMOA pathway)
2024 Antigua and Barbuda	**Fourth international conference on Small Island Developing States**	Antigua and Barbuda agenda for Small Island Developing States (ABAS)

Source: Authors

Figure 2 Summary timeline of SIDS-4 process

		Meeting/conference	Outcome
J	Balaclava, Mauritius 24–26 July 2023	**Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS) regional preparatory meeting**	Regional outcome document
A	Kingstown, Jamaica 8–10 August 2023	**Caribbean regional preparatory meeting**	Regional outcome document
	Nuku'alofa, Tonga 16–18 August 2023	**Pacific regional preparatory meeting**	Regional outcome document
S	Praia, Cabo Verde 30 August–1 September 2023	**Interregional preparatory meeting**	Praia (Cabo Verde) outcome document
O			
N			
D			
J	New York, USA 22–26 January 2024	**First preparatory committee meeting**	First draft of final outcome document developed
F			
M			
A	New York, USA 1–5 April, 2024	**Second preparatory committee meeting**	Finalised draft of final outcome document
M	St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda 27–30 May 2024	**Fourth international conference on SIDS**	Adoption of Antigua and Barbuda agenda for Small Island Developing States (ABAS)

Source: Authors

Figure 3 Summary of ABAS document



Source: Authors

2.2 The goal of the ABAS: resilient prosperity and sustainable development

The main objective of the ABAS is to support SIDS in achieving sustainable development and resilient prosperity (paras. 7; 16), with the latter framed in the following way:

> SIDS aspire to a resilient form of prosperity, that is reflected in sustainable development for all in their countries, where economic growth and well-being are sustained and their economies are robust, diversified, adaptable and able to withstand shocks, ensuring social equity, and promoting environmental sustainability. (para. 11)

In such a future, growth and well-being go hand-in-hand, and economies are characterised as 'robust', 'diversified', 'adaptable' and capable of dealing with external shocks. A resilient prosperity of this kind will be inclusive and will promote environmental sustainability. The ABAS clarifies from the start that:

> [I]n order for SIDS to achieve sustainable development and resilient prosperity, we must assist SIDS to diversify economies and strengthen state and productive capacities. (para. 7)

Developing renewable energy will provide SIDS with opportunities to diversify their economies and strengthen their productive capacities.

Despite accounting for less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions (IRENA, 2024), SIDS can show leadership in adopting and/or upholding ambitious mitigation policies. They can put pressure on other states, spurring greater climate ambition from other countries, as well as building resilience and energy security by reducing reliance on fuel imports. Investing in renewable energy can contribute to economic growth and resilient prosperity.

2.3 Roles and commitment from the international community

The ABAS is not an international treaty that imposes legally binding obligations upon States, including SIDS. However, the document has been subject to formal international negotiations (Figure 2) and endorsed by the UNGA, and therefore provides an important normative framework for action.

The ABAS is clear that the primary responsibility for sustainable development and resilient prosperity lies with SIDS themselves. However, it clarifies that the unique vulnerabilities and development challenges faced by SIDS call for additional support:

> While acknowledging *the primary responsibility of small island developing States* for their own sustainable development, we recognize that the persistent development challenges of the small island developing States *require enhanced global partnership for development, adequate provision and mobilization of all means of implementation* and *continued international support* to achieve internationally agreed goals. (para. 31, emphasis added)

The ABAS refers specifically to support from the international community (chapter II) and actions committed to (commitments) by the international community (chapter III). While a wide range of stakeholders are needed to meet the goals of the ABAS, this is a UN document, so 'international community' is understood as referring principally to member states and the international organisations funded by these states, including but not limited to the United Nations.

SIDS have persistent development challenges, which, in order to be addressed, require support through a global partnership for development, and the provision and mobilisation of 'means of implementation', understood as finance, technology transfer, and capacity building.

In particular, the first section of the ABAS concludes with the following call for action:

> We, the Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives... firmly reaffirm our commitment to support SIDS on their pathway to achieving sustainable development and resilient prosperity, where the progress of today does not compromise the possibilities of tomorrow, *through targeted, results-focused interventions and investments*, we will support SIDS as they exercise full ownership of their new agenda and seek to establish partnerships as equals, upholding values of equity, national ownership, mutual trust, transparency and accountability, and cooperation and promoting benefits across priority areas in their new 10-year agenda. (para. 16)

For the ABAS to become a reality and for SIDS to be truly supported, they need 'interventions and investments' that are 'targeted' and 'results-focused'.

The next section looks at the ABAS in further detail in relation to what these targeted, results-focused interventions and investments look like when it comes to SIDS' energy transitions.

3 References in the ABAS to the energy transition in SIDS

This section interrogates the language of the ABAS in relation to the development and promotion of an energy transition for SIDS.

3.1 SIDS' energy future

The ABAS is very clear in maintaining that SIDS require an energy transition:

> Recognizing that various anthropogenic pressures and adverse impacts of climate change as well as global shocks continue to impede water availability and food and energy security, and further recognizing the importance of access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy, and connectivity, *SIDS seek the support of the international community to foster sustainable energy transitions and energy efficiency, and ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy, based on all energy sources, in particular renewable energy sources.* (para. 26.i, emphasis added)

This recognition of the importance of transitioning to more modern, efficient and cleaner sources of energy is stronger in the ABAS than any of the previous SIDS ten-year agendas.

The ABAS leaves the door open to all sources of energy being used in pursuing sustainable energy transitions and energy efficiency, allowing for SIDS to continue relying on fossil fuels. Indeed, there are certainly 'modern' ways of relying on fossil fuels, even if limited to making their operations more energy-efficient through offshore wind, for example.[2]

Nonetheless, many SIDS have already put in place policies and legislation that provide extremely ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, which would be difficult to achieve if they continued to rely heavily on fossil fuels.[3]

These ambitious renewable energy plans are not being put in place just to comply with the countries' obligations under the Paris Agreement.[4] There is also a compelling economic argument behind 'clean' energy transitions in SIDS.

2 For example, the Innovations and Targeted Oil and Gas leasing process in Scotland seeks to power oil and gas installations through offshore wind, thereby decreasing the emissions from oil and gas production.

3 Other than Trinidad and Tobago, the largest producer of oil and natural gas in the Caribbean, most SIDS are heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels. See Mead, 2021.

4 Namely, Article 4 (2) of the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2016; referred to throughout the remainder of this report as the Paris Agreement), which requires parties to prepare and submit Nationally Determined Contributions, outlining their climate pledges in relation to both mitigating and adapting to climate change. These are updated every five years and represent a progression from the last.

Box 1 Recognition of a SIDS energy transition in previous outcomes

None of the previous SIDS conference outcomes make explicit reference to the term 'energy transition' in relation to actions required concerning SIDS energy resources. While each previous outcome dedicates a section to the importance of 'energy resources' and mentions renewable energy technologies, in particular against the backdrop of a strong economic dependence on fossil fuels, the language on the need for a transition towards renewable energy sources has significantly evolved.

The 1994 Barbados Programme of Action for Small Island Developing States (BPOA) contains rather cautious language on advancing renewable energy development and implementation in SIDS. On the one hand, it identifies early actions aimed at increasing economic possibilities, gathering and disseminating information, and strengthening research and policy capabilities for the development of renewable sources of energy. On the other hand, the document also explicitly 'encourage[s] the efficient utilization of non-renewable sources of energy' (UN, 1994: para. 38A).

The subsequent (2005) Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the BPOA (MSI) highlights 'renewable energy and advanced clean energy technologies that are affordable and readily adaptable to the special circumstances of small island developing States' as one of the key areas for action (UNGA, 2006: para. 42).

The language in the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway (2014) is more focused on '*sustainable* energy' and, for the first time, explicitly prioritises renewable energy sources over other energy sources. It 'strongly support[s]' the development of strategies and targeted measures to foster 'sustainable energy systems based on all energy sources, in particular renewable energy sources' (UN, 2014: para. 50).

The cost (relative to GDP) of fossil fuels imports is staggering. Energy makes up the highest share of imports across SIDS, given that most are almost wholly reliant on imported fossil fuels for electricity generation and transport (IRENA, 2017). For example, fuel imports in the Pacific region are equivalent to 10% of GDP (Atteridge and Savvidou, 2019). Similarly, the Maldives spends more than 10% of its GDP on importing diesel alone (Raiser et al., 2023).

It has been estimated, however, that if SIDS transitioned to renewable sources entirely, they would save approximately $3.3 billion per annum (IRENA, 2017).

Table 1 Examples of SIDS renewable energy targets

	—	86% renewable energy generation in the electricity sector by 2030	'International support for technology transfer, capacity-building and financial resources'
	50% emissions reduction in the electricity sector by 2030	95% share of renewable energy in the electricity mix by 2030	'International investment and support'
	—	50% renewable energy share in the electricity supply in 2030	'International funding' (amount defined)
	—	100% of electricity from renewable sources by 2025	'Financial support'
	—	70% of electricity generated from renewable sources by 2030	'Financing' and 'Upgrade of network Infrastructure'
	—	100% renewable energy generation grid connected by 2030	'International (technical and financial) support' and 'Finance from developed country Parties'

Note: Commitments set out in Nationally Determined Contributions. Current as of August 2024, NDC Registry.

Moving away from fossil fuels to 'indigenous' forms of renewable energy will lighten the weight on the public purse, allowing SIDS governments to repurpose freed-up resources for other much-needed societal priorities (health and education, for example).[5]

Some SIDS could even become renewable energy exporters, turning energy into an investment rather than a cost, and contributing positively to the economy. This could be the case for SIDS moving into the green hydrogen space.

5 By indigenous forms of renewable energy, we refer to renewable energy powered by sources that are present in SIDS, such as solar, wind, tidal, ocean thermal energy conversion and others. It is important to focus on indigenous forms as opposed to the current status quo in many SIDS, whereby many depend on the import of fossil fuels from other countries, placing a significant strain on the islands' finances. See also the Statute of the Small Island Developing States Dock (SIDS DOCK), where parties acknowledge that an early energy transition is a 'unique opportunity to achieve sustainable development as well as generating financial resources', available at https://sidsdock.org/what-is-sids-dock/.

3.2 Just, inclusive and resilient energy transitions

The energy transition that SIDS are asked to undertake should, according to the ABAS, be 'just', 'inclusive' and 'resilient'. The ABAS refers to these three elements together in the context of the energy transition several times; for example, in paras. 8, 26.i.a and 26.i.d.

What exactly amounts to 'just', 'inclusive' and 'resilient' will be context specific and may change from one country to another. Thus, more work is needed to understand and contextualise energy transition pathways in different SIDS.

Recommendation 1

The international community should work with SIDS to better understand what a 'just', 'inclusive' and 'resilient' energy transition means in each country. This recommendation calls for research to be carried out (preferably by SIDS-based organisations), to understand the needs of specific SIDS' energy sectors.

3.3 Means of implementation for the energy transition

Shifting from production and/or consumption of fossil fuels to clean sources of energy, and renewables in particular, requires a transition. Some of the challenges and barriers to a 'clean' transition will be similar for all developing countries. However, SIDS will often have increased challenges due to their specific vulnerabilities and, in other cases, unique barriers, which they will need to address and overcome. Even between SIDS there will be differences, which may call for bespoke solutions.

The second chapter of the ABAS puts forward a number of ways in which the international community can support SIDS context-based energy transitions; by:

> urgently enhancing support, investment and partnerships for just, inclusive, equitable, and resilient energy transitions and energy efficiency, including clean and renewable energy infrastructure, technology and training, with a view to fulfilling SIDS' bold and ambitious renewable energy targets for the next decade;
>
> addressing the underlying barriers in accessing and mobilizing finance to deploy renewable energy, including enabling environments and policy, legal and regulatory frameworks;
>
> developing SIDS-specific technologies and applications for renewable energy deployment, and integration into the power system, and promoting efforts to reduce the cost of capital for renewables;
>
> by providing support to overcome the structural barriers that hinder just, inclusive, resilient energy transitions, including institutional capacity, particularly skills gaps, and grid stabilization and upgrading. (paras. 26.i.a–d)

These paragraphs provide a vision for the future of renewable energy in SIDS, and how it can be achieved.

SIDS will require support to develop their own bespoke technologies and approaches, locally appropriate technical skills (through bespoke training) and governance arrangements to design and implement renewable energy projects and unlock much-needed finance and investment. The vision focuses not only on the technology and infrastructure needed for renewable energy systems, but also connectivity with the existing or new national grid.

The analysis below focuses on the four components of the above-mentioned ABAS SIDS energy transition vision:

- SIDS are supported to develop their own bespoke technologies and approaches
- SIDS are supported to develop the technical skills and institutional capacities needed to implement renewable energy schemes
- SIDS institutions are supported to develop and implement renewable energy projects
- SIDS are supported to unlock much-needed finance and investment

SIDS are supported to develop their own bespoke technologies and approaches

According to the ABAS, the international community should provide assistance to SIDS for their energy transition:

> by developing *SIDS-specific technologies and applications* for renewable energy deployment, and integration into the power system, and (by) promoting efforts to reduce the cost of capital for renewables[.] (para. 26.i.c, emphasis added)

SIDS should not always be framed as vulnerable. In the field of renewables, some SIDS may well be in an advantageous position, because of their wealth of natural resources. For example, Grenada is currently exploring prospects for geothermal energy as a potential climate change mitigation measure (Ferguson, 2024). The ABAS acknowledges the strengths of SIDS in relation to renewable energy and calls for support from the international community to 'develop' technologies and applications that may be unique to SIDS or bespoke to SIDS' realities, in relation both to the renewables themselves and to their integration into the grid.

Developing technologies and applications calls for more than just studying or thinking about them. The ABAS calls for states and international organisations to actually produce the technologies and applications. In this respect, our recommendation is as follows:

Recommendation 2

The international community should co-develop bespoke renewable energy technologies and applications with SIDS' stakeholders. Where possible, these should be adaptable for use across SIDS, as well as in non-SIDS countries.

The rationale for this recommendation is one of scale. States and international organisations will be reluctant to invest into SIDS-specific 'products' if they will only be used by small SIDS in remote areas.[6] A further rationale for the

6 The exception could be when investment goes towards pilot projects, but these tend to be carried out for the benefit of larger non-island countries, reinforcing the perspective of islands as 'labs' or testing grounds, which can be seen as a negative trend from an island community perspective.

recommendation is that, for technologies and applications to be truly SIDS-specific, SIDS stakeholders (governments, energy utilities and regulators, private sector, civil society and academia) need to be involved in the development of solutions from the start. This includes their participation in planning, designing, implementation and reviewing – and in the safe deployment of the technology within their islands. Lastly, it is important that such SIDS-specific technologies are developed taking into account the possible negative impacts they may have on marine and terrestrial biodiversity, with a view to minimising such impacts and, where possible, integrating nature-based solutions into the technologies themselves.

SIDS are supported to develop the technical skills and institutional capacities needed to implement renewable energy schemes

The ABAS calls for the international community to support SIDS in their energy transition:

> by *urgently enhancing support, investment and partnerships for* just, inclusive, equitable, and resilient energy transitions and energy efficiency, including *clean and renewable energy infrastructure*, technology and *training*, with a view to fulfilling SIDS' bold and ambitious renewable energy targets for the next decade[.] (para. 26.i.a, emphasis added)

The inclusion of the word 'urgently' speaks to the pressing need and critical importance of enhancing support, investment and partnerships. This language emphasises that this must be treated as a key priority and requires immediate action by the international community. In addition, 'enhancing' indicates that existing support, investment and partnerships currently fall short of what is required for SIDS energy transitions; hence, a significant scale-up of efforts to support SIDS is called for. Critical to the energy transition in SIDS is the provision of training to develop a skilled workforce to meet the challenge of shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy, including workforce analysis and training support to ensure workers within the fossil fuels energy sector are not left behind. The need to bridge the skills gap in SIDS' energy transition is also present in other sections of the ABAS,[7] and should fully consider current and future migration patterns and how these affect the available workforce.

7 The ABAS puts forward a general diagnosis in relation to SIDS' energy transitions in the following terms, which includes the need to retrain the workforce: 'SIDS are facing significant barriers related to accessing finance, cost of capital, market readiness, and *upskilling and reskilling workforces* needed for just, inclusive, and resilient energy transitions' (para. 8, emphasis added). Support by the international community for SIDS' energy transitions should 'overcome' the skills gap, which is framed as a 'structural' challenge to just, inclusive and resilient energy transitions. In this case, the international community is asked to lend support: 'by providing support to overcome the structural barriers that hinder just, inclusive, resilient energy transitions, including institutional capacity, *particularly skills gaps*, and grid stabilization and upgrading' (para. 26.i.d, emphasis added).

Recommendation 3

The international community should work closely with local education and training institutions to provide workforce analysis data to enable re-training and the expansion of broad-based and specialist skills to the local workforce, as required for the renewable energy transition. This should include training at the regional level, to develop skilled workforces across SIDS regions.

SIDS institutions are supported to develop and implement renewable energy projects

The ABAS refers to institutional capacity gaps as structural barriers to energy transitions. According to the ABAS, the international community should support SIDS:

> by providing support to overcome the *structural barriers* that hinder just, inclusive, resilient energy transitions, including *institutional capacity*, particularly skills gaps, and grid stabilization and upgrading. (para. 26.i.d, emphasis added)

Limited institutional capacity presents a challenge for SIDS' renewable energy transition. The ABAS sets out several ways of supporting local institutions, such as increasing public participation and consultation and investing in education and training to build skillsets, among several others (para. 25.ii). Needs and approaches will be specific to each country: for example, skills development for grid stabilisation and upgrading will necessitate a tailored approach. Support for capacity building needs to focus on project development and implementation – from planning, to proposal creation, to implementation. This will be critical for increasing country-level ambitions and aligning renewable energy deployment efforts with decarbonisation through mitigation and adaptation goals.

Recommendation 4

The international community should support state and traditional institutions to actively engage citizens, for enhanced participation in the development of projects for the energy transition.

For this recommendation to be effective, the international community needs to work closely with governments to understand how their institutions function, including norms and roles of traditional governance mechanisms, and work through these and civil society organisations to deliver.

SIDS are supported to unlock much-needed finance and investment

The ABAS makes clear on several occasions that SIDS continue to face barriers in relation to accessing finance for various needs (paras. 8; 32.B.i.l; 32.D.i.c). In particular, the ABAS notes that SIDS are faced with 'significant' barriers in relation to accessing finance (para. 8) and calls for the international community to support SIDS in their energy transition:

> by addressing the *underlying barriers* in *accessing and mobilizing finance* to deploy renewable energy, including enabling environments and policy, legal and regulatory frameworks[.] (para. 26.i.b, emphasis added)

These elements of the SIDS' vision, technologies, approaches/management, technical skills and institutional capacity all require finance to make them a reality. The ABAS highlights two possible areas that need to be 'addressed' to unlock the necessary finance: a) enabling environments and b) policy, legal and regulatory frameworks. Interestingly, this section of the ABAS can be interpreted as an issue not so much of expanding sources of finance, but of accessing existing ones. SIDS face significant barriers in accessing climate finance not of their own making (Wilkinson and Robertson, 2023). This calls for further analysis and advocacy.

Recommendation 5

The international community should help SIDS to develop enabling environments and policy, legal and regulatory frameworks to attract renewable energy finance, while at the same time supporting SIDS advocacy with a view to improving access to the climate funds.

This recommendation underscores the importance of better understanding both SIDS and international enabling environments and policy, legal and regulatory frameworks, so that any underlying barriers can be effectively tackled, and so that SIDS can access the necessary finance required in their energy transitions. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, as domestic barriers to attracting investment for the systemic changes needed are complex in nature and specific to each small island context.

Promoting synergies with LDCs' renewable energy transition vision

Like SIDS, least developed countries (LDCs) are disproportionately impacted by climate change, despite having contributed to only 3.3% of global GHG emissions (Flynn, 2023). Most LDCs are also heavily dependent on fossil fuel imports (Zimmer et al., 2019). For example, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is entirely dependent on fossil fuel imports (Souliyathai, 2018) and The Gambia is significantly reliant on imports to meet its petroleum requirements (Han and Kirabaeva, 2024). Energy imports therefore pose a significant burden in many LDCs.

LDCs are also abundant in renewable energy sources. While this potential has so far remained largely untapped, several LDCs set out ambitious renewable energy visions and targets in their NDCs.[8] As with SIDS, many of these are contingent on support from the international community.[9]

One initiative that is particularly important and could provide inspiration for SIDS is the Least Developed Countries Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Initiative for Sustainable Development (LDC REEEI, 2018).

8 An example is the Lao PDR, which has communicated an unconditional target in its NDC to reach a 60% emissions reduction, including by increasing its local hydropower capacity. Another example is The Gambia, which has set a conditional emissions reduction target of 49.7%. This is supported by several targets concerning grid and off-grid renewable energy.

9 With respect to the Lao PDR, several elements in its NDC are conditional on international support, including increasing its solar and wind capacity to 1GW, and biomass to 300MW. Meanwhile, The Gambia's NDC is supported by several conditional targets in relation to renewable energy, such as the expansion of its solar water heating facilities to supply 10% of demand by 2030.

The LDC REEEI is a voluntary and non-legally binding framework launched at COP22 in 2016. All LDCs have endorsed the initiative, which sets out the overarching framework and vision to accelerate renewable energy and energy efficiency across LDCs. It sets out a pathway for LDCs to shift to 100% renewable energy, breaking existing dependencies on other countries and chartering their own course forwards, including by tapping into their 'significant renewable energy source potentials' (LDC REEEI, 2018: 4). It states that the 'goals of the LDC REEEI will only be achievable with international equity and the provision of associated finance, technology and capacity building' (LDC REEEI, 2018: 8).

Accordingly, to realise this renewable energy transition, LDCs will require 'substantial funds' and 'long-term' support (LDC REEEI, 2018: 7), as LDCs may require up to 46% of their GDP for the energy transition (UNCTAD, 2024). This vision largely coincides with the vision for SIDS' energy transitions put forward in this report – i.e. that SIDS are primarily responsible for realising their transitions, but require international support to do so.

Joint approaches are needed to tackle questions of scale in the development and deployment of renewable energy technology, but there may be situations where the 'islandness' of SIDS requires island-specific approaches, which may not be possible or relevant for LDCs.

4 SIDS' energy transition vision and international climate change law

The ABAS and its energy transition vision for SIDS need to be read in light of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, as these treaties pave the way for energy transitions. They may provide more clarity around the 'targeted, results-focused interventions and investments' (ABAS: para. 16) upon which the international community is called to embark to implement the ABAS. On the other hand, they show that the ABAS energy transition vision is built on a strong foundation in international climate change law. Provisions on finance, technology and capacity-building in the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement prescribe a specific focus on the needs and circumstances of SIDS and LDCs.[10] The following examples illustrate the alignment of the ABAS energy transition vision with the climate change treaties' provisions.

Under the UNFCCC, Article 4 (5), developed country parties are required to

> take all practicable steps to promote, facilitate and finance, as appropriate, the transfer of, or access to, environmentally sound technologies and know-how [...] [and] support the development and enhancement of endogenous capacities and technologies of developing country Parties.

This is expected to involve a

> country-driven, integrated approach, at a national and sectoral level [...] [which] should involve cooperation among various stakeholders (the private sector, governments, the donor community, bilateral and multilateral institutions, non-governmental organizations and academic and research institutions), including activities on technology needs assessments, technology information, enabling environments, capacity building and mechanisms for technology transfer. (UNFCCC, 2002a: 24)

The treaties highlight the need for strengthened cooperative action on technology development and transfer, taking into account the particular needs and circumstances of SIDS and LDCs.[11] Capacity-building should primarily aim at enhancing 'the capacity and ability of developing country Parties, in particular [LDCs and SIDS]' and facilitate relevant training for technological development, dissemination and deployment (Paris Agreement: Art. 11 (1); UNFCCC, 2002b).

10 See, for example, Art. 4 (8) of the UNFCCC, as well as the Preamble, Arts. 9 (4) and (9), and Art. 11 (1) of the Paris Agreement.

11 See Art. 10 (6) in conjunction with Art. 4 (8) of the UNFCCC, and the Preamble of the Paris Agreement; see also Decision 1/CMA.5: para. 106.

To support and enhance SIDS' institutional and individual capacities to implement an energy transition, the treaty regime requires regional, bilateral and multilateral approaches beyond 'one size fits all' (Paris Agreement: Art. 11 (4); UNFCCC, 2002b: para. 9), which are

> based on and responsive to national needs, and foster country ownership [...] including at the national, subnational and local levels [and are] guided by [...] an effective, iterative process that is participatory, cross-cutting and gender-responsive (Paris Agreement: Art. 11 (2))

and

> [w]henever possible and effective, [...] should mobilize [...] existing national, subregional and regional institutions and the private sector [...] and build on existing processes and endogenous capacities[.] (UNFCCC, 2022b: para. 11)

In its Article 9, the Paris Agreement also provides a strong legal basis for the ABAS' call[12] for strengthened SIDS-specific financial support. For the treaty regime's own institutions – such as the Financial Mechanism or Technology Mechanism – the Paris Agreement requires enabling measures to achieve

> efficient access to financial resources through simplified approval procedures and enhanced readiness support for developing country Parties, in particular [LDCs] and [SIDS], in the context of their national climate strategies and plans (Paris Agreement: Art. 9 (9))

Although these treaties' provisions do not specifically refer to energy transitions, their precision in relation to the focus on SIDS' and LDCs' needs, on technology development and implementation and provides valuable guidance for the implementation of the ABAS energy transition vision. Moreover, their emphasis on bespoke, country-driven and participatory support and the need to foster country ownership and enhance endogenous capacities, all reinforce the policy recommendations developed in the next section.

12 See ABAS, para 32.B.i., in particular (g),(h) and (m).

5 Recommendations

Based on a detailed textual analysis of the ABAS, this paper presents a framework for action to accelerate SIDS' energy transition (see Table 2). While not legally binding, UN member states, through the ABAS, have committed to supporting SIDS over the next ten years. The five recommendations presented below provide a concrete set of suggestions as to how they can do that.

Each of the proposed recommendations requires enhanced support from the international community. However, recommendations 2–4 in particular should drive action on the ground that results in tangible benefits for SIDS, namely:

- the development of bespoke technologies
- the upskilling and retraining of local workforces
- the development and implementation of renewable energy projects.

Table 2 Recommendations for the international community to support the energy transition in SIDS

The ABAS renewable energy transition vision	Recommendation
The energy transition that SIDS are asked to undertake should be just, inclusive, and resilient	1. The international community should work with SIDS to better understand what a 'just', 'inclusive' and 'resilient' energy transition means in each country. This recommendation calls for research to be carried out (preferably by SIDS-based organisations) to understand the needs of specific SIDS' energy sectors
SIDS are supported to develop their own bespoke technologies and approaches	2. The international community should co-develop bespoke renewable energy technologies and applications with SIDS' stakeholders. Where possible, these should be adaptable for use across SIDS, as well as in non-SIDS countries
SIDS are supported to have the necessary technical skills (through bespoke training) to develop and implement renewable energy projects	3. The international community should work closely with local education and training institutions to provide workforce analysis data to enable re-training and the expansion of broad-based and specialist skills to the local workforce, as required for the renewable energy transition. This should include training at the regional level, to develop skilled workforces across SIDS regions
SIDS are supported to have the institutional capacity to develop and implement renewable energy projects	4. The international community should support state and traditional institutions to actively engage citizens, for enhanced participation in the development of projects for the energy transition
SIDS are supported to unlock much-needed finance and investment	5. The international community should help SIDS to develop enabling environments and policy, legal and regulatory frameworks to attract renewable energy finance, while at the same time supporting SIDS advocacy with a view to improving access to the climate funds

All of the recommendations are crucial for fostering a national enabling environment, which will allow SIDS to move as quickly as possible towards an energy transition. Recommendation 5 also refers to changes needed at the international level, so much-needed finance for the energy transition can be unlocked. This is vitally important, as the other recommendations are contingent on scaled-up finance being made available to support low-carbon development in SIDS.

Recommendations 2–5 apply broadly to all SIDS, but recommendation 1 pertains to the unique characteristics of individual SIDS. A just, inclusive and resilient energy transition will look different in every island nation, and each has distinct challenges and opportunities. This underscores the importance of understanding the specific context of islands, and tailoring support to the circumstances of individual SIDS. In particular, the energy needs across small states and regions of small states are likely to be very different: from expanding electrification in some islands, to reducing energy consumption in others.

Critically, SIDS will need technology transfer and investment in science and technology. There is great potential for renewables in small islands but also huge upfront capital costs, so significant finance will need to be mobilised. The implementation of these recommendations can and should be monitored; and the outcomes, or benefits, for SIDS' economies and populations of transitioning to cleaner energy should be measured as part of the new monitoring and evaluation framework being established alongside the ABAS.

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