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How Small Island Developing States view their development partners

A perceptions survey

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Key messages

The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) calls for scaled and more accessible finance for climate resilience and sustainable development in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and a Partnership Framework that eases transactions burdens, reinforces national ownership and offers sustained, predictable support.

The first SIDS Perceptions Survey presented below examines the partners SIDS value the most, the attributes of these partnerships, and the financial instruments and operational modalities SIDS prefer for climate resilience and sustainable development.

SIDS engage most with traditional development partners, based on colonial, historical and regional ties, but are forging new partnerships to meet their needs, responding to geopolitical shifts.

China is the most valued bilateral partner and the second most valued development partner overall, but multilateral development banks and some regional development banks are also popular, along with major climate funds and a small number of traditional bilateral donors.

China's development assistance to SIDS from 2020–2023 was $6.02 billion, outstripping Official Development Finance (ODA plus other official flows) from Australia ($4.78bn), the United States ($3.17bn), Japan ($2.03bn) and UK ($0.42 bn).

SIDS value ease of access, alignment with development and climate plans and reliability over volumes of finance. They find innovative finance instruments useful, but uptake and knowledge about these instruments remains limited.

SIDS partners should support ABAS priorities on global governance reform, streamlining access to development and climate finance, aligning finance flows with SIDS' priorities, providing predictable concessional finance, and shifting to long-term, systems-oriented capacity programmes.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ABAS	Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AfDB	African Development Bank
AIS	Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea
AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
BPoA	Barbados Programme of Action
CCRIF	Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRDC	climate-resilient debt clause
ECCB	Eastern Caribbean Central Bank
EIB	European Investment Bank
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IDA	International Development Association
IFI	international financial institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDB	multilateral development bank
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
ODF	Official Development Finance
SAMOA	SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WBG	World Bank Group

1 Introduction

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face structural constraints that heighten their vulnerability and limit their development choices. Their economies are typically small, import-dependent and highly exposed to external price shocks, while small populations and, in some cases, remoteness raise the per-capita costs of public service delivery (Noy and Edmonds, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2023). These challenges are compounded by extreme susceptibility to natural hazards and intensifying climatic events, imposing increasing fiscal costs and constraints on investment in adaptation and resilience. From 2000–2024, economic loss and damage due to extreme weather events in SIDS is estimated at $141 billion, with 38% attributable to climate change (Panwar et al., 2024), which is higher than for other groups of developing countries.

In response to these long-standing challenges, SIDS, through the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), have advanced successive international frameworks articulating their priorities and special circumstances, culminating most recently in the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS 2024–2034 (ABAS) (UN, 2025). The ABAS explicitly calls for, inter alia, scaled and more accessible financing for climate resilience and sustainable development. It reiterates SIDS' particular needs for not only concessional finance but also tailored modalities that recognise their structural vulnerability, limited administrative capacity and exposure to repeated and compounding shocks. The SIDS Partnership Framework, for example, sets out a blueprint for how to structure development cooperation with SIDS, highlighting the types of external partnerships required: those that ease transaction burdens, reinforce national ownership and offer sustained, predictable engagement rather than fragmented project cycles.

Sustainable development cooperation with SIDS has evolved significantly since their 'special case for development' was first recognised in international policy frameworks in the 1980s. SIDS have also received welcome support from development partners through international diplomacy: for example, in pushing for higher global mitigation ambition, in establishing the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, and through reforms to the international financial architecture promoted by the Bridgetown Initiative that offer liquidity to countries affected by disasters, to name but a few.

Yet despite these advances, questions remain over whether the development cooperation and diplomacy efforts of SIDS' partners effectively match SIDS' stated priorities and realities. The literature highlights some enduring challenges: the short-term, ad hoc nature of capacity development programmes (Wilkinson et al., 2020), difficulties in accessing climate funds (Treichel et al., 2024; OECD, 2022), and increasing ineligibility for concessional finance (Quak, 2019).

As the ABAS progresses, systematic evidence will be needed on how SIDS themselves assess the value of their development partners,[1] as well as the forms of support that they consider most useful. This working paper is based on analysis of SIDS governments' perceptions of their partners. It assesses the extent to which ABAS priorities for the provision and mobilisation of 'means of implementation' are being met. With a focus on financial and technical support and the development of innovative finance instruments to support SIDS' sustainable development, it presents new evidence from a survey of government officials across the three SIDS regions: the Caribbean, the Pacific, and the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS). The survey captures SIDS preferences for different development partners (the bilateral and multilateral agencies and climate funds that provide support to SIDS) the attributes that shape these preferences, and the financial instruments and operational modalities they view as most important for advancing ABAS priorities.

The comparative analysis presented in their paper complements existing studies, which tend to focus on individual institutions or specific challenges faced by SIDS, such as those related to the climate funds, multilateral development banks (MDBs), debt relief and restructuring, or insurance mechanisms (see for example, Prizzon et al., 2022; OECD, 2020; Treichel et al., 2024; Walker and Clauzel, 2023). The analysis in this study also adds value by examining development partner support from the perspective of SIDS governments.

The aim is to repeat the SIDS Perceptions Survey every two years throughout the lifetime of the ABAS. By comparing survey responses with insights from the literature and data on the implementation of different types of support, this biennial study will offer a more granular understanding of how the international community is advancing priorities and commitments under the ABAS. This aim is to support both SIDS in their collective efforts to advance their special circumstances and development partners' in structuring their support to SIDS. In a context of contracting aid budgets, understanding how SIDS value the financial and technical support that they receive – i.e. its appropriateness and effectiveness to SIDS contexts – is critical. Ultimately, the SIDS Perceptions Survey and analysis will be an important knowledge product, supporting learning and implementation throughout the ABAS.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The second section positions SIDS in the development cooperation landscape by revising the evolution of development support to SIDS and its current dynamics. The third section presents the data and methods used to design, implement and analyse the SIDS Perception Survey. Section four presents survey findings and discusses their implications. Section five concludes with key takeaways from the survey.

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1 For this study, 'development partners' refers to governments, international financial institutions and climate funds that provide direct financial and policy support for development and climate action. United Nations agencies are also assessed but separately from the abovementioned categories as they predominantly provide technical and contextual policy support to their member countries. The study does not gather perspectives from all actors in the development co-operation architecture. It captures only a part – albeit an important one – of SIDS' overall perceptions of development partners.

2 SIDS in the international development cooperation landscape

This section outlines the historical and political context that shapes SIDS' place in international development cooperation. It details how SIDS' vulnerabilities have been recognised, how they have exercised influence internationally, and how international financial institutions and development cooperation agencies structure their support to them.

2.1 SIDS as a 'special case for development'

2.1.1 Historical origins

The recognition of SIDS as a 'special case for development' emerged from growing acknowledgement that their structural constraints, including small domestic markets, narrow export bases, geographic isolation and acute exposure to environmental shocks demand distinct treatment within the international development support system (AOSIS, 2025). This recognition emerged gradually across major international institutions and international law.

A key milestone was the World Bank's adoption of the 'small state exception' in 1985, which expanded eligibility for concessional finance to several SIDS, despite their relatively high per capita income levels (World Bank, 2016). This early acknowledgement initiated a shift away from using only income-based metrics to understand resilience, towards a more structural understanding, setting an important precedent for international frameworks to come. From this point forward, SIDS' special case became embedded in wider multilateral commitments within the UN system, with their 'special case for the environment and development' first recognised at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Summit) (UN, 1994).

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 2015 Paris Agreement further reinforced SIDS' position by explicitly identifying them as especially vulnerable to climate change and underscoring the need for scaled-up financial support for adaptation and mitigation (UN, 2015a). There is also growing recognition of the need for grant-based and highly concessional finance for adaptation in SIDS. Indeed, the COP29 decision on the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance stresses the importance of grants and highly concessional climate finance (UNFCCC, 2024: article 14):

> Acknowledges the fiscal constraints and increasing costs to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change and, in this context, also acknowledges the need for public and grant-based resources and highly concessional finance, particularly for adaptation and responding to loss

> and damage in developing country Parties, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and have significant capacity constraints, such as the least developed countries and small island developing States.

Complementing the climate regime, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction highlights SIDS' pronounced exposure to natural hazards and affirmed that their resilience depends on increased investment in risk reduction and preparedness (UN, 2015b: article 42):

> Given the special case of small island developing States, there is a critical need to build resilience and to provide particular support through the implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway in the area of disaster risk reduction.

2.1.2 Emergence of a UN framework for SIDS

The 1994 Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA) was the first dedicated international framework for SIDS. Featuring 14 priority areas and concrete actions, the BPoA enabled SIDS to articulate their development needs within a coherent international framework, marking a significant achievement for a group of countries that had long struggled for visibility (UN, 1994). It established climate resilience, environmental protection and vulnerability reduction as core development pillars for SIDS, principles that continue to shape international engagement today.

A decade later, in 2005, the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation was framed as 'further implementation' of the BPoA, expanding its 14 thematic areas by adding five emerging issues essential to SIDS' sustainability: trade, sustainable production and consumption, health, knowledge management and culture (UN, 2005; UN, 2015a; Walker and Clauzel, 2023). This broadened agenda was further advanced in 2014 through the SAMOA Pathway, which strengthened the partnership dimension by establishing the SIDS Partnership Framework to monitor, stimulate and ensure accountability in international partnerships, marking a shift toward implementation-focused cooperation (UN, 2014; UN, 2024).

Despite these successive international frameworks, progress remained constrained by chronic underfunding, fragmented donor engagement and persistent exposure to external shocks (Chase and Gomes, 2014; Walker and Clauzel, 2023). The adoption of the ABAS in 2024 therefore represents a significant departure from previous agreements. Emerging from the Fourth International Conference on SIDS, ABAS shifts the focus from political recognition of needs, towards structural reforms that are required in international support systems (UN, 2024). It articulates what SIDS need, ranging from climate finance to support for debt sustainability; and how they intend to achieve these objectives through strengthened means of implementation, including partnerships, data improvements and institutional capacity (Sooksripaisarnkit and Tateno, 2024).

The ABAS also explicitly links the SIDS agenda to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), setting out 77 actions (out of ABAS's total of 130) that are new and specifically tailored to SIDS, making it more targeted and less overlapping than the SAMOA pathway (Sooksripaisarnkit and Tateno, 2024). Crucially, it reframes international engagement around access, alignment and accountability – three areas where earlier SIDS frameworks struggled to achieve sustained action.

2.2 SIDS leadership on climate and development agendas

Despite their limited structural power in international institutions, SIDS have actively sought to shape the international development cooperation agenda. Indeed, they have shaped international norms and agreements in ways that far exceed their formal power through strategic coalition-building, issue entrepreneurship and moral leadership (Wilkinson and Gmeiner, 2025; Bailer, 2012; Deitelhoff and Wallbott, 2012).

A central driver of this influence is AOSIS, established in 1992, an alliance that has been instrumental in advancing the SIDS identity and pushing climate ambition across negotiation cycles (Bishop et al., 2025; Wilkinson and Gmeiner, 2025; Corneloup and Mol, 2013). AOSIS has also leveraged alliances with the African Group, Latin American blocs and several Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, expanding political coalitions behind its priorities.

In parallel to this international diplomacy, regional bodies such as Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) have long provided platforms for coordinated positions, technical cooperation and coordinated disaster response, which are increasingly recognised as central to implementing SIDS agendas (UN, 2014).

Recent legal and political breakthroughs exemplify the growing sophistication of SIDS diplomacy. The 2025 International Court of Justice advisory opinion on climate change followed sustained advocacy led by Vanuatu and supported across Pacific, African and Caribbean governments (Wewerinke-Singh, 2024; Ligaiula, 2022). It builds on earlier victories at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (2024) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, all of which strengthened legal obligations to prevent climate harm (Cano Prentice et al., 2025).

SIDS have also sought to reshape international finance debates, through efforts such as the Bridgetown Initiative, which reframes climate finance as a climate justice issue – one which requires actions around debt relief and increased funding for loss and damage. Indeed, SIDS played a pivotal role in establishing the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, even though significant gaps remain between pledged and required resources (Bishop et al., 2025; Gordon-Strachan et al., 2025). Their advocacy has also been pivotal in driving recent shifts toward 'beyond GDP' approaches, most notably the calls for adopting the UN Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) or other vulnerability criteria in finance allocations (Wilkinson et al., 2023; Assa and Meddeb, 2021).

2.3 Development cooperation dynamics for SIDS

International development cooperation for SIDS is broadly made up of four types of support:[2] political/advocacy; financial; technical; and data, digitalisation and technology. Bilateral support to SIDS has been provided partly in recognition of SIDS' special circumstances (described above) and therefore need for external assistance so they are better able to implement international agreements as well as their own national priorities. But bilateral partner engagement with SIDS has also been shaped by broader geopolitical, institutional and economic considerations (Hurley et al., 2025), with donors supporting those SIDS that they have historical and colonial ties with, as well as for regional geopolitical motives (Bishop et al., 2025). This may sometimes make it harder to align bilateral support with SIDS' stated development needs, as priorities may shift with external strategic interests rather than long-term resilience and development objectives.

SIDS may be vocal and visible in multilateral negotiations, but they still occupy limited space in international development and within many multilateral institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO), which do not formally recognise 'smallness' as a basis for differential treatment (Campling, 2006; Corneloup and Mol, 2013). This dynamic contributes to a pattern in which commitments to SIDS are inconsistent across institutions, leaving a gap between rhetorical recognition and systemic follow-through (Mendenhall et al., 2023; Chase and Gomes, 2014; Walker and Clauzel, 2023). As a result, the volume and terms of financial and technical support remain shaped by partner incentives, institutional mandates and administrative preferences, rather than the holistic needs articulated by SIDS.

Existing literature on aid effectiveness and partner performance indicates that smaller and less-developed economies, despite their heterogeneity, share a relatively consistent view of what constitutes high-value engagement. They favour support that is predictable, concessional, accessible and coherent (OECD, 2020; Custer et al., 2021). These attributes also align with SIDS priorities and repeatedly emphasised across evaluations of the BPoA, the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation and the SAMOA Pathway implementation (ECLAC, 2003; Chase and Gomes, 2014; UN, 2024). Evidence across evaluations of development cooperation show a common pattern of constraints, such as fragmented and short project cycles, reliance on external systems, slow disbursement, high transaction costs, and complex reporting requirements that impose high administrative burdens on SIDS (OECD/UNDP, 2019; Kaur and Tennant, 2024; OECD, 2022).

The SIDS Partnership Framework, established under the SAMOA Pathway, seeks to address some of the fragmentation described above, by driving 'genuine and durable' partnerships through

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2 Another categorisation of development cooperation is used by the OECD: https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC/STAT(2024)11/REV1/en/pdf. It uses two broad categories to track development cooperation: financial and capacity development cooperation. The latter includes political and technical support.

accountability, registration, monitoring and multi-stakeholder dialogue (UN, 2014; UN, 2024). Yet, while the Framework supports transparency and coordination, it does not capture the nuanced relational dimensions that SIDS themselves prioritise such as speed, accessibility, concessionality, flexibility and the degree to which support empowers rather than burdens national systems. It is precisely this gap that motivates the present study, which examines how SIDS themselves assess their development partners, the support they value the most, and the extent to which cooperation aligns with their priorities. By examining SIDS officials' own assessments of bilateral, multilateral and climate-related partners, this study advances an empirically grounded understanding of how SIDS interpret the quality of development cooperation. In doing so, it complements existing literature by foregrounding SIDS' perspectives and provides insights into how development partners can more effectively align political, financial, technical, data and technology support with the priorities articulated under ABAS.

3 Data and methodology

3.1 Methodological framework

The survey methodology allows researchers to systematically capture the perspectives of SIDS government officials on their most valued development partners and preferred forms of support, along with the reasons for these preferences. In the context of this study, 'most valued partner' refers to partners whose financial, technical and advocacy support and provision of data and technology have been especially useful for advancing SIDS' development and climate goals over the years.

Country perspective-based surveys have emerged as a robust approach for eliciting government perspectives on the quality, effectiveness and responsiveness of international development cooperation. Surveys of government officials directly involved in development finance and cooperation decisions provide valuable insights into how countries experience and evaluate donor performance (see Prizzon et al., 2020; 2022; Custer et al., 2021; Davis and Pickering, 2015; OECD, 2025a). These studies permit an assessment of alignment, influence and helpfulness of development partners in supporting national policies and financing priorities, which could not have been fully captured through quantitative aid data alone.

This study uses a similar methodological approach, applying it specifically to the context of SIDS as a recognised, unique development category with shared structural vulnerabilities and financing challenges. In doing so, it builds on the methodological approach used by Prizzon et al. (2022), which systematically collects country perspectives on MDB effectiveness, extending it to cover the broader landscape of bilateral, multilateral, and climate and development fund partners most relevant to SIDS. In terms of objectives, the present study is closer to Custer et al. (2021), capturing how government officials perceive the value and responsiveness of their main development partners, but with a thematic scope and respondent group tailored to reflect the distinctive policy and financing priorities of SIDS.

Other studies have applied similar perspective-based or stakeholder surveys to assess development cooperation and effectiveness, including OECD (2020) and OECD/UNDP (2019). Comparable SIDS-focused quantitative research has also explored national capacity and institutional support (Kaur and Tennant, 2024), access to climate finance through the Green Climate Fund (Treichel et al., 2024), adaptation learning systems (Lindsay et al., 2024), and implementation of SIDS frameworks (Walker and Clauzel, 2023). Collectively, these studies confirm the feasibility and analytical value of structured surveys for capturing SIDS and development partner relationships.

3.2 Sampling and questionnaire development

3.2.1 Survey population

The survey covered government officials from the 38 of the 39 UN member states[3] categorised as SIDS (see Table 1). The focus of the survey was exclusively mid- to senior-level government officials directly engaged in managing or negotiating development and climate finance partnerships.

3.2.2 Sampling design

Existing literature does not suggest a sampling framework covering the survey population. A sampling framework was therefore built by taking several steps. First, a comprehensive contact database of potential respondents was created by compiling information from government websites and official directories. This database was then complemented with a list of ABAS national focal points. Finally, it was validated and expanded through consultations with regional institutions and affiliates from the Resilient and Sustainable Islands Initiative (RESI) network.

This process of building the framework ensured that only eligible respondents, i.e. those officials who are closely involved with the international development and climate finance in each of the SIDS, are approached. All respondents in the sampling framework were contacted with a request to respond to the questionnaire; no further selection was done.

Respondents were invited to respond to the survey by email. Reminders were sent to non-responders between second and fourth weeks from the initial invitation. In case of non-response after reminders, focal points in individual SIDS were asked to send reminders.

Table 1 List of UN member SIDS

Caribbean	Pacific	AIS
Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize*, Cuba*, Dominica*, Dominican Republic*, Grenada*, Guyana*, Haiti*, Jamaica*, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia*, St. Vincent and the Grenadines*, Suriname*, Trinidad and Tobago	Cook Islands, Fiji*, Kiribati*, Marshall Islands*, Micronesia*, Nauru*, Niue*, Palau*, Papua New Guinea*, Samoa*, Solomon Islands*, Timor-Leste*, Tonga*, Tuvalu*, Vanuatu*	Cabo Verde*, Comoros*, Guinea-Bissau*, Maldives*, Mauritius*, São Tomé and Príncipe*, Seychelles, Singapore

* denotes eligibility for Official Development Assistance as of 2024.

3 A list of UN member SIDS is available on the UN website: www.un.org/ohrlls/content/list-sids. Singapore was excluded because of its high-income status and distinct development cooperation profile.

3.2.3 Questionnaire development and survey implementation

The questionnaire was developed to reflect the core objectives of the study:

- identify SIDS' most valued development partners
- understand the attributes for partners to be considered effective and trusted
- assess SIDS' preferences for different financial instruments
- identify areas for improvement in support to sustainable development and climate resilience.

The survey draws on the conceptual framework and structure of the 'MDB Client Survey' (Prizzon et al., 2022) but adapted to the specific realities of SIDS. The questionnaire was structured in four parts:

- background information on the respondent's country, region and professional role and experience
- SIDS' most valued development partners including bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, climate and development funds, and UN partners,[4] and reasons for their preferences
- SIDS' preferences for types of financial support (e.g., grants, concessional loans, etc.) and innovative finance instruments (e.g., debt clauses, parametric insurance, carbon markets etc.)
- key areas for improvement in development partner support to advance the ABAS priorities.

The questionnaire was designed and implemented using LimeSurvey, an online survey platform that allowed for dynamic routing and drop-down selection features. Survey implementation took place from 25 July 2025 to 11 November 2025.[5] The process was entirely online, allowing respondents to complete the questionnaire at their convenience.

The questionnaire was tested with a group of senior government officials from SIDS , which helped refine the sequencing of questions, simplified the wording, and expanded the list of development partners to be included.

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4 UN partners were assessed separately from the three categories of development partners. UN entities primarily provide technical assistance, capacity-building, policy support, specialised expertise, and sustained in-country presence, rather than large-scale concessional finance. Treating them as a distinct category clarifies how SIDS value their predominantly non-financial contributions to policy development and implementation.

5 Personalised invitation emails were sent to the identified officials, containing a brief description of the study's objectives, confidentiality assurances, and a unique link to the online questionnaire. Respondents were initially given four weeks to complete the questionnaire, with reminder emails sent midway through the survey window to encourage participation. However, multiple reminders were sent to many SIDS officials from different email accounts as reminders to ensure survey participation.

3.3 Response rate and sample profile

The survey received 40 valid responses (with completed questionnaire) from 29 SIDS, covering 76% of the total target group with 21 responses from 13 Caribbean SIDS; 12 responses from 10 Pacific SIDS, and seven from six AIS SIDS (Table 2). This reflects broad geographic participation across all three regions. There were a further 23 incomplete responses to the survey which are not included in the analysis.

A large share of responses (73%) came from ministries of environment or climate change, followed by finance and planning ministries (18%). This is unsurprising given that in many SIDS, environment and climate ministries lead engagement with international development and climate finance partners, particularly in relation to accessing the multilateral climate funds. This pattern should however be interpreted in light of the institutional roles described in the limitations under section 3.5. Respondents carried a high level of professional experience and institutional knowledge, averaging 19 years of overall service and seven years in their current position. The predominance of senior officers, advisors and coordinators (73%) also reinforces the credibility of the responses, given their direct involvement in development funding coordination and reporting.

Table 2 Survey respondents' profile and response rate by region

	Caribbean	Pacific	AIS	All SIDS
A. Regional coverage (number of respondents)				
Total number of SIDS in survey population	16	15	7	38
Total number of SIDS that responded to survey	13	10	6	29
Total responses (completed survey)	21	12	7	40
Country level response rate	1.6	1.2	1.2	1.4
B. Respondents by affiliation in % (ministry/department)				
Finance/planning	14%	17%	29%	18%
Environment/climate change	76%	67%	71%	73%
Prime minister's office	5%	8%	-	5%
Other line ministries	5%	8%	-	5%
C. Respondents by role in %				
Permanent/assistant secretary	14%	8%	-	10%
Director/ deputy director	24%	8%	14%	18%
Senior advisors/officers/coordinators	62%	83%	86%	73%
D. Years of experience (averages)				
Years of work experience overall	22	16	18	19
Years of experience in current position	7	7	6	7

3.4 Weighing approach

Aggregate results were calculated using equal weighting across countries and the three SIDS regions, with each SIDS assigned a weight of one, regardless of the number of respondents it contributed.[6] Responses were first aggregated within-country and then included in regional and overall calculations. For instance, if there were two responses from the same country, they were each assigned a proportional weight of 0.5, ensuring that the combined weight for that country remained equal to one. The overall SIDS aggregates were similarly calculated by giving equal weight to the three SIDS regions. This approach ensured that no single country or region exerted disproportionate influence on the results while still preserving their distinct institutional and geographical perspectives.

3.5 Limitations

This study has a few limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, a relatively large share of respondents came from ministries responsible for environment and climate change (73%), and as such captures relatively fewer perspectives from finance, planning and other central ministries. However, in the context of SIDS, this institutional profile is largely reflective of practice. Climate and environment ministries are often the national focal points for development finance as well as the climate funds, coordinating external support related to resilience, adaptation and disaster risk, which are priority areas for SIDS governments. For the survey, the selection of the relevant ministry or department to complete the questionnaire was, in most cases, determined by the ABAS national focal points or SIDS permanent representatives at the UN in New York. The respondents' close and more frequent interaction with climate funds may introduce a degree of familiarity that shapes their perceptions in ways that differ from those of their colleagues in other ministries.

Second, while regional coverage was strong overall, participation was uneven across regions. Responses were received from 13 of 16 Caribbean SIDS, 10 of 15 Pacific SIDS and 6 of 7 AIS SIDS. The slightly lower participation from Pacific SIDS may limit the granularity of sub-regional comparisons, although it does not materially affect the overall patterns observed.

Third, as with all perception-based surveys, results reflect reported experiences and judgements rather than objective measures of performance. Although responses were triangulated with desk-based evidence where possible, perceptions may still be influenced by recent engagements or institutional mandates.

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6 Some SIDS provided multiple responses to the survey: four SIDS from the Caribbean and three from the Pacific.

These limitations do not undermine the core findings but highlight the importance of interpreting them in light of SIDS' institutional realities and the climate-centred nature of development cooperation in these contexts.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Engagement of SIDS with development partners

The survey asks government officials to identify the development and climate partners with whom they had interacted during the previous five years. This question was intended to establish a factual baseline of engagement patterns before exploring respondent preferences. Because respondents are officials directly engaged in negotiating, coordinating or implementing development and climate finance, their responses provide a credible picture of the development cooperation landscape across SIDS.

SIDS engage with a consistent cluster of multilateral and bilateral partners. The World Bank Group, including the International Development Association (IDA) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), is the most frequently cited partner overall, with 76% of the total 40 respondents reporting engagement. This is followed closely by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) (71%), the United States (61%), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) (55%), United Kingdom (53%), Japan (53%), International Monetary Fund (IMF) (52%) and China (52%). This pattern is broadly consistent with earlier evidence that multilateral banks, climate funds and a small number of large bilateral donors contribute a substantial share of SIDS' international development finance (Custer et al., 2025; Prizzon et al., 2022; Davis and Pickering, 2015; Treichel et al., 2024).

The engagement patterns of SIDS often reflect long-standing geopolitical and institutional relationships:

- In the Caribbean, there is interaction with the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) (91% of the 21 Caribbean respondents), the World Bank Group (89%), the GCF (82%), the IMF (69%), Canada (66%), the United Kingdom (58%) and the United States (58%). This shows the dominance of North American and European partners, along with the central role of the CDB and the World Bank in the Caribbean region's development financing (Kaur and Tennant, 2024; Tandrayen-Ragoobur et al., 2021).
- In the Pacific, engagement is heavily shaped by traditional regional partners and MDBs including Australia (90% of the 12 Pacific respondents), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (90%), Republic of Korea (85%), New Zealand (85%), Japan (80%), and the World Bank Group (80%). This is consistent with a widely accepted notion about the centrality of these actors in Pacific aid and climate finance landscapes (Waqavakatoga et al., 2024; Lindsay et al., 2024; Custer et al., 2021).
- In the AIS region, responses were more varied. The top four engagement partners for this group of SIDS are China, India, the GCF, the African Development Bank (AfDB), with each selected by 67% of the seven AIS respondents. The World Bank Group did not make it into the top five partners in the region.

This broad engagement landscape sets the stage for analysis of how SIDS value their partners and the specific characteristics of cooperation that influence those preferences across regions.

4.2 Most valued development partners for SIDS

The survey asked respondents to identify their 'most valued' bilateral and multilateral development partners; that is, those they regard as particularly reliable, effective or strategically important. They were provided with a list of traditional and region-specific development partners to select from, along with an option to suggest additional partners which might not be part of the list. This section presents SIDS preferences across all these groups of partners.

4.2.1 Most valued bilateral partners

The top five bilateral partners vary significantly across the three SIDS regions (Figure 1):

- In the Caribbean, the United Kingdom was considered a most highly valued bilateral partner by 50% of the respondents, followed by Canada and China (40% each).
- Preferences for most valued partner in the Pacific SIDS are for regional partners with Australia (85% of Pacific respondents), Japan (60%) and New Zealand (45%) most highly valued.
- AIS SIDS show a different dynamic, one characterised by a more diversified partnership profile. China (83% of the AIS respondents) emerges as the most valued bilateral partner, followed by Portugal (50%) Japan (33%), and India (25%).

These preferences broadly mirror historical diplomatic ties and long-standing development cooperation patterns in the subregions. For instance, a comparison with the Official Development Finance (ODF) disbursements from official donors' part of the OECD DAC reinforces these perceptions:

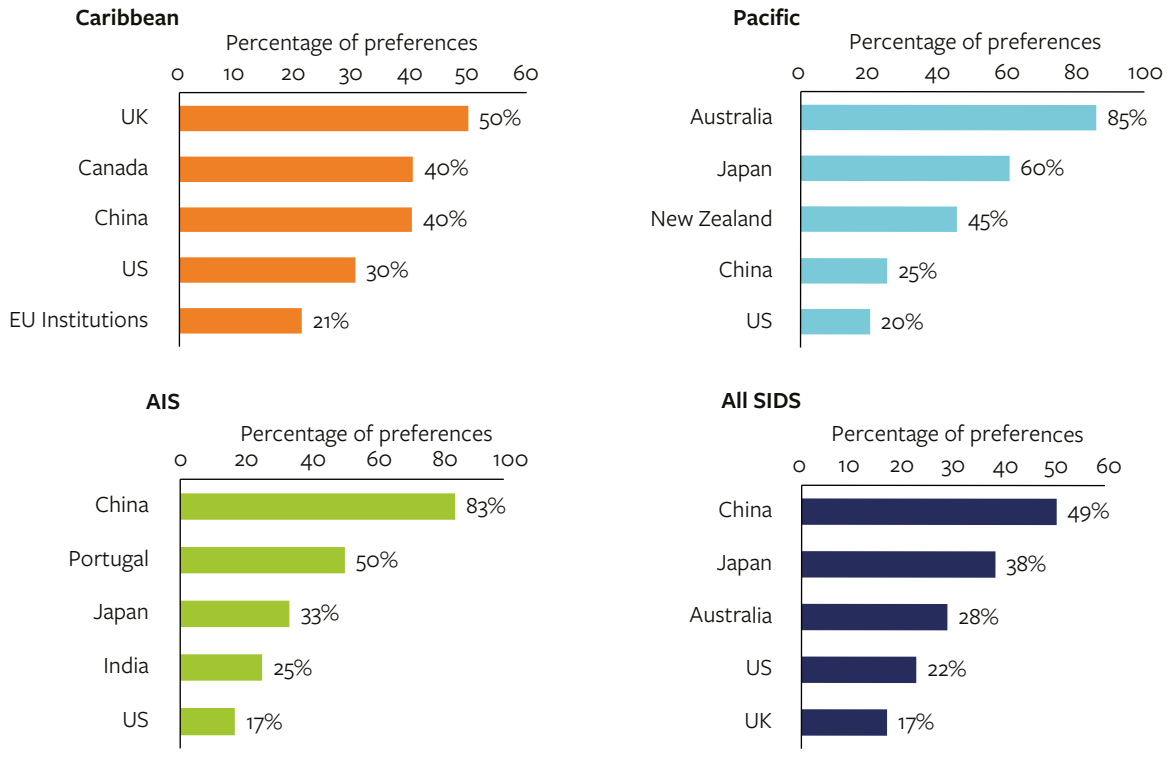
- In the Caribbean, the most valued bilateral partners were among the top five bilateral ODF providers between 2020 and 2023. The top five ODF providers for Caribbean SIDS include the United States ($1.8 billion, rounded off), France ($1 billion) European Union institutions ($0.7 billion), Canada ($0.6 billion) and Japan ($0.3 billion). The United Kingdom sits sixth on this list with $0.2 billion in ODF to SIDS over the same period.[7]
- Similarly, for the Pacific SIDS, Australia ($4 billion), New Zealand ($0.8 billion), Japan ($0.1.2 billion) and United States ($1.2 billion) feature in the list of top bilateral ODF providers over the 2020–2023 period.

7 The ODF figures have some limitations. They do not capture all financial assistance from bilateral donors, in particular, core funding to multilateral institutions that benefits SIDS.

- The mix of most valued bilateral partners in the AIS illustrates the region's hybrid geopolitical landscape, where emerging donors such as China and India have intensified their engagement, while long-standing cultural and linguistic ties (e.g., Lusophone linkages with Portugal) are also likely to have shaped preferences. In terms of top ODF flows, Japan ($0.4 billion), Portugal ($0.2 billion) and the United States ($0.1 billion) feature in the top bilateral ODF providers list as well.
- China features in the top five most valued bilateral partners across regions, and as the top choice on aggregate for all SIDS. This illustrates the deepening influence of emerging and regional development partners (McCormick, 2008; Waqavakatoga et al., 2024). What remains untracked from the OECD DAC data is that Beijing has provided $6 billion in developmental aid to SIDS between 2020 and 2023, with 61% of it directed to Pacific SIDS, 35% to Caribbean SIDS and 4% to AIS SIDS (see AidData, 2025). When compared with other bilateral providers, China remains the top bilateral development finance provider for the Caribbean SIDS ($2.1 billion) while it holds second position in Pacific and AIS SIDS after Australia and Japan, respectively.

The increasing influence of China and India in the AIS region in particular suggests that some SIDS have been overlooked by 'traditional' development partners. With emerging donors, SIDS are not only expanding their partnership portfolios but are also responding to providers that combine financial resources with diplomatic, technical and 'South-South' cooperation modalities that are increasingly relevant to their development strategies.

Figure 1 Most valued bilateral development partners



Note: Total number of responses: Base = 40 respondents (Caribbean 21, Pacific 12 and AIS 7). All SIDS responses are equally weighted by country. China here does not include Taiwan, which was selected separately by two Caribbean and one Pacific respondent.

4.2.2 Most valued MDBs and other financial institutions

As with the bilateral partners, the survey asked the respondents to select their most valued MDB and international financial institution (IFI) partners. Their perceptions, in this case, are more closely aligned across the three regions than for their bilateral partners, with respondents converging strongly around a few institutions (Figure 2). The World Bank Group is the most valued MDB overall (96% of total responses across all sample), followed by the IMF (76%) and ADB (55%).

Regional preferences for most valued partners align closely with institutional mandates of MDBs and historical engagement patterns:

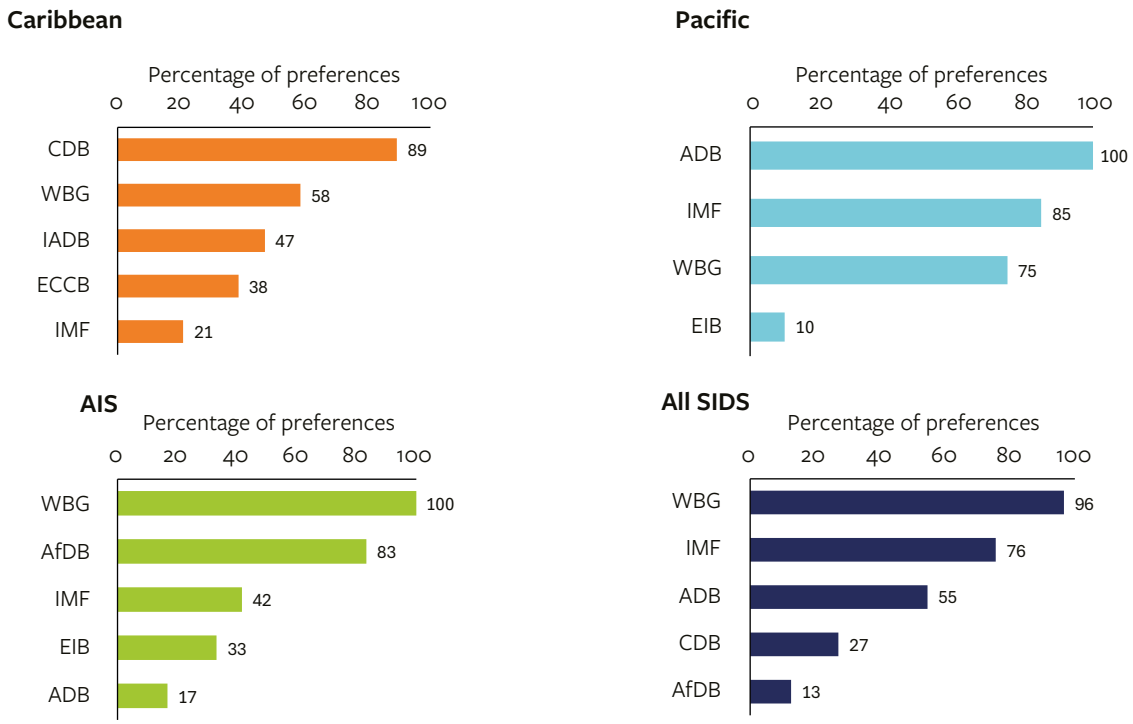
- In the Caribbean, CDB is the most valued MDB (89% of Caribbean respondents), followed by the World Bank Group (58%) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) (47%).
- In the Pacific, ADB was selected by all 12 of the Pacific respondents as their most valued partner, reflecting ADB's uniquely dominant regional footprint. This was followed by the IMF (85%) and the World Bank (75%),
- In AIS SIDS, the World Bank Group again ranks the highest, with all seven respondents selecting it as their top choice. The African Development Bank (AfDB) (83%) was the second most valued partner in this region, unlike ADB and CDB which were preferred over the World Bank Group in the Pacific and Caribbean regions. This might be due to the wider geographical coverage of the AIS SIDS which span from Africa to Indian Ocean and South China Sea.

The regional pattern of preferences corresponds to their long-standing reliance on regional MDBs and institutions. For instance, Caribbean SIDS largely rely on the CDB–IADB[8]–World Bank configuration for infrastructure, policy and social-sector financing.

Overall, SIDS preferences for MDBs and IFIs broadly mirror the top multilateral (excluding climate funds) providers of ODF to SIDS from 2020–2023. For example, the World Bank was among the top three largest multilateral ODF providers to the Caribbean ($1.9 billion), Pacific ($1.2 billion) and AIS ($0.7 billion), mirroring its position in the top three most valued MDBs across regions. The same is true for the IMF (across regions) and ADB (in the Pacific). Such alignment between perceived value and financial presence is consistent with earlier analyses of MDBs and SIDS engagement (see Prizzon et al., 2022).

8 Not all Caribbean countries are borrowing members of the CDB (e.g., Cuba and Dom Rep) or IADB (only seven Caribbean countries are borrowing members).

Figure 2 Most valued MDBs and IFIs



Note: Total number of responses: Base = 40 respondents (Caribbean 21, Pacific 12 and AIS 7). All SIDS responses are equally weighted by country.

4.2.3 Most valued climate funds

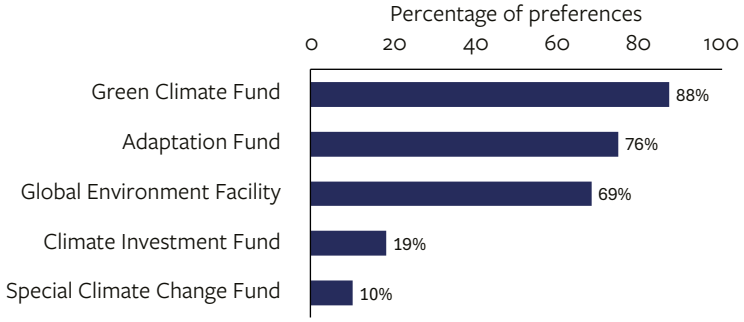
Across all SIDS, preferences for climate and development funds converge strongly, with respondents consistently selecting the GCF (88% of the responses), the Adaptation Fund (76%) and the GEF (69%) as their most valued sources of climate finance (Figure 3). There is some variation in the AIS group, with the African Development Fund appearing in the top five instead of the Special Climate Change Fund.

The ODF disbursement patterns confirm a correlation between SIDS' preferences for most valued climate funds and top five ODF providers. Both GCF and GEF rank in the top five climate funds to the Pacific ($180 million and $61 million) and AIS SIDS ($21 million and $34 million), while they remain at fifth and sixth positions (with $35 million each), respectively, in the Caribbean region. The Climate Investment Fund ranks higher than both GCF and GEF in the Caribbean with $115 million in ODF over 2020–2023.

The alignment across the Caribbean, AIS and Pacific regions suggests that SIDS prioritise institutions capable of offering high volumes of grants and/or highly concessional resources (Roberts and Weikmans, 2017; Betzold and Weiler, 2017). However, the strong clustering around

the GCF, Adaptation Fund and GEF does not necessarily imply that these funds are problem-free. Rather, it reflects the reality that they remain the only sizable, dedicated multilateral climate funds available to SIDS.

Figure 3 Most valued climate and development funds



Note: Total number of responses: Base = 40 respondents (Caribbean 21, Pacific 12 and AIS 7). All SIDS responses are equally weighted by country and region.

4.2.4 Most valued development partners overall

When asked to pick their top five most valued partners across bilateral, multilateral and climate fund choices, SIDS did not prioritise a single category of development partner. Instead, they favour a set of institutions that can simultaneously meet their core needs in development finance, climate finance, and policy and technical support (Figure 4). When responses are aggregated, all three types of partners emerge consistently in the top tier:

- a small but regionally differentiated group of bilateral partners (most notably Australia in the Pacific, the United Kingdom and Canada in the Caribbean, and China across all three regions)
- key regional and international MDBs (CDB, ADB and the World Bank Group)
- the climate funds (especially GCF).

Figure 4 Most valued development partners across bilateral, MDBs and climate funds

Note: Total number of responses: Base = 40 respondents (Caribbean 21, Pacific 12 and AIS 7). All SIDS responses are equally weighted by country and region.

Bilateral partners sit within the top tier primarily in regions where historical, geographic or geopolitical ties are strongest. Australia leads overwhelmingly in the Pacific, while the United Kingdom and Canada feature in the Caribbean's top six most valued partners. China (excluding

Taiwan) appears prominently across all three regions, making it the only bilateral partner to rank consistently among the top ten choices in every SIDS grouping. Overall, China ranks second across all SIDS.

MDBs form the second grouping of high-value partners, although the specific institutions vary by geography. The World Bank consistently features among the top choices across regions. Regional institutions rank highly, with the CDB second in the Caribbean, and the ADB and AfDB in third position in the Pacific and the AIS region respectively. As discussed earlier, this regionalisation of MDB preferences mirrors the dominance of these financing institutions and the role they play in providing budget support, project finance, and macroeconomic stabilisation in each of the regions.

Climate funds constitute the most uniform source of value for SIDS. The GCF ranks among the top four partners in every region, with the GEF also featuring prominently. This pattern is consistent with SIDS' strategic emphasis on climate-resilient development, where access to predictable, grant-based resources is a binding constraint. This strong preference for climate funds may partly reflect the institutional perspectives of respondents, many of whom interact directly with these funds. For many SIDS, climate funds are not perceived as sector-specific instruments but as core channels through which broader development priorities (such as fiscal stability, infrastructure resilience and social protection) are financed.

The breadth and balance of these preferences indicate that SIDS perceive no single class of partner as sufficient to address their development finance needs. They seem to prefer partners who typically combine substantial concessional finance with technical support and geopolitical strengths, situating them as influential actors in shaping SIDS development pathways (Custer et al., 2025). That said, the regional differences in choices suggests that the 'most valued' partner status is not a global judgement but a reflection of context-specific histories and regional alliances, and relate to whether partners step up consistently in moments of need.

4.3 What SIDS value in their preferred development partners

To deepen this assessment of most valued partners, the survey examined why respondents ranked their preferred development partners highly, so a relationship can be drawn between perceived value and the specific attributes that SIDS consider most important in their development cooperation relationships. Respondents were asked to select their top three reasons for preferring a development partner, with an option to suggest alternative (other) reason(s) not on the list. Figure 5 presents the key attributes that make a development partner most preferred.

4.3.1 What SIDS value in their preferred bilateral partners

A clearer picture of SIDS preferences emerges when considering why SIDS value particular bilateral partners (see Figure 5). Across all regions, the most frequently cited reasons were:

- ease of accessing partner funding (81% of total responses)
- alignment with national development plans and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (74%)
- volume of resources (56%).

These factors reflect long-standing patterns reported in the literature that show that SIDS place a premium on partners who minimise administrative burdens, offer predictable delivery and adapt support to national priorities (Kaur and Tennant, 2024; OECD/UNDP, 2019). Speed of response (44%) and flexibility during emergencies (39%) further underline the importance of responsiveness and accessibility for SIDS.

4.3.2 What SIDS value in their preferred MDBs and IFIs

SIDS value MDBs for a similar set of reasons as bilateral partners:

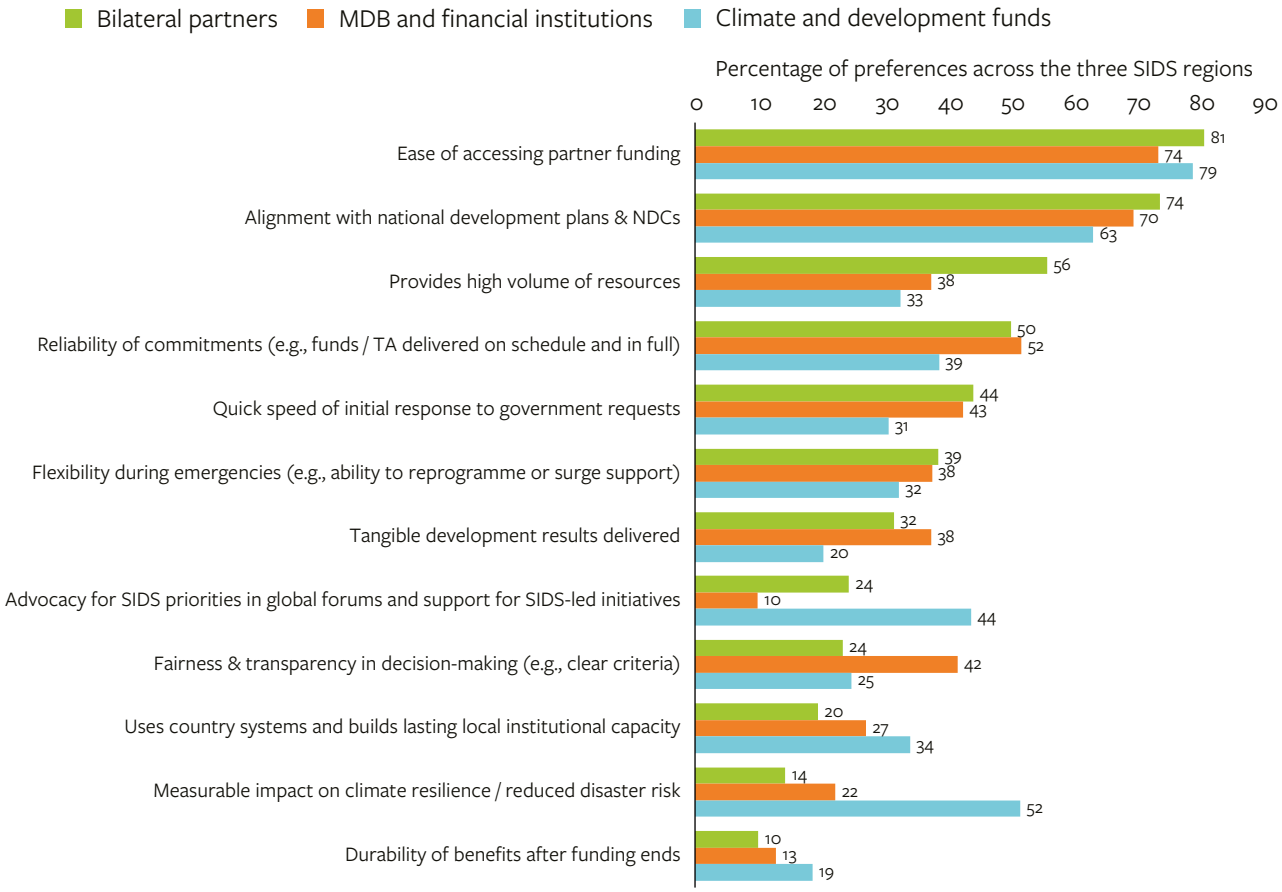
- alignment with national development plans and NDCs (70% of the total responses)
- ease of accessing funding (74%)
- reliability of commitments (52%).

This underscores SIDS' consistent preference for partners whose procedures align closely with national policy and planning frameworks. This along with ease of access are priorities that cut across bilateral, multilateral and climate fund partners rather than distinguishing one group from another. Alignment appears to function as a baseline expectation for effective cooperation, reflecting how SIDS prefer partners that reinforce domestic planning processes rather than introduce parallel systems (Prizzon et al., 2020; OECD, 2020).

At the same time, respondents expressed mixed views regarding MDBs' flexibility, speed of response and transparency, with only around 38–43% identifying these as MDB strengths. Importantly, these assessments mirror patterns observed for bilateral partners, suggesting that constraints related to lengthy approval cycles, rigid procedures and limited responsiveness are systemic features of development cooperation rather than shortcomings unique to MDBs (Prizzon et al., 2020; Davies and Pickering, 2015).

Only 10% of respondents valued MDBs for their advocacy on SIDS' priorities. This suggests that while MDBs are appreciated for their financial and technical roles, they are not viewed as championing SIDS' interests internationally.

Figure 5 Key attributes that make a development partner the most valued by SIDS



Note: Total number of responses: Base = 40 respondents (Caribbean 21, Pacific 12 and AIS 7). All SIDS responses are equally weighted by country and region.

4.3.3 What SIDS value in the climate funds

Climate and development funds are treated as a stand-alone category in this survey as the modalities of access and support are different to those that SIDS and other recipient countries have with donors, development banks and financial institutions. As with bilateral and MDB partners, SIDS value support from the climate funds for largely the same combination of reasons:

- ease of accessing funding (79% of the total responses)
- alignment with national development plans and NDCs (63%).

Interestingly, most of the existing literature on accessibility finds the major climate funds to be slow, administratively intensive and unpredictable (Bishop et al., 2021; Noy and Edmonds, 2019; Quak, 2019; OECD, 2022). However, SIDS perceptions on ease of access as a reason to prefer a particular climate fund are the highest. Climate funds' quickness of response to government requests was selected by 31% of the respondents. This apparent discrepancy may reflect the relative, rather than absolute, nature of respondent preferences, and SIDS may view their

preferred climate funds as being easier to navigate than some bilateral and MDB windows. This is particularly the case where there are now established in-country relationships, accredited entities, more grant-based financing and greater familiarity with project cycles, all of which reduce uncertainty.

SIDS' moderate perceptions on climate funds' reliability of commitments (39%), high volume of resources (33%) and flexibility during emergencies (32%) suggest that they may view climate funds as operationally far from perfect yet comparatively better – and certainly in relation to their need for climate resilience (52%) – than many traditional development partners.

SIDS also value the climate funds for their role in supporting advocacy for SIDS priorities and support for SIDS-led initiatives (44%), which is significantly higher than for MDBs (10%) and bilateral partners (24%). This reflects the role these mechanisms and other development partners can play in amplifying SIDS' climate agendas in international negotiations and programming decisions (Roberts and Weikmans, 2017; Weikmans and Roberts, 2019).

4.4 Most valued partner in the UN system

4.4.1 Most valued UN agencies

UN agencies were assessed separately in this survey because they serve a distinct functional role in SIDS development ecosystems. Their contributions centre on technical assistance, capacity-building, policy support, advocacy, specialised normative and legal expertise, and long-term in-country presence rather than the provision of large-scale loans or concessional finance. Treating UN actors as a standalone category therefore allows clearer insight into how SIDS value these institutions for the 'non-financial' dimensions of development cooperation.

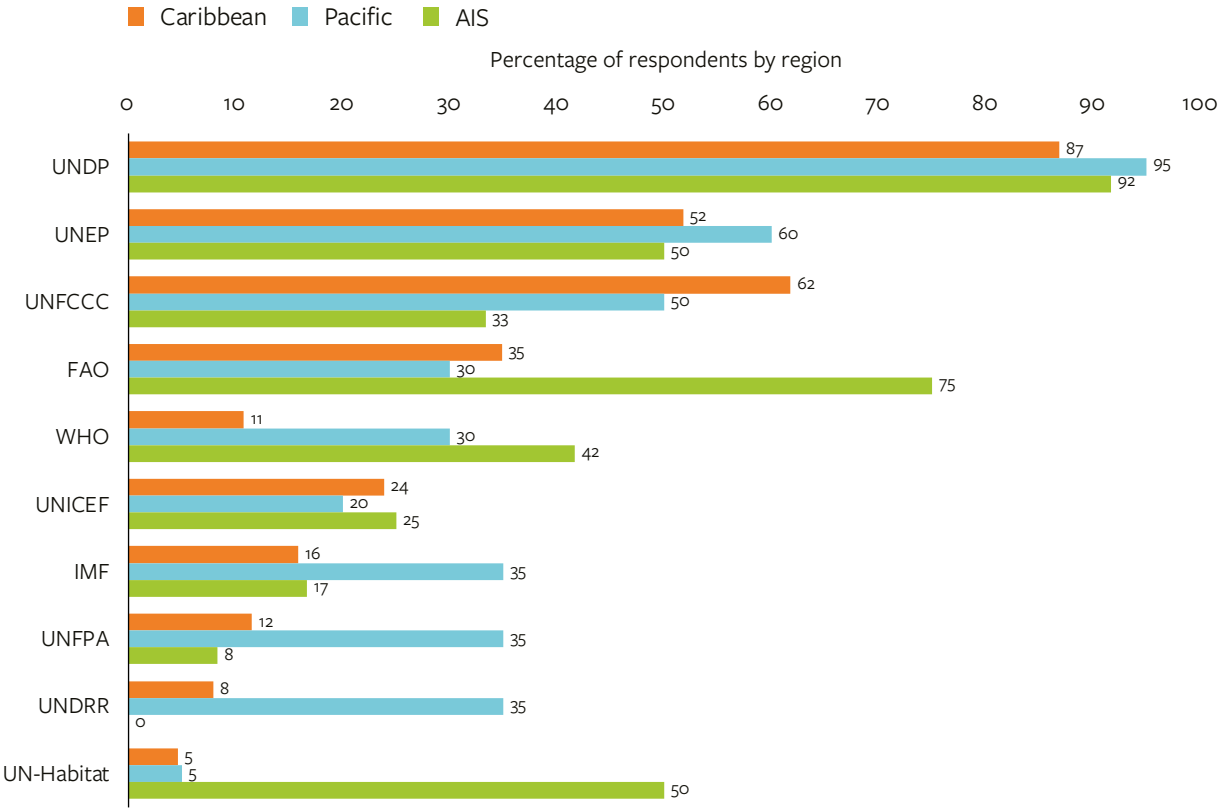
Across all three SIDS regions, SIDS referred to a number of UN agencies as key institutions (see Figure 6):

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (91%)
- United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) (54%)
- UNFCCC secretariat (48%)
- the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (47%)

The strength of SIDS' preference for UNDP is remarkably consistent: 87% in the Caribbean, 95% in the Pacific and 92% in AIS region. This is not surprising since UNDP is the largest UN agency in terms of reach and scope of its support to countries including SIDS. UNEP, UNFCCC and FAO all receive strong endorsements, although with more regional variation. For example, FAO is valued by 75% of AIS respondents but only 35% and 30% in the Caribbean and the Pacific, respectively. AIS respondents place relatively higher value on World Health Organisation and UN-Habitat, indicating their strong engagement on health and human settlement in the region. The Pacific

region shows a distinct emphasis on specialised UN bodies such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), echoing the demographic and disaster risk reduction priorities relevant to their contexts.

Figure 6 Most valued UN partners for SIDS



Total number of responses: Base = 40 respondents (Caribbean 21, Pacific 12 and AIS 7). All SIDS responses are equally weighted by country and region.

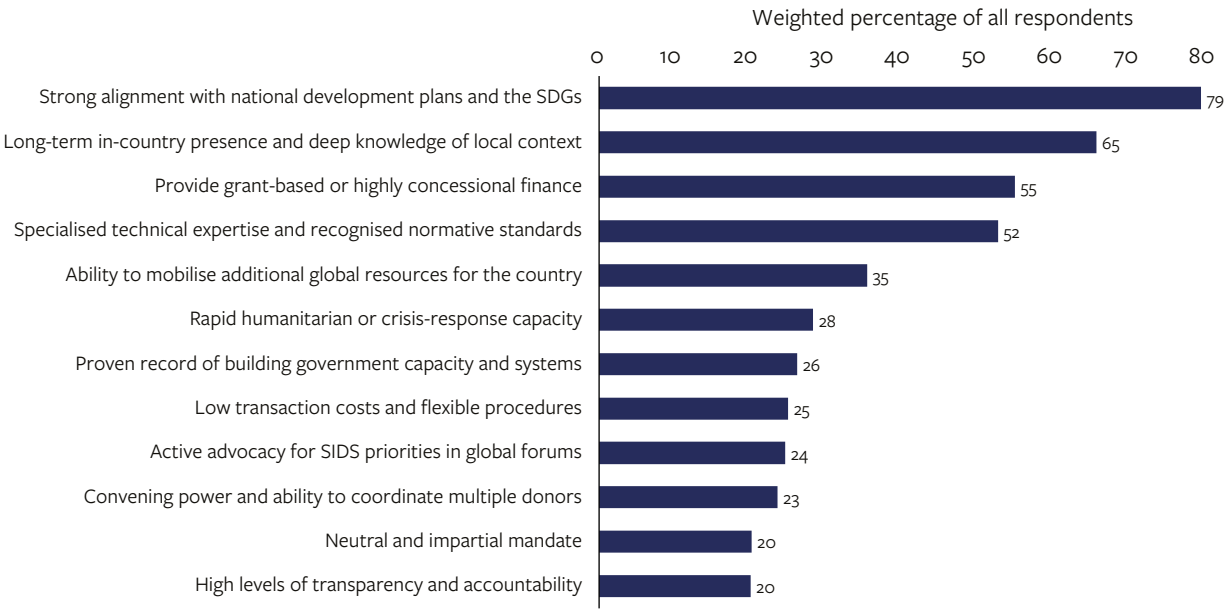
4.4.2 What SIDS value in their preferred UN agencies

Thought direct financing from UN agencies is limited, SIDS view them as central development partners because of their strong alignment with national development plans and the SDGs (79%), signalling that UN work programmes map closely on to country-led priorities (Figure 7). This is followed by the long-term in-country presence and deep contextual knowledge (65%), a key differentiator from some bilateral donors and climate funds whose engagement is often episodic.

Grant-based or highly concessional finance, though modest in volume, is valued by 52%, which is unsurprising particularly in case of smaller economies where fiscal space is often tight. More than half of respondents (55%) highlighted the specialised technical expertise and normative standards that UN agencies bring, consistent with earlier findings that SIDS rely on UN entities for policy formulation, reporting obligations and institutional strengthening. Respondents also referenced,

though less frequently, the importance of UN's ability to mobilise global resource for them (35%), crisis response capacity (28%), advocacy for SIDS priorities (24%) and convening power (23%), underscoring the UN system's bridging and coordination role across the fragmented development partner landscape.

Figure 7 Key attributes that make a UN agency a most valued development partner for SIDS



Total number of responses: Base = 40 respondents (Caribbean 21, Pacific 12 and AIS 7). All SIDS responses are equally weighted by country and region.

4.5 Preferred forms of climate and development support for SIDS

This section examines SIDS preferences for different types of financial support and instruments and assesses how this compares with the actual uptake of different climate and disaster risk finance tools, including innovative financing mechanisms.

4.5.1 Preferred forms of support

The survey reveals a strong and consistent hierarchy in SIDS' preferred forms of development finance (see Figure 8).

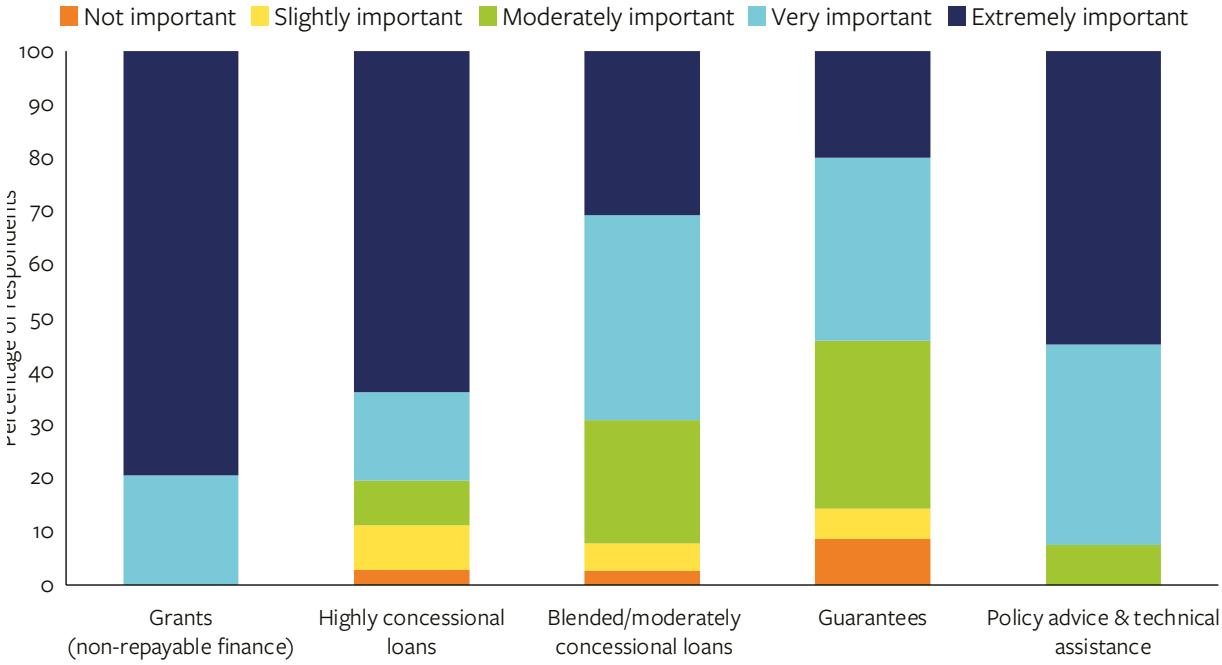
Grants dominate, with 78% of respondents rating them as 'extremely important' and a further 20% rating them as 'very important'. Regional patterns reinforce these dynamics. Caribbean and AIS respondents particularly emphasise grants (81% and 85.7% reporting them as 'extremely important', respectively), while Pacific respondents also prioritise grants but with a slightly larger share rating them as 'very' rather than 'extremely important'. This near unanimity across regions

reflects widely acknowledged structural constraints in SIDS including small revenue bases, high exposure to exogenous shocks and chronic volatility in public finances (Wilkinson et al., 2023; McGillivray et al., 2010; Dornan and Pryke, 2020).

Highly concessional loans rank second: 58% consider them 'extremely important' and 15% 'very important'. They receive the strongest support in AIS countries, where 71% rate them as extremely important, compared with 58% in the Pacific and 52% in the Caribbean.

Moderately concessional loans receive lower ratings as only 30% of respondents value them 'extremely important'. This shows that SIDS value concessional terms because they soften the pro-cyclical fiscal pressure associated with standard lending and better match the volatility created by climate shocks, while still offering a viable borrowing option when grants are unavailable.

Figure 8 Most preferred forms of development support for SIDS



Note: Total number of responses: Base = 40 respondents (Caribbean 21, Pacific 12 and AIS 7). All SIDS responses are equally weighted by country and region.

Policy advice and technical assistance are also rated highly, with 55% identifying them as 'extremely important' and 38% as 'very important'. Technical assistance is valued across all regions, but its salience is especially clear in the Pacific, where every respondent rated it very or extremely important, mirroring long-standing regional commentary on institutional strain

and project complexity (Dornan and Pryke, 2020). This emphasis reflects persistent capacity challenges associated with accessing external finance including project preparation, climate modelling, fiduciary standards and safeguard compliance (Treichel et al., 2024; OECD, 2018).

Credit guarantees (which provide SIDS with access to international capital markets on more favourable terms) score consistently low in all three regions, with slightly higher acceptance in AIS, but without any region treating them as central to their financing needs. This lower valuation is consistent with concerns about risk sharing and transaction complexity of such modalities of financial support for very small economies with narrow private sectors (Volz and Ahmed, 2020). It might also reflect limited understanding of how these instruments work in practice (see section 4.5.2).

Overall, respondents favoured financial modalities that minimise future debt exposure and reduce administrative burdens, while placing high value on support that strengthens their ability to access and manage climate finance (Jain, 2023). The combination of strong demand for grants and technical assistance and acceptance of highly concessional loans reflects a development finance landscape in which structural vulnerability and constrained fiscal space continue to shape the boundaries of feasible financing options.

4.5.2 Knowledge and experience of innovative finance instruments

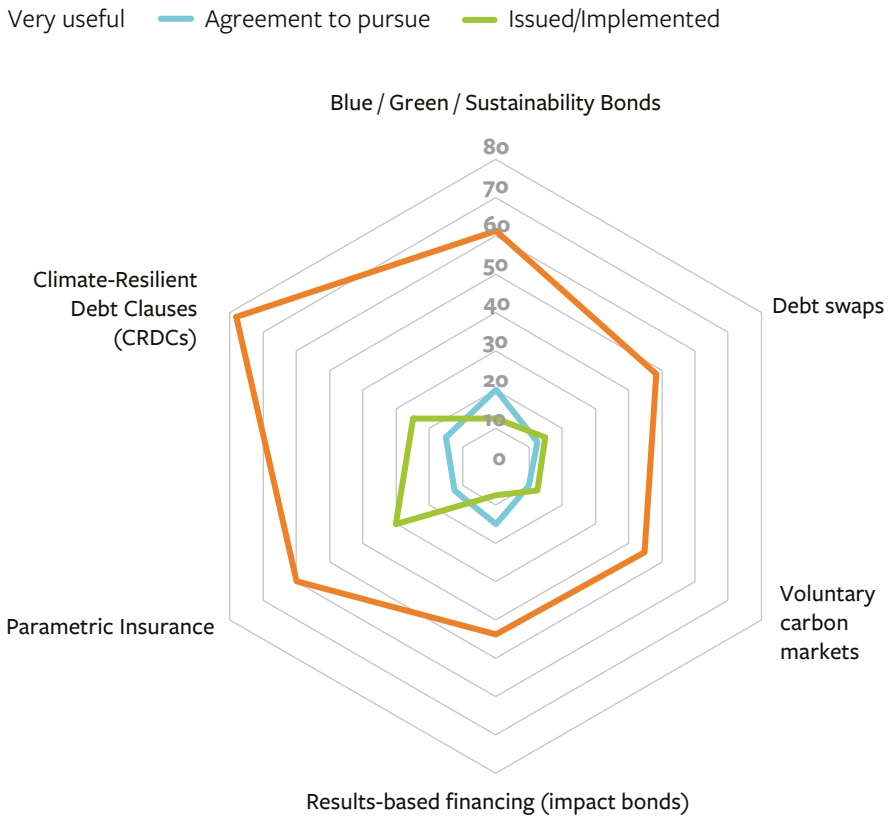
SIDS consider different innovative climate and disaster risk finance instruments to be highly valuable, yet their practical implementation remains uneven and often limited (Figure 9). When asked about the usefulness of innovative financing instruments, SIDS valued:

- climate-resilient debt clauses (CRDCs), with 78% of respondents rating them as 'very useful'
- blue, green and sustainability-linked bonds (61%)
- parametric insurance (60%).

However, when asked about their implementation or practical use, 15% of the respondents said their country was at an advanced discussions stage on CRDCs, and 25% reported actual issuance.[9] A similar pattern is evident for blue and green bonds, debt swaps, voluntary carbon markets and results-based financing, all of which show high perceived usefulness but limited practical implementation.

9 These two survey questions were asked separately to distinguish actual use from perceived usefulness. One question captured which innovative finance instruments governments have already implemented, while the other question was about instruments they consider most useful for their needs. However, the responses to these questions are analysed collectively.

Figure 9 Perceived usefulness versus implementation status of innovative climate and disaster risk finance instruments



Note: Total number of responses: Base = 40 respondents (Caribbean 21, Pacific 12 and AIS 7). All SIDS responses are equally weighted by country and region.

A regional breakdown of data confirms that these instruments are considered very useful but are at different stages of uptake across SIDS. Caribbean respondents report the highest implementation of parametric insurance and CRDCs, each at 43% of total responses. This relates to their long-standing engagement with pooled risk facilities and recent experimentation with disaster and climate contingent debt in that region. Pacific respondents show early but more tentative uptake: 25% of respondents report parametric insurance and voluntary carbon markets at the implementation stage, while other instruments remain largely at early discussion stage. AIS respondents, by contrast, are more concentrated in early discussion and agreement phases, particularly for bonds, debt swaps and results-based instruments, with implementation still nascent.

High levels of uncertainty also emerge from the data. Across all instruments, 35–43% of respondents select 'don't know or not applicable' for current use. This suggests that awareness of the status of these instruments within government is patchy, and that policy debates on innovative finance may be driven by relatively small expert communities rather than broad institutional familiarity. Studies on access to multilateral climate funds describe similar dynamics,

where complex fiduciary requirements, accreditation standards and project preparation demands concentrate knowledge in specialised units and external consultancies (Kalaidjian and Robinson, 2022; Treichel et al., 2024; OECD, 2025b).

To ground these perceptions in reality, it is important to compare respondents' perceptions with evidence of implementation of these instruments (see Appendix 1). Parametric insurance provides the clearest illustration of an instrument that is both widely understood and widely used. Twelve Caribbean SIDS participate in the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF), while 10 Pacific states use the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company for cyclone and earthquake coverage. CRDCs show similarly broad availability, with 35 SIDS being eligible to access them through either IBRD or IDA lending windows. However, their usage remains very limited. Most notable examples of SIDS which have used CRDC type hurricane clauses include Grenada, Barbados and Bahamas, where debt restructurings (used in 2015, 2018–19 and 2022, respectively) included state-contingent features that suspend debt payments following severe disasters (Mustapha et al., 2023).

The implementation of blue/green bonds, debt swaps and voluntary carbon markets is far more limited and uneven in comparison, despite their high perceived usefulness. Sovereign thematic bonds have been issued by only a few SIDS, with Cabo Verde and Fiji the leading examples of successful corporate and sovereign blue bond issuance.[10] Debt swaps show a similar pattern of concentration, most notably in the Caribbean SIDS.[11] Participation in voluntary carbon markets is even more restricted, with significant engagement limited to Guyana's transactions under the Architecture for REDD+ transactions.[12]

These selective cases demonstrate that, while SIDS recognise the strategic value of these innovative instruments, adoption depends on technical readiness, creditworthiness, and transaction support, leaving most countries unable to move from conceptual interest to implementation (Garschagen and Doshi, 2022; Treichel et al., 2024).

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10 Cabo Verde's Blu-X–listed blue bond raised US$3.5 million, complemented by a bilateral debt-for-climate swap with Portugal that redirected €140 million in debt service into a national climate and environment fund. Fiji also issued one of the first sovereign green bonds among SIDS in 2017 (raising FJ$100 million) and later issued a FJ$20 million sovereign blue bond in 2023.

11 The Bahamas launched a US$300 million debt conversion for marine conservation in 2024, unlocking approximately US$124 million in financing for ocean protection. Jamaica also conducted two domestic debt exchanges in 2010 and 2013, and it is often cited as early regional examples of debt restructuring linked to fiscal and macroeconomic stabilisation which, while not climate-focused, demonstrate experience with swap-like instruments and state-contingent restructuring frameworks. Debt swaps have been concluded in Belize in 2021 and Barbados in 2022 also.

12 REDD+ is Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Plus. Guyana sold 37.5 million jurisdictional REDD+ credits to Hess Corporation for a minimum of US$750 million (2022–2030), while Papua New Guinea hosts multiple Verra- and Gold Standard–certified carbon projects.

4.6 Strengthening development partners' support

Across all three regions, a priority concern is the need for significantly higher volumes of concessional finance (see Figure 10). It was selected by 64% of Caribbean, 60% of Pacific and 75% of AIS respondents as the top development partner support needed to advance implementation of the ABAS. The call for greater concessionality reflects not only financial stress but also the developmental logic of ABAS, which situates resilience-building as a public good requiring affordable, predictable finance.

A second priority concerns the speed with which development partners move from proposal to disbursement of funding. This issue was particularly acute in the Pacific (55% of the respondents) and AIS region (42%) and aligns closely with earlier observations that climate funds are valued for accessibility yet remain constrained by slow operational processes. The long approval time is a persistent barrier for SIDS across the multilateral climate funds and bilateral channels (Kalaidjian and Robinson, 2022; Treichel et al., 2024), undermining efforts to respond rapidly to climate impacts and delaying implementation of national adaptation plans. The emphasis on reducing approval times mirrors SIDS broader efforts to shift international financing systems toward 'fit for purpose' modalities that reflect their exposure to recurrent disasters and high transaction costs (OECD, 2018).

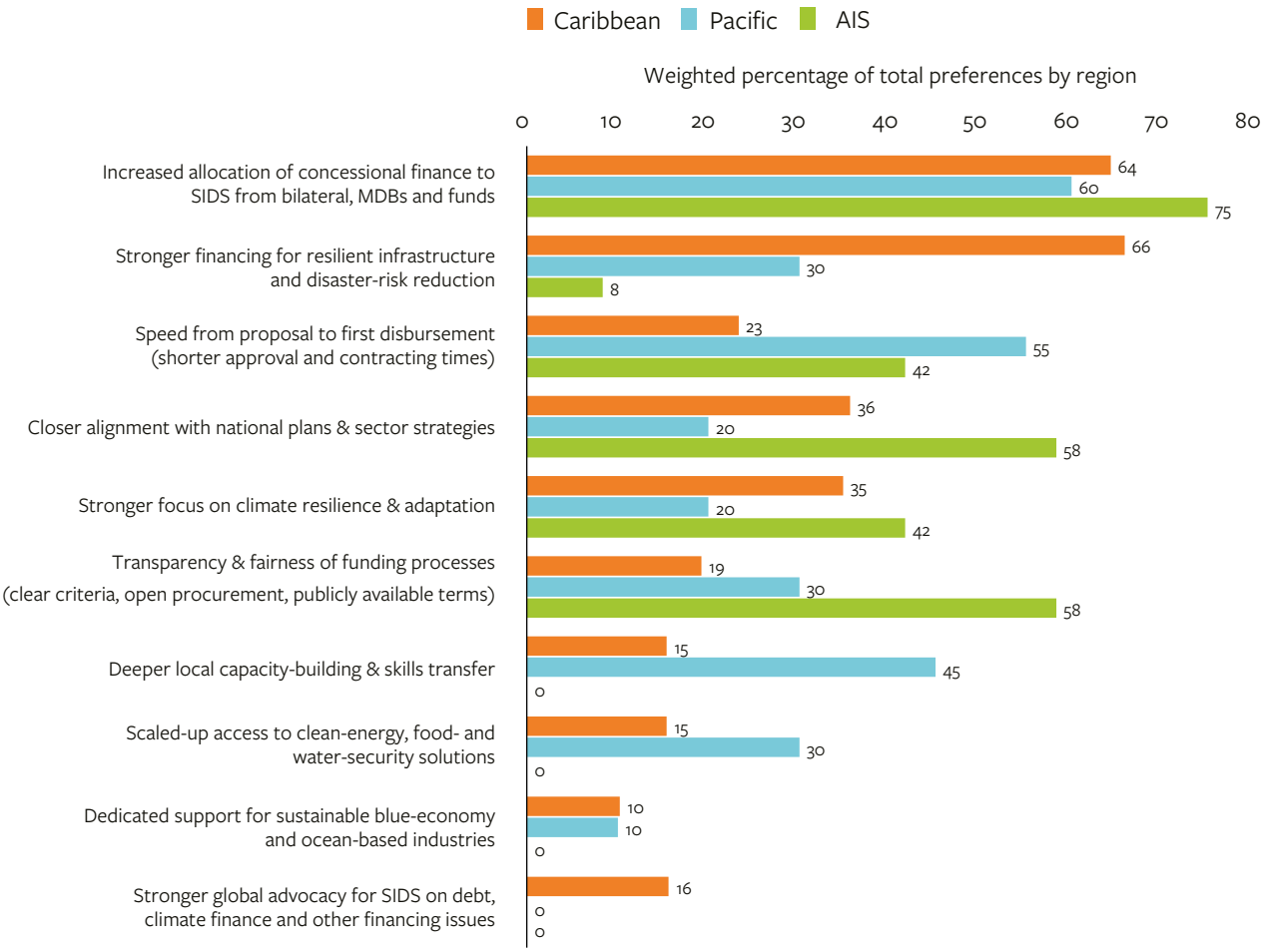
The third priority area relates to alignment of funding with national development plans, transparency in funding allocations, and stronger focus on climate resilience and adaptation. Caribbean and AIS respondents in particular strongly emphasised closer alignment with national plans and clearer funding criteria, which reflect their longstanding concerns about fragmented programming and externally shaped priorities (Custer et al., 2025). These concerns also surfaced in earlier sections: SIDS favour bilateral partners that respect national pathways, MDBs that demonstrate policy coherence, and climate funds that clearly support implementation of NDCs, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and national resilience strategies. SIDS also call for greater transparency (especially AIS SIDS), which is a widely accepted critique of development finance allocations involving opaque eligibility rules, unpredictable procurement requirements and inconsistent concessionality terms in multilateral and bilateral channels (OECD/UNDP, 2019; Custer et al., 2025).

A fourth priority is around support specifically for climate and disaster resilience, particularly in the Caribbean where 66% of respondents prioritised resilient infrastructure while 35% broader adaptation and resilience. This reflects recent regional experiences with hurricanes and the importance of risk pools such as CCRIF, which has shown how risk financing can be utilised in times of dire need.[13]

13 For instance, following Hurricane Melissa, Jamaica received a combined US$91.9 million in parametric insurance payouts from CCRIF SPC, comprising US$70.8 million triggered by its tropical cyclone policy and a further US$21.1 million under its excess-rainfall policy.

Finally, the need for capacity development emerges strongly in the Pacific, where 45% of respondents identified local skills transfer as an immediate priority. This supports earlier findings, which showed a considerable implementation gap for innovative finance instruments: high perceived usefulness is not translating into widespread adoption largely due to technical, legal and administrative capacity constraints. Many innovative financing mechanisms also depend on substantial grant funding or blended finance to become viable, yet these resources are increasingly scarce in SIDS. Therefore, the emphasis on capacity development highlights an institutional dimension of ABAS that is discussed less but remains critical for optimum utilisation of development cooperation.

Figure 10 SIDS preferences for support needed to implement the ABAS



Note: Total number of responses: Base = 40 respondents (Caribbean 21, Pacific 12 and AIS 7). All SIDS responses are equally weighted by country and region.

5 Recommendations for SIDS and their development partners

The findings and analysis presented in this study provide inputs for SIDS in advancing their case for tailored support aligned to their special circumstances, as well as guidance for development partners in structuring their support to SIDS. They should therefore help guide developments under the SIDS Partnership Framework, based on the principles of country ownership, long-term engagement and harmonised support.

A number of results stand out in the SIDS Perceptions Survey 2026, which SIDS should pay attention to as they advocate improvements in development and climate assistance.

First, the perceptions of SIDS government officials of their partners are well aligned with the literature and data on actual finance flows and take up of different financing instruments in SIDS.

Second, SIDS' engagement patterns with 'traditional' development partners reflect long-standing colonial, historical and regional relationships and thematic alignment, but this is changing as they forge new partnerships in response to geopolitical shifts. This could make it more challenging to align development support with SIDS' stated needs.

Third, SIDS value a range of development partners including multilateral – and notably regional – development banks, climate funds and a small number of large bilateral donors. But China is the most valued bilateral partner overall and has directed significant volumes of development finance to SIDS in recent years.

Fourth, while volumes of finance are clearly important, SIDS value most the ability to access partner funding, alignment with national development plans and NDCs, and reliability of finance. Looking ahead, it is also clear from the survey results that concessionality in finance is critical – it is the number one preference for SIDS for advancing implementation of the ABAS.

Fifth, SIDS consider disaster risk finance and other innovative finance instruments useful, but are at different stages of uptake, with limited practical implementation and limited understanding of these instruments in some cases.

Based on these findings, this paper puts forward five recommendations for improved alignment of development partner support with ABAS priorities:

1. Offer consistent support to SIDS leadership in global governance reform

Partners are not doing enough to support 'advocacy for SIDS priorities', signalling a perceived lack of dependable political backing. This stands in contrast to the central role SIDS play in shaping critical global public goods: from climate action to ocean protection and international financial reform. Development partners need to provide systematic diplomatic support for SIDS-led initiatives if they do indeed value them. This is consistent with ABAS's emphasis on fair representation and strengthened voice.

2. Streamline access to sustainable development and climate finance: joined up procedures, direct-access options and uptake of innovative finance

SIDS ranked ease of accessing finance as the single most important characteristic of their preferred partners, across all categories. Yet the literature repeatedly shows that SIDS face some of the most demanding access hurdles. Partners must address this mismatch by pushing for: simplified approval processes, harmonisation of requirements and strengthening national entities that seek direct access. This responds to ABAS calls for reduced administrative burdens, simplified access, and more timely, predictable support. Coordinated efforts should be made to increase the uptake of innovative finance instruments depending on their applicability and viability in a specific country context.

3. Put NDCs, NAPs and national development and resilience plans front and centre in all programming decisions

Alignment of external assistance with national development priorities was one of the most valued features of development partners. SIDS clearly prefer partners whose investments reinforce existing national plans and strategies. Partners should therefore structure their support based on a solid understanding of national priorities and work with partners that have an in-country presence (including UN agencies) to co-design country strategies, directly contributing to ABAS objectives on sovereignty, policy coherence and country ownership.

4. Provide predictable concessional finance that centres on reducing climate vulnerability and fiscal volatility

The survey shows that concessional terms and predictability matter greatly to SIDS, especially given their exposure to climate shocks and narrow fiscal space. Yet existing funding flows remain unpredictable and fragmented. Multi-year concessional commitments targeting places, sectors and populations with high exposure and economic impacts would help stabilise budgets, reduce crisis-driven borrowing, and advance ABAS priorities on resilient economies, debt sustainability and accessible climate finance.

5. Shift from fragmented technical assistance to long-term institutional and human capacity systems

The support offered by partners to strengthen SIDS national systems and institutional capacity is an area of notable weakness in development assistance. Survey respondents ranked this very low, and the literature confirms that technical assistance remains largely fragmented and short term (except for the embedded adviser modality being used to enhance climate finance access). This needs to be addressed through long-term, systems-oriented capacity programmes that can help SIDS to achieve and sustain development outcomes in line with ABAS emphasis on SIDS taking the lead and the need for strong local institutions.

The analysis and recommendations presented in this study suggest that development partners still have a way to go to adapt their modalities and support to SIDS if they are to advance their long-term resilience objectives. SIDS face unique challenges but they are not a monolith. Even SIDS in the same region do not agree on all issues (such as deep-sea mining), and their development priorities are different. This shapes how small island nations engage with development partners as their priorities shift and aid budgets contract. In this evolving landscape, it is more important than ever that the financial and technical support SIDS receive is appropriate to their contexts and is as effective as it can be.

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Appendix 1 Real-world uptake of innovative finance instruments in SIDS

Green = Yes / implemented / accessible

Red = No / not implemented

Yellow = Partial issuance / eligible / planning stage

SIDS	Blue/green/ thematic bonds	Debt swaps	Voluntary carbon markets	Parametric insurance	CRDCs / hurricane clauses eligibility*
Antigua and Barbuda					
Bahamas					
Barbados					
Belize					
Cabo Verde					
Comoros					
Dominica					
Dominican Republic					
Fiji					
Grenada					
Guinea-Bissau					
Guyana					
Haiti					
Jamaica					
Kiribati					
Maldives					
Marshall Islands					
Mauritius					
Micronesia					
Nauru					
Palau					
Papua New Guinea					

Samoa					
São Tomé & Príncipe					
Seychelles					
Solomon Islands					
St Kitts & Nevis					
St Lucia					
St Vincent & Grenadines					
Suriname					
Timor-Leste					
Tonga					
Trinidad & Tobago					
Tuvalu					
Vanuatu					

*IBRD or IDA eligible

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