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| Forum: | Environment Commission |
| Issue: | Addressing the issue of balancing the environmental harms and economic reliance on tourism in small island developing nations |
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Introduction

Tourism plays a key role in a nation's economy, especially in **small island developing states (SIDS)**. Being located in the Caribbean, the Pacific, the South China Sea, and the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, these islands have isolated economies that are vulnerable to climate change and external economic crises. Due to their limited resources, SIDS are also heavily reliant on tourism: in 2023, around 38% of export revenues in SIDS came from international tourism, this percentage reaching 43% before the pandemic. Tourism in the economies of SIDS have almost doubled over the past decades, with the arrival of international tourists increasing from 28 million in 2000 to 44 million in 2019 (Anon, 2021). This has undeniably improved the economies of SIDS through creating job opportunities and contributing to their GDP. Despite that, dependency on tourism can create concerns regarding the island inhabitant's needs for living resources, the amount of available land, and the lack of infrastructure.

Moreover, the increasing demand for tourism has led to environmental harms on these islands including the damaging and loss of ecosystems and **anthropogenic** pressures that are affecting all SIDS. Recently, more and more SIDS are seeing the degradation of ecosystems such as tropical montane cloud forests (ecosystems seen in the tropics that provide water during the dry season and for settlements) and sand and sediment on coasts, negatively impacting the state and health of biodiversity. In addition, anthropogenic forces, namely pollution and land-use, are causing freshwater shortages, while sea level rises and climate change are even leading to population displacement. A major factor for these environmental challenges faced by SIDS is not their negligence towards them, but instead their deficiency of technologies, skills, and land. As a consequence of their generally weak governance and small-scale economies, SIDS are unable to integrate widespread sustainable practices. Plus, with their over dependence on tourism as a primary source of revenue and employment, nations would be unlikely to make long term sustainable investments over short term gains. It is imperative for us to recognize the issue of balancing economic reliance on tourism and environmental harms for SIDS, understanding that an all-encompassing approach that includes protecting, collaborating, and educating is required to address this subject.

Definition of Key Terms

Small island developing states (SIDS)

A group of 39 states and 18 associate participants of United Nations regional commissions that share similar sustainable development challenges by reason of their small size and islands, remoteness, and vulnerability to natural disasters.

Anthropogenic

As an adjective, “anthropogenic” refers to being related to or caused by the influence of human beings on nature, and is either indirect or direct. Can also be used as an adverb, in which it’ll be written as “anthropogenically”.

History & Developments

Post war island developments (1960s)

Two major developments seen in small islands after the Second World War in the 1960s were the decolonization of the islands and the global expansion of international tourism. As a result of the rising trend of seeking independence, islands gained political freedom and established autonomies and unique laws/economic policies. Nontraditional activities such as offshore finance (business activity that takes place outside someone’s country of residence) also emerged, providing alternative economic opportunities for islands apart from agriculture or fishing. The rise of international tourism has also been remarkable, seeing that the growth in tourism expenditure was around 75% from 1958 to 1963 (The UNESCO Courier, 1966). This transformed the economic structure of small islands from exporting goods towards tourism as a primary source of income, resulting in more foreign exchange and infrastructure development.

Environmental impacts from tourism (1970s-1980s)

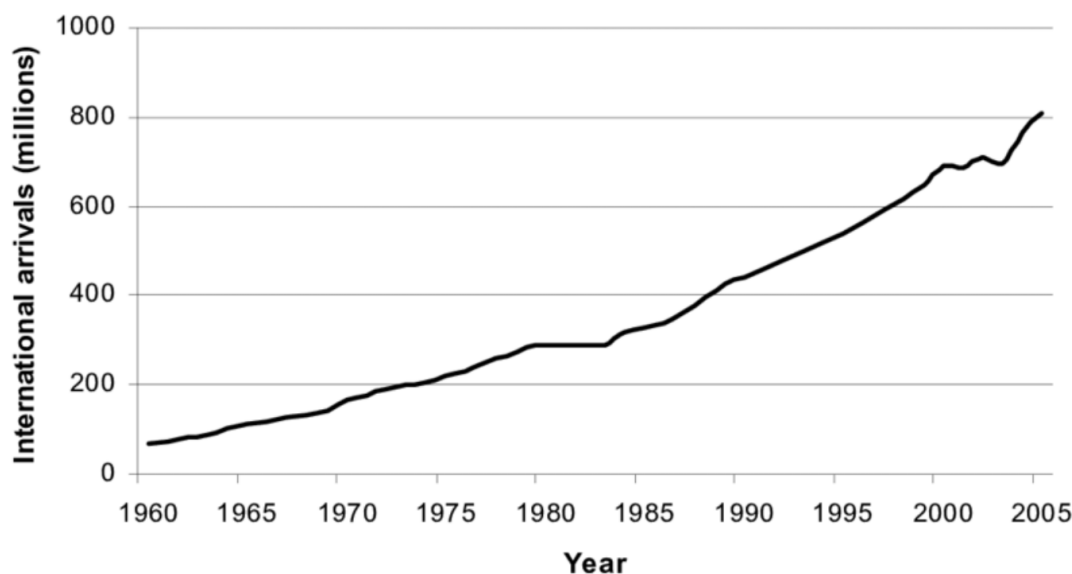
Islands invested heavily in infrastructure such as hotels and transportation systems to welcome the sudden influx of tourists, quickly leading to overbuilding and pressure on the islands’ local resources, in turn affecting their natural lands. The negative environmental impacts include deforestation and erosion of forests from road-works, as well as beach loss and water pollution from sand mining and dredging (removal of debris from the bottom of lakes and other bodies of water). Overall, incoming demand from tourists often exceeded the islands’ natural capacities, leading into a spiral of unsustainable practices.

Adopting eco-friendly tourism practices (1990s)

As island tourism escalated and developed, many established destinations such as Bermuda sought to balance vacation quality and its environmental impacts. They focused on building an urge for environmental conservation, spreading awareness within the community, and creating strong policies to monitor their participation. Not only that, but many islands also had offshore finance sectors that were big enough to support economic suffrage if tourism declines occurred. Policies that capped bed capacity and cruise ship numbers as well as initiatives to protect the islands’ threatened flora and fauna reduced pollution and the degradation of ecosystems.

In addition, active community engagement stimulated a sense of island identity, bringing together residents and strengthening their cultural heritage.

Tourism in SIDS today (2000s-present)



SIDS tourism now puts more emphasis on eco-tourism and more personalized luxury services such as exclusive accommodations or exotic locations. Cruise tourism and the “3S”—sun, sea, and sand—have become the main economic factors in these small islands, bringing them vacation travelers who are willing to spend considerable amounts of money. However, cruise ships still generate lots of damage to coral reefs and seagrass beds, not to mention the pollution and waste from the overwhelming amount of tourists visiting the islands every day. Furthermore, since cruise ships are often concentrated in the same small region, the impact of their waste becomes even more significant.

Figure 1: Number of international tourist arrivals between 1960 and 2005. Source: World Tourism Organization

Major Parties Involved

United States

The US has long been aiding SIDS in their efforts towards sustainable development through partnerships, funding, promotion, and technical assistance. Partnerships such as the U.S-Pacific Partnership Strategy as well as the utilization of Peace Corp Volunteers have succeeded in providing funds and support towards programs for sustainable development. The Millennium Challenge Cooperation (MCC) have also signed a \$125 million Belize Compact to increase the quality of education and reduce electricity costs, both of which were identified as key issues (The White House, 2024). In addition, The State Department and other sectors have invested in helping

SIDS combat climate change, expand green infrastructure, and help capacity building efforts. Moreover, the United States partners with and provides support to NGOs such as The Nature Conservatory and international partnerships such as The Global Environment Facility, which provide SIDS with resources for initiatives towards reducing pollution and reducing vulnerability towards weather events.

United Kingdom

The UK has been active in supporting small islands in protecting their marine life and funding projects that protect biodiversity, namely the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme (CMEP) and The UK Small Island Developing States Strategy. The CMEP was launched in 2016 with the goal of supporting the marine economies of 17 Commonwealth SIDS and help with making space on the islands to better organize their marine resources. Furthermore, The UK Small Island Developing States Strategy clarifies the International Development Strategy vision for SIDS' economic and climate resilience by 2030, which supports SIDS with the resources that they need for capacity building and protecting their ocean biodiversity, in addition to recognizing debt vulnerabilities and helping SIDS recover from the Covid-19 crisis.

The Global Environment Facility

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is an international environmental fund that focuses on providing opportunities for action towards climate change and biodiversity loss. The GEF has facilitated collaborations among SIDS and projects that combat pollution and improve nature conservation. Strategies such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) managed Global Environment Facility Small Grants Program (GEF SGP) has been active since 1993 and works with SIDS through different aspects by responding to unique challenges and maximizing new opportunities. During Covid-19, they've also provided innovative financial guidance including blue bonds to support conservation efforts and promoting climate action with the 2030 Agenda to help SIDS recover.

Timeline of Events

| Date | Event Name | Description |
|-------------|------------------------------|--|
| May 6, 1994 | Barbados Programme of Action | The outcome of the BPOA was the Barbados Declaration, a policy document that addresses the economic, environmental, and social development issues that islands face, as well as actions and commitments similar to those in Agenda 21. |

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| January 13, 2005 | Mauritius Declaration and Strategy | Reaffirms the Barbados Programme of Action, and states that the adaption of SIDS to the impacts of climate change and sea level rise is still a major priority, in addition to encouraging and promoting the use of improved fossil fuel technologies and energy efficiency. It also recognizes the smallest SIDS in their struggles to integrate into the global economy due to their size. |
| December 4, 2015 | 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development | Promoted tourism's role in accelerating sustainable development. It highlighted how tourism contributed to economic growth, employment opportunities and poverty reduction, climate change, cultural heritage, and peace and security. |

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)

- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), May 9, 1992
- Also known as the Earth Summit, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. This UN treaty establishes the basic legal framework and principles for global climate change and includes extensions into treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol, which commits states to contribute to stabilizing greenhouse gas emissions. The protocol, along with the original goals of the UNFCCC, has had both direct and indirect impacts on SIDS in their efforts to combat climate change. Through the encouragement of countries to financially aid emission reduction projects, small islands have been able to attract investments and mobilize funds to strengthen themselves against environmental disasters. In addition, the advocacy for global awareness on the weight of climate change has led to greater support for weaker nations including SIDS in global crises.

Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of SIDS

- Barbados Programme of Action, May 6, 1994
- Being one of the SIDS themselves, Barbados has been heavily involved in efforts to solve the issue of the environmental and economic impacts of tourism in SIDS, playing a crucial role in hosting the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of SIDS in 1994, which led to the approval of the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA). Over 100 countries adopted the BPOA, and by 1999 many improvements

had been made in climate change and tourism in SIDS. Gauges for monitoring sea rise had been set up in 11 South Pacific countries, and grants were given to small islands for adaption to climate change. For tourism, regulations, comprehensive plans and environmental impact assessments had been conducted in several SIDS, such as the Maldives, Mauritius, and the Netherlands Antilles.

- Along with the necessary areas of action that the BPOA specifies, Barbados has collaborated with other small islands to shift towards low-carbon, eco-efficient economy. As a result of the challenge of balancing economic stability and climate change, frameworks such as the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the BPOA (MSI) has been released, which elaborates upon the BPOA and sets additional strategies in prioritized areas to emphasize the consolidation of economic, social and environmental factors of sustainable development.

13th World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Global Code of Ethics for Tourism

- Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, September 27 1999, A/RES/406(XII)
- During the 13th World Tourism Organization (WTO) Conference, the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism was adopted by the resolution A/RES/406(XII), which is an all-encompassing set of guidelines for maximizing the nation's benefits while minimizing its negative impacts on the environment and cultural heritage. For SIDS, the Global Code of Ethic for Tourism advocates for responsible and sustainable tourism practices and points out the importance of partnerships and collaboration among private sectors, the government, and local communities in addressing sustainable tourism concerns.

Possible Solutions

1. Reinforcing Environmental Policies and Regulations

Through recognizing the increasing negative environmental impacts that tourism has on small islands' natural environments, and it's imperative for these nations to explore and integrate sustainable tourism applications that can merge well with existing traditional knowledge and practice. **It's thus necessary to strengthen policies and set stricter regulations, namely regulations to prevent overfishing, manage logging and agriculture, and to promote conservation and eco-friendly growth.** By promoting conservation and climate change adaptations, green practices such as using renewable energy can develop. Additionally, sector specific policies should be integrated among SIDS to ensure that each unique issue is addressed accordingly and relative to the local cultural and social traditional values.

2. Diversifying the Economy of SIDS:

As climate changes and sea level rises become more extreme, the availability of tourism in small islands face threats and their dominating position in SIDS economies aren't a guarantee. **To avoid the financial repercussions that these disadvantaged nations, small islands should look into other ways to support their economy.** Along with developing innovative strategies, investing in and building upon substitute industries such as

agriculture, renewable energy, and fisheries can reduce the dependence that many nations have on tourism. As a result, the environmental impacts of tourism may also be limited.

3. Building Resilience and Adaptation Strategies

When addressing unique challenges and environmental risks, nations should take appropriate climate change adaptation measures and strategies in case of natural disasters. **These measures include improving the durability of vital infrastructure such as water and energy systems through introducing new and innovative technologies or improved designs.** As island nations are prone to natural disasters such as tsunamis and hurricanes, the refinement of alarm systems and emergency response strategies within communities should be well prepared beforehand.

4. Strengthening Local Capacities of SIDS

Capacity building is important in SIDS due to their sheer vulnerability climate change impacts (such as fish and freshwater availability after changes in water temperature; the effects of sea level rise on agricultural production; and decline in tourism from damaged beaches or degradation of coastal ecosystems) and their limited financial resources. **By strengthening the local capacities of the small islands through cooperation between countries, awareness and knowledge can be spread for local stakeholders, government officials, and tourism managers about sustainable tourism practices.** Integrating approaches similar to Seychelles with the use of community-based initiatives and establishing marine protection/conservation areas can make a significant difference in the balancing the effects of tourism economically and environmentally.

5. Long Term Monitoring and Evaluation:

Through long term monitoring of the progress and evaluating the outcomes of sustainable projects and initiatives, it'll be easier to identify the most effective practices, revise approaches, and respond to emerging issues for small islands. **Moreover, with technologies that can regularly monitor the environmental, social, and economic impact of tourism on SIDS and organize data insights, it'll be possible take analyzations from the data for decision-making and creating policies or regulations.** Evaluation can also ensure that policy and strategy goals are being met, and this must also take into account the uncertainties and risks caused by global climate change and new environmental trends.

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