

Lonely Islands: Charting a Course for Islands to Resilience and Self-sufficiency in a Warming Planet

Drafted by the Small Island Nations COP30 Working Group

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Introduction

As a peripheral, small island nation on Europe's Atlantic fringe, Ireland occupies a unique position in climate negotiations, with its own histories of colonization and uneven development shaping its climate politics. While not facing the existential threats confronting Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Ireland's vulnerability to Atlantic storms and sea-level rise creates common ground for solidarity. This solidarity increasingly manifests through climate justice framings that link loss and damage, historical responsibility, and the pursuit of equitable transitions, enabling Ireland to support SIDS' demands for finance, technology transfer, and inclusive governance in the emerging Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP). By aligning its decarbonization and adaptation strategies with SIDS' calls for justice, Ireland can bridge North-South divides, foregrounding shared island vulnerabilities while resisting homogenizing narratives of energy transition.

Problem Statement

The unique biodiversity and cultural heritage of SIDS are increasingly threatened by climate change impacts, including sea-level rise, ocean acidification, and intensified extreme weather events, which erode both ecological integrity and intangible cultural lifeways. Safeguarding endemic species and traditional knowledge systems demands that climate adaptation and mitigation strategies integrate ecological conservation with cultural resilience. Moreover, as climate displacement accelerates, the safe passage and legal protection of climate refugees from SIDS must be embedded within international climate justice frameworks, recognizing loss of land and heritage not only as environmental issues but also as profound political and ethical concerns.

What has Ireland done so far to support SIDS facing the climate catastrophe

Ireland has established a dedicated SIDS Unit within the Department of Foreign Affairs to coordinate policy to support SIDS facing climate breakdown. The state recently launched its Second Strategy for Partnership with SIDS at COP28 in 2023, its first Strategy for Partnership with SIDS running from 2019-2025. Ireland has committed to modest funding of climate resilience projects for SIDS, contributing €25m to the Loss and Damage fund, €3.8m towards oceanic research, and €600k to help develop sustainable fisheries in African SIDS. These contributions are in addition to the €40m committed by Ireland to the Green Climate Fund, which exists to help countries reduce their Greenhouse Gases and adapt to impact of climate change, but this is not specifically a fund to support SIDS. Ireland has also established the SIDS Fellows Programme, allowing for the transfer of knowledge and skills necessary to mitigate against the climate breakdown.

Recommendations

1. Ireland should expand its Strategy for Partnership with SIDS and make a long-term commitment to supporting SIDS mitigate against the emerging climate shocks. The First Strategy for Partnership ran for six years, and it is unclear how long the Second Strategy for Partnership will continue.
2. Ireland should coordinate and collaborate with similar states seeking to support SIDS and establish a Union of Developed Island states – New Zealand, Japan, Iceland, Ireland etc., which should be formed to explicitly advocate for SIDS. These developed island nations should use positionality

and importance to Global North to raise voices of SIDS, which are states that do not have the same access to the global halls of power and financial markets as the developed island states.

3. Ireland should advocate for debt cancellation for SIDS. SIDS have been demanding debt cancellation so they can both develop and put their state's finances into climate resilience projects. A large portion of many SIDS' debt is due to decolonization. The Irish Free State was similarly straddled with debt owed to the imperial power which gainsaid development. The State eventually refused to pay the debt. Ireland has a moral imperative to advocate for SIDS' debt cancellation both from historical experience and to support SIDS in preparing for climate shocks.
4. Ireland should support cultural digitization projects with SIDS to conserve unique cultures histories and identities. Due to rising sea levels many SIDS face the real threat of submersion and mass emigration, which could subsequently result in the loss of their unique cultures and identities. Ireland should assist SIDS conserving these cultures and identities, as Ireland has global expertise in the digitisation and conservation of archives, illustrated by the State's Bureau of Military History and Pension Files archives project, and the Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland project.
5. Climate adaptation measures must be of top priority for all Island Nations; however, financiers still see them as high risk and niche emerging markets. To ensure that adaptation measures solve critical societal challenges and nature protection for vulnerable islands, flexible funding strategies for trial and error and blended finances for nature-based solutions need to be urgently employed. Ireland has access to financial markets and has demonstrated economic strength by hosting the most valuable technology companies in the world. In 2025, Ireland can streamline the climate adaptation capacity building for SIDS as committed before and invest for urgent nature-based solutions in the region.
6. For Island nations to be self-reliant, they have to lead in the field of Circular Economy and in conserving natural resources. A distinct policy for material consumption reduction can be proposed, with a focus on waste reduction, material procurement, and circularity. Ireland can help set ambitious targets for struggling Island nations for every sector based on existing waste and circularity policies. This strategy should heavily focus on economic incentives for businesses to meet the goals and persistent public awareness campaigns.
7. As the national leader in education and research, TCD has the means to turn itself into a "living lab" and pioneer climate adaptation measures on campus. This will set a standard for higher education institutions all around the world, particularly for SIDS and other Island nations. The department of Civil Engineering alone harbors 11 leading researchers on renewable energy and energy efficiency, combining their expertise with Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland experts, TCD can host numerous workshops, conferences, and modules geared towards training SIDS public and industry leaders.

Conclusion

At COP30 in Belém, we propose that Ireland takes a leadership role in supporting SIDS to adapt to the warming world. Ireland is well-placed to assist SIDS in this way, due to Ireland's global positionality and history. Our goal in this endeavor is to enable all Island Nations to become self-sufficient and resilient by 2050.

References



All references can be located following this QR Code: