House of Commons

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: UK Small Island Developing States Strategy, HC 1298

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Mr Richard Bacon; Theo Clarke; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger; Nigel Mills; David Mundell.

Questions 1 - 45

Witnesses

I: Jean-Paul Adam, Director for Policy and Advocacy, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa to the UN Secretary-General; Emily Wilkinson, Senior Research Fellow and Director, Resilient and Sustainable Islands Initiative, ODI.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jean-Paul Adam and Emily Wilkinson.

Q1 **Chair:** I would like to start this, our first session of the International Development Committee inquiry into small island developing states and the challenges they face, particularly around climate change. Thank you very much to our two witnesses today. We really appreciate you making the time. Would you introduce yourselves?

Emily Wilkinson: Hello, everyone. Thank you for inviting me to this meeting. My name is Emily Wilkinson. I am a senior research fellow at ODI, the global affairs think-tank, and director of the Resilient and Sustainable Islands Initiative.

Jean-Paul Adam: Good afternoon to all. I am Jean-Paul Adam. I am the director for policy and advocacy at the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa to the United Nations Secretary-General.

Q2 **Chair:** Emily, tell us what the common challenges facing UN-listed small island developing states are.

Emily Wilkinson: I am going to divide my answer into two sections. First I will talk about the common challenges that SIDS face to sustain their development gains. The second part will be in relation to their interaction with global institutions or the enabling environment.

SIDS, or, as they like to be known, large ocean states, share intrinsic structural features that make them a group of countries that is a meaningful category for development assistance and climate action. There are different definitions, but they tend to coalesce around a number of key features that make the group important and highlight their particular vulnerabilities.

The first feature is their physical exposure to tropical cyclones, coastal inundation and other hazards. They all share that. Almost all of them are located in the tropics and close to plate boundaries, so they have those physical vulnerabilities.

The second feature relates to size, and there are a number of aspects of that. They have small bureaucracies, they are small territories, and they have small populations and economies. Having small bureaucracies means that they have limited absolute capacity to manage affairs of state and those capacities cannot easily be stretched or altered. Having small economies means that it is very difficult to diversify economic activities, so they tend to be concentrated in one sector, often tourism. These economies are extremely open, so vulnerable to external shocks. In relation to their economic activities, I would add that the development opportunities that they have been able to pursue have often created environmental degradation and loss of diversity, which is a very critical issue for these small islands. Having small economies and populations also means that they are disproportionately affected by all kinds of external shocks. One example that I am very familiar with is that of Dominica, which was hit by a category 5 hurricane in 2017; 226% of GDP was wiped out overnight overnight.

The third feature of their particular characteristics and vulnerabilities is their remoteness and insularity. The distance between islands, particularly in the Pacific, and distance to markets makes the cost of development extremely high. It costs up to four times more to implement a development project in a small island developing state than in a larger developing country. For all those reasons, SIDS have high levels of structural vulnerability, which does not imply a weakness in development or a lack of development, but means that their developmental gains can easily be set back in a way that does not happen in larger developing countries and economies.

The second part of my answer is in relation to their interaction with global institutions. To very briefly provide a bit of context, the relative economic success of small island developing states has been dependent on a wider enabling environment. By that I mean an era, particularly post-independence, in which aid and trade preferences and relatively open migration schemes provided some opportunities for SIDS to identify and exploit niches, so they were able to develop in that way by exploiting this niches. That gave way to a neoliberal era in globalisation, typified by distinct niche strategies, where SIDS were able to sustain relatively high levels of growth by harnessing, for example, financial services, unlocking the potential of tourism and tapping into large inflows of remittances. That context is changing, as we are all aware. Although that is not the topic of this session, I wanted—

Q3 **Chair:** No, I am interested, and we are not all aware. Why is that context changing?

Emily Wilkinson: We are entering a new era characterised by greater global economic upheaval.

Q4 **Chair:** What do you mean by that?

Emily Wilkinson: I mean that there are more shocks and poly-crises affecting all economies and countries.

Q5 **Chair:** Can you give an example?

Emily Wilkinson: For example, there is the global pandemic, the war in Ukraine and, prior to that, the global financial crisis. All of these events came quite quickly in succession and overlapped in terms of their effect on small island economies and developing countries everywhere. Added to that, there is more division in the multilateral system. Perhaps the most important factor for small island developing states is accelerating climate change or climate impact. All of these things are happening at the same time.

Chair: Talk to us about that.

Emily Wilkinson: Small island developing states are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The next 10 years is the next period for the small island developing states strategy. We are coming to the end of the SAMOA pathway next year and there will be another 10-year strategy. Within that period, we are going to breach the 1.5° global warming threshold, most likely.

Under IPCC scenarios, it is going to have the biggest impact on the low-lying small island developing states, the atolls in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Those are the countries that are going to be most immediately affected by that threshold being breached in terms of global warming, particularly within the coastal areas. We are likely to see more intense tropical cyclones, coastal flooding and storm surge in coastal areas. Some of those very low-lying atolls will disappear. They will go underwater, if not over the next 10 years then certainly by the end of the century. There are some countries that face an existential threat, and that is not an exaggeration.

Q6 **Chair:** So within 75 years, some of these countries could disappear.

Emily Wilkinson: Yes.

Q7 **Chair:** Wow. You said that they would rather us not use "SIDS" and go for "large ocean states". Why?

Emily Wilkinson: That is because many small island developing states, although they only have a small land surface area, have very large exclusive economic zones. They have very large ocean territories, which are a source of resources and very much part of their identity. Even if the land disappears in some of these small island developing states, that territory is still there. It is really important in terms of natural resources. It provides really critical global public goods in terms of the biodiversity that is in those exclusive economic zones, the carbon sinks, of course, in the ocean and lots of resources as well, which they all want to protect.

Q8 **Chair:** That is really interesting, a point well made and something that we will take on board, so thank you very much for that. I know that your personal experience is most closely linked to Dominica, but I wonder, Jean-Paul, whether I could bring you in. I know that your background is around Seychelles. For many of us, Seychelles is seen as a paradise.

Jean-Paul Adam: It is a paradise.

Chair: I wonder whether you can overlay what issues are currently impacting the communities there.

Jean-Paul Adam: Following on from Emily, the driver of growth in Seychelles is, essentially, tourism, closely followed by fisheries. Both of these industries, which are the pillars of the economy, are extremely climate vulnerable. In the tourism sector, people are travelling there to see the beautiful beaches, but also the reefs and the fantastic ecosystems that are dependent on those reefs. Climate change is one of the biggest drivers of coral bleaching. We have seen huge acceleration in the rate of coral bleaching linked to climate change.

We all know that meteorologists are predicting another El Niño effect this year. The first one that I recall in my lifetime was in 1997 and this will be the third one in a period of less than 30 years. Before that, I think that you have to go back almost a century before you see another example. The frequency of these warming events is very dramatic. The ability of the natural environment to recover is dramatic and this has an impact on the mainstays of the economy, which are tourism and fisheries.

Again, coral reefs are absolutely essential for the livelihoods of a large percentage of the population, including being a very big contributor towards exports. This speaks to the fact that small island developing states refer to themselves as large ocean states. It refers to their geostrategic importance and the economic opportunity that they can potentially harness.

It is also perhaps the reality. If I take the example of Seychelles, it has only 454 square kilometres of land mass, but 1.3 million square kilometres of ocean. That is three times the size of Germany, to put it in context. When you look at that amount of oceanic space, it is a huge opportunity, but also a huge responsibility. Climate change is one of the biggest issues in relation to the ability of small island developing states to manage their economies effectively going forward.

Q9 **Chair:** Jean-Paul, you were previously in the Government in Seychelles and were Minister of Finance, Trade and the Blue Economy. You specifically mentioned coral bleaching. It is something that I am slightly obsessed with as well. I wonder whether you can talk a little bit more about how coral bleaching directly impacts the economy of a country such as Seychelles.

Jean-Paul Adam: Essentially, as the oceans heat up, the coral is less able to deal with this rise in temperature. The optimal temperature is between 20°s and 27°s. Most countries that are situated in these latitudes have the ideal environment for coral. As the temperatures increase, these corals are bleached, meaning they lose their colour and reach a point when they are unable to recover, although, over a period of time, there is strong evidence that they are able to recover as the temperature normalises.

Th frequency of events is a big issue for these countries, because they are coming more closely, with more frequency. The coral reefs are absolutely essential for the reproduction of fish species and, therefore, the livelihoods of local fishermen and fishing entrepreneurs, who are targeting mostly coastal species, but also for larger scale industrial fishing. The ecosystem is interlinked.

The species that we most associate with industrial fishing globally, such as tuna, are predatory species and depend on ecosystems that are absolutely dependent on reefs. The value chain around food resources globally, which is very much linked to the health of tuna stocks, is dramatically impacted by the health of coral reefs. There is a direct link between the health of a coral reef and the ability of any consumer around the world, for example, to find fisheries products in a reliable way.

The first impacts on the economies of these countries are very direct. If we take the example of the Indian Ocean, the yellowfin tuna is very badly affected at the moment. It is recognised to be in significant danger. This is due to overfishing, but climate change is also a significant impact in terms of both the impact on coral reefs, which affects the overall balance of the ecosystem, and the warming of the ocean affecting the migration of these species and, therefore, the ability to sustainably use these resources and the revenues associated with them.

Coral reefs are also essential for sustainable tourism in the long term. Particularly small island developing states tend to have models of tourism that are based on a more targeted tourism strategy. These countries also, for reasons of the vulnerability of their environments, tend to aim for tourism that is more targeted, less mass tourism for example. That means that, when your reefs are affected, you are less able to reach out to that specific traveller, for example, who is coming on a diving holiday and is going to spend a significant amount of money. When the reefs are very badly affected, that has a direct impact. There is a direct link in terms of the ability of these countries to develop themselves economically and the health of their coral reefs.

Chair: Thank you. You put that very starkly and clearly for all of us.

Q10 **Mrs Latham:** Jean-Paul, how are the small island developing states working to address their own development challenges?

Jean-Paul Adam: There are a number of ways in which they need to do so. The focus on referring to themselves as large ocean states is a step in that direction, focusing on their strengths rather than weaknesses. There are initiatives emerging that aim to make this a truly regional approach. There is a huge opportunity for the UK and other partners to invest in these kinds of regional approaches.

I will refer specifically to an initiative in the Indian Ocean called the Great Blue Wall. This is being supported by the United Nations, but also by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The Great Blue Wall initiative aims to support countries in developing capacity for climate adaptation, for example through the rehabilitation of mangroves. Mangroves serve many purposes: they help to reduce the impact of sea level rise; they are also critical for the health of fisheries in these regions. Investing in simple activities such as mangrove restoration has huge economic benefits that go beyond those activities.

An initiative such as the Great Blue Wall aims to address this systematically across multiple countries, linking that to the management of marine protected areas, which can also create additional revenues and jobs through ecotourism, for example. Also, the Great Blue Wall aims to address the sustainable fisheries value chain by investing in the capacity of local fishing entrepreneurs, so that they can process more of their catch, leading to less wastage, investing in the cold chain and therefore allowing more revenues to be derived within communities themselves that are engaged on a daily basis in protecting those resources.

The Great Blue Wall initiative is supported currently by eight countries in the western Indian Ocean. It is supported by heads of state, it has commitments at the level of presidents, and is co-ordinated among Ministries of Environment. It is translated into investment plans associated with marine spatial plans in each one of these countries, so countries are defining the various activities that would take place in their oceanic spaces.

These countries are also committing to protect 30% of their oceans as a means of boosting their climate resilience, but also, through those protections, creating opportunities for livelihoods and sustainable value chains. Again, that showcases the direct link between the protection of a resource and the ability to actually earn a living from it.

This is one example of an initiative that was born in small island developing states, specifically the islands of the Indian ocean. Its success means that it has also reached out to continental countries, so Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique are also part of the initiative. These are ways in which you have national initiatives that can be translated for scale into regional initiatives.

If I may, I can also share some other examples of financing innovations. One area that has a lot of promise is debt for climate adaptation swaps. A lot of small island developing states have relatively high levels of indebtedness, as concessional finance has become harder to come by. Essentially, as countries graduate from low-income status into middle income, or upper or higher middle income, they have less access to concessional resources. They have therefore tended to borrow more commercially and you have a spiralling level of debt.

In small island states, when you have an external shock, whether it be a natural disaster such as a cyclone, or a financial shock such as that linked to the war in Ukraine or the global pandemic, there is less ability to bounce back. You often have to borrow larger amounts. Debt for climate adaptation swaps allow countries to refinance their existing debt into more affordable forms of financing, creating fiscal space where they can invest in climate adaptation.

Debt swaps can take different forms. There are forms whereby countries or partners that hold debt will agree to give up a portion of that debt. There are also options where these swaps can be done by, for example, swapping an expensive form of debt for a cheaper form, by using a partial guarantee for the issuance of a new bond as an example. These kinds of mechanisms have been used very successfully recently by Barbados and Belize. Seychelles also did a smaller scale version—in fact, the first—in 2015. If we were able to do this at larger scale globally, it would significantly address the ability of states to have access to resources for investment in climate resilience. It would also be less costly from a development perspective, meaning that development partners would have to put in less resource for these kinds of actions.

Q11 **Mrs Latham:** Can you tell me how small island states' Governments are engaging with civil society in developing policy solutions, rather than it just being Government or even groups of Governments?

Jean-Paul Adam: I will start by going back to the Great Blue Wall. The Great Blue Wall, by its very nature, from the outset is involving civil society in all of the eight countries that are engaged in this initiative. It involves civil society at the national level and grassroots, community-based organisations.

I mentioned the example of mangroves because it is a very fundamental part of being able to succeed in this initiative. There are examples of community-based organisations that are helping communities to rehabilitate mangrove areas. In some countries, mangroves are used, for example, as firewood or in various industries, so moving communities away from that is very much dependent on the engagement of local civil society.

It involves the engagement of regional organisations that are involved in conservation, but also those that are involved in the welfare of, for example, entrepreneurs in the fishing sector. There are these kinds of initiatives, whose impacts are simultaneously local, regional and potentially continental. The UN is supporting the outreach of this kind of initiative to other parts of the continent.

I will take the example of Seychelles. When Seychelles did the debt for climate adaptation swap in 2015, we created a local trust fund, on which 50% of the board members are from civil society. We invited civil society to be actively engaged in fundraising for this trust fund. The disbursement of funds from the debt swap is largely done through civil society. I am giving you that as a specific example, but I think that there are a number of countries that are looking to do similar types of activities. Where innovative financing can be generated, whether it is from debt swaps or, in some cases, the sale of carbon credits, this can be channelled into trust funds that can work simultaneously with Government agencies and local civil society.

Emily Wilkinson: I will add an example from Dominica, where I have been working since the hurricane in 2017 with the Climate Resilience Execution Agency for Dominica, which was set up in 2018 with support from the UK Government. To respond to your question about the involvement of civil society, it is interesting that CREAD set about developing a climate resilience and recovery plan for up to 2030 with 20 targets in, in order to build back more resiliently and be better set up to face future extreme weather events and other shocks. One of the 20 targets is that all communities should be self-reliant for 15 days after an extreme weather event.

The application of that part of the plan, in trying to reach that target, means that community groups have had to come together at the start of hurricane season every year to plan and think about what they have in place. Do they have energy supply, water, food and all the medicine supplies that they are going to need if there is an extreme event and they get cut off? It is a very mountainous island and even not very extreme weather events can cut off communities for days, weeks or months. All those initiatives that have been undertaken and spearheaded by community groups are a really interesting example of how they have taken this commitment to become climate resilient at the national level down to the community level and are all engaging in this project now.

Q12 **Chair:** Does that relationship go in the other direction? Are you seeing civil society going up to Government and telling them what they need?

Emily Wilkinson: Yes. It has been created gradually over time. There is demand from communities and civil society to see the Government progress on their agenda. They do not want to have it be an ask of them but then not see that commitment continue down the line.

It is now five years after the hurricane and you still see that very strong commitment at the Government level; you can see it across all Ministries. That is coming directly from civil society, communities and youth groups as well, which have been very much engaged in this project. They are making demands on Government now to make sure that this programme continues to be implemented and does not get sidelined by some other, more important political priority.

Jean-Paul Adam: One of the building blocks of the Great Blue Wall initiative is marine spatial planning. While there is not one way to do it, the countries that have done it, such as Seychelles and Kenya, have used a very consultative approach, which has actively involved civil society. Through marine spatial planning, the idea is that you identify those areas that are critical, for example, for conservation, but also look at areas that are used extensively for fishing, areas that are at risk of oil spills because of large-scale shipping and so forth.

If I take the example of when Seychelles undertook this, it was very interesting to hear even traditional knowledge from fishing groups in terms of how they manage resources. There is a local fish known as the shoemaker fish in Seychelles. Traditionally, local fishing groups always recognised that, when they were spawning, they would never target this fish. This is local, traditional knowledge that was being used as a form of conservation and sustainable management of a fishing resource.

These types of local knowledge can be incorporated very successfully into marine spatial plans, as a means of not just imposing a specific form of governance around the oceanic spaces but ensuring that there is ownership by local populations. The tools that we have developed in Seychelles and Kenya, and that will be deployed through the Great Blue Wall initiative, can facilitate a lot of these conversations that will be happening across the region.

Q13 **Chair:** Do you see that use of local knowledge being embedded in other plans around the world in similar large ocean states?

Jean-Paul Adam: There is quite a large number of examples of countries that are undertaking these marine spatial plans, including outside Africa, in other large ocean states and in continental Africa. There are a number of countries incorporating these types of actions into their national adaptation plans, which are being submitted in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The ability to use this type of tool for the engagement with local civil society groups is extremely useful. There is a very good track record in terms of the results achieved.

Chair: That is really interesting.

Q14 **Mr Liddell-Grainger:** I am intrigued by what you have been saying. There are quite a lot of development conferences coming up over the next few years. What direction are you going to be taking where the conferences are concerned? It is a vast area. We have heard from both of you that there is a huge issue across the whole of the globe—countries disappearing, economic scenarios getting more difficult, threats of climate change and many other issues. What do you see on the agenda of these conferences?

I will come to you first, Jean-Paul. How do you think conferences in the future should be conducted across the globe in trying to narrow down what the most important things are? You have certainly given an interesting picture.

Jean-Paul Adam: You are right that there is a multiplicity of conferences. It can be very difficult to keep track of all the different commitments. In fact, one thing that the United Nations is advocating is that all partners need to be very clear about what they are committing, where the resources are coming from and the timeframes in which they will be delivered. Similarly, we need to link it to the actual need.

Perhaps I would start on the subject of the effectiveness of international development aid. One thing that small island developing states are very frustrated about, but it also reflects more broadly some of the challenges in development globally, is the use of GDP per capita as the main entry point for development assistance. The reality of this is that the countries that have smaller populations, such as islands, tend to graduate more quickly. In fact, since we have had the various categories that have been established by the UN and the World Bank, only six countries have actually graduated, and only one those six—Botswana—is not an island state. Every other country that has graduated has been a small island state. The reason why that graduation has happened is that the sole metric that matters is GDP per capita. When you have a smaller population, you tend to be able to grow your GDP per capita more quickly, but it does not reflect the real vulnerability of all countries.

I would argue that this is valid for all countries, not only small island developing states. Having metrics that address vulnerability more fundamentally would be much more useful. This is a critical conversation that happened recently in the Paris financing summit and is also key to the discussions happening in the World Bank and the IMF on the subject of the reform of the international financing architecture. One key element is addressing the subject of vulnerability and the ability of international development assistance to address vulnerability more effectively. In many cases, this means more resources, but it also means more effectively using existing resources.

The second point I would make is in relation to the subject of loss and damage in relation to climate change. There is an agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to establish this facility on loss and damage, which we hope will be operational soon. There are ongoing discussions on how this will be operationalised.

The critical factor here that those responsible for the largest amounts of pollution should contribute the most into these funds. Therefore forms of taxation that focus on global fossil fuel companies, for example, should be actively looked at. Of course, in the context of a framework convention, the main entry point is through individual states and those discussions are ongoing.

Another area that requires significant attention is the way in which debt is addressed. I have already mentioned the opportunity to deal with debt, for example, through debt for climate adaptation swaps. A principal goal of this is to avoid situations where countries are inevitably in default. There is a number of countries that could pre-emptively tackle their debt with the right support and mechanisms that would allow them to better manage their debt and reduce the potential likelihood of default, by making that debt a little bit more affordable and in some cases increasing the tenure—the maturity—of some of this debt, thereby creating some breathing space by which resources can then be invested in climate adaptation.

Q15 **Chris Law:** Hi, Jean-Paul. I was actually at the COP talks last year; this started off as an embryonic idea around loss and damage, then an agreement to commit to a fund for this year. Given that we have only a few more months before the ongoing talks conclude, how optimistic are you that a comprehensive loss and damage fund is going to be set up and is something that the world will embrace?

Jean-Paul Adam: I am always cautiously optimistic. I do not doubt that it is going to be very difficult, because it involves extremely difficult decisions by all countries. You are all involved in politics and you all have constituents. I think that constituents around the world, whether they be in Africa, small island developing states or the developed world, are all more conscious than ever before that we have to address climate change in a very fundamental manner.

One thing that has traction is that those that are the most responsible—here I am not talking necessarily about countries but about the fossil fuel companies in particular—have a responsibility to mobilise the resources. Record profits have been generated in the recent 12 months, but over a longer period as well, from these resources. You get a double benefit if you have a global arrangement by which resources from these companies can be mobilised towards tackling climate change, because you disincentivise and further accelerate the transition. You also provide the resources needed for supporting countries that are at the frontline of climate change, in particular small island developing states that are, for example, at risk of extinction.

It is not just a question about transferring resources from the north to the south. It is about a model of economic development that has to be adopted globally. There are different capacities in terms of being able to adopt those models. My optimism would be that, if there is some form of agreement that can allow for the mobilisation of resources from the companies that have profited the most, there is scope for a potential agreement.

Emily Wilkinson: I also am an adviser to AOSIS—the Alliance of Small Island States—in the climate change negotiations. I wanted to make a couple of other points in relation to the discussions taking place in the transitional committee in relation to operationalising this loss and damage fund, which are some of the sticking points, I think, more in terms of how the funds are used.

First, it really needs to be grant based if this is funding to address the impacts of climate change. There is not an investment opportunity. It is not going to help grow the economy or produce some sort of productivity gains that would allow a country to pay back a loan, so it really needs to be grant based.

Secondly, it needs to go through national budgets. The small island developing states are very keen that it does and that there is not a mechanism for channelling funds to the humanitarian sector, for example, or other organisations. In the case of small island developing states, they feel that they know best how to spend this money on supporting populations that are affected by climate change.

Thirdly, one of the biggest sticking points would be which countries will be targeted by this fund. It is all developing countries, but clearly some are more vulnerable than others. Some are more able to finance a response to a climate shock than others. In the case of SIDS, the argument is very clear and strong that extreme weather events have enormous impacts, increase the level of debt and are very difficult for small islands to finance in any way on their own. That makes them particularly vulnerable and in a particular category of requiring this kind of additional grant-based funding, so that is going to be a big discussion.

Q16 **Mr Liddell-Grainger:** Can I come back to you, Emily, on this? How can the UK best engage? What would be our best route to engage and make sure what we spend is well spent and in the right areas?

Emily Wilkinson: The UK is engaged in the climate negotiations and has negotiators there who have been supportive of the idea of setting up a loss and damage fund. I do not think that there is any question about that. The most important thing is to target the fund well at where there is the greatest need and, in terms of the economic losses, where finance is most needed. That is going to be the extreme weather events.

Then, providing that support and impetus so that countries can spend the money in ways that they most need to, quickly, particularly for these rapid-onset events, is an immediate priority. Of course there are slower onset impacts and non-economic impacts, which have been very much a topic of discussion as well. Those will need to be considered more carefully, but being able to quickly release finance to countries and communities affected by these events ought to be the priority.

Q17 **Theo Clarke:** Emily, how successful do you believe that UK engagement has been with SIDS, particularly in terms of addressing their development needs?

Emily Wilkinson: Up until last year, the UK did not have a SIDS strategy, so support to small island developing states would fundamentally have been through regional programmes, and would have targeted some specific countries, those that are eligible for official development assistance. My experience of working for many years in the Caribbean is that that assistance has been extremely valuable. The bilateral support provided to Caribbean countries has been good. The example of setting up this climate resilience agency in Dominica after the hurricane was an excellent initiative of the UK Government. That is on a country-by-country basis.

Without a SIDS strategy, I do not think that the UK Government were able to approach this group of countries as a group and help to, for example, raise common issues at the international level and support them in their engagement on these issues around multilateral development bank reform, which are so important to SIDS. The UK could do more, certainly, to support regional integration as well, because that is extremely valuable across the SIDS regions, so that they can work together to resolve collective issues. Based on that regional integration, it is much easier to build intraregional platforms and international-level representation.

AOSIS is a really excellent platform and has had incredible influence in the climate change negotiations, but it needs more support. I do not think that there has been sufficient support coming from the UK to AOSIS, given that it is such an important representation of small island states. AOSIS is able to collectively ensure that small island developing states are represented in the climate negotiations across all the negotiating tracks in a way that there was absolutely no way that many of the 38 small island developing states would be able to do if they were having to negotiate on their own. It is a very important negotiating bloc and has a similar function in negotiations around biodiversity and other issues.

Chair: We met its president a couple of months ago and were very impressed. We hope to get evidence from it.

Q18 **Theo Clarke:** You have just given some examples about where the SIDS strategy is being helpful. I am also interested to know where you think the UK Government have not done enough. What are the aspects missing from the SIDS strategy?

Emily Wilkinson: They have not done enough on building the regional supporting institutions. In all of the SIDS regions, there are regional organisations that represent SIDS. The UK should be supporting those much more strongly in the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean.

The other issue is around debt. We have spoken a bit about this already. The very high debt-to-GDP ratios that SIDS have make it very difficult for them to invest in resilience in the way that they urgently need to. The UK ought to be supporting SIDS in their pursuit of long-term debt restructuring, so it is not just talking about short-term debt relief and a bit of breathing space.

I know that there have been discussions around these debt pause clauses, which will be very helpful for SIDS. I think that was originally an initiative coming from Barbados, from the Bridgetown initiative, and led by Prime Minister Mia Mottley. That is very important, but it just gives them a bit of breathing space. The longer-term issue around debt restructuring remains there. It is a problem. Perhaps the loss and damage fund and finance could help with that, because we know that levels of debt spike after extreme weather events in SIDS in a way that they do not in other larger developing countries. That is on support around debt.

The other issue is around access to climate finance. Small island developing states have found it incredibly difficult to access the vertical climate funds, such as the green climate fund. It can take more than three years to get a project approved and, according to some of the climate finance specialists I spoke to in the Caribbean, the application costs can be up to 5% of the total value of the project. That is just the cost of the human resources and the consultants they need to bring in to get the application through. Most of the projects coming to small island developing states are coming through international or regional accredited entities. That may be okay and they may align well with the priorities of that country, but that is not always the case. There are obviously costs involved in those accredited agencies doing the application on behalf of a group of SIDS. It would be much better if they could access directly.

Q19 **Chair:** Emily, did you say the blue planet fund?

Emily Wilkinson: I said the green climate fund.

Q20 **Chair:** Is that run by the UN?

Emily Wilkinson: That is a multilateral fund, to which the UK is a major contributor. It is the largest contributor. It is set up under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is the largest climate fund.

Q21 **Chris Law:** We have heard over the last two or three years a repeated issue about climate finance being really difficult to access. Would you like to see a simpler, faster, more collaborative approach between island states so that, when you apply for a fund, it is distributed across different states? Would that be an easier way to do it? I know that the cost and time means that individual countries are at the back of the queue.

Emily Wilkinson: There are a couple of suggestions. One is that, for example, a regional development bank could be responsible for the accreditation process and do that for a number of small island developing states in the region. That could be a sort of copy and paste, because the procedure is the same, but it is very intensive.

Another option would be that there was some kind of special SIDS window in the green climate fund, where the application process would be simpler and could be for lesser sums of money as well. Part of the problem is that the minimum size of a project is very large, too large in some senses for some of these small island developing states.

It is very difficult to get through the accreditation and the application process, so there could be a special window. That is one of the other proposals, certainly making the procedures simpler and making it easier for smaller nations to access the scale of finance and more programmatic finance. They cannot necessarily spend a lot of money in a short space of time, but need that same volume of finance over a longer period, 10 years say, to implement a national adaptation plan. At the moment, the kind of finance that is available does not quite align with the needs of small islands.

Q22 **Theo Clarke:** Jean-Paul, in your view, have the UK Government chosen the right priorities in their SIDS strategy?

Jean-Paul Adam: To an extent, there is a lot of very good leadership from the UK. Having a strategy for small island states and making a lot of effort to engage with them, individually and as a group, is commendable. Also, the support of the UK through the Commonwealth is significant and the Commonwealth is a majority of smaller countries, including SIDS. This is something that is very much appreciated by small island states.

Emily already mentioned that the UK leads in terms of climate contingency clauses in debt instruments. That is very helpful, because we are still fighting that battle to get it systematically among all debt instruments globally. If the UK sets that as an example, that is very positive.

In terms of areas we need to address going forward, there has to be a fundamental understanding that, on climate change more generally, more resources are needed. That means that development leaders such as the UK have to pledge more towards development. It means that every country involved in development financing has to. That includes the UK. That means more ground resources that are made available.

Secondly, I would like to echo what Emily said about the ease of finance through existing funds, such as the green climate fund. I would personally advocate for using regional development banks. Certainly in the African context, the African Development Bank is quite well placed.

Looking at some of the other areas, I would like to stress that the majority of climate finance needs to be grants and not debt-related, but we should not forget the private sector angle. The UK has a good track record of engaging on blended finance instruments by, for example, using partial guarantees and credit enhancements. These can be particularly critical for infrastructure in small island developing states. Because of the smaller populations and the risk associated with these investments—things such as ports and undersea cables—it can often become possible for the private sector to invest in them with appropriate support. We should underline that these types of support are not a replacement for official development assistance. They are rather complementary and they bring in the private sector in areas where the private sector could be active.

Finally on the subject of debt, the existing common framework is very slow and cumbersome for all countries. The majority of small island developing states are bending backwards to not be in a situation of default. In the majority of cases, with the right support, they could refinance their debt in a way that would make it much more sustainable. A lot of this can be facilitated with the support of institutions that might be able to provide partial guarantees for new bond issuances, again using the Barbados type model. These need to be available systematically.

One of the biggest problems at the moment for debt swaps to become more routine in international development is that they are very ad hoc. If the UK and other partners such as the UK were to ensure that these types of instruments are available as one option for states before they end up in default, it would significantly help in reducing some of these debt burdens in the medium to longer term.

Q23 **Theo Clarke:** Can I clarify something? You have talked helpfully about the UK Government's priorities. Do you believe that they align with the SIDS's own development priorities?

Jean-Paul Adam: They do to a degree. The UK has a very good understanding, compared with many other development partners, of SIDS issues. Let us be clear: the majority of SIDS currently do not receive bilateral development assistance from the UK because the majority of SIDS are outside the GDP cutoff that the UK has set. There are some exceptions applied, as they are in international institutions. If the UK was to be more forthcoming and direct in recognising the specific circumstances of SIDS, there could be more efficiency in the deployment of resources. It would not actually cost a huge amount and would also show a fundamental shift in the understanding of the key challenges that small island developing states face.

I would also like to say that the UK has understood the value of regional approaches. This could be built on further. Emily already spoke about this. Initiatives such as the Great Blue Wall or other initiatives that are coming from countries in the Caribbean or the Pacific, through a regional aspect, allow larger scale initiatives to be implemented more quickly.

Chair: What you are saying is fascinating, but I need to ask you for slightly briefer answers, because we have a lot of questions for you.

Emily Wilkinson: I wanted to add something about insurance. I know that the UK Government have been particularly keen on risk insurance as a response to or for supporting countries experiencing the impacts of climate change, not specifically through the SIDS strategy but within FCDO. I get a sense from talking to colleagues across small island developing states that they are less keen on that as a solution, partly because, although the UK and other donors have been very supportive of these parametric insurance schemes, which are regional, providing them with subsidies in order to purchase the insurance, it is seen as not sustainable long term.

The question of how long these subsidies are going to be paid for always arises. How expensive is the insurance going to become? Climate change is increasing the frequency with which these events happen, making the insurance more expensive and, ultimately, some of the loss is uninsurable. There is a big question mark over whether that is a suitable long-term strategy for supporting countries.

Q24 **David Mundell:** Emily, is the UK Government's SIDS strategy sufficiently aligned with the UK's wider foreign policy development and climate goals?

Emily Wilkinson: Yes. In the international arena, the UK Government strategy is really well aligned with, for example, the desire to build climate justice and strengthen responses to climate change. It is well aligned, for example, with the need to strengthen global security. The renewed focus on the Pacific islands is an important addition that is coming through the SIDS strategy, which was not there before. There are certainly tensions in the Pacific region, which the UK and its partners recognise. The need to build soft power and influence in the Pacific islands is a particularly important response to that.

Q25 **David Mundell:** There have been some specific issues in the Solomon Islands. Is that right?

Emily Wilkinson: Yes, that is correct. The Solomon Islands was looking to sign a security pact or agreement with China, which in the end has not progressed any further. There are other Pacific islands that are also reaching out to China and seeing it as an ally or partner in building regional security. That is an issue of concern to Australia and New Zealand as well as the UK.

Having an agenda that supports the Pacific islands and provides them with development assistance is an important step towards building soft power and influence in that region, which certainly was not there before. That aligns well with the overall approach.

Q26 **Mr Bacon:** You mention the Solomon Islands. As it happens, I was watching a film yesterday about Kale, which is now underwater and has been for nine years. Is there a contingency plan written down anywhere, where interlocutors and NGOs, the folk who are passionate about all of this, talk about what they are going to do in those cases where people are displaced and need to be put somewhere? Where might they be put?

Emily Wilkinson: A number of Pacific islands, if not all of them, are looking at this through their national adaptation plans. They are looking at different scenarios and the timelines over which different islands are going to disappear. For now they are putting at least a plan in place as to what they are going to do. That does involve the relocation of the population.

The Marshall Islands, for example, has signed a compact with the United States for historic reasons. Its adaptation plan has three parts. Plan A is to move people away from the coastlines on the islands where they live. They have a strategy for what they are going to do there: they are going to move people inland. Plan B is to move people from the lower-lying islands to the islands that have higher land, so relocating people from one island to another across the 30 or so atolls they have.

Plan C is to relocate the whole population to the United States, which they can do because they have US citizenship.

Q27 **Mr Bacon:** Are there comparable plans for all the other islands, whether it is Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia or somewhere else? Is there a list of places where people might go? Is there a hierarchy of vulnerability? Are people in a position to know what they will need to do and where they will go in 10 or 30 years' time? Is that all still being negotiated?

Emily Wilkinson: That is very much still being negotiated. It is on an individual basis. Every country will have to negotiate that with New Zealand or Australia. Lots of these discussions are moving ahead, but there is certainly no list or hierarchy of which countries are most in need.

Q28 **Mr Bacon:** I have another quick question, which is probably more for Jean-Paul. Emily Wilkinson mentioned islands disappearing. This could potentially alter the shape or extent of an exclusive economic zone because the total apparent territory is altered. Is there a discussion as to how you can, as it were, compensate for that by tweaking the rules on the international law of the sea so their territory does not diminish just because an island here or there has gone underwater? Is that under discussion?

Jean-Paul Adam: That is a very interesting question, one which, certainly to my knowledge, has not necessarily been broached in detail. The important element from the perspective of small island developing states is that they are already very resource-constrained. If there is a risk of them losing access to territory because of climate change, there has to be a means by which this is addressed in some form.

The wider subject, which Emily has covered quite comprehensively, is around being able to move populations to places that are safe. The historical territories or maritime zones that these countries have enjoyed are essential for the conceptualisation of them as countries and nations. In the majority of cases, these countries define themselves relative to the oceans they have historically had access to.

Mr Bacon: I will take that as a no, at the moment.

Jean-Paul Adam: At the moment, as far as I am aware, it is a no. I will perhaps revert to you, if I can find more information.

Q29 **Mr Bacon:** If there is any more information and it is good news, or even if it is bad news, perhaps you could write to us.

Emily, to what extent does the current SIDS strategy effectively marry the geopolitical and the development goals?

Emily Wilkinson: It marries them quite well. The SIDS strategy seems to be focused on the right things. There is very good alignment with what I am hearing from the different regions. At the moment they are about to embark on a preparatory regional process for the fourth SIDS conference next year. I am hearing them talking about very similar issues to the ones that are highlighted in the SIDS strategy, whether that is on the blue economy, access to finance, debt issues or helping to build resilience. All the right issues are there.

Given that those are the priorities of the SIDS in the various regions, that aligns well with the vision, if you like, for the UK to be more influential and to have a clearer global role in supporting SIDS and, therefore, boosting regional security. That aligns well.

It is a very new strategy so I cannot really speak to the level of implementation, but I would be very keen to see the strategy fully implemented and all the resources that have been committed being executed.

Q30 **Mr Bacon:** I am being slightly provocative here, but pursuing an aid strategy that aligns with our geopolitical interests, perhaps even economic interests, is precisely what people have railed against for 30 or 40 years, is it not?

Emily Wilkinson: In the case of SIDS, I would say that that is not as problematic as it sounds. The former Department for International Development was not focused on small island developing states because they were considered higher-income countries, which were doing well on growth and development. Precisely for all the reasons we have spoken about, their particular vulnerabilities are problematic and were not previously being addressed.

Since the merger there has been a much sharper increase in focus on these small groups of countries, because they make up 20% of votes at the UN are scattered across a region in which the UK and its partners and allies would like to have more influence.

Q31 **Chair:** You think the focus on SIDS is for votes rather than doing the right thing.

Emily Wilkinson: If it is, that is not problematic from a SIDS perspective.

Chair: We look forward to hearing from the fisher people to see what their view is as well.

Jean-Paul Adam: It is possible for a national priority to be aligned with a global good.

Mr Bacon: That is a neat answer.

Q32 **Mrs Latham:** Emily, does the UK Government's SIDS strategy do enough to address the fact that climate change has a disproportionate impact on women and girls?

Emily Wilkinson: That is a very good question. As currently set out, the UK SIDS strategy does not have a particular focus on women and girls. There are particular issues faced by women and girls as well as other groups. We can look at the differential impacts of climate change on various groups in small island developing states, and it is very important to do so. Not everyone is going to be affected equally.

Q33 **Chair:** Emily, give us the quick headlines. How and why are women and girls disproportionately affected?

Emily Wilkinson: We need to look at the role of women in emergencies and then responding to climate change, when they have to, on behalf of themselves and their households. They have to make sure their families have access to food and water. They have a specific role in responding to emergencies. They have a particular planning role as well in the household and thinking ahead to the future, with all the uncertainties that climate change brings.

We need to think about the leadership role women and girls can play in climate emergencies as well as their particular vulnerabilities. They may be excluded from decision-making, particularly in some traditional decision-making structures that occur in some of the small island developing states.

Q34 **Chris Law:** I have a question for you, Jean-Paul. Given the diversity of small island developing states, are there merits to the UK Government treating them as a group?

Jean-Paul Adam: Yes, definitely. They do share a lot of characteristics. As always, when engaging with a group, you have to be aware of the diversity within it. Africa, as an example, is extremely diverse, but there is also value in dealing with African countries as a group because there is a political agreement among them.

Among SIDS, the common issues of extreme vulnerability to climate change, usually very similar economic characteristics, small populations and similar challenges in accessing resources merit a strategy that takes them as a group, without dismissing their individual specificities.

Q35 **Chris Law:** There is a follow-up question to that. Would you like to see a far more regional approach? Okay, there might be three or four groups of islands with a similar type of diversity. Would you prefer to see that kind of strategy?

Jean-Paul Adam: Yes, there is a lot of value in undertaking a regional approach, while not setting aside the bilateral approach. If we take the example of oceans, by definition, meaningful action has to be cross-border and involves engaging with states that are not island states. There is a lot of value in engaging in that because it is a global good with real impacts on local populations. You are really going from local to global when you are looking at resources that are ocean-based, as an example.

I would stress that individual countries do have specificities. While engaging at a region level, it is always important to underline those at the same time.

Emily Wilkinson: We must not understate the importance of engaging with SIDS as a group internationally. That is really important, despite the many differences and peculiarities of each one. That representation and the common interests and difficulties that SIDS share are so important.

The UK could effectively play that role in supporting SIDS globally. That would be a very specific role for the UK. No other donor is doing that. Australia is very influential and supportive. It is the biggest bilateral donor and supporter of Pacific small island developing states. Global Affairs Canada has a big role in the Caribbean. It has quite a few large programmes supporting Caribbean countries on climate resilience. There is no donor that is looking at this internationally and providing that support to the international representation of SIDS.

Q36 **Nigel Mills:** As a natural follow-up to that, Emily, who does this particularly well? If we were to try to follow an example from somebody else in the world who was working well with SIDS, who would it be?

Emily Wilkinson: Some of the UN agencies have specialist units to support small island developing states. There is a UN agency that deals specifically with landlocked states and small island developing states, UN-OHRLLS. Its mandate is to support small island developing states.

Some of the other UN agencies have specific SIDS units. For example, UNCTAD works very closely on SIDS issues. The OECD secretariat also has a specific focus on this. Where those units exist and they are providing evidence, support and advocacy to SIDS, they do a really good job of that. We are seeing more of those springing up.

This is also happening in the regional development banks. ADB has a Pacific department, which has a very specific focus on the Pacific small island developing states. It is going through a strategy change and developing a new framework for understanding fragility, resilience and vulnerability in Pacific SIDS.

Those specialist units are really important. They can substitute some of the capacity that is not in the small islands and never will be because they do just have small bureaucracies and a limited number of people to do things. It is really important to have those units to back-stop and support SIDS Governments with all the things we have been talking about, such as access to climate finance and the implementation of projects. Those are really good examples.

Jean-Paul Adam: Emily has done a great job of explaining what the UN does so I will not go into detail on that, other than to say there is a UN process centred on a document that tracks outcomes, which is the SAMOA pathway. The UN is structured to try to engage on these issues.

I would also mention the Commonwealth’s work on capacity building. That is a very good example of how it supports SIDS. The gap is particularly on the financing questions.

Q37 **Nigel Mills:** You have given us examples of who does well. Are there any examples of who has messed this up? You have suggested that one of the potential pitfalls was a lack of local capacity in some of these islands. Is that where things go wrong, if they do go wrong?

Emily Wilkinson: Yes. What all donors and development banks have suffered from in their engagement with SIDS is putting in capacity. They send in a consultant to do an assessment of something or to work on the development or evaluation of a project. Somebody in one of the countries in the Caribbean where I was working referred to this as building more capacity in the consultants than in the country they are working in, which I thought was an interesting comment. It does not necessarily transfer capacity. The capacity does not stay when the consultant has left. The consultant moves on and can find similar work elsewhere. That is a big mistake. All development assistance and bilateral project support needs to bear that in mind as an absolutely fundamental context-specific issue. There is limited capacity. It is not going to suddenly grow. It cannot expand out of nowhere. There are not going to be more people to work on something.

If you come in with a project expecting that people will need to work on it, it needs to be accompanied by a strategy for long-term support. As I mentioned before, that could be capacity substitution, with people in a back-stopping role in another agency providing long-term assistance. It could be putting in place individuals who can work in Government for a number of years. ODI has a fellowship scheme that does that. We have a number of fellows in the Pacific islands. There are different ways of thinking around this problem. When you do not think about it, but just put in a consultant for a bit and then say to the Government, "Off you go; now you implement it," that is when the real problems arise. I have seen that happen a lot.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is changing that model. It is putting in climate finance advisers in a number of small states who are going to be there for a lot longer. They are going to help with several funding applications, not just one.

Q38 **Mr Bacon:** On that point, I should declare an interest. Many years ago, I used to represent the consulting industry. I also worked for VSO in Africa many years ago. I come from an agricultural constituency and it had me on its shortlist of possible MPs. It was a project to help smallholders in rural Tanzania. I was nearly finished in terms of the spec of what I was going to do, and then I was introduced to another person, who was a contractor for VSO. When you said "capacity", I wonder whether you also partly meant empathy. Her job was to sit people like me down and say, "When you get there, you need to remember that you have two eyes, two ears and one mouth, and you should probably use them in that proportion. The fact you are an insecure, overachieving type A personality means there is a higher than usual risk you will go in and say, 'Right, what you need to do is this.' By the way, you are also a white male". It was extremely effective.

What interests me about what you have just said is that you have seen a lot of it. This is not new. It was happening in the late 1980s and early 1990s after the Berlin Wall came down. It was happening in eastern Europe, when consultants threw reports from the steps of aircraft, with a large invoice, as they fled back to London, Paris and Brussels. They looked on in astonishment as all the countries were stolen by a small number of clever people, and we have seen the consequences of that.

Why is not it more embedded already that we should do more of this empathy building and thinking about what needs to be done to solve the problem? Why is that not the default already?

Emily Wilkinson: There must be certain risks associated with changing the model. Certainly when I was first engaging with the Climate Resilience Execution Agency for Dominica, which had been set up and staffed after the hurricane, supported by the UK, there was a desire for most of the staff to be Dominican nationals or from the Caribbean region, which was achieved. It still took probably a year and a half for the agency to get up and running, to be trusted by Government and civil society, and to show that it knew what it was doing and was going to be spending the money wisely. That was having mainly Dominican nationals working there.

It worked. It has been very successful, but it has taken a lot longer than the UK Government perhaps expected to start implementing projects. Maybe therein lies the answer to your question. If you had sent in consultant specialists to implement projects right from the start, some of those projects might be a bit further along than they are now, but they would not be being handed over and run by Government and local contractors, which is the process.

Mr Bacon: There would not be any domestic capacity.

Emily Wilkinson: Yes. Some of those Dominican nationals were abroad. They were brought back to work in this organisation. Hopefully, they will stay and continue to work on the resilience agenda. This is probably because of a desire to get things done quickly rather than building that trust, which does take time.

Q39 **Nigel Mills:** You have mentioned Dominica a few times, Emily. If you were after an example of an island that had had challenges and made the most progress, where would it be? Would it be Dominica? Jean-Paul, you might tell us that the Seychelles is an example of that kind of place.

Emily Wilkinson: I am not sure I could really make that comparison. Barbados is probably a very good example just because of the very difficult fiscal and financial situation the country was in when Prime Minister Mia Mottley took over five years ago.

Barbados has shown leadership on taking forward renewable energy, for example. They have some really ambitious commitments around transforming the country to be low carbon and resilient. They are going about it in quite a step-by-step way. They are not trying to commit to everything all at once but moving from one agenda to another. That is an example of extremely strong and charismatic leadership and some good advocacy with international institutions.

Nigel Mills: Jean-Paul, you are waving at us.

Jean-Paul Adam: Yes, I never miss an opportunity. Seychelles has done some things well. It is not perfect.

I would not necessarily select individual countries. In some of the countries where there have been some successful interventions, such as Seychelles, Barbados and Mauritius, those have been built around very strong ownership of what I would call the financial engineering of their own countries. That is how money is mobilised domestically through taxation and how this links in with the opportunity to raise resources externally, whether it be through engagement with multilateral institutions, private markets or development partners.

Anchoring the development strategy is what the country sees as its economic opportunity. In Seychelles a few years ago, for example, there was this focus on the blue economy. There has been a link between the mobilisation of resources, financial engineering and the goal of investing in these sectors.

One other example I could touch on is Cabo Verde, which has made a very strong commitment on renewable energy. They have done so simply because they have done the homework to show that they will have cheaper energy by investing in renewables. They have looked at it from a value chain perspective. They have also invested, for example, in training technicians to work in these sectors. I am using those examples, but there are more.

Q40 **Nigel Mills:** Can I just ask a slightly mischievous question? Australia had a Pacific step-up; New Zealand had a Pacific reset; Indonesia had a Pacific elevation; the US has a Pacific pledge; we have a Pacific tilt. I am not sure how many more words I can add to "Pacific" before I run out of strategies. Is there a role for the UK to play here or are we just jostling and duplicating what others are doing? It is quite a long way from here to the Pacific, isn't it? Are we well placed to do this? Should we be focusing on stuff a bit nearer to us and leaving the big Pacific players to deal with this?

Emily Wilkinson: I would go back to my previous comment. The engagement with the Pacific is particularly important to strengthen regional co-operation, integration and, from there, engagement in international global governance in order to support Pacific islands, along with their counterparts in the other SIDS regions, to engage better on the agendas of common interest to them. It is through that intraregional knowledge exchange, support and joint advocacy that the Pacific islands are able to have a voice in the international arena. That is where the UK can offer additional value. It is not something the Australian Government are particularly focused on.

Colleagues from the Pacific islands talk to me about the desire to understand better and to have more examples and exchanges of ideas with the Caribbean, for example, which they do not necessarily have a connection with at all. Their connection is more with Australia and New

Zealand. They have some common agendas there. It is at that level where engagement will really add value.

Jean-Paul Adam: I would just say that the oceans are a global good. Countries such as the UK, which are leading development partners, should be engaged globally on oceans. In most cases, SIDS and large ocean nations are the gateways to effective oceanic and blue economy development.

There needs to be care to avoid duplication of what other partners are doing, but it would be a mistake to ignore large regions such as the Pacific or any oceanic region. The engagement with these countries is essential from a climate resilience point of view in terms of, first, succeeding in delivering on climate resilience and, secondly, having a healthy ocean, which is critical for planetary health.

Q41 **Chair:** Jean-Paul, could I just push you a little bit? You started on oceans and you have ended on oceans. The use of language is always really important. In the research for this inquiry, we have been using the term "SIDS" not least because the Government have a SIDS strategy. You both started by saying that we should be instead using "large ocean island states". Is that distinction significant and something we ought to take seriously? Does it matter? If we went for "large ocean island states", would that leave anybody out who ought to be on that list? How has the use of "SIDS" developed over time?

Some of the countries included in that list are middle-income or potentially high-income countries, so having the word "developing" seems to be slightly odd. Could either of you speak to that?

Jean-Paul Adam: There is a distinction from the UN perspective. The category of "small island developing states" is not extended to all members of AOSIS, for example. The alliance, which is a political grouping, covers countries that would not necessarily fit the grouping as defined by the United Nations.

The "SIDS" category within the United Nations is linked to a definition based on size, economic capacity and being a developing nation. There are a number of criteria that contribute to that. It is not a firm category because it does not link to the allocation of resources. It is linked to the research and the focus of resources within the United Nations. In that context, that is not going to change immediately. The United Nations terminologies are defined by their member states and by the extent of their member states.

The terminology of "large ocean nations" is something SIDS themselves have adopted as a means of showcasing their value in terms of both their own resources and their potential value vis-à-vis potential partners. I would say that both terminologies will continue to be used side by side. The context is slightly different. "SIDS" is a more technical term used in reference to the development architecture, while "large ocean nations" reflects the value these countries bring to the international community.

Q42 **Chair:** Would "large ocean nations" bring in France and Russia, for example?

Jean-Paul Adam: Yes. This is why, from a perspective of development and from the perspective of the United Nations, the term "large ocean nations" is not likely to be adopted at any point soon, because the terminology is less defined.

The point that the SIDS have been making about speaking about "large ocean nations" is to recognise something that has been underappreciated in the past, including by some SIDS. Oceans have not been seen as offering the value they really could.

Q43 **Chair:** Richard made the point about states that have already disappeared. The ocean has remained, and they have sovereignty over that ocean. What I am taking from you is that the ocean is the key bit. How we feed that into the inquiry is the key bit. There is still a debate to be had around the exact terminology linking these vulnerable islands together. Emily, is that right?

Emily Wilkinson: Yes, I agree. Both terms are useful for different things. The terminology "small island developing states" is in essence about the vulnerability of these nations. That is really important to highlight. For all the reasons we have discussed, it provides an important category. It means we need to think about development differently.

It is not linear anywhere, but it is certainly not linear in small island developing states; it can be set back. In that sense, they are all developing, even if they have very high levels of income, because they have a very high level of vulnerability. That is important when thinking about what kind of development assistance they need, what kind of investment is suitable and all of those issues in relation to the interaction of SIDS with these global institutions.

The term "large ocean states" is exactly about their value, what they offer and the global public goods they provide, which is equally important. It cannot be one or the other. On the one hand, they will be able to take advantage of those assets and develop what they call the blue economy. There are definitely lots of opportunities there for very many, although not all, of these countries. They can do that only if they are recognised as being vulnerable and deserving of the kind of assistance we have discussed. The two categories and terms work very well in relation to each other.

Q44 **Chair:** When the Committee met the World Bank, it was arguing that we should be looking at small states. It would take the ocean out entirely. You are arguing that the ocean needs to be in entirely.

Emily Wilkinson: Yes.

Q45 **Chair:** What definition does AOSIS use? How does it define this?

Jean-Paul Adam: I am less aware of the more specific definition. We can find the quote and send it to you. The definition used by AOSIS is essentially countries that are developing and that are islands. There are many exceptions. There are countries that are part of AOSIS that are mainly land-based but have some islands. There are some countries that are entirely islands. There are countries such as Singapore that have reached a status of income beyond "developing".

The definition came from negotiations that were taking place in the context of various United Nations conventions and treaties, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Earth Summit. All of these different processes led to the need for groupings of countries to form for the purposes of alliances.

The definition that emerges from the Alliance of Small Island States encompasses island countries that at certain points in their history have been developing nations and have been constrained by a similar set of circumstances, to broadly summarise.

The definition of "SIDS" by the United Nations is related to the engagement of United Nations institutions towards this category of countries. It is a little more restrictive, but, because it does not concern the allocation of resources, it is also not strictly scientifically defined. It is based on a smaller population and on the fact that they are islands. There are a number of countries that are politically part of AOSIS, but, in terms of the United Nations definition, are not strictly categorised as small island developing states.

The UN will continue for the foreseeable future to use the terminology of "SIDS". Perhaps one way of thinking about it is that "SIDS" is a category and "large ocean nations", as a term, is perhaps an aspiration.

Chair: That is an excellent point to end on. You have both given us lots to think about in our opening session. We always try to challenge ourselves. You have given us lots of thoughts about the directions that we should go in. Thank you so much for your time, both of you.