

Research Briefing

Number 9339

By Philip Loft

13 October 2021

Commonwealth small island developing states and climate change

Summary	1
1 Background: The Commonwealth	2
2 Vulnerabilities of SIDS	3
3 UK and Commonwealth climate programmes	10
4 Diplomatic initiatives	12
5 Commonwealth declarations on the environment	14

Summary

In November 2021, the UK is due to host the [COP 26 Climate Change Conference](#). 196 countries and parties are expected to attend, including the 54 members of the Commonwealth.

As [small island developing states](#) (SIDS), 25 Commonwealth members are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. These include countries such as the Bahamas, Jamaica, Papua New Guinea, and Mauritius.

SIDS are [recognised by the UN](#) as being highly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change and experiencing significant restraints on their development (eg., challenges in accessing aid and being remote from trade and markets). In 2021, the UK Mission at the UN noted that SIDS [faced an](#)

[“existential crisis”](#) due to climate change, natural disasters, and the impact of Covid-19.

This briefing provides a brief profile of Commonwealth SIDS, the threats they might face from climate change and a short background on the work of the Commonwealth on climate change. It also looks at debates around what support SIDS need to help them adapt to, and mitigate, changes in the climate.

1 Background: The Commonwealth

The modern Commonwealth was established in April 1949 with the signing of the [London Declaration](#). Most members were part of the British Empire.¹

Map of Commonwealth states



Source: The Commonwealth, [Member countries](#). A full list of Members can be found via the link.

Commonwealth states have a combined population of around 2.4 billion (half of which is accounted for by India).² Its members had a combined GDP of around US \$10.4 trillion in 2017.³ However, Commonwealth states vary widely in their economic development: In 2019, six countries had a GDP per capita of less than US \$1,000 while two (Australia and Singapore) had rates above US \$50,000.⁴

¹ The Commonwealth, [Pan-Commonwealth](#). Unless stated, all sources accessed 1 October 2021

² The Commonwealth, [Fast facts on the Commonwealth](#).

³ The Commonwealth, [Fast facts on the Commonwealth](#).

⁴ Commons Library, [Statistics on UK trade with the Commonwealth](#), CBP 8282

Commonwealth leadership

The current [Commonwealth Chair-in-Office](#) is the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. The Chair's role is to represent the Commonwealth at international meetings. The President of Rwanda will assume the role at the next Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. This was expected in 2020 but was [delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic](#).⁵

The Commonwealth Secretariat is the organisation which coordinates Commonwealth activities, including those relating to the environment. Its Executive Officer, the Secretary-General, is [Baroness Patricia Scotland](#).⁶ Baroness Scotland will [lead a delegation to the COP 26 Climate Conference](#) on behalf of Commonwealth states.⁷

2

Vulnerabilities of SIDS

There is no single set of criteria for defining SIDS. The UN recognises [38 UN-member states as SIDS](#) (there are also an additional 20 non-UN-member-state territories), with a total population of 65 million. SIDS share several development challenges, including geographic remoteness, vulnerability to natural disasters, and economic reliance on their public sectors, international trade, and their natural environments.⁸

Geographic remoteness means a significant proportion of the aid they receive is absorbed in communication costs. In 2014, the UN estimated transaction costs were 4.7 times higher than in other developing countries. Retail energy costs are also three to seven times higher than in developed economies.⁹

25 of the 38 UN-recognised SIDS (66%) are [members of the Commonwealth](#). In addition, three Commonwealth SIDS are defined by the UN as [Least-Developed Countries \(LDCs\)](#).¹⁰ These are Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. This means they have a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of less than US \$1,018, high economic and environmental vulnerability, and a low human assets index (such as low literacy rates).¹¹

⁵ The Commonwealth, [How we are run](#); The Commonwealth, [Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting \(CHOGM\)](#)

⁶ The Commonwealth, [How we are run](#); [Secretary-General Patricia Scotland](#)

⁷ The Commonwealth, [Commonwealth to champion climate-vulnerable small states at COP 26](#), 12 September 2021

⁸ UN Office of High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked developing countries, and SIDS (UN-OHRLLS), [About SIDS](#).

⁹ OECD, [Making development co-operation work for SIDS](#), 2018, section 2.2.1; OECD, [Sustainable Ocean for all \[...\]](#), 2020, "Renewable Energy"

¹⁰ The Commonwealth, [Commonwealth small states and SIDS](#)

¹¹ UN, [LDC identification criteria & indicators](#)

Commonwealth Small Island Developing States			
Africa	Income classification	Caribbean and Americas	Income classification
Mauritius	Upper-middle income	Antigua and Barbuda	High-income
Seychelles	High-income	Bahamas	High-income
Asia		Barbados	High-income
Maldives	Upper-middle income	Belize	Lower-middle income
Singapore	High-income	Dominica	Upper-middle income
Pacific		Grenada	Upper-middle income
Fiji	Upper-middle income	Guyana	Upper-middle income
Kiribati*	Lower-middle income	Jamaica	Upper-middle income
Nauru	High-income	St Kitts and Nevis	High-income
Papua New Guinea	Upper-middle income	St Lucia	Upper-middle income
Samoa	Lower-middle income	St Vincent and the Grenadines	Upper-middle income
Solomon Islands*	Lower-middle income	Trinidad and Tobago	High-income
Tonga	Upper-middle income		
Tuvalu*	Upper-middle income		
Vanuatu	Lower-middle income		

* UN-defined Least Developed Country

Note: Income classification is based on World Bank data. For 2022, lower-middle income states had GNI per capita of US\$ 1,046- \$4,095; upper middle-income of between US\$ 4,096 and \$12,695; and high-income economies of US \$12,696 per capita or more.

Sources: UN-OHRLLS, [List of SIDS](#) and The Commonwealth, [Commonwealth small states and SIDS](#); World Bank, [World Bank country and lending groups](#)

The land masses of SIDS are relatively small compared to the ocean areas they are responsible for, being more than [2,000 times larger than their land area](#).¹² Collectively, they represent 14% of the [world's coastlines](#).¹³

The economies of most SIDS are based on a narrow range of sectors, which are frequently related to their natural environment and ocean resources. In 2018, 66% of SIDS had a tourism sector which represented at least 20% of their GDP. This compared to an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average of 4%.¹⁴ Fisheries are also a significant source of income: In Commonwealth SIDS such as Kiribati and the Maldives, [70% of their exported goods are seafood](#).¹⁵

Being reliant on these sectors makes SIDS particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change on rising sea levels, more intense weather events, and coral bleaching.¹⁶ From 2000 to 2015, SIDS and low-income countries suffered the largest relative losses from natural disasters (17% of GDP).

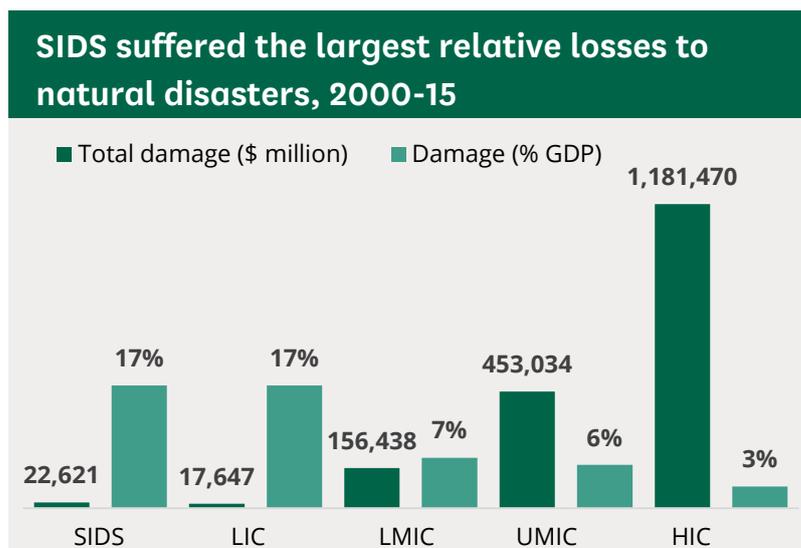
¹² OECD, [Covid-19 pandemic: Towards a blue recovery in SIDS](#), 26 January 2021, p6

¹³ OECD, [Making development cooperation work for SIDS](#), 2018, Box 1.2

¹⁴ OECD, [Covid-19 pandemic: Towards a blue recovery in SIDS](#), 26 January 2021, p6

¹⁵ UNCTAD, [SIDS face uphill battle in Covid-19 recovery](#), 10 June 2021

¹⁶ OECD, [Covid-19 pandemic: Towards a blue recovery in SIDS](#), 26 January 2021, introduction



“LIC” stands for low-income country, “LMIC” lower middle-income country, “UMIC” upper middle-income country, and “HIC” high income country.

Income classification is based on World Bank data. For 2022, lower-middle income states had GNI per capita of US\$ 1,046- \$4,095; upper middle-income of between US\$ 4,096 and \$12,695; and high-income economies of US \$12,696 per capita or more.

Source: OECD, [Making development cooperation work for SIDS](#), 2018, fig 1.2

2.1

Effects of climate change

In August 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its most recent [assessment on the physical science of climate change](#), including its potential effects on all small islands (not solely SIDS).

The panel noted that constructing climate information for small islands is “challenging”, [due to observational and capacity issues](#) and determining how far changes in their climate are due to human or natural influences.¹⁷ However, it concluded it was “very likely” that:

- Most small island regions have warmed from at least the 1960s.
- Sea level rises will continue in all small island regions and result in increased coastal flooding.
- Those in the Caribbean will see declining rainfall, by up to 20-30% by 2100.¹⁸

¹⁷ IPCC, [Climate change 2021: The physical science basis](#), August 2021, pp3553, 3546 (pdf)

¹⁸ IPCC, [Climate change 2021: The physical science basis](#), August 2021, pp3549, 3553 (pdf)

It also notes that small islands will see lower levels of warming than the global average. Projected median temperature increases are around 1.3°C to 2.8°C by 2081-2100 compared to temperatures in 1986-2005.¹⁹

Shoreline retreat is also predicted with a “high confidence” for most small islands in the Pacific and Caribbean. Projections are that by 2100, more than 100 metres of median shoreline retreat will occur on all small islands, and up to 200 metres in the Caribbean.²⁰

Resources on SIDS, climate change, and development

- International Institute for Sustainable Development, [Small islands, large oceans](#), March 2021
- OECD, [Covid-19 pandemic: Towards a blue recovery in SIDS](#), January 2021
- UN, [Development and globalisation facts and figures: SIDS](#), 2021
- Climate Ambition Support Alliance/Overseas Development Institute, [Climate science for SIDS](#), April 2020
- Adelle Thomas et al, [Climate change and SIDS](#), Annual Review of Environment and Resources, vol 45, 2020
- Siân Herbert, [Development characteristics of SIDS](#), June 2019
- OECD, [Making development co-operation work for SIDS](#), 2018

2.2

Determining vulnerability and access to finance

The [Paris Climate Agreement of 2015](#) recognises SIDS as particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and to have particular capacity issues in accessing resources and adapting to climate change.²¹

Many SIDS are middle-income economies, which means they are less able to access concessional finance (that below market rates) and likely to receive less official development assistance (ODA) than lower-income states.²²

ODA is aid intended to promote the economic development of developing countries. Such assistance must meet OECD criteria and be reportable to

¹⁹ IPCC, [Climate change 2021: The physical science basis](#), August 2021, p3547 (pdf)

²⁰ IPCC, [Climate change 2021: The physical science basis](#), August 2021, p3234 (pdf). [Shoreline retreat includes](#) inundation, erosion or raising the mean water level.

²¹ UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, [Paris Agreement on Climate Change](#), 2015, Article 9.4

²² Evert-jan Quak, [Institute of Development Studies. How losing access to concessional finance affects SIDS](#), July 2019

them. Countries classified as middle- or high-income countries are not eligible for ODA.²³

Because SIDS typically transition to middle-income status [based on a few service sectors](#) (eg., tourism), they remain highly vulnerable to external economic shocks. Combined with their distance from markets, which reduce the speed at which they attract foreign direct investment, and their high vulnerability to environmental hazards, they also often struggle to make the capital investments needed to adapt to climate change. This means SIDS continue to [show a high reliance on external support](#), despite rising incomes, but with additional challenges to accessing it.²⁴

The OECD reports that in 2017/18 SIDS saw the [same proportion of their external finance come from ODA as other developing countries](#) (16%). However, they were more reliant on money sent from abroad, such as through family (74% versus 63%) and received proportionally less foreign direct investment (7% versus 13%).²⁵

Access to aid

Depending upon the definition of SIDS applied, a minority are not eligible to receive ODA. In 2020, the OECD reported that 33 were eligible. Due to rises in their GNI, a further three may be ineligible by 2023.²⁶

Analysis of donor behaviour, published by the Overseas Development Institute, [suggests donors tend to draw down their ODA](#) to middle income countries.²⁷

ODA is not often targeted at ocean sustainability, a major concern of SIDS. From 2013 to 2018, 0.8% of global ODA [targeted the sustainable ocean economy](#).²⁸ However, the amount of ODA to SIDS [relating to the environment has risen](#), from US\$ 760 million in 2011/12 to US\$ 1,152 million in 2017/18 (34% of bilateral ODA to the SIDS).²⁹

Access to concessional finance

Concessional finance is funds provided at, or below, market rates. It is often aimed at public services, such as health and water, where domestic resources are insufficient. It is of [particular significance to SIDS](#) in the context of climate

²³ OECD, [Development Assistance Committee list of ODA recipients](#)

²⁴ Evert-jan Quak, [Institute of Development Studies, How losing access to concessional finance affects SIDS](#), July 2019; ODI, [Sustaining development in SIDS](#), July 2021

²⁵ OECD, [Factsheet: External financing to SIDS: Where we stand](#), 2020, fig 2.

²⁶ OECD, [DAC list of ODA recipients. Effective for reporting on 2021 flows](#); OECD, [Covid-19 pandemic: Towards a blue recovery in SIDS](#), January 2021, Annex 1.A

²⁷ ODI, [Exit from aid: An analysis of donor experiences](#), April 2019

²⁸ OECD, [Sustainable ocean for all: Harnessing the benefits of sustainable ocean economies for developing countries](#), 2020, fig. 4.1

²⁹ OECD, [Factsheet: External financing to SIDS: Where we stand](#), 2020, fig 5.

change, where their restrained fiscal space (due to debt repayments—see section 2.3), may prevent them from using domestic resources or accessing borrowing to meet the costs of climate resilience.³⁰

Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UN established the Green Climate Fund (GCF). [Half its resource must be invested in SIDS, low-income economies, and Africa](#). From 2015 to 2020, it approved US\$ 899 million for SIDS.³¹ As of March 2020, 10 of the 40 SIDS recognised by the GCF had not received any support.³²

Defining vulnerability

In 2021, the Commonwealth Secretary General, Baroness Scotland, backed a call by small island states to move away from using gross domestic product to measure aid allocation. Instead they favoured [the Universal Vulnerability Index \(UVI\)](#).³³

UVI weighs economic, socio-political, and environmental vulnerabilities, and the resilience of countries to such challenges. It is not the only method that can be used to measure vulnerability—the Multidimensional Index (MVI) offers an alternative.³⁴ Both see SIDS, together with Least Developed Countries (traditionally supported by ODA) as the most vulnerable to climate change.³⁵

A report, published by the Commonwealth in June 2021, found that, depending upon the method applied, [between 25 and 30 Commonwealth states were above the median values of vulnerability](#) and between 18 and 21 of the 34 SIDS were too.³⁶

Speaking at the launch of the report, Baroness Scotland said UVI [offered a more “nuanced and constructive way”](#) to measure vulnerability compared to GDP. The endorsement of the G20, Commonwealth countries and other organisations is now being sought.³⁷

The Chair of the APPG on Small Island Developing States, Kerry McCarthy MP, has [argued for reform of the climate finance accessible to SIDS](#), citing the

³⁰ OECD, [Making development cooperation work for SIDS](#), 2018, section 2.2.

³¹ GCF, [Climate action during the pandemic](#), March 2021, pp5, 10

³² GCF, [Independent evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the GCF's investments in SIDS](#), March 2021, ppxiii, 5

³³ The Guardian, [Forget GDP, “vulnerability index best gauges aid” to small islands](#), 1 July 2021

³⁴ UN-OHRLLS, [SIDS: A special case for climate finance and debt relief](#), 28 July 2021; UN Development Programme, [Towards a MVI](#), February 2021; Sustainable Development Solutions Network, [The decade of action and SIDS: Measuring and addressing SIDS' vulnerabilities \[...\]](#), 12 July 2021

³⁵ The Commonwealth, [New global index seeks to transform how developing nations are supported](#), 24 June 2021

³⁶ The Commonwealth, [The Commonwealth UVI](#), April 2021, p31

³⁷ Commonwealth Round Table, [The Commonwealth launches a new approach to measuring vulnerability and resilience](#), 29 June 2021

ineligibility of many SIDS for ODA.³⁸ Climate finance is provided by [developed countries to developing ones](#) to support their efforts to address climate change and its impacts.³⁹

The UK Government has argued that its ODA spending will [focus on acute humanitarian needs](#), but the needs of small island states would be considered at COP 26.⁴⁰

2.3

Debt and funding climate adaption

High levels of debt in SIDS and impact of pandemic

SIDS have a [substantial level of debt](#).⁴¹ The UN reported that the total external debt stocks of such countries reached \$50.4 billion in 2019, this is [an increase of 70% since 2009](#).⁴² In 2020, debt to GDP ratios averaged 48% in the 23 SIDS surveyed by the OECD. Seven exceeded the IMF target of 60%, including Commonwealth states such as Jamaica (96%) and Belize (85%).⁴³

Some analysts argue that SIDS are [showing signs of debt distress](#), and that COP 26 must focus on debt sustainability alongside climate finance commitments.⁴⁴ The IMF also reports that the greater a country's vulnerability to climate change, [the greater the likelihood of debt default](#) compared to more climate resilient countries.⁴⁵

These development challenges have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. In October 2020, the IMF estimated that [SIDS would see GDP contraction of 7% in 2020](#), compared to 5% in all ODA-eligible developing countries.⁴⁶ SIDS are also expected to have a decline in remittances from abroad, which represent 8% of their GDP on average, but as high as 40% in the Commonwealth state of Tonga.⁴⁷

During the pandemic, the UK is among those to have supported the World Bank's [Debt Service Suspension Initiative](#) (DSSI).⁴⁸ 73 countries are eligible for a temporary suspension of debt service payments to bilateral donors. It does

³⁸ Kerry McCarthy MP in the House, [SIDS need a good deal on climate before it's too late](#), 19 April 2021

³⁹ Commons Library, [COP26: Delivering on \\$100 billion climate finance](#), 12 October 2021

⁴⁰ HC Deb, [20 July 2021](#), c792

⁴¹ OECD, [The impact of Covid-19 crisis on external debt in SIDS](#), August 2021, pp17, 22

⁴² UN General Assembly, [External debt sustainability and development: Note by the Secretary General](#), A75/281, 30 July 2020 para 25;

⁴³ OECD, [The impact of Covid-19 crisis on external debt in SIDS](#), August 2021, pp17, 22. The OECD [references a report](#) stating 60% is often the "prudential limit for developed countries."

⁴⁴ UNCTAD and ODI, [SIDS need urgent support to avoid debt defaults](#), 12 April 2021

⁴⁵ IMF, [Why climate change vulnerability is bad for sovereign credit ratings](#), 17 February 2021

⁴⁶ OECD, [Covid-19: Towards a blue recovery in SIDS](#), January 2021, fig.2

⁴⁷ OECD, [Covid-19: Towards a blue recovery in SIDS](#), January 2021, p9

⁴⁸ PQ 179712 [[Developing countries: Debts](#)], 19 April 2021

not currently include private creditors. From May 2020 to September 2021, US\$ 5 billion in relief has been delivered to 40 countries.⁴⁹

Debt for climate swaps

In 2015, the Commonwealth Secretariat proposed that [small states conduct debt swaps for climate change mitigation and adaptation](#), citing the substantial demands of debt repayments on many states and lack of climate finance committed to them.⁵⁰

In 2021, Belize, supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat, is exploring the potential of swaps. The country currently faces a debt to GDP ratio of 130%, which it considers unsustainable.⁵¹

Debt for climate swaps means that creditors agree for a debt, or debt payments, to be reduced, and the money saved reinvested in agreed-upon climate change projects.⁵² The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are expected to unveil the [option of “green debt swaps”](#) by COP 26 in November.⁵³ In response to a parliamentary question on whether the UK Government would support such swaps, the Treasury Minister, John Glen, said the Government would [support the renewal of the World’s Bank DSSI](#) (see above) to help countries focus their fiscal resources on responding to the pandemic and noted the UK had committed to increase the amount of Climate Finance it provides.⁵⁴

The Government of Belize previously [implemented such a swap](#) with the US Government in 2001.⁵⁵ In 2015, the Seychelles also came to an agreement with a US conservation group to sell its debt in exchange for the county [creating 13 new marine protected areas](#).⁵⁶

3

UK and Commonwealth climate programmes

Below is a summary of two environmental programmes relating to the Commonwealth, provided by the UK and the Commonwealth Secretariat,

⁴⁹ World Bank, [Covid-19: DSSI](#), updated 24 September 2021

⁵⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, [Discussion paper: Debt swaps for climate change adaptation and mitigation: A Commonwealth proposal](#), March 2015

⁵¹ The Commonwealth, [Belize explores debt for climate swaps with Commonwealth support](#), 2 July 2021

⁵² IIED, [Tackling the triple crisis: Using debt swaps to address debt, climate and nature loss post-Covid-19](#), September 2020; Frances Fuller et al, [Debt for climate swaps: Caribbean outlook](#), 2018

⁵³ Reuters, [IMF, World Bank to unveil “green debt swaps” option by November, Georgieva says](#), 8 April 2021; Reuters, [World Bank, IMF to consider climate change in debt reduction talks](#), 20 February 2021

⁵⁴ PQ 36703 [[Debts written off: Developing countries](#)], 26 July 2021

⁵⁵ Convention on Biological Diversity, [The Belize debt for nature swap](#), undated

⁵⁶ BBC Future, [The deal that saved Seychelles’ troubled waters](#), 3 August 2020

respectively. Further information can be found on the Commonwealth's website, [Our work: Climate change](#).

3.1 Commonwealth Marine Economies

In 2016, the UK launched the Commonwealth Marine Economies (CME) programme. It seeks to support the marine economies of [17 Commonwealth SIDS](#) who are eligible to receive Official Development Assistance (ODA) to promote sustainable growth and development.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is the lead government department, and expertise from UK agencies, such as the Hydrographic Office, support the development of national Maritime Economy Plans.⁵⁷ Examples of projects include supporting sustainable fishing, developing resilience to hurricanes and other hazards, and providing hydrographic information to improve the capacity of SIDS to manage their marine assets.⁵⁸

3.2 Climate Finance Access Hub

The [Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub](#) (CCFAH), hosted in Mauritius, seeks to help vulnerable states access, and manage, adaption and mitigation funds.⁵⁹ Climate finance advisers are deployed to 11 countries, including Barbados, Fiji, Seychelles, and Tonga, to provide technical support, share knowledge, and implement climate change projects.⁶⁰

The programme was initially funded by the UK's Department for International Development, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the Government of Mauritius. Additional resources have come from the NDC Partnership and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). From 2016 to February 2021, £4.1 million was spent on its activities.⁶¹

Since becoming operational in 2016 to March 2021, CCFAH helped secure [US\\$ 43.8 million in six countries](#), with US\$ 762 million in 11 countries in the pipeline.⁶² Funding has supported applications in Mauritius to [secure](#)

⁵⁷ FCDO, [CME Programme](#), updated 30 March 2021

⁵⁸ FCDO, [CME Programme](#), April 2018; FCDO, [CME Programme](#), undated; National Oceanography Centre, [CME Programme](#)

⁵⁹ The Commonwealth, [Commonwealth Secretariat strategic plan, 2017/18-2020/21](#), 2017, para 39

⁶⁰ The Commonwealth, [CCFAH](#)

⁶¹ The Commonwealth, [Evaluation of the CCFAH](#), February 2021, pviii

⁶² The Commonwealth, [CCFAH: Impact report](#), March 2021

[€600,000 to help smallholder farmers](#) adapt to climate change and US\$ 500,000 to improve [solar energy generation](#) in Tonga.⁶³

An [independent evaluation of the CCFAH](#), published in February 2021, concluded its effectiveness was “moderate,” though said the programme would likely meet its headline target to deliver its target of US \$40 million by 2020, and that there was demand from SIDS and Least Developed Countries for finance.⁶⁴

4 Diplomatic initiatives

4.1 SIDS and international organisations

SIDS are one of the recognised groupings within UN debates on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as being members of the G-77. The G-77 is a [coalition of developing countries](#).⁶⁵ Both these groups work to [establish common negotiating positions to pursue at climate negotiations](#).⁶⁶

SIDS also work through the [Alliance of Small Island States \(AOSIS\)](#). This group of 43 states has consistently called for tougher targets on climate change. In September 2021, the group adopted a [new declaration outlining priorities for COP 26](#). It called for the international community to increase its financial support and for major emitters, including those of the G20, to address the subsidisation of fossil fuels.⁶⁷

The Commonwealth also seeks to represent the needs of SIDS. Its [Strategic Plan for 2017/18 to 2020/21](#) states it will seek to strengthen the resilience of small and vulnerable states to climate change, including access to climate financing.⁶⁸ The Commonwealth provides a number of environmental programmes that seek to build resilience of SIDS to climate change (see section 3 above).⁶⁹

⁶³ The Commonwealth, [Commonwealth support secures grant to help Mauritian farmers \[...\]](#), 8 April 2020; The Commonwealth, [Tonga secures nearly \\$500k grant to improve solar electricity generation](#), 10 January 2020

⁶⁴ The Commonwealth, [Evaluation of the CCFAH](#), February 2021, ppix, 16, 19

⁶⁵ [The Group of 77 at the UN](#)

⁶⁶ UNFCCC, [Party groupings](#)

⁶⁷ AOSIS, [Launch of the AOSIS Leaders' declaration](#), 22 September 2021

⁶⁸ The Commonwealth, [Commonwealth Secretariat strategic plan, 2017/18-2020/21](#), 2017, p4

⁶⁹ The Commonwealth, [Small states and the Commonwealth](#), 2017, pp5, 7

4.2

The UK and the Commonwealth

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, 2021

Commonwealth Heads of Government meet every two years to discuss common issues. The next [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#) (CHOGM 2021) was originally planned to be held in Rwanda in June 2020.

The FCDO did intend to use the CHOGM, initially-rescheduled for June 2021, to make progress with Commonwealth countries on [addressing climate change](#) and preparing for COP 26.⁷⁰ However, both meetings have been delayed due to the pandemic and [no new date has been set](#).⁷¹

Climate change was expected to be raised at the meeting. The Commonwealth Secretary-General had planned to raise the issues of [land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change](#).⁷²

CHOGM 2018

At the previous CHOGM, Commonwealth leaders [committed to address climate change](#). This included renewing their commitment to the Paris Climate Agreement to keep average increase in global temperatures to less than 2°C and piloting “innovative approaches” to tackling climate change.⁷³

COP 26

The UK Government says it is [meeting with different regions](#) of the Commonwealth in the lead up to the COP26 in November 2021.⁷⁴

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Baroness Scotland, [will lead a delegation to COP 26](#). In September, she said the organisation would seek “decisive action” to mobilise financial support for vulnerable states.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ PQ HL14910 [[Rwanda: Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#)], 28 April 2021

⁷¹ PQ 8610 [[Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#)], 7 June 2021

⁷² The Commonwealth CHOGM 2021, [Commonwealth to bolster action on sustainable land use management on the road to COP 26](#), 19 March 2021

⁷³ CHOGM 2018, [The ambition](#), 16 April 2021

⁷⁴ HC Deb, [17 May 2021](#), c 310

⁷⁵ The Commonwealth, [Commonwealth to champion climate-vulnerable states at COP 26](#), 12 September 2021

5

Commonwealth declarations on the environment

Commonwealth leaders have made four main declarations on the environment, in which they resolve to cooperate to meet international climate goals, such as those set down in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Langkawi Declaration, 1989

Commonwealth leaders stated their concern about the [deterioration in the environment and the threat future generations face from it](#). They resolved to act both collectively and individually to support and strengthen international funding to improve environmental protection and to implement strategies to adapt to climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.⁷⁶

Edinburgh Commonwealth Economic Declaration, 1997

The Edinburgh Declaration includes a statement that Commonwealth members would seek [significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions](#) and to initiate action in the international community to strengthen disaster relief responses.⁷⁷

Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration, 2009

The Climate Change Declaration reaffirmed the Commonwealth's commitment to the [Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan](#), issued in 2007. This included ensuring that burden sharing in response to climate change should be equitable and should not perpetuate poverty.⁷⁸

Commonwealth Blue Charter, 2013

The Blue Charter commits Commonwealth countries to [solve ocean related problems](#) such as ocean-warming, marine pollution and unsustainable fishing, and to meet commitments to sustainable ocean development found in UN Climate and Biodiversity agreements.⁷⁹

Under the Blue Charter, [ten action groups](#) have been formed in the Commonwealth to work on ocean-related issues. These include:

⁷⁶ The Commonwealth, [Langkawi Declaration on the environment](#), 1989

⁷⁷ The Commonwealth, [Edinburgh Commonwealth Economic Declaration](#), 1997, p46

⁷⁸ The Commonwealth, [Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan](#), 2007 and The Commonwealth, [Climate Change Declaration](#), 2009

⁷⁹ The Commonwealth, [Blue Charter: Shared values, shared ocean](#), 2013

- A group on the ocean and climate change, led by Fiji, that is considering financial mechanism to support a [“blue carbon” approach to address climate change](#).⁸⁰ “Blue carbon” approaches seek to maximise the storage of carbon in marine ecosystems. More information can be found in the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology briefing, [Blue carbon](#) (September 2021).
- A group led by Barbados and Seychelles on [Marine Protected Areas](#) (MPAs). MPAs are areas of ocean where marine management takes place to conserve their environments and ensure they are used sustainably. The group intends to expand the number of protected areas in Commonwealth countries such as Belize.⁸¹

Under the charter, the UK and Vanuatu also lead the [Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance](#). This has 34 members, who are committed to reducing plastic pollution.⁸² As of June 2021, the UK has committed £70 million to address plastic pollution in the ocean, including through funding improvements to waste management systems to reduce plastic pollution.⁸³

⁸⁰ The Commonwealth, [Blue Charter: Action groups](#); The Commonwealth, [Blue Charter: Action group on ocean and climate change](#).

⁸¹ The Commonwealth, [Blue charter: MPAs](#)

⁸² PQ 258999 [[Overseas aid: Environmental pollution](#)], 6 July 2021; The Commonwealth, [Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance: Action group on marine plastic pollution](#)

⁸³ PQ HL950 [[Seas and oceans: Pollution control](#),], 23 June 2021; Department for International Development, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Commonwealth unites to end scourge of plastic](#), 15 April 2018

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)