



Review Essay Small Island Developing States and International Climate Change Negotiations

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Abstract - de Águeda Corneloup, Inés and A. Mol (2014), “Small Island developing states and international climate change negotiations: The power of moral “leadership””, *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 14(3): 281-297. Mead, Leila (2021), “Small Islands, Large Oceans: Voices on the Frontlines of Climate Change”, *International Institute for Sustainable Development*.

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Introduction- Since the dawn of the industrial revolution, the uneven impact of human activities has elevated the speed at which the human civilisation was growing and consuming things, having a devastating impact upon nature and ecology at large. The impact has become even more severe in the 20th Century leading to atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and limnologist Eugene F. Storer proposing a new geological era named Anthropocene to highlight it. The devastating impact has led to what is now called climate change. It delineates the relationship between risks to human society and the planet caused due to the inadvertent pressure upon the ecosystem by human activities. Closely related and often interchangeably used with climate change is the term global warming that points out the influence of human activities on the warming of the earth system. However, the impact of climate change while being present globally has not impacted everyone equally and the precarity, risk, hazard associated with it has an intersectional dimension to it.

This essay takes into consideration the impact of climate change on small island developing states (from here on SIDS). Despite contributing <0.003% of the total greenhouse emissions, SIDS are at the forefront of the dangers caused by anthropogenic climate change. Tourism comprises more than 30% of total exports in the majority of SIDS, and in some, it can go over 50% like Maldives, Seychelles, and Bahamas (Coke-Hamilton 2020). SIDS depend highly on food imports with 50% of them

importing more than 80% of the required food. SIDS has a combined population of approximately 65 million out of which one-third live on land less than five metres above the sea making them more predisposed to storms and rise in sea level. Sea level rise has become a physical threat to the survival of some island developing countries. The low adaptive capacity along with other factors make climate change an existential threat for SIDS.

SIDS, while not being homogenous in terms of geographical and socio-economic outlook do share similarities that make the case for bracketing them in talks on climate change. The policy brief that has been taken here historically looks at the evolution of international environmental negotiations by centring SIDS. It tries to come up with newer mechanisms to address the issues that are faced by SIDS. The influence of great powers in shaping issues at the international level makes it difficult for the voice from the margins, like those of SIDS, to be heard easily. Despite this, we find SIDS countries being successful in negotiating on the different international environmental forums. The 1972 Stockholm conference, for the first time, recognised the global nature of climate change issues. However, it was not until the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) that the international community recognised SIDS requiring special intervention. Lobbying by SIDS led to the recognition of their vulnerability in Agenda 21, the programme of action that was adopted at the Earth Summit. The special need for international cooperation in the areas of finance, technology transfer, capacity building, and information sharing was highlighted in the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development (BPOA) adopted at the conference in 1994 aimed at prescribing actions needed to help SIDS achieve sustainable development. The role of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a coalition of SIDS, created in 1990, has been very crucial in lobbying at the international environmental negotiations.

Copenhagen Accord and role of leadership- In international climate negotiations, despite having a low bargaining chip, SIDS have managed to make space for their views. Mol and Corneloup look at the role of moral leadership in the negotiation process. For this, they examine events since the establishment of the Bali Action Plan in December 2007, leading up to and including the 2-week fifteenth Conference of Parties (COP 15) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at Copenhagen in 2009. Mol and Corneloup do an in-depth content analysis of primary, secondary sources and corroborate them with interviews of climate change experts and negotiators to come up with a more accurate analysis of three important dossiers for SIDS: limits to temperature rise, additional funding needed for adaptation in developing countries, and the constant tussle for establishing a legally binding negotiation outcome. They start by analysing the crucial role of setting up the discourse which they define as ideas, concepts, and categorisations that inherently produce, reproduce, and transform practices as well as physical and social reality. They see a direct link between discourses, strategies, and outcomes.

To examine the details of negotiations at Copenhagen, they look at the placing of discourses by AOSIS and the role played by leadership in making strategies that were to be employed by SIDS. Several authors have written on the idea that leaders need to strategise. Mol and Corneloup state three forms of leadership that hold significance for SIDS. The first type is entrepreneurial leadership that refers to the special diplomatic and negotiating tactics, and skills that give the leader an advantage in setting the negotiation agenda and prioritising issues. Second, intellectual leadership which emphasises leaders' knowledge of sciences to help sway the scientific community in their favour. The last one, environmental leadership or directional leadership that focuses on leaders implementing domestic policies and practices to legitimise their stand on climate change negotiation. The prime role of different types of leadership here is to get support in favour of their conception of reality which they try to do by shaping the discourse. Different leadership types use different strategies to get their desired outcome. However, leadership may not always give the desired outcome and thus, Mol and Corneloup warn against the establishment of a false causal link between leadership strategies and outcomes.

1.5 Degrees Celsius Limit- To dwell further on strategies employed and the negotiation outcome, Mol and Corneloup analyse each of the three issues that were mentioned earlier and were part of the SIDS dossier. The issue of a temperature rise limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius was proposed for the first time in 2008 by AOSIS, one year before COP 15. SIDS promoted this goal using all three forms of leadership. AOSIS used the slogan, "1.5 to stay live". AOSIS made sure that their view about temperature rise was presented at every conference, speech, demonstration, and publication. Along with the demand of 350 ppm advocated by certain civil society groups that included renowned scientists and research institutes, a discourse was created that favoured SIDS. They together advocated both the demands on various platforms widening the reach. Apart from using public forums, SIDS also promoted their position by bringing in scientific arguments and intellectual leadership in favour of their stand. The main pivot around which they pushed their demand was the scientific nature of demand as opposed to the commonly political one. It was also backed by two regional research centres, international scientific institutes, and renowned researchers. Most of the studies agreed that the 2 degrees Celsius limit was old and would be obsolete, needing a replacement by the 1.5-degree Celsius target put forward by SIDS. Apart from this, with regards to leadership. some of the SIDS countries framed their domestic initiatives which were in line with the demand put forward by SIDS. The Maldives, for example, announced that it plans to become carbon neutral by 2020 and also emphasised other countries to become carbon neutral at the Climate Vulnerable Forum in November 2009. In the heydays of the conference, the SIDS Dock Initiative, a platform for transferring technology and finance to SIDS was launched by several small islands for investing in clean forms of energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Despite the effort by AOSIS and SIDS, the Copenhagen summit did not accept the 1.5-degree Celsius demand and increased the limit to a maximum of 2 degrees Celsius. Mol and Corneloup in their article give several reasons for this. First, they point out that 2 degrees Celsius was politically and scientifically agreed upon a long while back before the demand for 1.5 degrees Celsius came up. EU had fixed the goal as 2 degrees Celsius back in 1996. The IPCC Fourth Assessment report that came out in 2007 adopted 2 degrees Celsius as a reference for scientific studies gave it the much-needed legitimacy. Further, due to the politicisation of the debate, it became even more difficult to have a more scientific argument. The SIDS proposal of a 1.5 degrees limit was opposed by both the global south and global north. However, we do find that due to the constant pressure of AOSIS and SIDS, the proposal of 1.5 degrees Celsius limit found mention in the IPCC report of 2013. Later, Tony de Brum under the umbrella of the High Action Coalition brought the rich and the poor countries together leading to the successful inclusion of the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit in the Paris Climate Change Agreement.

Adaptation Fund- The second goal of AOSIS was obtaining additional funds for addressing climate change issues. As opposed to the conventional norm of stressing upon concrete finances, SIDS focussed on an adequate fund, immediately delivered, was stable, and could be provided over a long period. They followed the strategy which they used earlier in the case of their 1.5 degrees Celsius proposal. They used intellectual, entrepreneurial, and environmental leadership strategies. Instead of relying upon research to strengthen their demands, they stuck to what the Prime Minister of Samoa said during COP 15, “we see and experience it every day”. At the same time, they used the estimations by World Bank and UNDP to give the audience an idea about what an “acceptable’ and “sufficient” range of financial help means in the context of extremely vulnerable SIDS. There was a special focus on narrating the experiences of their vulnerability due to climate change on every platform. They made sure that it did not seem like just another climate change issue but one about the survival of Islanders. The Environment Minister of Tonga in speech reflected this when he said in COP 15, “We speak from our heart”. At the same time, we see this discourse being carried forward even after the Copenhagen Summit. The fact that SIDS control around 30% of all oceans and seas was strategically used by their leaders. They projected the ocean and its resources as a reservoir having the potential to tap into the “blue economy” which stresses upon a sustainable idea of using oceans for human needs and economic growth. Danny Faure, the former president of Seychelles, emphasised the blue economy as the “next frontier of our development”. Further, a High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy highlighted that an investment of a dollar would give five dollars in return. Mauritius in 2013, came out with a plan to tap into Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) by bringing together the different existing sectors, like seaports, tourism, marine biotechnology, and renewable energy. Seychelles later went forward with the world’s first sovereign blue bond with 15

million USD in 2018. The bond will help expand the marine protected areas (MPAs) and further improve governance.

The role of entrepreneurial leadership strategy was crucial in mobilising support for creating adaptation funds under the convention and also as availability of special finance for SIDS countries compared to other countries that receive the fund. AOSIS used the idea of polluter pays principle and state responsibility under international law to advocate their request for adaptation finance. However, the environmental leadership lacked strength. Till December 2009, very few countries had submitted their National Adaptation Programs of Action for the LDC Fund. But at the same time, it did provide support in building the discourse on the vulnerability of SIDS and how it could be addressed through financial support. The Copenhagen summit did not however turn out to be an ideal outcome for SIDS. It only provided a short-term provision of 10 billion USD for 2010-2012. While the proposition of establishing a Green Climate Fund by 2020 was made, nothing concrete in terms of its governance, structure, and operationalisation was laid out. The one positive side for SIDS was the acceptance by the larger international community of the idea of adaptation funding. Most of the powerful countries recognised the special needs of SIDS countries. The Copenhagen Accord made available to SIDS and other vulnerable states, special window access to the annual 10 billion USD financial flow. Thus, while the idea of adaptation fund was ignored at Copenhagen Accord, SIDS were able to achieve smaller goals and move the discourse forward.

Legally Binding Outcome- The third, and final outcome that AOSIS advocated at COP15 was a legally binding obligation that would entail compliance and ensure repercussions in cases of non-compliance. UNFCCC negotiations went on two different tracks. The first called the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP), essentially looked at the continuity from the Kyoto Protocol while considering new commitments and new emission reduction targets for Annex I states. The second group, Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA) had a much wider scope and looked at the improvements that could be done to the existing climate change policy for better implementation of the objectives of the convention. AOSIS wanted both the tracks and thus, focusses on two separate agreements from the Copenhagen summit. The leadership strategy of AOSIS here was an entrepreneurial one and relied on procedural initiatives along with the negotiation process. Tuvalu presented proposals at the Bonn Talk of 2009 that targeted both tracks: amending the Kyoto Protocol and establishing a new Copenhagen Protocol. However, despite the effort of the AOSIS coalition, the two negotiation tracks did not produce any legally binding treaty due to the United States refusal to be part of a renewed Kyoto Protocol and the opposition from large economies (BASIC) to be part of a new climate change treaty. Thus, we find that structural leadership strategy proved vital in deciding the outcome that was the product of setting up the discourse, thereby rendering the entrepreneurial strategy ineffective.

Analysing the Strategies- SIDS discourse developed around being the victims of climate change linking it with the vulnerability that they were exposed to. This gave them the moral right of voicing their concerns at the Copenhagen Summit. Despite being less powerful, SIDS did play a role in shaping the discourse. For instance, SIDS promoted the issue of climate change as one of international peace and security which led to the discussion of climate change issue at the UN security council for the first time in 2007. They also linked it to the idea of human rights. The initiatives led by AOSIS found coalition partners in the form of least developed countries, African Countries, and Civil Society actors. Several NGOs raised slogans and activities that also included the initiatives pushed forward by SIDS. This was visible when the civil society raised the slogans, “Listen to the Islands” inside the conference centre when Tuvalu called for the suspension of COP.

Mol and Corneloup point out how the analysis of the three cases give us insights into the role of leadership in negotiations. Despite limited structural power, SIDS along with AOSIS were an active part of the UNFCCC negotiations, managing to make their discourse audible to the world, and in the process also influencing the discourse and achieving smaller victories. In the events leading up to the Copenhagen Summit, the leaders proved effective in reaching out to the larger international community, conveying their concerns while also getting support. However, all this was not possible once the summit moved towards closed-door agreements. Thus, AOSIS and SIDS are in favour of formal procedures and legal outcomes as they the structural power needed for closed-door meetings.

As opposed to most countries that already have some kind of legitimacy and normativity in international environmental negotiations, SIDS rely to a great extent on morality to build discourse and get support while delegitimising and shaming other states for being climate change offenders. Thus, Mol and Corneloup state that this needs to be seen as a strategy that is mobilised by SIDS paving the way to another kind of leadership vis-à-vis moral leadership apart from the four-leadership mentioned earlier. He construes it “as an ideal-typical fifth category of leadership” that needs to be added to the prevalent conceptions of leadership to understand how SIDS made use of their short stature in international relations to the best use. They constantly framed issues by linking them to the discourse of morality trying to get their way around. Thus, Mol and Corneloup point out that it is not environmental but moral leadership which was the reason SIDS had so much influence on affecting the discourse in Copenhagen summit.

Conclusion- The uneven pressure that SIDS countries are exposed to need to be taken into consideration whenever we talk of climate change and its repercussions. While giving the baton to these countries for voicing their vulnerability, the global world leaders need to consider the effect of climate change on human freedom. While the policy brief and the research article by Mol and Corneloup highlight the ill effects that SIDS have to face and how they have tried to tackle it, there needs to be a collective effort aimed at addressing the challenges posed in the Anthropocene to the global earth system. As highlighted by the Human Development Report 2020, there needs to be an

effort where we see problems as not something external to us but as an inherent part of the complex system where each unit is connected to the other. While stressing international cooperation and innovative financial approaches, we need a shift in the value system. The conception of human freedom and the role of social imbalances in exacerbating climate change and its impact needs to be highlighted. A collective effort would entail here focussing on the orthodox sites of power in ameliorating inequality and restructuring human values while being culturally sensitive and aware. We need to shift towards sustainable practices, cutting down the dependence of SIDS countries and the world at large on fossil fuels paving way for a more ecologically sensitive means of fuel. Apart from technological assistance and financial assistance, we need to develop a negotiation platform that negates structural anomalies which exist due to the preponderance of power and provide a platform to vulnerable SIDS, other weaker countries, and communities. The solutions that we are looking for need to be grounded in both lived experience and sciences.

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