

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

We are living on the planet as if we have another one to go to. This quote by American Environmentalist, Terri Swearingen, has encapsulated the reason towards the perilous decisions posed by human beings. Islands are sinking, emissions are increasing, and lives are at risk, yet almost all global leaders today prefer profit over sustainability, harming the environment from all aspects despite depending our lives on it.¹ Simple actions including banning plastic use or any single-use items might be seen as a hassle, though if one looks at the bigger picture, constant implementation of such policies helps provide a cleaner and sustainable world.² The reality of this world is never as beautiful as it sounds. From poor farming practices, overconsumption, to land and sea pollution, our natural resources have been deeply affected, forcing them to lose their essence and are forced to deal with rapid urbanisation.³

Humans neglect the fact that they need a proper, non-exploited environment on both land and sea to provide the right natural resources to survive. Though the land is essential, it is general knowledge for all to know that 71% of the world is

¹ Saber Salem, "Climate Change and the Sinking Island States in the Pacific," *E-International Relations*, January 9, 2020, <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/80990> (accessed June 12, 2024).

² Louis Sokolow, Celeste Meiffren-Swango, and Jenn Engstrom, *Plastic Bag Bans Work* (Environment America Research & Policy Center and U.S. PIRG Education Fund, January 2024), <https://publicinterestnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Plastic-Bag-Bans-Work-revd.pdf>.

³ Rajshekhar Basavapattan, "Causes, Effects and Solutions for Depletion of Natural Resources: Theoretical Perspective," *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 6 (June 2021): 5651–5657.

covered by the ocean.⁴ Where, it is currently dealing with extreme effects of climate change, biodiversity loss (e.g. extinction to both animals and plants), pollution in shorelines and sea, and more to mention as sustainable policies are not implemented as planned.⁵ If carried on further, the sea level rises and all within it face severe consequences, leading to submerging island nations.⁶

Take Maldives as an example, the island is known to be the lowest-lying country among others and is currently facing threats to be completely submerged by 2100.⁷ Articles posted by United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) with real-life statements from local children mentioned how the ocean, as their main resource, has been rising in temperature, affecting their habitat, leading to health and food security as seen through their imports for basic necessities.⁸ If all island states in various continents are exposed to the same threats and conditions, local people will have to anticipate relocating to the nearest, less-threatened countries in order to ensure their survival. Take Fiji and Kiribati’s land buying case as an example.⁹ Migration, whether legal or illegal, will cause threats to the host country’s resources, cultures, and stability in both political and economic

⁴ National Geographic, “Ocean,” *National Geographic*, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/ocean/#:~:text=The%20ocean%20is%20a%20huge,%2C%20Indian%2C%20and%20Arctic%20oceans> (accessed June 11, 2024).

⁵ World Wildlife Fund, “Threats,” *World Wildlife Fund*, <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats> (accessed June 11, 2024).

⁶ Saber Salem, “Climate Change and the Sinking Island States in the Pacific,” *E-International Relations*, January 9, 2020, <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/80990> (accessed June 12, 2024).

⁷ Naff Asim, “We’re Being Swallowed by the Ocean and Running Out of Freshwater,” *UNICEF*, November 18, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/blog/were-being-swallowed-ocean-and-running-out-freshwater> (accessed June 12, 2024).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Elfriede Hermann and Wolfgang Kempf, “Climate Change and the Imagining of Migration: Emerging Discourses on Kiribati’s Land Purchase in Fiji,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 29, no. 2 (2017): 231–263, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26408006>.

aspects.¹⁰ Therefore, this issue should be a global responsibility and concern for all nations to collaborate and include in their agenda.

Knowledge of why these threats occur is easily accessible, in addition to the actions that are seen through the well-known Paris Agreement, Kyoto Protocol, and Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in upholding sustainability. First established in Berlin 1995, the COP meetings are held annually with different hosts each year. Here, member states review and discuss their implementation, decisions, and other related arrangements by the COP, making it the supreme decision-making body for the UNFCCC.¹¹

Despite the progress and commitments taken by nations, concrete results are barely seen.¹² Looking backward to COP26, there are three notable failures to remember; first, developed countries have not (or might never) fulfil their commitment since 2010 to aid 100 billion USD to the least developed countries in terms of transitioning to clean energy. Second, the conference failed to come to an agreement for the least develop countries to claim compensation from the high

¹⁰ Sascha O. Becker and Andreas Ferrara, “Consequences of Forced Migration: A Survey of Recent Findings,” *Labour Economics* 59 (August 2019): 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.02.007>.

¹¹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), “Conference of the Parties (COP),” *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)*, <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/supreme-bodies/conference-of-the-parties-cop> (accessed August 5, 2024).

¹² Lindsay Maizland, “Global Climate Agreements: Successes and Failures,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, last updated December 5, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/paris-global-climate-change-agreements>.

Green House Gas (GHG) emitting countries as it as eventually blocked by the European Union (EU) and the United States (US).¹³

Third and last, agreements made are not compatible with the present situation, which even if it succeeds, changes made are not prominent to consider. This leaves us the question of how and why it is difficult for nations to provide suitable policies and agreements that hits the target. Answers to this question vary, though the disparity between the developed and developing states serves as the most fitting. With opposite aims and interests, sustainable policies and targets (majorly made by the developed) are struggling to position themselves with the developing (and underdeveloped).¹⁴ One of the examples is occurring in the Commonwealth, an association of 56 equal and independent countries, where 33 member states are small states and island nations. The Commonwealth has its Secretariat, with aim to support its members in achieving its goals, with one of them being set under the Commonwealth Blue Charter (CBC), established in 2018. Focusing on the sea, the CBC, with its motto of ‘shared ocean, shared values,’ aims to protect and manage the ocean of 56 countries through agreements and action groups.¹⁵

These countries understand that the ocean is currently facing severe acidification, having difficulty in dealing with marine litter, and must put in extra

¹³ M. Maslin, J. Lang, and F. Harvey, “A Short History of the Successes and Failures of the International Climate Change Negotiations,” *UCL Open: Environment* 5 (2023): 08, <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444/ucloe.000059>.

¹⁴ Laxmi Adrianna Haigh and Joel Marsden, “Sustainability Policies Can Worsen Global Inequalities. Here’s What Needs to Change,” *World Economic Forum*, June 17, 2022, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/06/sustainability-policies-global-inequalities/> (accessed June 12, 2024).

¹⁵ The Commonwealth, “Commonwealth Blue Charter,” *The Commonwealth*, <https://thecommonwealth.org/bluecharter> (accessed June 11, 2024).

efforts in restoring their marine protected areas and ecosystems. The CBC established ten action groups, where each are led or co-championed by different countries, highlighting its attention to SIDS, as follows:

1. The Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance (CCOA) led by the United Kingdom (UK) and Vanuatu
2. Coral Reef Protection and Restoration co-championed by Australia, Belize, and Mauritius
3. Mangrove Ecosystems and Livelihoods led and championed by Sri Lanka
4. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) championed by Barbados and Seychelles
5. Ocean Acidification championed by New Zealand
6. Ocean and Climate Change championed by Fiji
7. Ocean Observation led by Canada
8. Sustainable Aquaculture championed by Cyprus
9. Sustainable Blue Economy championed by Antigua and Barbuda and Kenya
10. Sustainable Coastal Fisheries championed by Maldives and Kiribati¹⁶

While most charters, agreements, journals, articles, or studies are heavily tilted to the developed, the Commonwealth, including the CBC, has provided a platform for SIDS to take the lead in promoting a sustainable ocean management. The Commonwealth alone holds 45% of the world's coral reef, with 49/56 countries having marine coastlines. Out of the 56 countries, 45% of them are SIDS, marking its essential role towards the whole order of the Commonwealth.¹⁷ These states are

¹⁶ The Commonwealth, "Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups," *The Commonwealth*, <https://thecommonwealth.org/bluecharter/action-groups> (accessed June 11, 2024).

¹⁷ The Commonwealth, "Commonwealth Blue Charter," *The Commonwealth*, <https://thecommonwealth.org/bluecharter> (accessed June 11, 2024).

the frontliners in experiencing the danger of marine environmental threats, and though it is commonly referred to as tiny or a little dot on the map, these states are home to millions of people and organisms.

It must be able to be at the forefront in shaping the course of climate change to survive.¹⁸ Spread through four out of five regions (Asia, Africa, Caribbean and Americas, and the Pacific, excluding Europe) of the Commonwealth, the results of the action groups in SIDS have experienced several successes and drawbacks.¹⁹ Observed through the case studies published by the CBC, most of these cases are still ongoing, and various challenges remain in island states as extra help is much needed. Looking through the CCOA, this action group has published an action plan targeted until the end of 2028. One of the past goals is to commit to significantly reducing any single-use plastic waste by 2021, with another aim to hold annual meetings as a platform to exchange views and knowledge.²⁰

The alliance had its first Ministerial meeting in Nairobi in November 2018, with the UK as its leader and partner in technical assistance and aid. Here, representatives discussed their success in gradually banning single-use plastics on national and regional level. Though, challenges including resistance to these policies occur specifically from manufacturing industries. This meeting also

¹⁸ United Nations Development Programme, “Small Island Developing States Are on the Frontlines of Climate Change – Here’s Why,” *United Nations Development Programme*, April 30, 2024, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/small-island-developing-states-are-frontlines-climate-change-heres-why> (accessed June 11, 2024).

¹⁹ Commonwealth Foundation, “Commonwealth Small States and Small Island Developing States,” *Commonwealth Foundation*, <https://commonwealthfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Commonwealth-Small-States-and-SIDS.pdf> (accessed June 11, 2024).

²⁰ The Commonwealth Blue Charter, “Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance Action Plan,” 2024, *The Commonwealth Blue Charter*, <https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-05/commonwealth-clean-ocean-alliance-action-plan.pdf?VersionId=XW8A4fgK59ALMekx12mbbMdJxTcHNwG7> (accessed June 11, 2024).

highlighted the drawbacks experienced by SIDS, including their vulnerabilities in being exposed as a receiver of other country's plastic pollution.²¹

Apart from the meeting, funding reports are also published, seen through the UK's scheme which includes CCOA Technical Assistance Facility (CCOA TAF), the Commonwealth Marine Litter Program (CLiP), and Global Plastic Action Partnership published in 2019.²² In August 2019, CLiP collaborated with Belize, and now published as an ongoing case study by CBC in 2021. As a member of the CCOA, Belize aims to realise its commitments through adopting a national Marine Litter Action Plan.²³ Expanding Belize's reach under a four-months collaboration with CLiP, the country's Department of Environment (DOE) established a partnership with the UK's Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) in addressing the plan. Response includes studies on plastics, raising awareness through education, and capacity-building activities with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This resulted in policy papers and the identification of gaps between policy and action, including 25 marine litter actions that were transformed into a framework for Belizeans.²⁴

²¹ Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance, "Ministerial Breakfast meeting: Chair Summary," November 27, 2018, *Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance*, <https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-02/Commonwealth%20Clean%20Ocean%20Alliance%20-%20Ministerial%20Breakfast%20meeting%20Chair%20Summary.pdf> (accessed June 11, 2024).

²² Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance, "Funding and knowledge sharing opportunities," February 2019, *Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance*, <https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-02/Commonwealth%20Clean%20Oceans%20initiatives%20and%20funding.pdf> (accessed June 11, 2024).

²³ The Commonwealth, "Case Study: Developing a National Marine Litter Action Plan, Belize (On-going)," August 4, 2021, *The Commonwealth*, <https://thecommonwealth.org/case-study/case-study-developing-national-marine-litter-action-plan-belize-going> (accessed June 11, 2024).

²⁴ Ibid.

As COVID-19 came into play, the action plan's timeline has been paused, leaving challenges for Belize's local government to overcome. This includes the lack of funding, equipment, and technical expertise as the CLiP programme was limited to time constraint despite needing its assistance much longer. This marks an inefficacy in SIDS, which gaps must be filled for these states to be exposed to the right funding scheme, modern technologies, and equipment.²⁵

COVID-19 has also become a challenge in the Bahamas, affecting its MPAs. Each area has its unique characteristics and priorities, where different management strategies must be implemented for a proper development. Through the CBC's case study report, the Bahamas is known to be working closely with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in providing specific categories for MPAs.²⁶ The Bahamas implemented three workshops over nine months in 2014, involving six SIDS from the Caribbean to exchange knowledge and awareness on the issue. Results from these workshops then continued until 2019, though concrete implementation is still yet to be seen as the Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19 arrives simultaneously.²⁷ Ever since, the Bahamas' MPA management has been reducing their focus back to the basic level as the staff's safety and security remains priority.

²⁵ The Commonwealth, "Case Study: Developing a National Marine Litter Action Plan, Belize (On-going)," August 4, 2021, *The Commonwealth*, <https://thecommonwealth.org/case-study/case-study-developing-national-marine-litter-action-plan-belize-going> (accessed June 11, 2024).

²⁶ The Commonwealth Blue Charter, "Assigning IUCN Protected Area Management Categories – The Bahamas Experience," *Commonwealth Secretariat*, 2020, <https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-02/Case%20Study-%20Assigning%20IUCN%20Protected%20Area%20Management%20Categories%20E2%80%93%20The%20Bahamas%20Experience.pdf?VersionId=SOeHjpp1MmxsczPP3nxu4ws0SD9j6WQ>.

²⁷ Ibid.

Despite the efforts, CBC's action groups have not been able to address the problems faced by SIDS efficiently, let alone building progress and providing concrete steps in settling the issue. Furthermore, there has been little to no published academic writings referring to the gaps experienced by SIDS under CBC from a perspective of both International Relations and the environment. Therefore, with the title of **“Evaluating the Drawbacks of the Commonwealth Blue Charter in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) 2018-2024,”** this research aims to be one of the new lenses in understanding both actors.

1.2 Research Questions

Highlighting the attention to CBC's SIDS, this research is focused on one representative from each region:

1. Maldives (Asia)
2. Seychelles (Africa)
3. Antigua and Barbuda (Caribbean and Americas)
4. Fiji (Pacific)

Through collecting and comparing data, reports, and journals on these four states, other states of similar condition, and exploring the gaps within the drawbacks of the CBC, this research identifies what alternatives serve best in filling these gaps. This research is also focusing on a specific time frame, starting from the year of CBC's establishment in 2018 until the present year of 2024. Therefore, this research aims to provide an answer to this one following research question:

1. How does climate change affect the conditions of ocean management within representative SIDS?

2. What are the suitable alternatives to the drawbacks of CBC in SIDS?

1.3 Research Objectives

Referring to the earlier research question, the objective of this research is as follows:

1. To explore and dig deep into the background of representative countries in pursuing a proper ocean management; and
2. To develop suitable alternatives in covering the drawbacks experienced by SIDS under the CBC.

After a process of comparing and analysing within the mentioned time-line, this research offers the most fitting alternatives to the gaps experienced in SIDS under the CBC in upholding a sustainable ocean-management.

1.4 Research Significance

The world is at an alarming state when it comes to dealing with environmental threats, and SIDS are at the frontlines. Despite understanding the reason why these threats should be a global concern, the world still refuses to explore the gaps and patch it with better solutions. Not to mention, research on SIDS is not as much as other wider, less-threatened states. Therefore, despite its drawbacks, platforms such as the CBC are prominent, and if used efficiently, SIDS will gain the attention it deserves. This research provides comprehensive, realistic alternatives to the gaps in the CBC through the analysis of four SIDS of Maldives, Seychelles, Antigua and Barbuda, and Fiji.

Moreover, this research addresses the concerns of SIDS and the CBC through both lenses of International Relations and environment, where readers coming from either backgrounds or beyond may gain better perspectives to the matter. Either academicians, researchers, environmentalists, NGOs, International Organisations (IOs), or individuals, this paper aims to provide fresh insights and knowledge to readers as a reference for others to explore deeper on related topics.

1.5 Structure of Writing

In terms of structure, this research is sectioned into five main chapters, in which all five are arranged in order, correlating to one another. Starting with the first chapter, it is divided into five parts including the structure. The first part is a comprehensive background to understand the essence and urgency of this research is provided. Alongside, the research's questions, objectives, and significance are also served to enhance the aim of this research.

Within the second chapter, readers are introduced to theoretical frameworks with topics aligning to the research. This chapter is divided into two parts, where the first consists of ten literature reviews, sectioned into four groups with each theme connecting to the first chapter. The second part is theory, coming from the field of International Relations. This section consists of one grand theory and two follow up concepts to set the perspectives of this research in answering its questions.

Moving on to the third chapter, it includes the methodology of this research, or how this research is conducted. It is divided into four parts, which includes the

approach, method, data collection technique, and data analysis technique of this research.

Onto the fourth chapter, or the main part of the research, it elaborates the points mentioned within the first three chapters, specifically the first and second which serves as an introduction. Throughout the chapter, readers will find analysis of data and arguments coming from proper references. Divided into three sections, this chapter focuses on the role and actors separately within the first two, before reuniting them within the last part. This combination results in an evaluation, fulfilling the research's aim and aligning to its title.

Lastly, the fifth chapter or conclusion highlights the grand takeaways from the first four chapters in a brief form. In addition, this chapter also stresses on the recommendations available to the relevant challenges of this research, which may be used for further analysis by other studies.