

# How to realise the opportunities for small island developing states under the BBNJ Agreement

“How to” workshop summary

March 12th-13th 2025 · Tokyo

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## Moderator



**Minna Epps**

Director, Global Ocean Team, Centre for Conservation Action  
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## Speakers



**Zhen Sun**

Associate professor, WMU-Sasakawa  
Global Ocean Institute  
World Maritime University



**Angelique Pouponneau**

Lead negotiator on ocean  
Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)



**Rizza Sacra-Dejucos**

Asia lead  
High Seas Alliance



**Jerry Enoe**

Ambassador and special envoy for ocean  
Government of Grenada

# Summary

The UN's Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, also known as the “high-seas treaty”, provides a framework for equitable access to, and sustainable management of, marine resources in areas of the ocean beyond national territory. As significant stakeholders, small island developing states (SIDS) stand to benefit greatly from the agreement.

The BBNJ Agreement, adopted in June 2024, is the third legally binding treaty under UNCLOS, governing the high seas. It is built on four pillars: marine genetic resources (MGRs), area-based management tools (ABMTs), environmental-impact assessments (EIAs), and capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology (CBTMT). Discussions focused on SIDS' ratification of the agreement, capacity needs, representation and how SIDS can access funding mechanisms like the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the BBNJ Special Fund to support treaty implementation.

- **Challenges and strategies for SIDS' ratification**

Speakers highlighted political hurdles in SIDS' ratification, including low prioritisation on government agendas and the impact of election cycles on policy



commitments. Grenada is leading regional efforts within OECS and CARICOM, aiming to complete its own ratification by UNOC 2025 (June 2025). Jerry Enoe stressed the importance of education, public awareness, and diplomatic engagement in securing national support.

- **Capacity needs for SIDS in high-seas governance**

SIDS face critical capacity gaps, requiring financial and technical resources to participate effectively in high-seas governance. With 13 of the 20 ratifications so far from SIDS, speakers stressed the urgency of ensuring their strong presence in BBNJ institutions. A key discussion focused

on operationalising the BBNJ Special Fund, designed to accept private-sector contributions and support capacity-building. Angelique Pouponneau from AOSIS highlighted the need for an ecosystem-based approach to managing exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and high-seas governance.

#### ▪ **Representation of SIDS in BBNJ institutions**

Speakers emphasised the role of civil society and advocacy groups in securing equal access to BBNJ benefits, including participation in Preparatory Committee meetings where foundational decisions will be made. Indigenous knowledge was recognised as vital in identifying and managing MPAs. Currently, marine research and data collection are dominated by wealthier nations, limiting SIDS' access to crucial ocean data. Rizza Sacra-Dejucos called for a centralised clearing-house mechanism to enhance data accessibility.

#### ▪ **The BBNJ Clinic: practical support for SIDS**

Zhen Sun introduced the BBNJ Clinic, a programme designed to provide technical advisory support, capacity-sharing and legal assistance to SIDS. The programme follows a needs-based approach, working with regional organisations and local stakeholders to identify specific capacity-building requirements. The first pilot training workshop, focusing on ratification case studies and implementation strategies, will take place in Grenada in April 2025, in partnership with the OECS Commission and the Government of Grenada.

### **Key takeaways:**

#### **Opportunities for SIDS**

- **Leadership in implementation:** SIDS can shape BBNJ governance structures and may propose regionally tailored solutions.
- **Financial sustainability:** Exploring blended finance, including private-sector investment in marine research and sustainable fisheries.
- **Technological advancements:** Investing in AI-driven marine surveillance, drones and marine biotechnology.
- **Data-sharing and regional collaboration:** Strengthening **data accessibility** and indigenous-knowledge integration for conservation.

#### **Challenges to implementation**

- **Enforcement and compliance:** Limited capacity to monitor high-seas MPAs and combat illegal fishing.
- **Data ownership and accessibility:** SIDS lack resources to access and interpret marine scientific research.
- **Shipping-industry considerations:** Decarbonisation pressures impacting SIDS economies and port infrastructure.
- **Regulatory disparities:** Need for harmonised MPA regulations to ensure effective conservation.

#### **Notable mentions**

- Recognition of Ambassador Rena Lee for advancing BBNJ negotiations.
- Ireland's "Islanders supporting Islanders" initiative, redirecting EU institutional support towards SIDS.
- Strengthening regional collaboration through the BBNJ Clinic and training programmes.
- Urgent need for early ratification and national implementation strategies.

With momentum building for the BBNJ Agreement's entry into force, this workshop served as an important forum for discussing concrete steps towards SIDS' participation, capacity-building and sustainable financing solutions. The outcomes of this discussion will inform future regional initiatives and policy dialogues, ensuring that SIDS play a central role in shaping the governance of biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions.

