

# Science and knowledge to support Small Island States conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction

**Background Paper**

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## Executive Summary

Science, technology, and traditional and local knowledge will be crucial for the implementation of a new international legally binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This paper: (i) illustrates challenges with current approaches to capacity building and technology transfer (CBTT) for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), focusing on science and technology, (ii) discusses the role of traditional and local knowledge practices in the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, and (iii) outlines opportunities for the BBNJ Agreement to meet the needs of SIDS.

Although the specific needs of SIDS will need to be self-determined as they will likely vary by State, the general importance of science, technology and knowledge, and their application to policy, is clear. Deep- and open-ocean scientific research and technology (such as for monitoring, control, and surveillance) is required to understand marine biodiversity, and designate, implement, and monitor management measures such as area-based management tools and environmental impact assessments. Scientific and technological capacity will be an important factor determining the equitable sharing of benefits from marine genetic resources. Traditional and local knowledge and practices could also play important roles in ocean research, monitoring and management, including in understanding ecological and cultural connections to ABNJ, and are a strength many SIDS can draw from for the broader benefit of the global community as a whole. There is also a need for further research and knowledge sharing to understand the social, cultural and economic importance of BBNJ to humans, and examine implications for conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity. This is especially relevant for SIDS as large ocean States, given their close relationship to, and dependence on, ocean areas both within and beyond national jurisdiction.

Yet persisting challenges faced by SIDS, for example, in relation to deep-ocean research and sustainable finance, raise doubts about the sufficiency of current CBTT approaches to meet the needs of SIDS. Ineffective CBTT undermines sustainable development in SIDS, for example: (i) the one-off donor-driven nature of many CBTT efforts that consist of single workshops or training courses; (ii) donations of technological equipment that require maintenance and calibration to be done overseas, posing more of a burden than a benefit; (iii) cruise participation that is tokenistic or exposes a person to harassment or discrimination, and (iv) the stop-start nature of funding that is unable to provide longevity to promising projects. However, increasing scrutiny on problems such as ‘parachute science’, and efforts to ‘co-design and co-develop’ research and capacity-building partnerships to counteract these problems suggest that approaches to CBTT are evolving.

The BBNJ Agreement is an important opportunity to meet the human, technical, financial, and institutional capacity needs of SIDS in relation to marine conservation and sustainable use, and to strengthen the implementation of UNCLOS. However, it is uncertain whether the framework for CBTT in the BBNJ Agreement will move beyond UNCLOS Part XIV. Questions remain regarding key issues such as specific modalities and institutional arrangements for CBTT, the provision of financial resources, the role of the clearinghouse mechanism, and monitoring and evaluation. There are also questions remaining regarding the role of traditional and local knowledge and practices. The aim of this background paper is to provide a contribution to ongoing discussions regarding these issues.