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Assessing Singapore's Role and Impact in SIDS Framework Case Study: Implementation The SAMOA Pathway

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Abstract

This research will evaluate Singapore's strategic role in supporting the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway framework for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), with a focus on the renewable energy agenda through the "SIDS of Change" initiative. The SAMOA Pathway framework, launched in 2014, aims to promote environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and economic resilience for small island nations. This study applies Robert Keohane's Liberal Institutionalism theory, which emphasizes the importance of multilateral cooperation and the role of international institutions in facilitating collaboration among nations to address collective challenges.The research adopts a qualitative method with a descriptive analytical approach. Primary data is obtained through interviews with experts in the fields of energy and sustainable development, while secondary data is collected from academic journals, official reports, and related policy documents. To enhance validity, the study employs data triangulation to compare information from various sources. The findings indicate that Singapore plays a crucial role in supporting SIDS through capacity-building programs such as the Singapore Cooperation Program (SCP), which facilitates technology transfer

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and foreign direct investment (FDI). Singapore leverages its strengths in renewable energy technologies, such as Carbon capture and Storage (CCS) development and solar farm projects, to build strategic partnerships with SIDS. However, challenges such as the bureaucratic complexities among SIDS and the lack of immediate economic benefits for Singapore hinder the implementation of this agenda. From the perspective of Liberal Institutionalism, Singapore's contributions highlight the importance of international institutions in creating opportunities for countries with similar challenges to collaborate.

Keywords: Small Island Developing States, The SAMOA Pathway, renewable energy, liberal institutionalism, multilateral cooperation, Singapore.

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INTRODUCTION

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are a collection of countries with several characteristics, such as geographic isolation, small land area size, and vulnerability to environmental and economic problems. Although there is no exact definition of SIDS, there are several criteria that characterize SIDS countries, namely small population size, limited natural resources, and easily affected by international dynamics, such as climate change issues or global economic fluctuations. According to the *United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (*UNCTAD), SIDS face some unique development challenges due to their geographical position away from the global market, which limits them from developing their economies and increases the cost of developing their remote countries (UNCTAD, 2021).

A problem and challenge that SIDS often experience is vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise and extreme weather conditions. A further challenge for SIDS countries is their limited domestic economic sectors, usually in tourism and agriculture, because of their small land mass, SIDS countries have limited capacity to develop other sectors that can help their economic development. Another problem often faced by SIDS countries is limited access to global markets. These problems are related to the small domestic markets of SIDS countries, which hinders economic diversification and growth. Therefore, there are some SIDS countries that experience poverty and underdevelopment, although some SIDS countries have high Gross Domestic Product per capita in some cases (Herbert, 2019).

In response to some of these issues, the SAMOA Pathway was established at the Third International Conference on SIDS held in Apia, Samoa, in September 2014. The SAMOA Pathway sets out a framework for sustainable development specifically designed for SIDS. Some of the objectives of the SAMOA Pathway include promoting economic resilience, enhancing social inclusion, and fostering environmental sustainability. The SAMOA Pathway emphasizes the importance of partnerships between SIDS and international stakeholders to effectively mobilize resources and implement sustainable practices.

The implementation of the SAMOA Pathway involves several key strategies including improving access to finance for development projects, strengthening disaster risk management capacity, and promoting sustainable tourism practices, among others. Recent progress shows that various initiatives have been launched in member countries to achieve these goals, however, challenges remain in theprocess of mobilizing resources and ensuring that commitments translate into tangible results. The need for the SAMOA Pathway arises from the recognition that

SIDS require targeted support to address their unique issues. Without the SAMOA Pathway framework, these countries risk falling further behind in global development efforts, especially as climate change continues to threaten their very existence.

Singapore, a country classified as a small developing country with rapid development, has joined the SAMOA Pathway initiative to support its commitment to sustainable development in the region. Singapore's participation is driven by their understanding of the common challenges faced by SIDS as well as a desire to make a positive contribution through knowledge sharing and capacity building.

As a leader in urban sustainability and energy efficiency, Singapore can offer valuable insights and technologies to help other SIDS countries develop their energy sectors. This includes sharing best practices in renewable energy, energy conservation techniques, and innovative solutions for sustainable urban planning. By leveraging its experience, Singapore aims to help other SIDS countries transition to more resilient energy systems that not only meet local needs, but also align with global sustainability goals.

In conclusion, the intersection of the unique challenges of SIDS with frameworks such as the SAMOA Pathway highlights the need for collaborative efforts in addressing sustainable development. Singapore's engagement reflects how developed small island states can play an important role in supporting their developing peers through strategic partnerships that focus on shared growth and resilience.
In terms of sustainable development, SIDS countries need focused strategies that are suited to the geographical characteristics of island states. In their efforts, SIDS have identified the urgent need for more effective climate adaptation policies, particularly through frameworks such as the Barbados Programme of Action, which emphasizes specific actions to address member states' unique vulnerabilities to climate change (UNFCCC, 2005). The program has facilitated the establishment of national climate change committees and the drafting of action plans, allowing SIDS to assess vulnerabilities and implement strategies for climate adaptation (UNFCCC, 2005).

Despite efforts at global cooperation, the fact remains that international assistance is often unable to provide a sufficient response due to the diverse and unique factors of each SIDS country. In addition to the conditions experienced by SIDS, there are also various globalpressures related to environmental issues to reduce dependence on energy sources that are considered non-renewable and limited, such as oil, natural gas, and others. In this case, the majority of SIDS member countries have

difficulty in following the call, especially seeing how the majority of SIDS member countries prioritize the use of fossil energy (The Lancet, 2024). With the unique characteristics of small island states, SIDS countries have the potential for renewable natural resources that can then be used and explored to make the transition to the use of renewable energy for its member countries. There is an urgency for SIDS countries totransition to renewable energy given their vulnerability to climate change and the high costs associated with fossil fuel dependence. Despite contributing only 0.03% of global greenhouse gas emissions, SIDS face significant threats from rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and economic instability associated with fossil fuel price fluctuations (IRENA, 2024). Transitioning to renewable energy sources is not only important for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but also crucial for improving energy security and resilience to climate impacts for SIDS countries. Given how the majority of SIDS countries have a slow economic pace, efforts to develop infrastructure that supports the use of renewable energy require a boost funding allocation. In other words, while SIDS collectively recognize the need to address the challenges they are experiencing through regional and international collaboration, as in the SAMOA Pathways framework, the implementation of which is still hampered.

Singapore's engagement with SIDS countries is important in the context of energy diplomacy and sustainable development, especially given the unique challenges these countries face, such as vulnerability to climate change and limited resources. As an island nation that can be categorized as an urbanized state with significant natural resource limitations, Singapore recognizes the existential threats posed by energy dependence and climate impacts, which has led to its proactive role in supporting SIDS through initiatives such as the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP). The program includes specialized technical assistance aimed at building capacity in areas such as sustainable urban development, water management and energy efficiency (National Climate Change Secretariat, 2024). Furthermore, by providing specialized training and resources under initiatives such as "SIDS of Change," Singapore aims to equip SIDS countries with the necessary tools to implement sustainable practices and enhance resilience in the face of climate-related challenges (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore, 2024). As such, Singapore is not only playing a pivotal role in efforts to tackle energy vulnerability in SIDS, but also serving as a model example of cooperation that can inspire similar initiatives in other regions. Its diverse approach demonstrates the importance of collaborative efforts in achieving sustainable development goals across different geopolitical contexts.

This research then aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities faced by Small Island Developing States (SIDS) countries in utilizing limited resources to achieve

sustainable development. Although SIDS countries have diverse geographical and economic characteristics, they share similar problems, including limited natural resources, vulnerability to natural disasters, and dependence on certain sectors such as tourism and marine resources. , this research will explore how SIDS countries can develop adaptive development strategies, address environmental threats, and utilize existing economic potential in a sustainable manner. Based on the background that has been described above, the problem formulation of this research is: How is the effectiveness of the technical assistance program "*SIDS of Change*" that Singapore offers in supporting the implementation of the renewable energy agenda in *The SAMOA Pathways*?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In analyzing Singapore's role in the SAMOA Pathway, the theory that will be used is the theory of Liberal Institutionalism by Robert Keohane. Liberal Institutionalism, as proposed by Robert Keohane, emphasizes the role of international institutions in promoting cooperation among states, especially in an anarchic international system, where self-interest is often dominant. This theory holds that states are rational actors who seek to maximize their interests, but Keohane recognizes that interrelationships between states to build good relations and create cooperative relationships can reduce the sense of 'uncertainty' in an anarchic international system (Keohane, 1984). The main factor in Liberal Institutionalism theory is the role that international regimes and organizations play in facilitating the medium of cooperation between states by providing a framework for negotiation, setting norms, and also reducing transaction costs in international interactions. In addition, this theory states that institutions can help mitigate issues related to collective action problems by creating incentives for member states to comply with agreed rules and standards (Ostrom, 1990). In this context, trust and reciprocity are important elements that increase the likelihood of sustainable cooperation among states. Overall, Liberal Institutionalism provides a lens through which to understand the dynamics of international relations, especially regarding how small states navigate their vulnerabilities through collective action within an institutional framework.

In discussing Singapore's role in the SAMOA Pathway through a Liberal Institutionalism perspective, it is seen how Singapore is actively involved in collaborative efforts to address the common challenges faced by *Small Island Developing States* (SIDS). By participating in initiatives such as the *Singapore Partnership for the SAMOA Pathway*, Singapore demonstrates its commitment to fostering cooperation and providing support to fellow SIDS. This approach not only enhances the development prospects of Singapore, but also strengthens the

collective resilience of these vulnerable countries within the international community.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method defined by John W. Creswell as an investigative approach that aims to understand the meaning built by individuals or groups related to a particular phenomenon. According to Creswell (2014), this method focuses on collecting descriptive data that is narrative and in-depth, including the results of interviews, observations, documents, or texts. The descriptive data serves to analyze and describe the social construction that has been made by individuals or groups and provides a detailed explanation of the phenomenon that is the focus of the research.

In this research, the data used is divided into primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through interviews with relevant parties, such as individuals directly involved in the policy or implementation of the SAMOA Pathway framework. These interviews aimed to explore in-depth information related to Singapore's contribution in supporting the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) framework. Secondary data, on the other hand, came from various sources of documentation, such as scientific journals, official reports, and academic papers, which were used to complement and support the primary data.
This research also applied the data triangulation approach, as described by Michael Quinn Patton, to increase the validity of the research results. Patton (1999) explains that triangulation is done by comparing data from various sources to ensure accuracy and consistency of information. In this case, primary data from interviews was tested with secondary data from scientific journals and official documents to verify the validity of the information obtained. Through the application of this qualitative method, the research aims to identify and analyze Singapore's contribution to the SAMOA Pathway framework. The data analysis process provides a holistic picture of the form of these contributions, their relevance, as well as their impact on SIDS countries. With this approach, the researcher is able to validate the facts thoroughly and produce findings that can be accounted for.

RESULT

In preparing this paper, the author conducted an interview with Mr. Muhammad Anis Zhafran Al Anwary who works under the Research Analyst PFS Department at the ASEAN Centre for Energy (ACE). From ACE's perspective, he believes that Singapore has an important role to play in the sustainability of The SAMOA Pathway framework. This is based on their position as the largest GDP country in

the Southeast Asian region and their energy diplomacy based on sustainable energy which classifies Singapore as one of the *middle power developing countries*.

In the interview, Mr. Anis agreed that Singapore's energy diplomacy plan is now closely based on the development of technology to process renewable energy. Among some of Singapore's main projects are the development of *Carbon Capture and Storage* (CCS), the creation of a *special economic zone* between Singapore and Malaysia, clean energy electrification with Australia, and *Solar Farm*. With this, Singapore is believed to one of the countries with high knowledge and capabilities in renewable energy processing and is believed to be able to contribute a lot in other international forums. However, within the framework of The SAMOA Pathway, Singapore cannot assist in the sustainable development dialog with SIDS countries. Mr. Anis pointed out that Singapore is a country with a strong 'business' base, where looking at the dynamics of SIDS countries, Singapore assesses that development assistance will not give them any benefit. Therefore, Singapore prioritizes assistance in The SAMOA Pathway in managing *Foreign Direct Investment* FDI) and facilitating technology transfer in the form of *capacity building* among SIDS countries. Singapore is carrying out *capacity building* with Fiji in 2022 to conduct joint learning in conquering the challenges of sea volume increase and optimizing securitization is one example of a program under the framework of The SAMOA Pathway (Fiji Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

In the implementation process Mr. Anies did not ignore the challenges, he explained that the complexity and diversity of bureaucratic systems between countries in SIDS prevented joint projects in the long term. ACE views that the energy business bureaucratic system with the Singapore government has an effective framework where the government is a *'regulatory'* institution that provides policies and the energy business runs independently. Therefore, the ownership of an inter-state project will not be under the name of the Singapore government but under a designated business. However, not all countries in SIDS have the same bureaucracy, which raises the challenge of the ambiguity of a project's responsibility when there is a dialogue working together under the SIDS organization.

DISCUSSION

Singapore's position as a Middle Power Developing Country

Singapore's Minister for Sustainability and Environment, Grace Fu, stated that Singapore is a *developing country* under the Paris Agreement (TOC, 2024). In the 29th *Conference of the Party* (COP) under the auspices of the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC), Singapore reaffirmed their position as a developing country, and will continue to contribute to climate change management by allocating financial assistance to developing countries in need. In the study of Energy Diplomacy, a country can be classified as a developed or developing country by analyzing its behavior in carrying out energy diplomacy seen from several criteria. These criteria include the goals that the country wants to achieve in its energy diplomacy; the "*tools"* used by the country to achieve its goals in energy diplomacy; the methods launched by the country to achieve its goals; and the actors who play a dominant role in the energy diplomacy carried out by the country. Therefore, the author will analyze Singapore's position in its energy diplomacy.

In its energy diplomacy, Singapore aims to maintain energy security and achieve energy esilience to realize its decarbonization strategy. At the *Singapore International Energy Week* (SIEW) 2024, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry, Gan Kim Yong, explained Singapore's energy transition approach which emphasizes the *3 Re's* (*Resilience, Reliability, Responsiveness*) (EMA, 2024). At the event, the Singapore Government also explained how Singapore will use space-saving and efficient energy sources to maximize the use of the country's limited territory. The Singapore Government encourages the use of *solar*, regional power plants, natural gas, and other low-carbon sources.

Singapore's energy diplomacy goals that focus on energy security, energy security and energy transition enhance the development and innovation of green energy technologies, which one of the country's "*tools*" to achieve national goals in its diplomacy. Despite Singapore's limited territory and natural resources, the country still has a *bargaining position* in international dynamics due to its economic strength and strategic location as an international *hub country*. Under the Solar Nova program, the Singapore government, through the *Housing & Development Board* (HBD), encourages the development of *photovoltaic* (PV) solar panel technology to achieve a target of 540MWp by 2030 (HDB, 2022). Innovation and development of clean technology can be an attractive consideration factor for international investment to enter Singapore. Singapore and Australia's energy cooperation in clean energy transfer is also a "*tool*" to achieve Singapore's energy security and energy. The *Energy Market Authority* (EMA) licenses energy

imports from Australia to Singapore by utilizing the *Sun Cable* which delivers 1.75 GW of low-carbon energy (EMA, 2024). Such energy cooperation could open up opportunities for other technical and commercial projects in the future.

Singapore takes several approaches internationally to achieve its goals. As part of Singapore's efforts to address climate change, the country is active in both bilateral relations and multilateral forums. Singapore has been active in international forums on climate change under the auspices of the United Nations since they ratified the UNFCCC in 1997 as recorded in the *National Climate Change Secretary* (NCCS) *of Singapore* (NCCS, 2025). After ratifying the UNFCCC, Singapore has been active in international forums, particularly to advocate for energy transition and the development of clean energy technology innovation. Singapore is an important actor in regional energy initiatives as seen in the *Singapore Tianjin Eco-city* Project with China and its collaboration with Jambi Province on peatland management. Singapore also provides technical assistance and human resource training through *capacity building* programs under the *Singapore Cooperation Programme* (SCP). Through the SCP, Singapore develops technical work programs for *Small Island Developing States* (SIDS) that are tailored to the needs of SIDS countries, such as sustainable urban development, water management, energy efficiency and emissions reduction.

In pursuing its agenda to achieve its goals internationally, the Singapore government is the dominant actor utilizing several of its statutory bodies, such as the EMA and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. These institutions play an important role in shaping policy, negotiating international agreements, and promoting cooperation within the private sector. This can be seen from EMA as the organizer of the SIEW which was attended by more than 18,000 energy policy makers, *stakeholders*, and industries from 70 countries (EMA, 2024). On the other hand, business actors, especially in the energy sector, also play a role in the development of clean energy innovation and technology in Singapore. Sembcorp Industries being one of the business actors instrumental in the installation of solar panels that helped reduce carbon emissions in Singapore (HDB, 2022).

After analyzing Singapore's position in its energy diplomacy, the country is included in the *middle power developing country* as evidenced by its behavior in energy diplomacy. Singapore's energy diplomacy aims to achieve energy security and clean energy transition so as to maintain its national economic development in a stable manner. In achieving its goals internationally, Singapore utilizes its clean energy technology innovation development and economic strength supported by their strategic location as a *hub country* to attract foreign investment to enter their country. Singapore has an active role in the international clean energy transition

agenda, both multilaterally, regionally and bilaterally. The Singapore government, through statutory institutions such as the EMA and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, plays an important role in their energy diplomacy. The important role of the government is also supported by business actors in the energy sector who are leading the development of clean energy innovations and technologies to achieve a decarbonization strategy in line with the international energy transition agenda. Thus, despite Singapore's assertion that it is a developing country, its strategic location and clean energy technology innovations make it a major economic power in Southeast Asia. This has led them to become a dominant actor in multilateral, regional and bilateral energy initiatives and cooperation. This dominance gives Singapore the impression of being a *developed country*.

Singapore's contribution to The SAMOA Pathway framework

The explanation above supports that in the *Small Island Developing States* (SIDS) collection, Singapore has an advantage over other members with technological advances and the country's GDP level supporting Singapore as a developed country in the Southeast Asia region (Dikasaputra, 2020). With an area of 734.3 square kilometers, Singapore can be categorized as a small island state that has typical vulnerabilities that are commensurate with other SIDS members, such as being prone to extreme climate change, limited natural resources, fragile ecological defenses, and limited bargaining power in various international forums (Tahir, 2010). Singapore's solutions to these challenges are by creating the *Singapore Cooperation Programme* (SCP) in 1992. This was in the context of Singapore contributing as a SIDS member in *The Samoa Pathway* to encourage the empowerment of countries experiencing similar difficulties. The programs provided by Singapore centered on courses, seminars, training in various fields such as agriculture, communication, technology, transportation, economic development, education, clean water management that helped the growth process for *SIDS*. In running the program there are two main activities encouraged by Singapore namely (MFA Samoa, 2024):

1. Bilateral Training Programmes

Singapore designs these programs according to the needs of the recipient country, such as training courses or study visits called *Singapore Cooperation Programme Training Awards* (SCPTA) and *Small Island Developing States Technical Cooperation Programme* (SIDSTEC).

2. *Joint Training Programmes or Third Country Training Programmes* (TCTP)

Singapore has established cooperation with donor countries and more than 30 development partners that include developed countries and international organizations such as France, Canada, UNICEF, WHO, and so on.

Since the establishment of Singapore's partnership with the *Samoa Project, the* programs proposed in the joint framework are based specifically on the uniqueness and distinctiveness of each SIDS country as an island nation. This principle can be seen in the program *"Understanding Risk Management and Risk Financing for Disaster Resilience (2019-2023)"* which is aimed at enhancing cooperation and improvements to development planning and recovery that have high disaster risk, which is carried out to realize the sustainable development agenda and *The SAMOA Pathway*. In addition, in preparation for long-term challenges, Singapore announced that there will be an update in the technical assistance package for *SIDS* called *"The SIDS of Change"* which includes new programs with adjustments to emerging issues such as blue carbon and *carbon storage*.

ANALYSIS

The results of the interview with Mr. Anies can be concluded that with the existence of the SIDS international organization, countries that have island characteristics such as Fiji, Antigua, Bahamas, Barbuda, and others have the opportunity to voice the same concerns judging from the same geographical, political, and social conditions. One of them is the creation of The SAMOA Pathway framework that opens opportunities to empower member countries. Here, Singapore as a *middle power developing country* or developing country plays a role in encouraging the sustainability of the framework with one of their mainstay *tools*, namely *Foreign Direct Investment* (FDI).

In line with the perspective offered by liberal institutionalism, where international institutions have an important role as a medium and space that encourages the movement of collaboration and cooperation between countries because of *common problems* that are felt equally between the actors involved (Keohane, 1984). Here SIDS acts as an international organization that accommodates media and space so that countries with island characteristics have collective problems and similar geographical background conditions. The creation of 'The SAMOA Pathway' is a reflection that each SIDS member has a strong commitment to the establishment of multilateral cooperation to find solutions collectively. This research highlights the role played by Singapore, which has the capacity to make a difference as a developed country.

Programs such as the *Capacity Building* between Singapore and Fiji and the implementation of joint studies in the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore, 2024) reflect the liberal institutionalism principle that

international institutions encourage the enhancement of the capacity of member states driven by the same moral values of 'togetherness' and 'togetherness'. In addition, the extension of The SAMOA Pathway, which was initially launched until 2019, has been ratified to be renewed over time, proving that Singapore has made efforts to build and strengthen international institutions by committing to the program implementation over a long period of time, in accordance with the principles adopted in liberal institutionalism.

CONCLUSION

This research shows the success of *The SAMOA Pathway* project as an effective multilateral cooperation platform for *Small Island Developing States* (SIDS) in addressing collective challenges such as climate change, constraints, and disaster risks. In the context of liberal institutionalism theory, this success is supported by the role of international institutions that serve as a forum for collaboration, norm-setting, and uncertainty reduction among member states. Singapore, as a country with significant economic and technological capacity, plays a central role through programs such as the *Singapore Cooperation Program* (SCP) that facilitates training, technology transfer, and management of *Foreign Direct Investment* (FDI) to enhance the capacity of SIDS countries.

Through an approach based on collaboration and technology transfer, Singapore has successfully aligned its interests with the needs of SIDS member countries. Initiatives such as *capacity building* and sustainable program implementation are a testament to the moral principles of "togetherness" and "mutuality" in *The SAMOA Pathway* framework. Despite bureaucratic and coordination challenges, the sustainability of the framework including the ratification of the extension of the program to 2019 and beyond shows that the values of liberal institutionalism can be effectively applied, even though economic instruments such as FDI. This affirms Singapore's commitment to strengthening international institutions to achieve shared sustainable development goals.

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