

## AGAINST ALL ODDS? BLUE ECONOMY AND BLUE OCEAN MARITIME STRATEGY IN SEYCHELLES AND MAURITIUS<sup>©</sup> $\Sigma$

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### ABSTRACT

Does Blue Ocean become the perfect mantra for reaching desired developmental goals? Blue Economy is an important sustainable development framework for coastal and island states who rely on the ocean and marine resources as a source of livelihood. The concept of a Blue Economy merges economic development and conservation for coastal and island states. The Seychelles and Mauritius are two Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Western Indian Ocean, faced with economic development and conservation dilemmas. The identification and understanding of the challenges and limitations of Blue Economy for SIDS are required to understand the vulnerability of those nations, which is essential to the future outcomes of sustainable development in the Seychelles and Mauritius. Adopting library research methods and online focus group conversations with different stakeholders in both countries, and over two years, during pre-and post-Covid lockdown periods, provide this paper with fascinating findings. Further identification and understanding of vulnerability, overcoming challenge and paradox of Blue Economic ideals in these two different cases of SDIS refine the authors' scepticism upon the myth of the SDG. The authors' preliminary findings explain difficulty of the Covid-19 pandemic in allowing both states to realise their SDG target.

**Keywords:** Blue Economy, SIDS, challenges and limitations, Blue Ocean Maritime Strategy in Seychelles, and Mauritius

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## **MENONGKAH KEMUSTAHILAN? EKONOMI BIRU DAN STRATEGI MARITIM SAMUDERA BIRU DI SYECHELLES DAN MAURITIUS**

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### **ABSTRAK**

*Adakah Lautan Biru menjadi mantera yang tepat untuk mencapai matlamat pembangunan yang diinginkan? Ekonomi Biru ialah rangka kerja pembangunan mampan yang penting untuk negara pantai dan pulau yang bergantung kepada sumber laut dan marin sebagai sumber mata pencarian. Konsep Ekonomi Biru menggabungkan pembangunan ekonomi dan pemuliharaan untuk negara pantai dan pulau. Seychelles dan Mauritius adalah dua Negara Membangun Pulau Kecil (SIDS) di Lautan Hindi Barat, berhadapan dengan dilema pembangunan ekonomi dan pemuliharaan. Pengenalpastian dan pemahaman tentang cabaran dan batasan Blue Economy untuk SIDS adalah diperlukan untuk memahami kelemahan negara tersebut, yang penting untuk hasil pembangunan mampan masa depan di Seychelles dan Mauritius. Dengan mengguna pakai kaedah penyelidikan perpustakaan dan perbualan kumpulan fokus dalam talian dengan pihak berkepentingan yang berbeza di kedua-dua negara, dan selama dua tahun semasa tempoh penutupan sebelum dan selepas Covid, menyediakan kertas ini dengan penemuan yang menarik. Pengenalpastian dan pemahaman lanjut tentang kelemahan, mengatasi cabaran dan paradoks cita-cita Ekonomi Biru dalam kedua-dua kes SIDS ini memperhalusi keraguan pengarang terhadap mitos SDG. Penemuan awal pengarang menjelaskan kesukaran pandemik COVID-19 dalam membenarkan kedua-dua negeri merealisasikan sasaran SDG yang ditentukan.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Ekonomi Biru, SIDS, cabaran dan limitasi, Strategi Maritim Samudera Biru di Seychelles dan Mauritius*

## Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) released its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as part of its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainable development has been defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future” (Brundtland 1987, 3). Meanwhile “SDG14: Life Below Water” (UN 2020), has brought sustainable ideas of Green Economy as part of the ingredient to the concept of Blue Economy, as it aims to “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources” (Smith-Godfrey 2016, 59). Originating from the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (UNCTAD 2020), “Blue Economy” become a developmental mantra for maritime microstates in which separates social and economic governance from green economy intertwined with the Blue Ocean Strategy, as developed by renounced Harvard management pundits (see Armstrong 2022; Mauborgne and Kim 2020; Kim and Mauborgne 2005a, 2005b). Existing literature on the Blue Ocean economy unravels three forms of multidimensional policy strategies for micro, and small states: dealing with the global water crisis, innovating and symbiotic economic adaptability, and finally, developing the marine economy (Childs, and Hicks 2019, 326). But how does Covid-19 become an unpredictable factor that reduce the Blue Ocean diplomatic strategy of maritime states is remained to be seen.

Nonetheless, Blue Ocean diplomacy is often integrated as part of Small Island and Developing States (SIDS) and their foreign policy strategies for the better management of their state system, connecting the ideas of the oceans, climate change, and social welfare into their microstate strategy in International Relations (IR) (Bouchard 2022, 254). According to the World Bank, Blue Economy has been defined as “the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, and improved livelihoods, while preventing environmental degradation.” (World Bank 2017, 23). Thus, oceans are considered “vital” to human life, providing food, security, income, as well as routes for “global trade”. Oceans are used for many economic activities, such as tourism, maritime transport, and fishing (Voyer *et al.* 2018, 597). There are over 300 million jobs associated with oceans: international trade in marine products, such as fish, which generates nearly US\$ 102 billion annually, in addition to roughly US\$ 9 billion in ecotourism (Techera 2018, 9). Inadvertently, it is essential to understand and explain recent pandemic Covid-19 consequences upon the current concerted efforts of the SIDS and the Blue Ocean diplomacy. There is an immediate need for the policymakers and academics to re-evaluate the intrinsic intertwined between the way we see the seas, oceans, marine resources with diplomatic strategies and maritime security. Blue Ocean Diplomacy allows for the cooperation between states and other transnational actors, since oceans are vast and do not recognise international territorial or sovereign borders. Therefore, mutual and multilateral cooperation is essential for the ecological peace of Blue Economy diplomatic practice (Childs and Hicks, 2019; Doyle, 2018; Llewellyn, *et al.* 2016). After all, the big ocean of world politics is regarding smart bargaining and solidifying alliances without intense competition (see Chong and Mathias 2016).

Meanwhile, vulnerable SIDS attributes for the Seychelles and Mauritius, are defined by their historic and economic links to the oceans and seas. Such small maritime states heavily depend on those marine resources, highlighting the importance of Blue Economy strategies in Blue Ocean diplomacy (Meredith 2018, 115). The Seychelles' current and future success is largely based on its marine and coastal resources, with tourism and fisheries as the two main sectors driving the economy, gross domestic product (GDP), and creating employment. In another similar yet interesting context, Mauritius relies on its marine resources for tourism and fisheries (Seetanah *et al.* 2021, 17). The country has recognised the Blue Economy as “one of the pillars” of its economic growth, contributing to approximately 10%-11% of its GDP (Government of Mauritius 2018, 12). Despite being small in size, the Seychelles has managed to gain a significant reputation as an important member within the world of diplomacy and global governance through the international debate on ocean governance and has been considered a significant and reliable partner of the international community. The country has effectively advocated Africa's Blue Economy programme (Mishra, 2019).

In this paper, we aim to explore the relations between Blue Ocean Economy activities for diplomatic advantages of Seychelles and Mauritius and how successful both countries manage to absorb the impacts of the pandemic. As such, we argued that while Blue Economy was developed primarily because many island states in the Indian and Pacific Oceans have more territorial sea than land, both microstates served with many challenges in the actual realisation of their Blue Economy strategy, especially for SIDS. In 2012, the Joint Commission of the Mauritius-Seychelles Extended Continental Shelf, Mascarene Plateau region has “unlocked” the two states' joint management area (JMA) for oil and gas exploration (Beaubouef, 2018). The treaty enables both states to discuss the JMA diplomatically. The ‘Joint Commission’ established eases the “coordination and management of the exploration, conservation and development of the living and non-living resources of the seabed in the area” (Ernesta, 2018; Flynn 2022; Gibert and Grzelczyk. 2016).

However, the Seychelles and Mauritius have some obstacles to overcome, these include damage to coral reefs from increased seaport activity for tourism and daily life; overfishing to support the growing nation, and much more. Moreover, both states must consider maritime security, which enables them to keep watch over their vast marine territories (Voyer, *et al.* 2018). Therefore, the strategies must be adapted to overcome such limitations and challenges, with consideration of the size and capabilities of the states in question. Furthermore, with conflicting definitions of the concept of Blue Economy, it is difficult to develop a central and established framework and efficient policies and laws that include all the states and regions involved in Blue Economy (Meredith, 2017; Wallbolt 2014).

Our paper seeks to answer the following questions: What are Blue Economy sectors' key challenges and truth potentials to catalyse Seychelles and Mauritius and what will it mean during pandemic outbreaks? Secondly, how successful is a blue ocean in providing diplomatic strategy for both counties in addressing those challenges and limitations in Blue Economy sectors for SIDS? The discussions within the paper were

divided into a few parts, including a literature review, a theoretical framework for maritime that emphasised the nexus between Blue Ocean diplomacy and maritime strategy, discussions on findings and a concluding remark.

## Literature Review

### *Ambiguity Concept of Blue Economy and the Blue Ocean Diplomacy*

The past decade has seen the rise of a popular concept, Blue Economy, as an approach to preserving our planet's oceans and marine resources (Armstrong 2022; Lee, *et al.* 2020). Emerging in 2012 at the UN Rio conference, Blue Economy was evolved from Green Economy (Schutter and Hicks, 2019, 427). Generally defined as the "sustainable use of ocean and marine resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and human wellbeing, without environmental degradation" (Rudge 2023, 21). Defining the concept of Blue Economy is essential to understanding the possibilities offered. However, there are conflicting details in the definition of the concept: the existing literature does not provide a universal definition, and this inconsistency stands as a setback for setting a proper, established framework (Sach *et al.* 2020). Therefore, one of the primary challenges of is that there is no unified definition – 'one size does not fit all'. According to Meredith (2017) and Lee *et al.* (2020), this inconsistency allows for states or regions to form their own policies and law according to their national interests, with different stakeholders choosing an interpretation that best suits their needs and purposes. This validates the point that the available resources, economic status, and capital vary from state to state (see Santos-Paulino and McGilivray 2016). Nonetheless, most of the authors and researchers accept the premise that the "triple bottom line remains economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity" (Sellstrom 2015, 45)

### *One or Many Roads? Overpromised and Undelivered SDG?*

As early as the 1980s, the term "sustainable development" was used when describing the future of humankind (Rahman 2022, 201). Brundtland (1987, 292) defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future". The need was due to the impending global crisis: the current abuse of the planet's resources, especially with the Global North's capitalist consumerism, affecting the future of humankind (1987, 292). The UN works diligently towards a better future, combating environmental issues such as climate change (Bishop 2012, 943). Dyer (2017, 85), Ferreira (2017, 50) and Yalvac (2017, 50), used critical and green theory to validate the need for change for the survival of humans. Furthermore, Hoagland *et al.* (2001, 1481) states that "the principle of sustainable development" has been linked within UNCLOS, sustainable fisheries.

When Sustainable Development Goals SDG adopted in 2015 by all member states of the UN, the 17 SDGs are a "universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030" (UN 2020). Many scholars linked SDGs with Blue Economy, in particular SDG 14: the sustainable use of

the ocean and its resources while conserving the environment. For instance, Menzel (2022) explain the need for sustainability, using SDG 14 to provide direction (see also Techera 2018; Teng 2019). According to Haas (2017), there are other SDGs that can be linked to Blue Economy, depending on the interests of the particular stakeholder in question. Guerreiro, (2022, 18) arguing that the “identification of the scope and boundaries” are “vague and even challenging”. Based on existing literature, Guan and Koh (2022) surmises that in addition to SDG 14 Life Below Water, SDG 15 Life on Land, and SDG 12 Responsible Consumption & Production can be linked to Blue Economy. However, in terms of stakeholder interests, SDG 3 Good Health & Well-Being and SDG 8 Decent Work & Economic Growth are preferred over SDG 12 Responsible Consumption & Production and SDG 13 Climate Action (Gigleux 2016, 28).

### *Law of the Sea and Exclusive Economic Zone*

One the oldest and newest bodies of international law, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), an international treaty, was signed in 1982 (Ishihara, Masashide *et al.* 2018.). It provided the basic framework for international law for the oceans, and a legal maritime governance blueprint for future treaties and agreements (Hoagland, *et al.* 2001). Referencing Principle 21 of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, island or coastal states have an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 200 nautical miles. Molenaar, (2022, 281) states that according to the UNCLOS, states have the sovereign right to use their natural resources as long as their actions do not go against their obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment. Harrison (2017) quotes Grotius (1609), the seas “were free to all nations but belonged to none of them,” which falls in line with the law of the sea from the 17th century, where a state may have the rights and jurisdiction “on the ocean, to a certain extent, and beyond that was considered ‘international waters’” (Harrison 2017, 13). This territorial ocean was known as a state’s EEZ, the area “beyond and adjacent” to the territorial sea of a coastal state or island state (Hoagland *et al.* 2001; UN 2020; UN 2020). Law of the Sea declares that the state has sovereign rights over that zone and the rights to the marine resources, living and non-living, including fish, natural gas and oil (Mossop 2016). These states also hold the right to “construct and operate artificial islands and other structural installations, within a limited zone of safety (Hoagland *et al.* 2001). Meanwhile, Techera (2018) and Sperling (2022), note that EEZs allow smaller states such as the Seychelles and Mauritius to grow the economy, with most of their primary income stemming from marines or coastal industries such as tourism and fisheries (Spark 2022).

### *Small Island Developing States*

Recognised in 1992 by the UN, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are “islands of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans” (King and Tennant 2014; UNESCO, 2021). According to Sutton (2011) and Gigleux (2016) SIDS are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, with their existence threatened. Sea level rise, change in annual weather patterns, and coral bleaching result from climate change, negatively impacting those island nations' economy and lifestyle

(Petzold and Magnan, 2019). However, Kaplan (2009) argues that the smallness of SIDS' territorial land and population are not necessarily disadvantages but is related to their tendency to be affected by climate and environmental changes sooner, and more severely than other nations. In reference to existing research, Batra and Norheim (2020) and Lannon (2022) agree that SIDS have adapted to climate change quite earlier on, therefore, appropriate to use to study adaptation policies and practice. However, Herbert (2019) state there is limited research to compare those policies and practices across the SIDS. Blue Economy has been tied to SIDS, such as the Seychelles and Mauritius and has recently gained traction due to the vital role the Indian Ocean has in the economic growth of the region (Gvalia et al. 2013).

### **Theoretical Exploration of the Blue Ocean Diplomacy and Maritime Strategy**

To explain the nexus between Blue Economy, Blue Ocean Diplomacy with Maritime Strategy, we browsed and blended a few key assumptions from three major intellectual strands in Critical International Relations (CIR) perspective, Critical Theory, Ecological Green Theory, and Micros State in IR.

Critical theory, especially post-structuralist assumptions about discourse and power relations, highlights "emancipation" as a concept focused on the "idea of freeing people from the modern state and economic system" (Ferreira, 2017). According to Yalvac (2017), this perspective sees inequality resulting capitalism as the source of global issues through its means of production and consumption, which raised the need for the concept of "sustainable development" that opposed capitalist endeavours. Edkins (2021) agrees that the capitalist system is "inherently wasteful and unmanageable" and offers two opposing notions: consumption is both an issue and a necessity. Mitchell (2021, 53) explained the need for a way to monitor the consumption of global resources, so they last for future generations without affecting the well-being of today's population (Ferreira 2017). As a result, Critical theory recognise the need for emancipation realisation beyond zero-sum game of rational choice approaches in economic consumption and at the expense of limited unrenueable nature of natural resources (Veenendal 2014). Key proponents of Environmental Economics are focusing on the symbiotic relations between development and economic needs that dispelled Social Darwinism and Survival of the Fittest (Yalvac 2017). Much of these ideas underpinned the intrinsic aspirations of Blue Ocean Strategy in which progress in development should be reduced to unhealthy competition and over exploitation of limited natural resources. For thousands of years civilisational expansions and clashes with different political communities is structured by Realist narrowed spectrums of constant competitions and conflictual relations (Kim 2005a).

While inevitable human encounters with mother nature remained disruptive, they should not be guided by econometric logic of unlimited exploitation and complete destruction of ecology (Tallis 2022). After all, there is only one hospitable planet earth and no other viable means of initiating interstellar exploration of alternative liveable planet or parallel universe. In line with emancipation discourse in Critical Theory is

ecological conviction of restoring a balance and more productive relations between human and mother nature. This require us to move beyond ordinary understanding of international politics where relations are no longer confined to inter-human relations. For centuries, proponents of ecological peace and green theory illuminate logical fallacy of neoliberal premise of extractive economics and Social Darwinist false promise of survival (Ryan 2022).

Like many strands in Critical IR, Green theory highlights the powerful consciousness of those who dare to defy all odds (Otto 2022a). Against oddities of exploring realistic options to compromise and promote mutual coexistence in conflict resolution (Otto 2022b). As the world materialistically developed so did international politics, and environmental issues took a meaningful portion in everyday international political discourse and towards the end of the 20th century (Steven *et al.* 2022). The concept of Green Theory evolved at and embedded the powerful reminder upon the “tragedy of the commons”, where mankind would eventually abuse the world resources and endanger their means to survive and not perish (Dyer, 2017). Haas (2017) explains Green Theory as preserving the interests of both humans and replenishing mother nature. Similar to Blue Economy definitions and concepts, Lynch *et al.* (2019, 12) explain how “green ideology” is perceived as a threat by capitalistic leaders and technocratic policymakers. False narrative of win-win solution undermined the developmental needs of human to progress is rather counterproductive. Technological acceleration of future is meaningless when spatiotemporal conditions of human defined by the bountiful of nature to replenish (Kedia and Gautnam 2020). It is a capitalistic fear to compromise, and resources reserved for future dividends needs threatens our desire to exist (Henrikson 2001). This fear comes from viewing capitalist advancements over time is unavoidable destruction cost of the environment that we cannot undone. Above all, consequence of illustrations of ideals from Critical and Green theories are intrinsic attributes and characterisations of micro costal states in IR (Corbett *et al.* 2018). The key defining feature of SIDS is not just their relative physical size but geopolitics and spatiotemporal location of these micro islandic states (Gvalia 2013).

### **Why Do the Seychelles and Mauritius Needs Blue Ocean Strategy?**

Ability to maneuverer policy that not only guided by scientific facts of climate change but also by political capabilities to transform disadvantages into impactful foreign policy strategies (Mukhopadhyay and Gupta 2022). Understanding this common sense is important in realising the needs to unpack Blue Ocean economy as a maritime strategy. Gone are the archaic belief that maritime strategy is only relevant to operate the goal of becoming a maritime hegemon (see Roberts *et al.* 2020). Instead, transforming large water surroundings and coastal disadvantages into powerful diplomatic cards of negotiations is needed (Senaratne 2020).

Thus, our political readings and oceanic security discourse informed the need to shift Blue Ocean strategy beyond Blue Ocean economic needs. Integration of maritime strategy as part of Blue Ocean diplomacy and economic is the weapon against all odds (Steven *et al.* 2022). This brings our discussion to brief geopolitical context of both



countries. The Republic of Seychelles is an archipelago of 115 islands, with a surface area of 455km<sup>2</sup>, more territorial sea than land, and an EEZ of about 1.374 million km<sup>2</sup> (Government of Seychelles, 2012). According to Senaratne (2020, 18), tourism accounts for over 80% of the national GDP, and fisheries almost 20%. Senaratne and Zimbroff (2019) emphasise the importance of oceans for local economies, explaining the state's need for Blue Economy as climate change and piracy threaten future economic growth and livelihoods. In 2015, the Government of Seychelles (GOS) embraced the concept with the creation of a specified department, and together with newly formed Seychelles Conservation and Climate Change Adaptation Trust (IMF 2017), began translating the concept into actions (Schutter and Hicks 2019). In reference to Mishra (2019), the Seychelles is an active advocator for Africa's Blue Economy programmes, achieving a reputation within the international community despite its small size. In 2018, the GOS approved the "Seychelles Blue Economy Strategic Policy Framework and Roadmap", which laid out an integrated approach towards sustainable development focused on the ocean and marine resources, in accordance with the "Sustainable Development Agenda (2030), Aichi Target 11 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (2015)" (The Commonwealth 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic threatens the economy today, exposing the state's economic weaknesses (Senaratne 2020). Discussion will now move to include contextual readings of Mauritius.

The Republic of Mauritius is an island state, with a surface area of approximately 2040 km<sup>2</sup>, and an EEZ of around 2.3 million km<sup>2</sup> (Government of Mauritius, 2018). Mauritius also relies on its marine resources for tourism and fisheries (Al Naser 2022). According to Amstrong (2022), the country has recognised the Blue Economy as "one of the pillars" of economic growth, contributing to approximately 10%-11% of its GDP as of 2016. As with most SIDS, Mauritius' economy is threatened by climate change, with severe coastal erosion since the 1960s (Allen 1999). The Government of Mauritius (GOM) has budgeted funds towards several sectors within Blue Economy, such as the development of aquaculture, and fisheries (Bailes *et al.* 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the Mauritian economy, especially the tourism industry.

### ***Blue Ocean Economic Sectors, Blue Ocean Strategy and Maritime Strategy***

Barnwell and Toussaint (1949), Bueger and Wovel (2018), Burns (2018) and Bush (2018) explore the industries and sectors that make up Blue Economy: fisheries, tourism, trade, and resource mining. Canterbury (2022) and Carbonell (2022) identify four conceptual interpretations of the Blue Economy: "oceans as: natural capital, livelihoods, good business, and drivers of innovation". Schutter and Hicks (2019) make it more relative to SIDS by including "oceans as integral to SIDS". One of the oldest activities, fishing has provided a source of food and income globally. Over the years, resources have rapidly declined due to unsustainable fishing. Robertson and Tyralla (2022) believes that local fisheries in Blue Economy would be more beneficial in the long run. Jakupec *et al.* (2022), Kipkech *et al.* (2000) and Fusun *et al.* (2017) consider tourism as one of the main features of the Blue Economy, with small islands such as the

Seychelles relying heavily on the income. Cordes *et al.* (2016) explain how the continual expansion of oil and gas exploration in the deep sea has become increasingly challenging to environmental protection. Franda (2019), Bari (2017), Foley *et al.* (2022) also explains the need for Blue Economy as the oceans provide a means of transportation for almost 80% of trade worldwide.

Meanwhile, as introduced by Kim and Mauborgne (2005a), the Blue Ocean strategy introduced a market where individuals may conduct business without competition, resulting in continuous growth, and has been tied in with Blue Economy (Sydall *et al.* 2022). In congruent with many scholars, Gu *et al.* (2022) agree that higher growth is a “key goal” for states, governments, and organisations. “Entrepreneurial activities and innovation” are essential when discussing economic policies (UNESCO 2021). In 2012, the EU proposed a “Blue Growth” strategy aimed at economic development of marine policies, according to Europe’s oceans, seas and coasts (Vuori 2022). Verhoeven (2018) explore the “Blue Economy Innovation Plan” that the EU launched in 2014 which targeted three main aspects: the development of sectors promoting sustainable jobs and growth; vital element which will offer “knowledge, legal certainty and security” in its Blue Economy; and strategies that will provide specific courses of action and “foster cooperation” between the nations.

Although a relatively new concept as Blue Economy, maritime security is intrinsic to economic development as it focuses on national security, human security, and marine safety (Potgieter, 2017). Doyle (2018) and Voyer *et al.* (2018), address the issue of security, and its link to blue economy. Malcolm and Murday (2017) and Potgieter (2018) explain the need of maritime security to ensure human security in the Seychelles and Mauritius, as the Indian Ocean SIDS are vulnerable, in terms of piracy, drug trafficking, illegal fishing and climate change. Furthermore, food security is an important issue, and an essential part of Blue Economy as the ocean provides a large portion of the global population with food resources, and therefore illegal or unregulated fisheries have a significant impact (Batra and Norheim 2020).

Nonetheless, with the development of the international system, the need for diplomacy within IR of SIDS has increased significantly, with state interactions needing mediation. Bailes *et al.* (2016) explains that there are at least three definitions of ‘diplomacy’: the representation of one’s nation in “international negotiations”; it involves the “external policies of a nation or its government”; and diplomacy is considered a “branch of political science” related to international relations. With the emergence of Blue Economy, there has been a shift in the view of oceans and seas in international politics, and many scholars have brought forward the cruciality of diplomacy for Blue Economy success (Baldacchino 2022). Mocanda *et al.* (2022) explain that the presence of many states and regions in various stages of development involved in Blue Economy, create the need for regional cooperation in order for its success. Nauen and Boschetti (2022), Oneil (2021) and Okafor-Yarwood (2020) mention the necessity for the cooperation between SIDS and other international actors which aids economic growth through trade and learning, as well as adapting policies and laws (Roberts and Ibitoye 2012).

## Research Methodology

The data for this research was collected in the form of existing secondary library research and primary data of online interview for several months during and after the period of prolonged lockdown in relation to pandemic Covid-19 in both countries. Utilisation of the Secondary data improves our understand on the topic and refine the gap in the research (see also Mead 2021). The secondary data is useful in guiding our online questionnaire design and webinar mode of focus group discussions with various stakeholders. Delayed in the primary data collections is expected since COVID-19 hindered many of our earlier planed of qualitative online surveys and scheduled online group discussions with those involved in the Blue Economy sectors and Blue Ocean Diplomatic strategy in both the Seychelles and Mauritius. Nevertheless, we relied on the qualitative content analysis methods of data gathered from secondary scholarly works. We also used NVIVO software to analyse and understand thematical patterns of our online qualitative survey with 400 respondents and subsequent scheduled webinar group discussions with relevant stakeholders in various Blue Ocean sectors. In sum, the process of data collection and analysis are guided by similar research designs developed by Larsen (2022)

## Discussions and Findings

Our findings highlight interesting relations between pandemic, Blue Ocean diplomacy, maritime strategy, and Blue Ocean economic sectors of both countries. Discussions are structured by themes, and they highlight simultaneous findings from booth Mauritius and Seychelles.

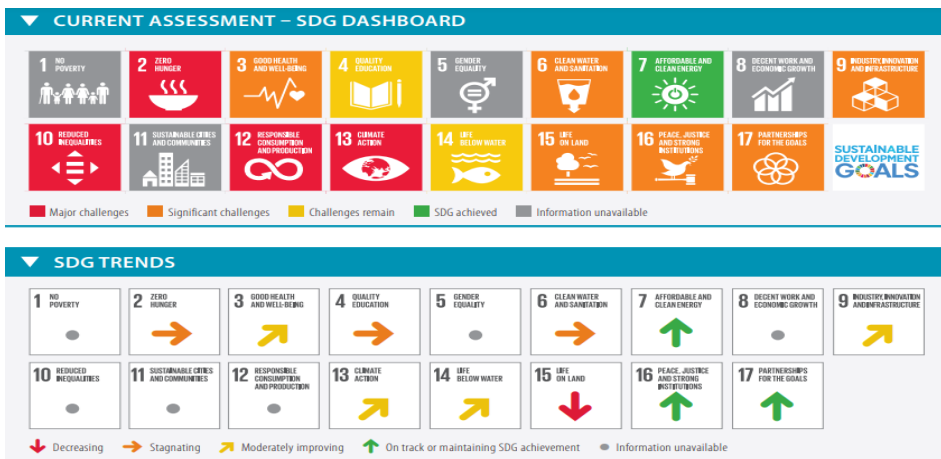
### *Climate Change and Sustainable Development*

Climate change is a global issue, affecting countries across the globe: rising sea levels, shoreline erosions, and extreme weather conditions. With Mauritius heavily dependency on tourism and natural resources, in particular ocean and marine resources, SIDS are particularly vulnerable to the existential threats brought on by climate change (Online personal communication with diplomatic officer 1, The Seychelles, August 3, 2020). The economic and social aspects of SIDS, including the Seychelles and Mauritius, are at risk due to these dangers. Further webinar conversations about SDGs with local academics in both countries, they mostly confirmed with the SDG report of Mauritius as we discovered that climate change continuously decreases "productivities and changing the spatial distributions of economically important marine species and their habitats" (see Figure 1). Climate change is predicted to considerably impact marine fisheries in terms of providing food and income for nations, in particular SIDS such as the Seychelles and Mauritius. It has been observed that marine creatures, which include fish and invertebrates, have been changed their "distributions" due to changes in ocean temperatures (Webinar Focused Group Discussion Note 2, July 17, 2020). Changes in weather conditions and other factors of climate change negatively impact the "physical and ecological resources on which tourism depends on" (Online personal communication with diplomatic officer 2, Mauritius, July 7, 2020). Our primary data

confirmed with the study by Hern (2023). The study expected that ocean tourism will contribute about 26% of ocean-based economy, putting it at the top of ocean industries in terms of production value by 2030. Fish species migrations, coral bleaching, beach erosion, increase in frequency and intensity of extreme weather, in addition to rising sea levels, affect SIDS who rely on tourism.

Since sustainability is at the core of Blue Economy; however, economic development during pandemic lockdown is also a factor, bringing up the challenge of sustainable development is closely relevant. The widely accepted, general definition of Blue Economy and sustainable development both share the notion of feasible development which will aid present generations and provide for future generations (Webinar Focused Group Discussion Note 3, July 12, 2020). Though in theory this is perceivable by most states as they pursue Blue Economy, the question of how to balance conservation with economic development remains a point of uncertainty. The challenge Mauritius face is the need for economic development and preservation of their environment (Online personal communication with diplomatic officer 1, Mauritius, July 9, 2020). With the reality that most of these SIDS have more territorial sea than land, their GDP relies on the use of ocean and marine resources. Both Mauritius and Seychelles are considered developing countries whose service sectors remain as the largest contributor to their national GDP: approximately 67% and 72% respectively in 2019 (Webinar Focused Group Discussion Note 1, July 2020). The diverse marine ecosystems of the Seychelles and Mauritius give them the advantage of tourism opportunities which support their economies while pursuing conservation (Online personal communication with economic officer 1, Mauritius, July 15, 2020). Therefore, the question is how will SIDS such as the Seychelles and Mauritius expand their economy without the over exploitation of their resources?

Figure 1: Sustainable Development Report for Seychelles



Source: (Sach et al. 2020)

According to the Seychelles, their efforts in towards achieving SDG 14 are moderately improving; however, there are significant challenges that remain in terms of moderating fisheries, and overexploitation of fish stocks. Additionally, conservation in marine-protected areas still presents a challenge, similarly with SDG 15 (see Figure 1). According to local expert from the Seychelles (Webinar Focused Group Discussion Note 4, August 10, 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has been predicted to affect the SDGs, in particular: SDG1 due to job losses and unemployment, SDG2 and SDG3.

Figure 2: Sustainable Development Report for Seychelles



Source: (Sach et al.2020)

In reference to SDG 14 (Figure 1), Mauritius is faced with several challenges: from difficulties in the protection of marine parks, to overexploitation of fish stocks (see Figure 2). Additionally, the 2020 MV Wakashio incident polluted the shoreline and mangrove forests, affecting the delicate ecosystem. Furthermore, there is limited data available for both SIDS, Seychelles, and Mauritius, as well as political issues presenting a challenge (Webinar Focused Group Discussion Note 3, July 12, 2020).

Blue Economy has been seen as an opportunity for these nations to expand the economies, and reduce their reliance on external markets, without negatively impacting their important ocean and marine resources. However, it has been observed that there is a fine line between economic expansion and conservation. One example of their attempt at emancipation from external markets is the Joint Commission of the Mauritius-

Seychelles Extended Continental Shelf, signed in 2012 (Online personal communication with diplomatic officer 1, The Seychelles, July 27, 2020). This treaty established a joint commission for the exploration of the shared Mascarene Plateau region in the pursue of fossil fuel sources that may provide both nations with the capital required for further economic development. However, this raises the challenge of how to balance sustainable development with the push for economic development. The environmental impacts of the search and extraction of deep-sea oil and gas resources have to be considered as it may negatively impact conservation goals (Webinar Focused Group Discussion Note 3, July 12, 2020). Furthermore, due to the reliance on external markets, SIDS are vulnerable to many factors, recently the COVID-19 pandemic (Webinar Focused Group Discussion Note 7, September 3, 2020). Both Indian Ocean Island countries are highly dependent on their tourism sector: accounting for 80% of the Seychelles national GDP, and 24% of the Mauritian national GDP (Foley *et al.* 2022). SIDS were among the nations who suffered the worst economic hits due to the pandemic in 2020: their GDPs are predicted to have to dropped by 6.9% as compared to 4.8% of other developing nations (OECD 2021).

**Table 1: Seychelles and Mauritius' Economy and Territory**

Country	Seychelles	Mauritius
<b>Surface area</b>	455 km <sup>2</sup>	2040 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>EEZ</b>	1.4 million km <sup>2</sup>	2.3 million km <sup>2</sup>
<b>National GDP (billion USD)</b>	<b>2019</b>	1.703
	<b>2020 (est.)</b>	1.13
	<b>2021 (est.)</b>	0.95
<b>Main economic sectors (2019)</b>	Tourism Fisheries	Tourism Sugar Textiles & clothing

Source: (compiled by the Authors from multiple national reports)

### ***Green Perspective of the Blue Economy Sectors?***

With the drive to gain greater economic freedom from external forces, the island nations of Seychelles and Mauritius are challenged with finding the balance between sustainability and rapid economic development. With more territorial sea than land, the ocean and marine resources are the greatest sources of wealth for these SIDS.

Fishing is an integral part of the nations' culture and livelihoods and has been a significant food source for decades, recorded as the primary protein source for many islanders. With steadily increasing populations, it has been predicted that there will growing demand for Indian Ocean fish for both domestic consumption and exports, leading to the overfishing of certain species including tuna and sea cucumbers (Senaratne and Zimbhoff, 2019). The FAO has documented the current unsustainable practice of fisheries in the Indian Ocean (see Figure 4 in Appendices) (FAO, 2018) The

decline in many marine species can also be attributed to an increase in artisanal and recreational fishing. With restrictions imposed by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), Seychelles has experienced a decrease in revenue brought by their tuna production. However, Cordes *et al.* (2016) report that artisanal and recreational fishing are not subjected to such policies, making it difficult to control and ensure sustainability.

Additionally, the European Parliament in 2019 voted for the re-introduction of fishing subsidies in the Western Indian Ocean, the reported source of approximately 40% of the EU's tuna. This development would further impact the EU's unsustainable fishing practices (SIF 2019). This could lead to shortening the fish stocks which could negatively impact the Western Indian Ocean SIDS, going against the Blue Ocean Strategy. Furthermore, according to Cornell and Lowitt (2020), social challenges arise as the fishing industry grows. Technological advancements contribute to an increase in fishing effort which have positive economic gains, though results in a reduction in manpower, creating employment issues (Cusumano and Ruzza 2022).

### *Ecotourism shattered by Pandemic Recessions*

There have been numerous studies conducted on the importance of tourism to SIDS, and their economic reliance on the tourism sector (Potgieter 2017). Tourism forms part of the livelihood strategies and is one of the main drivers of SIDS' GDP (Chummun and Mathithibane 2020). In the cases of Seychelles and Mauritius, it is clear that the environment, both land and sea, and tourism are intertwined.

The Seychelles are renowned for their touristic locations, having focused on the development of the sector since gaining independence in the 1970s. The country is renowned for its tropical climate, and beach and water activities, and records a high number of tourists annually, making it the largest contributor to the national GDP, and the government has put a focus on the development of tourism facilities. Over the years, there have been growing concerns over the sustainability. Larger projects are being approved, taking over land and resources (Sienaert *et al.* 2017).

Tourism is said to be one of the pillars of the Mauritian economy, and the government has also focused efforts on growing their tourism sector at the cost of environmental degradation. The growth in tourism-related activities, as well as poor management, have had negative impacts on the coastal environment (Beeharry *et al.* 2020). Previous studies have shown that the rapid growth has caused increasing marine environmental degradation (Daby 2003). According to Beeharry *et al.* (2020) and Bina (2013), increasing tourist arrivals meant an increase in tourism activities: swimming, snorkelling, recreational boating activities, and water-taxis. These activities have led to increased coastal modification, such as seagrass removals, and increased boating activities damage the seabed and coral (Bowman 1991).

Though these modifications make the areas more attractive for tourism, increasing revenue, they have negative long-term impacts. Seagrass is considered essential as a

“habitat and refuge” for many marine creatures, including some fish species, crustaceans, and molluscs (Ferreira 2017). Furthermore, researchers have shown that certain marine fauna species are negatively affected by tourist activities (Nunes, et al., 2020). Coral disturbances cause fish species, which rely on the coral for shelter and food, to migrate elsewhere.

**Table 2: Examples of coastal modifications**

Hotel Name	Coastal Site	Lagoon Modifications	Purpose
<b>Shangri-La's Le Touessrok</b>	Trou d'Eau Douce, East	Removal of beach rock; clearing of lagoon seagrass beds, coral heads and coral rubble; dredging to deepen lagoon for ski and boat lanes	Shore landscaping; creation of an aesthetically pleasant swimming zone for tourists, and boat and ski lanes
<b>Sugar Beach</b>	Flic en Flac, west	Clearing of seagrass beds and coral heads, removal of basaltic boulders and coral rubble	Creation of an aesthetically pleasant swimming zone for tourists
<b>Canonier Beachcomber</b>	Grand Baie, north	Creation of an artificial beach and a pleasant swimming zone for tourists	Removal of beach rock and coral debris in lagoon

Source: (compiled by the Authors from multiple national reports)

### ***Ecotourism Findings from Seychelles: Anse La Mouche***

Taking into consideration that the whole archipelago is a coastal zone, Seychelles prioritises Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM). The Seychelles has numerous hotels and resorts spread across several of its islands. Due to the increasing tourist arrivals before the COVID-19 pandemic, the government had approved several new projects, such as the Anse La Mouche project (Laurence and Bonnelame 2017). There were several environmental and social concerns raised. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) showed that the proposed site has parts of “protected beach front/coastline (P4),” segments of “wetland, marsh, and mangrove (P3)” and residential areas (see Figure 6 in Appendices) (Charlette 2019).

With Seychelles’ drive towards conservation, construction near protected beach regions may negatively impact the local marine fauna. Construction runoffs pollute the sea, damaging the sensitive ecosystems. This project is an example of the dilemma SIDS face: development of tourist facilities, encouraging and sustaining increased tourism, or protect and conserve coastal and marine environments. Despite the concerns raised by a non-governmental organisation (NGO), the project is reported to be carried out (Laurence 2021).



### *Ecotourism Findings from Mauritius: MV Wakashio*

On July 25th, 2020, Mauritius faced an ecological disaster when a Japanese bulk carrier ran aground on a reef in Mauritian waters. The consequent oil spill in the Marine Protected Area of Blue Bay Marine Park endangering corals, fish, and other marine life in the Indian Ocean, as well as public health (Asariotis and Premti, 2020). Although the GOM and NGOs, attempted to contain the pollution from the 800-900 tonnes of fuel oil, there remains a large accumulation in the mangroves forests which contributes to long-term consequences on the entire ecosystem (Seveso *et al.* 2021).

The hydrocarbon toxicity in the oil infiltrated ecosystems, causing the death of many marine organisms, such as fish, crabs, and coral. Furthermore, marine mammals, such as dolphins, whales, as well as sea turtles, have been affected, and killed, by the spill after ingesting the oil when surfacing for air. This will affect the fisheries sector of the Mauritian economy, and the tourism industry. Economically, the oil spill reportedly “accelerated Mauritius’ economic decline”, in addition to existing social and political issues, and the pandemic (Degnarain 2020). Mauritius faces a lot of challenges as a SIDS in its pursuit in Blue Economy, and this incident is just another hurdle.

### *Multidimensional Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Both States*

2020 saw the beginning of a challenging, and seemingly endless global health crisis, COVID-19, or SARS-CoV-2. The pandemic gives rise to many new challenges, and SIDS, in particular, are experiencing many difficulties.

#### *Tourism*

The travel and safety measures imposed due to the pandemic have taken its toll on the tourism sector (Coke-Hamilton, 2020). Using statistics gathered by the Seychelles National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2021) and Mauritian Government Statistics (2021), the Seychelles and Mauritius have seen a significant decline in their revenue in 2020, and now 2021 as seen in Figures 9 and 10, respectively. The GOS predicted a decline in tourism revenue of about 70% in 2020 (Rassool *et al.* 2020).

**Table 3: Effects of COVID-19 on tourism in Seychelles**

<i>Seychelles: Tourism Statistics</i>							
<b>Year</b>	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	<i>2021 (1<sup>st</sup> 1/4)</i>
<b>Tourist Arrivals</b>	276,233	303,177	349,861	361,844	384,204	114,858	6,785
<b>Growth (%)</b>	+11.6	+8.9	+13.3	+3.3	+5.8	-234.5	-1,210.4

Source: (compiled by the Authors from multiple national reports)

**Table 4: Effects of COVID-19 on tourism in Mauritius**

<i>Mauritius: Tourism Statistics</i>							
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (1 <sup>st</sup> 1/4)
<b>Tourist Arrivals</b>	1,151,252	1,275,227	1,341,860	1,399,408	1,383,488	308,980	2,772
<b>Growth (%)</b>	+9.8	+9.7	+5.0	+4.1	-1.2	-347.8	-10897.2

Source: (compiled by the Authors from multiple national reports)

UNCTAD has been predicted that this decline in tourism revenue due to the pandemic will have long-lasting effects, including devastating economic consequences (Figure 9) (Coke-Hamilton 2020).

**Table 5: Tourism, Debt and Foreign Currency Reserve Indicators by UNCTAD**

Country	Tourism (% GDP)	External Debt (% GDP)	Reserves (# months of imports)	Estimated Fall in GDP (%)	Financial Assistance needed (million USD)
<b>Seychelles</b>	66	198	3	16	153
<b>Mauritius</b>	24	72	5	6	540

Source: (compiled by the Authors from multiple national reports)

Furthermore, León, et al. (2020) convey the impact of climate change on infectious diseases, and its consequent impact on tourists' decision and willingness to visit island destinations. Though the study was carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic, the results do provide proof that tourists feel more secure if they are aware of the "prevention, preparedness and response strategies" of holiday destinations (León, *et al.* 2020). The Seychelles and Mauritius suffered immense setbacks due to COVID-19, leaving the challenge of regaining economic stability.

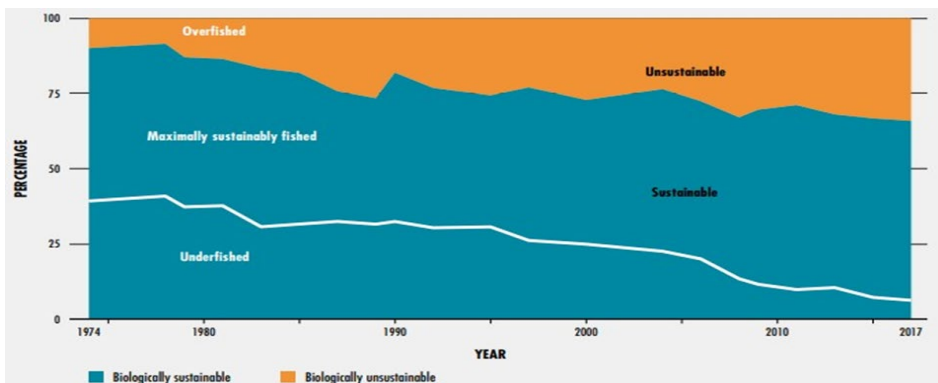
#### *Socio-Economic Impacts*

The COVID-19 pandemic has had many impacts on the Seychelles and Mauritius, not only to the economy, but also society. The fall in tourism numbers contributed to the loss of jobs, and the decrease in opportunities. In the Seychelles, it was recorded that there was a significant decrease in job opportunities from 2019, to 2020 (Rassool, *et al.* 2020). In Mauritius, the unemployment rate rose to 10.2% by May 2020 (Pusz, *et al.* 2020).

*Fisheries*

Due to health and safety measures placed by the WHO and health ministries of respective countries, there has been a decrease in consumer demand for fish products and seafood in restaurant and hotels (UNCTAD, 2020). In addition, the restrictions on flights and closed borders meant that there were limited means to export seafood products. As fisheries is one of Seychelles’ main exports, the sector has faced difficulties, such as increased freight prices and fewer available international flights, due to COVID-19, resulting in a loss in revenue for the Seychelles (Laurence, 2021). Moreover, a total lockdown in April 2020 left many artisanal fishermen without any income (CFFA, 2020). Mauritius also faced similar issues (FAO 2021b). However, the pandemic may bring about positive effects on the sustainability of global fisheries in theory by offering an opportunity for better stock and ecosystem management (UNCTAD 2020).

**Figure 3: Global trends in state of the world's marine fish stocks, 1974-2017**

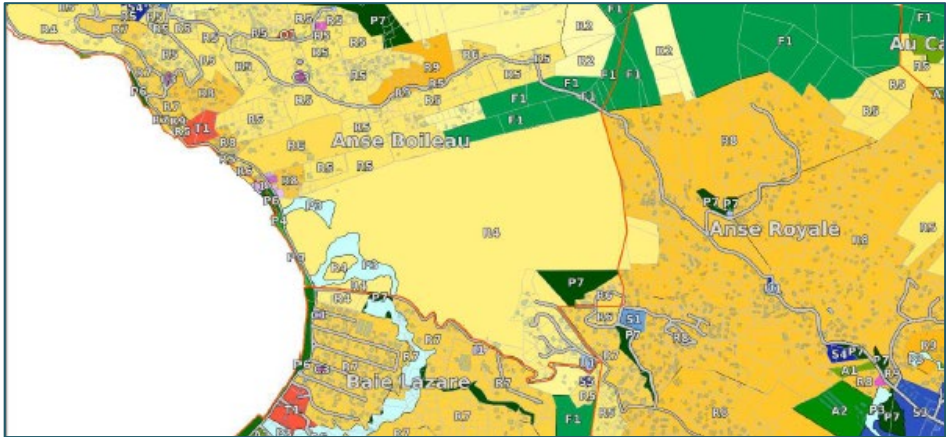


Source: (FAO 2020)

**Figure 4: Proposed Project of the Layout**



Source: (Charlette 2019)

**Figure 5: Land Use of Proposed Project Area**

Source: (Charlette 2019)

### ***Do We Learn Anything, So Far?***

Maritime security is an important feature in Blue Economy, especially for SIDS who rely on ocean and marine resources for income. Even during ‘normal’ times, the ocean has been described as a “poorly-policed, untamed frontier” (Saumweber, *et al.* 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a new set of threats to maritime security. It has been recorded that there is an inability to enforce laws in the Western Indian Ocean, resulting in its vulnerability to drug smuggling, and illegal and unregulated fishing activities, which has increased during the pandemic (Kakoti 2020).

Considering the pandemic, the GOS re-evaluated the nation’s priorities, with the revised budget themed new priorities in a new reality (Boodia-Canoo 2023) The budget has shifted away from Blue Economy and its long-term vision (Government of Seychelles 2020). This brought us to our final research inquiry: how successful is a soft power such as diplomacy in addressing those challenges and limitations in Blue Economy sectors for SIDS?

### ***Blue Ocean Diplomacy and Strategy***

Diplomacy, one of the soft power tools used by diplomats and foreign relations officers, plays a crucial role in ensuring that the nations cooperate. To facilitate communication between nations in a region, conferences are regularly organised. One of the defining conferences was the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). SIDS at the conference identified the need for Blue Economy, a more focused, ocean-based economic development that would benefit many (Benzaken *et al.* 2022).

Senaratne and Zimbroff (2019) also note that the conference brought out the necessity for international cooperation for the success of Blue Economy.

There are also several associations which facilitate international communication and cooperation, as well as multinational action, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and African Union (AU). The use of associations, and international cooperation has allowed SIDS to tackle challenges and limitations in Blue Economy sectors. Such as in the case of fisheries, the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) is an "intergovernmental organisation that manages tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean and adjacent seas" in the strive for sustainable fisheries (FAO 2021). As predicted, SIDS were particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. The World Oceans Online Conference 2020, among others, gave way to discussions on how nations will recover their Blue Economy post-COVID-19 (Behnam 2020).

Additionally, the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and EU took part in the second 'Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean' in June 2019. The GOM pointed out the need for diplomacy in addressing issues faced with maritime security illegal activities such as the drug trade (Government of Mauritius, 2019).

### *Instructive Reflections for Other SIDS*

SIDS are defined by their historic and economic links to the oceans and seas. Having more territorial sea than land, small states, as Seychelles and Mauritius, are heavily dependent on their maritime resources as a source of food, security, livelihood, and other economic activities including tourism, fisheries, and trade. Based on the findings from the analysis of secondary data available, it can be deduced that SIDS are economically vulnerable to external factors, in particular climate change.

Sea level rise, coastal erosion, ocean acidification, increased ocean temperature, floods droughts, and other environmental changes brought about by climate change negatively affects these island nations. Economic activities such as tourism and fisheries have suffered as a result. Both the Seychelles and Mauritius face the dilemma between growing the tourism industry for increased revenue, and conservation. Over the years, Mauritius has been destroying the marine ecosystem by removing seagrass and coral to beautify touristic locations, this has negatively affected the environment that attracts tourists to the island. Seychelles invests heavily on building new hotels in order to accommodate the growing tourism sector; however, there is limited space, and some of its latest projects are threatening conservation regions. Furthermore, recreational sea activities such as water sports and fishing damage the fragile ecosystems in some marine parks in both nations.

Climate change affects ocean health and can cause the migration of fish and seafood stocks. Additionally, unsustainable, and unregulated fishing practices around the Western Indian Ocean threaten the future fish stocks, in particular, tuna. Though the

IOTC has the power to impose fishing restrictions on commercial fisheries, artisanal fisheries are not subject to such laws and regulations. On one hand, many local fishermen rely solely on fishing for their income; however, their methods may be considered unsustainable. Food security is a major concern for both island nations and is part of the long-term policies for both governments.

Moreover, both the Seychelles and Mauritian governments are faced with the dilemma of choosing between environmental conservation, and economic development, to gain more economic stability and independence. As in the case of fossil fuel exploration on the seabed of the JMA. The potential of location oil or natural gas sources will come to a great economic advantage to the nations, though it may affect the future of conservation. As seen with the unprecedented incident of the MV Wakashio shipwreck in Mauritius in July 2020. Leaked crude oil polluted the marine environment, affecting marine life, and has spread to the mangrove forests. The incident not only affected the environment, leaving years of damage, it also affected the worsening Mauritian economy.

From the findings, one of the major, current on-going challenges faced by both the Seychelles and Mauritius is the global pandemic, COVID-19. Like the rest of the world, the two island nations were left crippled by the health disaster. Apart from the health problems, closed borders and travel-bans caused a crash in tourism, one of the main economic sectors in both nations. The decrease in tourist numbers has caused an economic downfall in both the Seychelles and Mauritius. Additionally, the pandemic has resulted in an increase in unemployment as many have lost their jobs, and the number of employment opportunities have severely decreased, meaning that many new graduates have not found suitable employment. It has been predicted that it will take a long time for the nations to recover from this economic disaster.

### ***Blue Ocean Diplomatic and Maritime Strategy for Mauritius and Seychelles***

Diplomacy is an essential soft power used in international politics. It has been a crucial part in the development of Blue Economy in the Seychelles and Mauritius. International communication and cooperation have paved the way for success for the two island nations. Seychelles has essentially set itself as a leader in Blue Economy due to its pioneering role in the promotion of the concept and policies. The many conferences organised to promote Blue Economy, as well as the discussion of new policies and strategies have ensured its continued success over the years. Conferences such as the 'Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean', has allowed states in the Western Indian Ocean to collaborate on laws and policies to navigate maritime security in the region. Additionally, the IOTC and IORA, have allowed Indian Ocean states to collaborate and share their strategic roadmaps for Blue Economy, and help whilst pursuing sustainable development.

The available data was insightful, and more research on specific sectors within Blue Economy for both islands would be very interesting to carry out. Despite the limitations, this study can provide an important insight on the different aspects of Blue Economy in

the Seychelles and Mauritius. Additionally, this research has put forward the new challenges to Blue Economy as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which can allow the governments of the Seychelles and Mauritius, as well as future researchers, to understand how vulnerable the nations are to external factors.

#### *At the State Level: Seychelles and Mauritian Government*

The GOS has identified the main challenges to Blue Economy which include food security, ocean acidification, coral bleaching, and sea level rise specifically, and has set in place national policies to inspire the nation to understand and play a role in the Blue Economy endeavour. The Seychelles Model of 'the world's first sovereign Blue Bond' to attempt at addressing the economic and social challenges faced by the island nation. This Blue Bond will allow the government to dedicate parts of the ocean purely for conservation, whilst investing the other parts towards economic development (*Forbes Africa*, 2020; OAH, 2020). The GOS has also noticed its reliability on tourism has made its economy vulnerable, vowing to take advantage of its other sectors, in particular agriculture (Rassool, *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, the GOS has reassessed the nation's priorities in light of the pandemic and has released the reviewed budget that has shifted away from Blue Economy. This should be reviewed and reconsidered in the near future, as sustainable development is the long-term solution to many problems faced by SIDS.

Similarly, the GOM has recognised has embraced Blue Economy, in particular the need for maritime security considering its war on drugs. There are also other sectors that can also bring economic and social benefits to Mauritius. Furthermore, Mauritius has been struck severely by the COVID-19 pandemic, as other nations, and can take advantage of some of the benefits that Blue Economy can offer as the nation recovers from the effects.

#### *At the societal Level: Seychelles and Mauritian Societies*

In the Seychelles, new development projects for tourist infrastructure impact the natural environment. An example of such is the Anse La Mouche project. The community has spoken up about the negative environmental and social impacts such projects and have often carried out peaceful protests in the town of Victoria, or at the site locations, as well as circulating petitions against such projects to get the attention of the government. Though they have had limited results, the community should not give up, and may use this research and others to educate themselves further and form better arguments for the preservation of the environment. The MV Wakashio incident was a major disaster to Mauritius, but it showed how the Mauritian society banded together to help save their local environment.

Figure 6: The MV Wakashio Oil Spill

Source: (Sveso *et al.* 2021)

Figure 7: Seychelles Employment Situation (January-July 2020)

Data	Jan-Dec 2019	Jan-Jul 2020
PEA's Total Registered Job Seekers	234	406
Total Registered Unemployed My First Job Graduates	36	598
No. of registered unemployed youth (15-30 years)	185	270
No. of registered unemployed youth (15-24 years)	161	208
Total job placement	595	75
Total Graduates Placement (My First Job)	434	376
Total registered vacancies	1098	438
Total workers made redundant	n.a.	698
Total registered grievance cases	n.a.	118

Source: (Rassool *et al.* 2020)

Figure 8: The MV Wakashio Oil Spill

	Employed	Unemployed	Labour Force	Unemployment Rate (%)	Activity Rate (%)
Q1-20	534, 800	41,300	576,100	7.2	73.7
May 20	405, 400	45,800	451,200	10.2	57.3
June 20	473, 100	66,000	539,100	12.2	70.0
Jul-20	498, 000	57,300	555,300	10.3	72.0



Source: (Pusz *et al.* 2020)

### **Concluding Remarks**

SIDS face many challenges and limitations, which have significant economic impacts, in the pursue of Blue Economy. Without integration of the Maritime strategy, Blue Economy sectors and thrust of The Seychelles and Mauritius unable to match with the ambitious aspirations and loaded goals of the Blue Ocean Diplomacy. Moving forwards is the lessons for the UN SDG proponents to understand local sensitivity on the grounds of microstates. Already worsened by the hardship of pandemic recovery and endemic transition, it is highly unlikely for many other SIDS that shared similar experiences of both countries, as studied by us. From the global challenge of climate change to SIDS-specific challenges, such as the difficulty to find the balance between economic development and conservation. The Seychelles and Mauritius face many challenges while pursuing Blue Economy, and the limitations that exist can be due to the nations small size, and their reliance on external markets, as well as their vulnerabilities to external factors.

With the COVID-19 pandemic adding more challenges, priorities have swayed. Diplomacy in the form of many conferences and partnerships with several organisations have allowed the nations to overcome some of the challenges; however, they still have a long way to go. The COVID-19 pandemic was an unforeseen challenge that has hindered the nations strive towards sustainable economic development. It will take some time, but both states can achieve greater strides in Blue Economy diplomacy if maritime strategy are part of the Blue Ocean diplomacy in overcoming people livelihood hardships and policy vulnerabilities. After all, there is only planet earth, and no other alternative to imagine planet B.

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