

DRIVING ECONOMIC RESILIENCE IN SMALL ISLANDS



01

ABOUT VOICES OF SUSTAINABILITY

Voices of Sustainability is a thought leadership platform launched by the Zayed Sustainability Prize to explore the challenges and opportunities of the global transition to an inclusive and

prosperous future. Each month, the series hosts the world's leading experts to discuss the latest trends and themes in the sustainability agenda.



02

INTRODUCTION

On 28 March 2025, the Zayed Sustainability Prize aired its 46th episode of the Voices of Sustainability series, featuring Hon. Senator Dr. Joyelle Clarke, Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment, Climate Action & Constituency Empowerment for St. Kitts & Nevis. This timely episode focused on the unique climate and economic challenges faced by Small

Island Developing States (SIDS), and the pathways they are forging to build resilient, inclusive, and sustainable futures. Senator Clarke shared practical examples from St. Kitts & Nevis while calling for a fundamental shift in how global climate financing is accessed and delivered to the nations that need it most.



03

SUMMARY

Episode 46 of Voices of Sustainability explored the critical role of climate financing, policy integration, and inclusive leadership in supporting sustainable development in Small Island Developing States. Senator Clarke outlined the wide-reaching impacts of climate change on SIDS, including the escalating costs tied to fossil fuel-based energy generation, frequent exposure to hurricanes, and mounting economic vulnerability.

She highlighted the government's Sustainable Island State Agenda, which is anchored in seven transformational pillars: climate resilience, energy transition, water and food security, sustainable industries and settlements, circular economy, and social protection. These pillars are aligned with the SDGs and are embedded across all ministries, budgets, and national planning frameworks.

Senator Clarke shared examples of model initiatives in St. Kitts and Nevis, such as land conservation above the 1000-foot contour line to protect biodiversity, the creation of the Royal Bastille Valley National Park to safeguard water sources, and the development of the Eco Park in collaboration with Taiwan, combining sustainable agriculture, tourism, and renewable energy. She also spotlighted a national recycling initiative that evolved from a student-led campaign into a catalyst for banning single-use plastics.



“There’s a recognition also that vulnerability is not going to change. That circumstance won’t change for Small Island Developing States unless there is a shift in the international financial architecture... We need more adaptation financing and more concessional grants as opposed to loans.”

Hon. Senator Dr. Joyelle Clarke

Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment, Climate Action & Constituency Empowerment, St. Kitts & Nevis



The Minister emphasised that St. Kitts & Nevis has accessed over US \$8 million in climate readiness funds from the Green Climate Fund, which has supported resilience-building across sectors including tourism, education, and health. However, she pointed out that despite the availability of climate finance, access remains a barrier for SIDS, and a shift in international financial architecture is essential. Senator Clarke advocated for the adoption of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) to replace outdated measures like GDP in determining aid



eligibility. She also endorsed the Bridgetown Initiative, which calls for debt pauses during climate crises and promotes high-quality, concessional financing over traditional loans.

The episode concluded with a powerful discussion on gender equity and leadership. Senator Clarke called

for resources, allies, and purposeful leadership to enable women's meaningful participation in climate solutions. She emphasised that women, particularly in SIDS, are often closest to climate impacts and must therefore be central to resilience strategies.

04

BIOGRAPHIES

Hon. Senator Dr. Joyelle Clarke

Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment,
Climate Action & Constituency Empowerment for St. Kitts & Nevis

The Honourable Senator Dr. Joyelle Clarke is the Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment, Climate Action, and Constituency Empowerment for St. Kitts & Nevis. She is widely recognised as a passionate advocate for climate action, youth participation in decision-making, and gender justice. Her career began in public service as one of the youngest female directors in government and evolved to include teaching, research, and community activism.

With over 15 years of experience in social impact and sustainable livelihoods research, Senator Clarke has led initiatives supporting women’s economic transitions, community development, and climate resilience. Her work has included retraining female sugar workers, promoting sustainable tourism, and supporting female farming cooperatives in adopting climate-smart agricultural methods.

Senator Clarke has co-founded mentorship programmes such as “Women Empowering Girls” and the consultancy firm Relate Consultancy. Her previous roles as an educator, senator, and researcher have all contributed to her current portfolio—one that perfectly aligns with her deep-rooted passion and lifelong commitment to sustainability, equity, and empowerment.



05

OUTCOMES



SIDS are uniquely vulnerable to climate change and must be recognised as requiring special financial and technical support.



Climate finance should be restructured to ensure accessibility for the countries that need it most, with emphasis on adaptation and resilience.



The Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) offers a more equitable basis for assessing aid eligibility than GDP alone.



Debt relief and concessional financing must be prioritised to avoid deepening economic challenges during climate crises.



Cross-sectoral strategies, such as the Sustainable Island State Agenda, are key to integrating climate resilience into national planning. This agenda identifies seven key pillars: energy transition, water security, food security, sustainable industries, sustainable settlements, the circular economy, and health and social protection.



Women must be resourced and empowered to lead climate solutions, especially in communities most affected by environmental change.



International partnerships and alliances amplify the voices and capabilities of SIDS, enabling them to scale impact and innovation.



Platforms like the Zayed Sustainability Prize are critical in giving visibility, recognition, and support to SIDS' sustainability efforts.

Watch the [full episode](#) on the Zayed Sustainability Prize's YouTube channel

Follow our social media accounts for updates about upcoming episodes



[zayedustainabilityprize](https://www.zayedustainabilityprize.com)



[ZSP_ORG](https://twitter.com/ZSP_ORG)



[ZayedSustainabilityPrize.com](https://www.ZayedSustainabilityPrize.com)