

‘Borrowing Power’ to Influence International Negotiations: AOSIS in the Climate Change Regime, 1990 – 1997

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Abstract

While small island developing states (SIDS) are microcontributors to anthropogenic climate change, they are among the most vulnerable to its impacts, with some islands even facing the possibility of extinction. Recognising their vital stake in an effective climate regime, small island states formed a negotiating group, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), to represent their interests in the international climate negotiations.

Given their limited power, however, to what extent, and by which means, did AOSIS impact the climate regime? Assuming that both, the process and outcome of negotiations depend largely on power, this paper argues that low-power parties can nonetheless exert influence in international negotiations by ‘borrowing power’, that is, by drawing on external power sources, such as the negotiation context, the stronger target, third parties, and the negotiation process. A framework for analysis is thus developed and used to assess AOSIS’s negotiating strategies and respective successes in the climate regime from 1990 to 1997. As the analysis reveals, AOSIS made clever use of external sources of power over this period, and shaped the negotiations to a remarkable degree, much more so than the a priori power distribution would predict.

Introduction

Climate change presents small island developing states (SIDS) with a fundamental dilemma: While contributing the least to global greenhouse gas emissions, the root cause of anthropogenic climate change,¹ they may experience the most dire and immediate impacts, including the possibility of extinction.² Island states thus have a vital stake in the international effort to combat climate change, but cannot significantly contribute to mitigation and adaptation measures. Despite these difficulties, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) was one of the most vocal participants in the negotiations for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of 1992 and its 1997 Kyoto Protocol. As a bloc, island states could – to a certain extent – overcome their traditional marginalisation and influence the international climate change regime. How can this success be explained? What were the strategies employed by AOSIS, and what did they effect?

Starting from the assumption that power determines both process and outcome of negotiations, this paper addresses the so-called ‘structural paradox’, the question of how the weak bargain successfully with the strong. It argues that low-power parties can exert influence by ‘borrowing’ power, that is, by drawing on external sources of power (Habeeb 1988; Pfetsch and Landau 2000; Zartman 1997;

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¹It should be noted that it remains debated what portion of observed climatic changes can indeed be traced to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. For a comprehensive assessment, see the IPCC Assessment Reports (IPCC 1991; 1995; 2001; 2007).

²For an overview over the impacts of climate change on small islands, see e.g. Mimura et al. (2007); Roy and Connell (1991).



Figure 1: AOSIS members countries: geographical dispersion.³

Zartman and Rubin 2000a). An assessment of the negotiating strategies and successes of AOSIS in the climate change negotiations from 1990 to 1997 shows that by making clever use of the power sources available – the negotiation context, target, third parties and the negotiation process – even microstates can have an impact in international bargaining.

Small Island Developing States

The United Nations lists 51 small island developing states, some of which are not exactly small,⁴ islands,⁵, developing,⁶ or states.⁷ Small islands are a highly heterogeneous group with stark social, political, economic, historical, and geographic differences. SIDS do, however, share certain physical and structural development challenges, including small territories and geographic remoteness; small population size and few human resources; narrow economic basis and reliance on outside aid; environmental fragility and vulnerability to natural disasters; and difficulties to participate fully in international relations (e.g. Briguglio 1995; Mimura et al. 2007; Naseer Mohamed 2002; Reid 1974).⁸

These challenges explain why the international representation of island interests has, until recently, been ‘uncoordinated and disjointed’ (Heileman 1993: 55). Because of the geographic dispersion (see figure 1), all five UN regional groups contain island states, to the effect that island interests have historically been marginalised and severely underrepresented (Ashe et al. 1999). Islands everywhere, however, recognised climatic change as a vital interest, for the consequences, especially rising sea levels and increased intensity of extreme weather events, would adversely affect them all. Small island countries therefore met first as a group in 1990, at the Second World Climate Conference in Geneva. This led to the foundation of AOSIS as an ad hoc coalition on climate change within the United Nations.⁹ AOSIS has by now a membership of 42, including all sovereign SIDS plus Cyprus

³Retrieved February 2, 2010, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:AOSIS_members.png.

⁴Cuba or Papua New Guinea are in comparison rather large, both in terms of territory and population.

⁵Belize, Guyana, Guinea-Bissau and Suriname are low-lying coastal states.

⁶Singapore and The Bahamas can hardly be described as developing.

⁷Anguilla, Aruba, the Netherlands Antilles, and the (British and US) Virgin Islands in the Caribbean; American Samoa, Guam, and New Caledonia in the Pacific are dependent territories. The Cook Islands and Niue are ‘freely associated’ with New Zealand; Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau with the United States.

⁸These difficulties explain why the Cook Islands and Niue are not member of the United Nations, while the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Tonga and Tuvalu only acceded over the course of the 1990s.

⁹AOSIS has since expanded its scope to also represent small island interests in other areas, with mixed success.

and Malta.¹⁰ Not being recognised as an independent group, the alliance is a member of the negotiating group of the developing countries, the Group of 77 (G-77),¹¹ and works rather informally based on consultations and consensus, for it has no formal charter, regular budget or secretariat (AOSIS 2009; Honoré 2004).

country	area (km ²)	population (1000)	GDP (mio. US\$)	GDP/cap (PPP)	emissions (excl./incl. LUCF)	
Antigua and Barbuda	443	85	1,615	19,100	388	291
Bahamas, The	13,940	309	8,779	28,600	2,197	2,197
Barbados	431	285	5,466	19,300	3,751	3,740
Belize	22,966	308	2,820	8,600	6,335	2,310
Cape Verde	4,033	429	1,635	3,800	293	329
Comoros	2,170	752	741	1,000	519	-376
Cook Islands	237	12	183	9,100	80	-74
Cuba	110,860	11,452	108,200	9,500	38,122	11,653
Cyprus	9,250	797	22,690	28,600	1,585	n.a.
Dominica	754	73	720	9,900	152	-220
Dominican Republic	48,730	9,650	77,430	8,100	20,441	13,937
Fiji	18,270	945	3,616	3,900	1,391	-6,310
Grenada	344	91	1,211	13,400	1,606	1,514
Guinea-Bissau	36,120	1,534	857	600	1,694	n.a.
Guyana	214,970	772	3,010	3,900	2,706	-23,780
Haiti	27,750	9036	11,590	1,300	5,132	6,087
Jamaica	10,991	2,826	20,880	7,400	8,988	8,821
Kiribati	811	113	357	3,200	28	28
Maldives	300	396	1,738	5,000	483	483
Malta	316	405	9,801	24,200	2,670	2,430
Marshall Islands	181	65	134	2,500	18	n.a.
Mauritius	2,040	1,284	15,360	12,100	2,059	1,837
Micronesia, Federated States of	702	107	238	2,200	246	246
Nauru	21	14	60	5,000	36	27
Niue	260	1	10	5,800	4,422	4,508
Palau	458	21	164	8,100	125	-292
Papua New Guinea	462,840	6,057	13,290	2,200	5,012	4,599
St. Kitts and Nevis	261	40	785	19,700	164	75
St. Lucia	616	160	1,801	113,000	886	541
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	389	105	1,103	10,500	380	247
Samoa	2,944	220	1,057	4,900	561	479
São Tomé e Príncipe	1,001	213	277	1,300	122	-1,423
Seychelles	455	87	1,473	17,000	256	-576
Singapore	693	4,658	240,000	52,000	26,859	26,859
Solomon Islands	28,450	596	1,078	1,900	294	294
Suriname	163,270	481	4,256	8,900	3,330	4,871
Tonga	748	121	549	4,600	229	-80
Trinidad and Tobago	5,128	1,230	24,190	18,600	16,390	14,918
Tuvalu	26	12	15	1,600	6	6
Vanuatu	12,200	219	983	4,600	299	298
total	1,206,369	47,015	590,162	n.a.	160,257	80,494

Table 1: AOSIS members: basic statistics¹²

Although taken together, AOSIS represents one fifth of total UN membership and over one quarter of developing countries, the combined territory amounts to less than one percent of world land area,

See Chasek (2005); Fry (2005).

¹⁰Upon accession to the EU, both Malta and Cyprus left AOSIS. Timor-Leste only recently joined AOSIS. Four dependent territories (American Samoa, the Netherlands Antilles, Guam, and the US Virgin Islands) have only observer status.

¹¹Some AOSIS members are not (the Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue and Tuvalu) or no longer (Malta and Cyprus) member of the G-77.

¹²All data except for emission data are taken from Central Intelligence Agency (2009). Emission data represent total aggregate emissions and removals of CO₂, CH₄ and N₂O in CO₂ equivalent (Gigagrammes) reported for 1994, taken from FCCC (2005) and the UNFCCC website (<http://unfccc.int/di/DetailedByParty.do>); emission data for Cyprus and Marshall Islands refer to CO₂ emissions from fossil-fuel burning only, and are taken from Boden et al. (2009).

population five percent of world population, and GDP less than .01 percent of global GDP (see table 1; AOSIS 2009). Most importantly for a discussion of AOSIS's role in the climate change regime, island states are microcontributors to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions – altogether, they are responsible for less than .003% of global emissions (see table 1).¹³ Unable to reduce emissions on any meaningful scale, and lacking the financial and technological means to adapt to adverse impacts, AOSIS members hence depend on other, larger countries for both, mitigation and adaptation.

Borrowing Power

Under the circumstances, one could easily reach the same conclusion as Gordon (2007: 1565), who believes that 'climate change appears to be yet another chapter in the increasing powerlessness and irrelevance of poor nations.' This judgement, however, seems premature. Although research on negotiations under power asymmetry is surprisingly scarce, there is evidence that weak actors can and do successfully negotiate with the strong and obtain sizable results (Habeeb 1988; Zartman and Rubin 2000a). How can this so-called 'structural' or 'structuralist' paradox be explained (Zartman 1997)?

One approach to this paradox is the concept of 'borrowing power', in other words, drawing upon external sources of power (Zartman and Rubin 2000a; see also Pfetsch 2000; Pfetsch and Landau 2000). Power here is understood as *added value*: 'the value of the deprivation or gratification required to dissuade or persuade a party to move from one position to another' (Zartman 1974: 397). In other words, power is exercised 'when [an actor's] moves can negatively or positively alter the value of a particular action's outcome for the target' (Zartman 1997: 231). This value change may come from external sources; strategies can thus be sorted into four interrelated categories, according to the respective power source, as identified by Zartman and Rubin (2000b): context, target, third party, and process.

Appeals to principles and norms fall within the category of *context*-based strategies. The strategic use of norm-based arguments provides moral power, which has been identified as an important source of leverage (e.g. Keck and Sikkink 1998) for those who 'possess and pursue preferences in line with the standard of legitimacy' (Schimmelfennig 2001: 63). Further, power can be borrowed from the (stronger) negotiating partner, the *target*. These strategies appeal to common interest, suggest solutions to common problems, or pair positions; the objective is thus to invoke the opponent's self-interest by demonstrating that *A*'s preference is ultimately in *B*'s interest. Gaining the support of *third parties* also provides leverage. Nongovernmental organisations and lobby groups can provide useful information and expertise; use of scientific evidence and jargon is particularly relevant for environmental negotiations with their pervading uncertainties; through the media, public support can be gained, yet this impact is more indirect in nature.¹⁴ Last, the playing field can be leveled through the negotiating *process*, that is, by skillfully 'playing the game'. Active participation is, however, difficult for small countries, which is why forming a cohesive coalition and pooling resources can help to increase influence. Further, opportune moments should be used; early action, for instance, may entail first-mover advantages (Slade 2003; Zartman and Rubin 2000b).

The utility of these different strategies depends on their respective success, that is, on how much value a given strategy can add to or distract from the outcome of a particular action for the target *B* in terms of the direction preferred by *A*. Success in negotiation is *theoretically* a fairly straightforward concept and can be measured in terms of goal attainment: how many objectives were reached in the final outcome. Focusing on outcomes alone, however, may be misleading and overlook instances of influence in the negotiation *process*. Initial positions, for instance, may not reveal true objectives, and goals may change over time. Dupont (1994: 153) thus distinguishes between 'formal success' and 'inferior yet potentially substantial results', for example, recognition by other actors. Betsill

¹³Some island states do, however, have comparatively high emissions, including Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, and Singapore.

¹⁴It is beyond the scope of this paper to take into account the role of the media, but see Newell (2000).

and Corell (2001) point to shaping the agenda and discussion as instances of influence, for example by ensuring that certain proposals or issues are addressed in greater depth, even if these do not make it into the final agreement. Hence, this work sees success as behavioural change in an intended direction, in the negotiation process *or* its outcome.

Combining these two dimensions of success, process and outcome with the different negotiating strategies yields the following framework for analysis, adapted from the framework established by Betsill and Corell (2001).¹⁵ It allows to systematically gather information on the negotiating behaviour of AOSIS based on available documentation and interviews.¹⁶ A careful analysis of different data sources can thus shed light on the inner dynamics of the negotiation process and reveal instances of influence of particular actors. Conclusions nevertheless need to be treated cautiously, for causal relationships are difficult to establish, particularly in situations as complex as longstanding multilateral negotiations.

triangulation by	independent variables	dependent variable
data type	<i>borrowing of power</i> <i>context-based strategies</i> – how did AOSIS refer to principles and norms? <i>target-based strategies</i> – how did island states link their objectives to the position of others? <i>third party-based strategies</i> – how did AOSIS make use of actors external to the negotiations? <i>process-based strategies</i> – how did AOSIS organise its participation in the negotiations?	<i>goal attainment</i> <i>outcome</i> – does the final agreement contain text drafted by AOSIS? – does the final agreement reflect AOSIS's objectives? <i>process</i> – were AOSIS proposals discussed and seriously considered? – was AOSIS recognised as a player in the negotiations?
data source	<i>primary texts</i> (country submissions, draft decisions, position statements, final agreements) <i>secondary texts</i> (NGO newsletters, press releases, articles by participants) <i>interviews</i> (delegates for AOSIS and other countries, NGO representatives, observers)	

Table 2: Framework for analysis¹⁷

AOSIS in the Climate Change Regime, 1990 – 1997

The Climate Change Regime, 1990 – 1997

In the wake of several scientific conferences on climatic changes,¹⁸ the United Nations set up an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) in 1990. In 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was signed in Rio.¹⁹ At its core, it sets as ‘ultimate objective’ the ‘stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system’ (art. 2). More precise commit-

¹⁵The framework was developed to assess the influence of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in international negotiations (see also Betsill and Corell 2008; Corell and Betsill 2001).

¹⁶The UNFCCC Secretariat archives official documents, see <http://unfccc.int>. Environmental NGOs publish daily reports of environmental negotiations, in particular the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* (ENB) (see <http://www.iisd.ca/vol112/>) and the *ECO Daily Newsletter* (ECO). Interviews were conducted with a number of delegates, observers, and Secretariat staff.

¹⁷Adapted from Betsill and Corell (2001) and Zartman and Rubin (2000b).

¹⁸For an overview, see e.g. Bodansky (2001).

¹⁹The Convention text is contained in A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 (INC 1992).

ments were resisted by the United States and members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that feared the negative economic consequences of emissions abatement.

Such concerns notwithstanding, the Convention entered into force in 1994. In 1995, the first Conference of the Parties (COP1) met in Berlin, and found the provisions of the Convention ‘not adequate’ (FCCC 1995c). Following the Green Paper, a proposal by most developing countries, including all AOSIS members, the ‘Berlin Mandate’ hence advocated a further agreement with stronger commitments, particularly emissions targets for Annex I Parties (FCCC 1995c: 4ff).²⁰ After much debate and despite opposition from laggard countries around the United States and OPEC, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol²¹ thus legally binds Annex I Parties to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by ‘at least 5 per cent below 1990 levels in the commitment period 2008 to 2012’ (art. 3.1).

This compromise seems to have been the maximum that was politically feasible given economic concerns. Further, it was understood that both, the Convention and the Protocol were first steps in a ‘common global strategy for addressing climate change’ (INC 1992: 10), to be refined and revised over time. While the climate change regime is still developing, the underlying principles and basic institutional architecture were agreed in this early period. To what extent, then, did small island states mark this regime formation period?

Strategies and Successes of Small Island States

Over this period, AOSIS made use of all four sources of power identified by Zartman and Rubin (2000b). AOSIS’s interventions drew first and foremost on the *context* by appealing to norms and principles, linking this with *target*-based strategies that highlight the common interest all participants should have in combating the global threat posed by climate change, as scientific findings (*third party*) underscore. Supported by NGOs (*third party*), AOSIS could as a bloc fully participate in and shape the negotiation *process*, gaining visibility and political clout. It should be noted, however, that strategies in practice often overlap. While it is often difficult to attribute a course of action to a particular category, or some accomplishment to a particular course of action, the categories provide a means of systematic analysis.

Context-Based Strategies

AOSIS countries used a discourse of vulnerability, which was set against existing principles, especially the polluter pays and the precautionary principle (Interview 5). These *context*-based strategies presented islands as ‘innocent victims’ of the actions of others, particularly developed countries, who have a historic responsibility and moral duty to act. Accordingly, only a strong climate agreement can be seen as ‘right’ and legitimate.

The model argument was ‘that the countries who had done the least to create the problem are the ones who will be suffering the most’ (Interview 2): AOSIS countries ‘are being hit first and hardest by climate change that *they are not responsible for*’ (ENB 1995b; emphasis added). In the words of Lionel Hurst, delegate of Antigua and Barbuda: ‘the contribution to climate change of such small island states is zero, while the impact of climate change will literally reduce them to zero’ (ECO 1993b). The polluter must pay, and urgently so, regardless of remaining uncertainty: ‘precaution alone should warrant action’ (ENB 1995a). The precautionary principle effectively is tied to survival, and a ‘moral imperative’, as the ni-Vanuatu Ambassador, Robert van Lierop, emphasises: ‘We do not have the luxury of waiting for conclusive proof [...]. The proof, we fear, will kill us’ (cited in Sands 2003: 267).

This persistent moral pressure was central to AOSIS’s influence (see Barnett 2005; Kristan 2002; Interviews 8;9), for island states thereby positioned themselves as the ‘international conscience’

²⁰Annex I Parties are roughly the industrialised countries and Central and Eastern European countries with economies in transition.

²¹The treaty text is contained in decision 1/CP.3 in FCCC/CP/1997/7/Add.1 (FCCC 1997).

(Davis 1996) and instilled a moral dimension into the negotiations. Most importantly, it guaranteed AOSIS special consideration, since ‘destruction without representation’ (Davis 1996) was not acceptable. Contrary to UN practice, AOSIS was hence granted a special seat on the Bureau of the negotiations, in the INC as well as in the COPs, and by extension also on the subsidiary bodies established subsequently (FCCC 1995a;b; INC 1995a). This was the first time a seat was specifically reserved for a group other than a UN regional group, and helped AOSIS to exert influence on the overall coordination of the negotiations, and to ensure its voice was heard in the process (Interviews 6;8). The Bureau seat is thus AOSIS’s main accomplishment and can be considered a direct measure of success for AOSIS (Interviews 1;4;5;7). This is all the more remarkable as OPEC countries similarly fought to obtain a specific seat on the board, but ultimately failed.²²

Recognition of the special situation in the Convention text, and by reference in the Kyoto Protocol, on the other hand, cannot as easily be considered a success, for while ‘small island countries, [and] countries with low-lying coastal areas’ are identified as particularly vulnerable, the same category comprises arid, landlocked and many other countries, even those whose economies would adversely be effected by mitigation, that is, oil-producing countries (Preamble; art. 4(8); 4(10)).

Art. 3(3) of the Convention endorses the precautionary principle, not least because of AOSIS’s advocacy, according to Yamin and Depledge (2004: 71; see also Slade 2003). In contrast, AOSIS was not strong enough to ensure incorporation of the polluter pays principle. The principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibility’ (art. 3(1)) together with the preambular acknowledgment of the historical and current emissions of developed countries and the differentiated commitments (art. 4) may, however, be interpreted as an indirect reference to the polluter pays principle (see Ashe et al. 1999; Nurse and Moore 2007).

Target-Based Strategies

Given that concerns about mitigation costs pervaded the climate debate, emotional appeals to abstract principles were clearly not enough. Hence, a *target*-based strand of argumentation responded to concerns by emphasising the higher costs of inaction and invoking the self-interest of all parties, for a safe climate was ultimately in everyone’s interest (Interview 4).

Concerns about costs are short-term and unsubstantiated, AOSIS refuted the laggards’ objections, emissions reductions are ‘achievable at no cost’ (ECO 1996; see also e.g. ENB 1995e), while the costs of inaction are prohibitive – for countries worldwide: ‘AOSIS states will be the early victims – not the only victims,’ so ‘AOSIS’s interests are everyone’s interests’ (Teuatabo et al. 1992; see also e.g. ENB 1995b;d). This argumentation was strengthened by referring to commonalities between AOSIS’s position and that of other delegations. Propositions are regularly embedded in international consensus, as indicated by references to earlier decisions or supportive statements (e.g. FCCC 1995d: 60, 64; ENB 1995c;d). AOSIS thereby sought to isolate ‘obstinate and obstructionist’ countries (ENB 1995d) while building a winning coalition with forward-looking parties, particularly the European countries and key developing nations. As one interviewee puts it, AOSIS ‘tried to play a sort of bridging role between developed and developing countries [...], to appeal to the common objective that both sets of parties had, which was to achieve a safe climate’ (Interview 4).

Although AOSIS’s dire warnings were confirmed in several scientific reports, island states ultimately failed to persuade recalcitrant nations that ambitious reductions were in their own interest; concerns about costs were too strong. The Convention lacks any binding commitment to even stabilise, much less reduce, greenhouse gas emissions, contrary to what AOSIS had hoped. While the Kyoto Protocol eventually enshrined legally binding targets, these are comparatively weak outcome, and nowhere near the 20% CO₂ reduction advocated by AOSIS, or the 60% reduction deemed necessary by the IPCC. The Protocol, from this perspective, marks a failure for AOSIS, a failure on its most important objective: strong mitigation. On the other hand, the alternative was no agreement

²²Even without a special seat, however, OPEC has secured itself representation on every COP Bureau since COP2 through the regional groups (Depledge 2005: 54f).

at all. Insofar as the Kyoto Protocol contains legally binding targets, it can be seen as a success for AOSIS. One interviewee even suggests that ‘the fact that the Protocol was agreed could not be anything but a success for AOSIS’ (Interview 8).

To what extent agreement can be ascribed to AOSIS is, however, unclear. Clearly, the European interest in a strong regime and thus support for AOSIS’s positions played a key role: ‘without the support of the EU, [AOSIS] would not have been as successful in the climate change negotiations’ (Interview 6; see also Interviews 1;4). Similarly, G-77 support was crucial, as the G-77 represents AOSIS’s political base and group solidarity is felt to be the only way to counter the power of developed countries (e.g. Interviews 4;5;8). That AOSIS could often obtain G-77 support can on the one hand be ascribed to its rhetorics of historic responsibility and North-South exploitation (see context-based strategies). On the other hand, AOSIS enjoyed a first-mover advantage; they were able to exert a disproportionate influence by being the first to formulate a position on climate change, a problem other developing countries in the period under review assigned comparatively low priority.²³ Despite notable successes such as the Green Proposal that led to the Berlin Mandate, AOSIS’s influence on the G-77 position was moderated by the oil-producing countries, who fiercely oppose a strong climate agreement and occupy a leading position within the G-77.²⁴

Third Party-Based Strategies

Underlying AOSIS’s argumentation was a strong reliance on scientific evidence, which was considerably facilitated by NGOs. NGOs provided not only technical information, but also legal advice and capacity, without which AOSIS would not have been able to establish themselves as a serious negotiating group.

According to Nurse and Moore (2007: 105f), to be convincing, AOSIS’s argumentation must ‘be informed by the best available science, and must be both robust and credible.’ Science clearly played and continues to play an immensely important role in the climate regime. As one interviewee highlights, emotional argumentation alone does not work: ‘You have to be able to bring strong scientific facts to the table. And that is the only way that you can make a completely convincing case’ (Interview 2). ‘Science was extremely important,’ says another interviewee (Interview 5; see also Interview 4), and it is thus not surprising to observe that AOSIS constantly referred to the IPCC reports and other scientific findings (Interview 2; see also e.g. ECO 1993a; Teuatabo et al. 1992; INC 1994b).

AOSIS’s use of scientific evidence was facilitated by environmental NGOs who naturally turned to AOSIS, which they regarded as a ‘beacon of light’ in the negotiations (Interview 4; see also Interview 9). With their help, AOSIS delegates became ‘fluent in climate speak’ (Interview 5), which facilitated participation in the debates, and was thus ‘a big thing’ (Interview 4). NGOs also provided AOSIS with legal expertise. In this respect, the Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development (FIELD) deserves special credit. This organisation has assisted and continues to assist AOSIS by enhancing AOSIS’s capacity for negotiation and analysis. FIELD also had international lawyers sit on AOSIS delegations and negotiate on their behalf from the very beginning. The expertise and knowledge that these lawyers brought with them were important assets, and clearly contributed to the prominent role of AOSIS, for, as one interviewee explains: ‘they had something to say, [and] they could present it well’ (Interview 8; see also Kristan 2002; McMahan 1993).

AOSIS was very open and appreciative of this legal and technical expertise, more so than other (developing) countries (Interviews 3;4;5; ECO 1993a; McMahan 1993). The close relationship with NGOs, and with FIELD in particular, however, also earned AOSIS criticism, mostly from other G-77 countries, who eyed the influence of outsiders with suspicion (Interview 4). Small island countries, in contrast, recognised the benefits of ‘having the right people work for them’ (Interview 1) and were ‘skillful in getting expertise on their side’ (Interview 9; see also Interview 3). In the words of

²³Personal communication with Joanna Depledge. See also Kasa et al. (2008: 116).

²⁴Because of OPEC opposition, the G-77 was unable to find a common position at COP1. The group thus split, with the majority backing the Green Paper proposal.

one interviewee, ‘AOSIS only succeeded because at the end of the day the delegations, in particular some key leaders within AOSIS, were using the advice and the support of NGOs to their advantage’ (Interview 4). NGO support translated into power in the climate change negotiations, for it allowed small island states to participate on par with much larger and better resourced delegations. The technical and legal expertise provided by NGOs were used to actively table proposals, often in legal language, which clearly had an impact on the negotiation process as well as its outcome, even if these proposals were typically watered down. This third-party strategy thus turned into a process-based strategy.

Process-Based Strategies

Not last with the support of NGOs, AOSIS countries quickly learned to play the game and to make use of the *process* itself. On the one hand, this meant organising all island states into a tight negotiating coalition; on the other hand, early submissions entailed a first-mover advantage and helped to ensure that issues important to AOSIS were part of the discussion and given due consideration, which can be counted as success in terms of influence over the negotiation process.

Even before formal negotiations started in 1991, island microstates recognised that they could only meaningfully participate in the negotiation process and thus contribute to the outcome if they came together as a cohesive group (Interviews 4;5;8; see also e.g. Objectif Terre 2004; Slade 2003). Led skillfully by some key AOSIS representatives, including Robert Van Lierop of Vanuatu, Tuiloma Neroni Slade of Samoa, and John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda, island states thus ‘acted as though they were members of *one* negotiating team’ (McMahon 1993: 11; emphasis added). Together, AOSIS countries were among the most active participants (e.g. Interviews 1;3;4), and could ensure ‘that the positions adopted by the group would be represented fully not only within the INC as a whole, but also within the respective regional groupings and within the larger Group of 77’ (Ashe et al. 1999: 212).

En bloc, small island states gained considerable political clout. By now, AOSIS is widely recognised as a major player in the climate change regime, alongside much larger groups like OPEC (e.g. Oberthür and Ott 1999; Yamin and Depledge 2004); AOSIS representatives are regularly invited to chair negotiation groups, a position they had previously not been granted (Bodansky 1993). This in itself can be considered a remarkable accomplishment for small island states, given that their ability to participate in international organisations is typically tightly constrained.

Further, their active participation and many initiatives clearly made an impact on the negotiation process. First and foremost, they helped to start the discussion and keep it alive. The Convention negotiations had been initiated upon a Maltese proposal. Once agreed, the Convention entered into force so soon because small island states ratified the treaty very quickly (e.g. INC 1995b; Interview 7), and had AOSIS not pushed for negotiation of a protocol immediately after entry into force of the Convention, it seems likely that another agreement would not have been adopted so early (Interview 6; see also Interview 4). As Yamin (1998: 431) remarks, with emission trends going up, and public interest going down, ‘the task of ensuring something meaningful emerged from the first adequacy review fell largely on the ‘front line’ states.’ To that end, AOSIS submitted a draft protocol, at INC11, just before COP1 (INC 1994a). AOSIS was thus the first to table a complete draft protocol, in legal language and containing a specific emission target (Depledge 2000: 43; Interview 5; Interview 8). This proposal exerted considerable influence on the Kyoto process. Although its core propositions – most importantly a 20% reduction target – were ultimately not adopted, the Berlin Mandate and hence the Protocol negotiations were based upon the AOSIS protocol. AOSIS countries were probably aware that the proposed target was not achievable; rather, the proposal ‘aimed at raising the expectations around the first review of adequacy of commitments’ (Oberthür and Ott 1999: 45). It set the bar high and served as point of reference in the entire Kyoto negotiations. As such, it seems to have rendered politically unacceptable the adoption of a mere stabilisation target, as advocated among others by the United States (see Barnett 2005; 2007).

Strategies and Success

Although small island states did not wield enough power to create the outcomes needed for mitigating climatic change, they nonetheless had a disproportionate influence on the climate change regime in the period under discussion: ‘So they boxed way above their weight. And everyone took their voice seriously,’ assesses one interviewee (Interview 4), while another concludes: ‘They did extraordinarily well in that circumstance’ (Interview 5). While it is clear that small island countries as microstates can only do so much, they can extend the scope of their room of manoeuvre by cleverly using whatever source of leverage they have at their disposal. AOSIS thus ‘borrowed’ power rather successfully in the climate change negotiations from 1990 to 1997. Lacking the traditional sources of power, AOSIS made clever use of all external sources of power identified by Zartman and Rubin (2000b). Small island states drew on the *context*, framing climate change as an existential threat for those who have contributed the least to the problem. Urgent action is thus described as a moral imperative. More important in terms of influencing substantive commitments, however, proved to be *target*-based strategies and invoking the participants’ self-interest, for at the end of the day, narrow national interest counts, particularly when far-reaching economic implications are involved. Here, AOSIS was less successful; calls for immediate and significant cuts were only heard in 1997, with the Kyoto Protocol’s modest, but legally binding, emission targets and timetables. Concern about economic costs prevailed and hindered more stringent provisions, even if scientific evidence had considerably hardened by then. Nonetheless, science played a major role in the evolution of the climate change regime, and AOSIS relied heavily on this *third party* to substantiate its claims. Last, small island countries actively participated in and considerably shaped the climate change *process* from the beginning, having formed a negotiating alliance even before formal negotiations on climate change begun, and benefiting from NGO support (*third party*). They thus managed to build considerable capacity and overcame their traditional marginalisation.

All four strategies were used extensively; the data do not reveal a preference for a particular strategy. Similarly, no change in strategy over time can be discerned. On the other hand, there seems to be a decline in success (see also Gillespie 2004; Shibuya 1996; Interview 7). The most substantive contributions of AOSIS date to the pre-Berlin period: the seat on the INC Board, the draft proposal for a protocol in 1994, or the Green Paper at COP1. The main explication for this downward trend appears to be the changing nature of the climate change regime. While the early period was concerned with the definition of what was perceived as an environmental problem, the debate has shifted towards implementation and the associated costs. As economic interests came to the forefront, more and more actors became actively involved, leaving little room for trivial emitters like island microstates who cannot themselves contribute to mitigation, but have to rely on rhetorics and moral power.

AOSIS’s exercise of power is further constrained by their need to rely on ‘positive power’. Islands strove to ‘*positively* alter the value of a particular action’s outcome for the target’ (Zartman 1997: 231; emphasis added). It seems that as very weak actors dependent on support by others – not only in the context of climate change – AOSIS countries had to resort to gratification rather than deprivation to exert influence (see also Larson 2003; 2005). This positive exercise of power, however, is presumably less effective than more negative strategies. Much of the influence of OPEC, for instance, derives from its obstructionism and the ability to block, or threaten to block, consensus (e.g. Depledge 2005; 2008). AOSIS countries, on the other hand, had to fight *for* consensus, they had to try and persuade all participants to reach agreement, and to make sure this agreement was as strong as possible.

This uphill battle was more successful in terms of influencing the negotiation process rather than its outcome. While the final treaties do reflect the objectives of island microstates (Interview 8), the core propositions put forward by AOSIS only made it into the negotiation outcome in a watered-down format. In Dupont’s (1994) terminology, AOSIS’s formal success was less than its inferior results. Indeed, recognition as a ‘potent political force’ (Bodansky 1993: 481; see also Interviews 5;6) may be AOSIS’s main accomplishment. Given their tiny size, in terms of territory, population, economy, and

greenhouse gas emissions, it is most remarkable that they were able to shape the discussion to the degree they did. This accomplishment becomes even clearer when contrasting the influence of small island states with for instance the group of least developed countries. Like small island states, these countries are fairly powerless, they emit very low levels of greenhouse gases and are vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Yet unlike small island states, their presence in the negotiations went almost unnoticed (Interview 8; see also Interview 7).²⁵

Concluding Remarks

As this analysis showed, power can be ‘acquired’, which allows even lowest-power parties to have an impact on international multilateral negotiations. Borrowing power from external sources seems to be a viable strategy for weak and very weak actors in situations of power asymmetry. The framework used here may be taken as a blueprint for microstates and other low-power actors in other contexts. However, it must be noted that the case of small island states in the climate change regime is unique in that island states were literally negotiating for survival, which certainly provided a suitable platform around which to organise. A second caveat pertains to the inherent methodological difficulties of analysing multilateral negotiations. Causal links are hard to prove, in particular in situations as complex as the negotiations under the climate change regime. While it is sometimes possible to establish a clear link between one party’s agency and a specific outcome, outcomes are typically the result of an interplay of a multitude of factors, which makes it hard to ascribe a given ‘success’ to a specific course of action of a single actor.

Even if AOSIS’s success may be ascribed to favourable circumstances rather than the agency of small island states, their contribution to the international climate change regime is undeniable. Further research would be recommendable for a fuller assessment of this contribution. A comparative approach over time, across issue areas, and among actors in particular seems an appropriate path for further insights. While analysis of a longer time period is beyond the scope of this work, it would be interesting to examine AOSIS’s negotiating behaviour beyond Kyoto. Such a longer time frame would possibly also yield further insights into the evolution of AOSIS’s strategy over time, and thus allow to compare the differing degrees of success of specific tactics. Such insights may also be gained by expanding the scope of analysis to other issue areas, comparing AOSIS’s strategies and according influence in the climate change regime with its efforts elsewhere. Last, a more explicit comparison of AOSIS to other participants, particularly other vulnerable and weak actors may further prove helpful to understand in how far low-power parties can borrow power to make their voice heard.

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²⁵The least developed countries started to organise similar to AOSIS at a later period.

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