

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL: AGENCY FOR SMALL STATES – CONSULTANCY

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1. REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Systemiq invites qualified consultants and suitably experienced organisations to submit proposals for the consultancy described in this Request for Proposal (RfP): “Agency” for Small States – How Small States Can Navigate and Shape the New Geopolitical Order.

The purpose of this RfP is to identify and appoint a consultant capable of delivering an independent analytical report and related policy outputs that provide strategic analysis and actionable recommendations to inform the Bridgetown Initiative’s policy positions, advocacy strategies and stakeholder engagement.

This RfP sets out the Terms of Reference, required qualifications, proposal submission requirements, procurement timetable, financial proposal requirements, and the criteria that Systemiq will use to evaluate proposals.

Systemiq reserves the right to amend, suspend or cancel the procurement process, to seek clarification from applicants, and to reject any or all proposals without obligation to award a contract. Any appointment will arise only upon execution of a definitive written agreement.

The successful applicant will be engaged under a consultancy services agreement with Systemiq which may include flowdown requirements of the Bridgetown Initiative. Systemiq reserves the right to negotiate scope, budget, deliverables and timelines prior to contract award.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.1 Background and Context

Small states, which include the sub-category of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and low-lying coastal countries, today are at a critical juncture. Already confronting existential climate risks, these nations now face the compounding pressures of intensifying geopolitical rivalry, the fragmentation of multilateral norms, and the weaponisation of economic dependencies by larger powers. The rules-based international order that small states have historically relied upon to amplify their collective voice is under severe strain, and new alignments, shaped by great-power competition, debt distress, and contested development finance are redrawing the parameters within which small states can act.

At the same time, this moment of disorder creates openings. Small states have demonstrated remarkable diplomatic agility; forging coalitions, leveraging their moral authority as the world's most climate-vulnerable nations, and occupying influential positions in multilateral fora disproportionate to their material size. The question is no longer simply how small states survive geopolitical turbulence, but how they can actively shape the emerging order to advance their interests and values.

The Bridgetown Initiative, championed by Barbados and a growing coalition of climate-vulnerable states, has already elevated reform of the international financial architecture as a central demand of the Global South. Its evolving agenda on agency, resilience and transformation recognises that structural reform is inseparable from political agency: without the capacity to act autonomously and to influence global norms, even the most technically sound financial reforms will remain beyond reach.

This consultancy is commissioned to produce an independent analytical report examining the pathways through which small states can reclaim and exercise agency in this turbulent geopolitical environment. The report will provide strategic analysis and actionable recommendations to inform the Bridgetown Initiative's policy positions, advocacy strategies, and stakeholder engagement.

2.2 Objectives of the Assignment

The consultancy has three interrelated objectives:

- Analyse the geopolitical landscape as it bears on small states, identifying the structural forces, emerging fault lines, and coalition dynamics most relevant to small island states' agency.
- Map and evaluate the strategic instruments, alliances, and institutional frameworks through which small states can exercise influence beyond their material size.
- Develop forward-looking recommendations to strengthen small states agency within the Bridgetown Initiative's agency, resilience and transformation agenda, with implications for the broader community of climate-vulnerable nations.

2.3 Scope of Work and Key Tasks

The consultant will undertake the following tasks:

2.3.1 Desk Research and Literature Review

- Review existing scholarship and policy analysis on SIDS in international relations, small state diplomacy, and climate geopolitics.
- Synthesise recent developments in the geopolitical landscape bearing on small states, including shifts in development finance, debt dynamics, and multilateral governance reform.
- Analyse existing Bridgetown Initiative documentation, communiqués, and advocacy materials to identify gaps and opportunities in the agency dimension of the agenda.

2.3.2 Stakeholder Consultations

- Conduct targeted interviews with small states government representatives, regional organisations, civil society actors, and international financial institution interlocutors.
- Engage scholars and practitioners working at the intersection of small state diplomacy, climate policy, and international political economy.

2.3.3 Analysis and Report Drafting

- Develop a structured analytical framework for assessing small states-related agency across diplomatic, economic, legal, and normative dimensions.
- Draft the full report in accordance with the chapter structure outlined in Section 5, incorporating evidence, case studies, and comparative analysis.
- Prepare a four-page executive summary suitable for high-level policy audiences.

2.3.4 Review and Finalisation

- Incorporate feedback from a designated review panel into a revised draft.
- Finalise the report for dissemination and prepare a two-page policy brief distilling the report's core findings and recommendations.

2.4 Deliverables and Timeline

#	Deliverable	Timing	Indicative length
I	Inception note and workplan	End of Week 1	2–3 pages
II	Draft report	End of Week 6	30–50 pages
III	Technical support and advisory to convenor(s) of a 'Roundtable on Reframing the Agency of Small States within the Contemporary Geopolitical and Climate Context', while also serving as a meeting facilitator	November 2026	

IV	Revised final report	End of Week 8	30–50 pages
V	Executive summary	End of Week 10	4 pages max
VI	Policy Brief and OpEd	End of Week 12	2 pages

2.5 Structure of the Output Report

The report, entitled *Reclaiming Agency: How Small Island Developing States Can Navigate and Shape the New Geopolitical Order* - will be organised into five substantive chapters, each addressing a distinct but interrelated dimension of agency in the context of geopolitical instability. An indicative structure is shared below but subject to discussion with the consultant.

- Chapter 1: The New Geopolitical Landscape: Threats, Shifts, and Asymmetries Facing Small States –**
 This opening chapter establishes the analytical foundation for the report by mapping the current geopolitical environment as experienced by small states. It examines the erosion of multilateral norms, the intensification of great-power competition (particularly in the Indo-Pacific and Caribbean), the weaponisation of economic interdependence, and the fragmentation of development finance. The chapter identifies the principal threats to small states agency including debt dependency, geopolitical conditionality, and the marginalisation of small state voices in multilateral governance, while also surfacing the structural asymmetries that define the operating environment. It concludes by articulating what "agency" means for small states in this context: not merely autonomy from external coercion, but the positive capacity to shape international norms, coalitions, and outcomes in ways that advance small states' interests and values.
- Chapter 2: Historical and Contemporary Strategies: How Small States Have Navigated Great-Power Dynamics –**
 Drawing on historical and comparative evidence, this chapter examines the diplomatic, economic, and legal strategies through which small states have historically exercised influence disproportionate to their size. It analyses case studies of successful small state agency including SIDS leadership in the negotiation of the Paris Agreement loss and damage provisions, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) as a model of collective advocacy, and individual country strategies such as Barbados's Bridgetown Agenda and the Pacific's "Blue Pacific" identity framework. It also evaluates episodes where small states have been captured by great-power competition or locked into asymmetric dependencies. The chapter distils the institutional, coalitional, and normative conditions that have historically enabled or constrained small states agency, providing a baseline against which contemporary strategies can be assessed.
- Chapter 3: Instruments of Agency: Diplomacy, Law, and Norm Entrepreneurship –**
 This chapter provides a systematic analysis of the tools available to small states for exercising agency in the current geopolitical order, organised across three dimensions. First, diplomatic instruments: coalition-building, non-alignment strategies, forum shopping, and leveraging UN General Assembly influence. Second, legal instruments: the use of international courts and tribunals (including the landmark ITLOS advisory opinion on climate obligations), treaty-making, and new legal frameworks for climate-vulnerable states. Third, norm entrepreneurship: how small states can lead in defining and institutionalising new norms around climate justice, loss and damage, and the rights of climate-affected peoples. The chapter assesses the relative efficacy, constraints, and complementarities of these instruments in the current environment.
- Chapter 4: The Bridgetown Initiative as a Vehicle for Small States Agency: Opportunities and Tensions –**
 This chapter examines the Bridgetown Initiative specifically as a potential framework for small states agency, analysing its architecture, political coalitions, and reform proposals against the geopolitical dynamics established in earlier chapters. It assesses how the Initiative's agenda, covering reform of multilateral development banks, special drawing rights, debt suspension mechanisms, and climate finance can be advanced in a fragmented geopolitical environment. The chapter identifies the opportunities created by the current moment of contestation alongside the tensions and risks, including the prospect of the Initiative being co-opted by larger powers, or small states being divided by competing bilateral pressures. It also examines how the agency, resilience and transformation agenda can be operationalised beyond finance, addressing governance, technology transfer, and data sovereignty. The chapter offers concrete recommendations for strengthening the Initiative's political coalition and deepening its small states-related ownership and authorship.

- **Chapter 5: Towards a Small States Agency Roadmap: Recommendations for Action** – The concluding chapter synthesises the report's analysis into a forward-looking strategic roadmap for small states agency. It presents tiered recommendations organised by time horizon (immediate, medium-term, and structural) and by actor (individual small states governments, regional bodies such as CARICOM and the Pacific Islands Forum, the AOSIS coalition, and the Bridgetown Initiative's champions). Recommendations address: strengthening the institutional architecture of small states collective advocacy; building small states negotiating capacity in international legal and financial arenas; diversifying diplomatic partnerships to reduce geopolitical dependency; embedding agency considerations into the Bridgetown Initiative's reform agenda; and developing a shared small states narrative on sovereignty, climate justice, and the right to development capable of commanding broad international legitimacy. The chapter closes with a reflection on the systemic conditions including reform of the UN Security Council and international financial institutions that would most significantly expand the structural agency available to small states over the long term.

2.6 Qualifications and Experience Required

Essential

- Advanced degree (Master's or Doctorate) in international relations, political science, international law, development economics, or a closely related discipline.
- Experience in geopolitical analysis, international affairs, political economy or strategic advisory..
- Demonstrated expertise in small state diplomacy, SIDS policy, or climate geopolitics, with a strong publication or policy record.
- Knowledge of relevant international financial architecture and multilateral reform debates.
- Proven ability to produce high-quality reports for policy audiences within tight timelines.
- Excellent written and spoken English, with the ability to translate complex analysis into accessible policy language.

Desirable

- Direct professional experience working with small states and, in particular, SIDS governments, regional or multilateral organisations.
- Familiarity with international legal mechanisms relevant to small states, including UNCLOS and international climate litigation.
- Ability to engage effectively with small-state diplomatic, policy and academic communities.

2.7 Management Arrangements

The consultant will work independently and engage regularly with the Director, Bridgetown Initiative and a designated Systemiq project manager to ensure ongoing alignment.

The consultant will:

- Attend an inception meeting;
- Provide fortnightly progress updates;
- Present draft findings at the end of Week 6;
- Participate in review discussions;
- Incorporate comments from the review panel into the final outputs.

3. PROCUREMENT PROCEDURE AND TIMETABLE

3.1 Procedure

Systemiq Limited will act as the contracting authority for this procurement and will be the counterparty to the resulting services contract. The procurement is open to suitably qualified individual consultants, firms or consortia that can demonstrate the expertise and capacity required under this RfP.

Systemiq may request written clarifications and/or invite shortlisted applicants to a clarification interview. Any material clarification to the RfP will be shared on an equal basis with prospective applicants who have expressed interest or submitted questions.

3.2 Procurement Timetable

All times are UK time (BST). The timetable is indicative and Systemiq reserves the right to amend it.

Milestone	Date
RfP issued	20 August 2026
Deadline for clarification questions	24 August 2026, 18:00 BST
Consolidated responses to clarification questions	26 August 2026
Proposal submission deadline	30 August 2026, 18:00 BST
Evaluation of written proposals	31 August - 3 September 2026
Award notification	3 September 2026
Contracting / expected start	7 September 2026

4. APPLICATION PROCESS AND PROPOSAL CONTENT

Interested applicants should submit the following:

1. A current CV (or CVs of the proposed key personnel, where applicable).
2. A technical proposal of no more than three pages setting out: (i) the proposed approach to the assignment; (ii) the relevant experience and expertise the applicant would bring; (iii) an indicative workplan and methodology; and (iv) availability during the assignment period.
3. Examples of up to three relevant publications or policy outputs.
4. A Financial Proposal, which must be complete and consistent with the proposed technical approach. At a minimum, it should include:
 - Daily rate and estimated number of days,
 - Travel & other expenses: unit costs × number of units, as applicable.
 - The total proposed professional fee and total proposed price, clearly showing any applicable taxes separately (Systemiq Limited is UK based).
 - A payment schedule linked to the completion and acceptance of proposed activities & deliverables. The proposed allocation of payments must reasonably reflect the level of effort associated with each activity/deliverable. Schedules that are materially inconsistent with the Technical Proposal (e.g. artificially front-loaded) may be rejected (or be subject to clarification in accordance with the rules stated here before being scored in the evaluation).

The Financial Proposal should be sufficiently detailed to enable Systemiq to assess the level of effort, cost assumptions and overall value for money. Applicants may use their own template, provided the above information is included.

No maximum budget or indicative budget range will be disclosed as part of this procurement. Bidders shall submit a realistic, competitive, and comprehensive Financial Proposal that is consistent with the proposed scope of work & delivery approach, and the required quality standards.

4.1 Due Diligence, KYC and Conflict of Interest

As part of the RfP response and/or prior to contract award, prospective suppliers will be required to provide the information and documentation necessary to complete Systemiq's standard due diligence, Know Your Customer (KYC) and Conflict of Interest (COI) checks. Specific requirements and/ or supporting documentation will be communicated by Systemiq as appropriate.

4.2 Clarification Questions and Proposal Submission

Clarification questions must be submitted by email no later than 24 August 2026 at 18:00 BST. Material responses will be shared on an equal basis with prospective applicants.

All proposals must be submitted electronically by 30 August 2026 at 18:00 BST to:

Email: barnabe.colin@systemiq.earth and Purity.Karuri@systemiq.earth

Subject line: RFP – Agency for Small States Consultancy

Late submissions may be rejected at Systemiq's discretion. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that their proposal is complete and received by the deadline.

5. EVALUATION AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Proposals will first be reviewed for completeness and basic eligibility. Only proposals that meet the submission requirements and demonstrate the essential qualifications will proceed to scored evaluation. Systemiq may seek clarifications or hold interviews with shortlisted applicants before making a final selection.

Eligible proposals will be assessed on a maximum score of 100 points against the following criteria:

Award criterion	Assessment	Max score
Relevant expertise and experience	Relevance of the consultant/team's qualifications and professional experience, including geopolitical analysis, international affairs, political economy or strategic advisory; demonstrated expertise in small state diplomacy, SIDS policy or climate geopolitics; and ability to produce high-quality policy outputs.	35
Proposed approach and methodology	Quality, clarity and credibility of the proposed approach; understanding of the assignment; appropriateness of the methodology; realism of the workplan and ability to deliver within the required timeline.	30
Understanding of the assignment and SIDS context	Quality and relevance of previous publications, policy outputs and comparable assignments, including experience working with small states, SIDS governments, regional or multilateral organisations where applicable.	20
Financial proposal / value for money	Competitiveness and reasonableness of daily rates, estimated level of effort and other costs; internal consistency of the budget; and overall value for money relative to the proposed approach and expertise.	15

Systemiq will select the proposal that, in its judgement, provides the strongest overall combination of technical quality, relevant expertise, delivery confidence and value for money.

6. GENERAL CONDITIONS

- Each applicant shall bear its own costs of preparing and submitting its proposal. Systemiq will not reimburse proposal preparation or submission costs.
- Systemiq reserves the right to accept or reject any proposal, to negotiate with one or more applicants, or to discontinue the procurement process at any time without incurring liability to applicants.
- Information provided in connection with this RfP should be treated as confidential and used solely for the purpose of preparing a proposal.
- Any appointment is subject to satisfactory completion of Systemiq's due diligence, KYC and COI requirements and agreement of final contracting terms. Please see annex 1 attached. Please fill it out and return it with the proposal
- All deliverables produced under this assignment shall become the property of Systemiq and the Bridgetown Initiative upon final payment, unless otherwise agreed in writing.