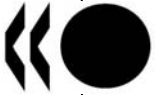


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## **Global Forum on Sustainable Development**

### **ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: PACIFIC SIDS CONTEXT**

**by Kanayathu C. Koshy**

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## ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: PACIFIC SIDS CONTEXT<sup>1</sup>

Kanayathu C. Koshy<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in general, and Pacific SIDS in particular are a special case for environment and development. As the struggle to implement the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) continues, it is important to recognise that changing external and internal circumstances are creating greater challenges for the island states. The current environment in Pacific SIDS, therefore, calls for greater understanding and cooperation from all stakeholders involved in Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). Currently the SIDS are engaged in a *full* and *comprehensive* review of the *implementation* of the Barbados Programme of Action, as part of the International Meeting (IM), scheduled for 10-14 January 2005, Mauritius.

### Environment context

Although the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of the Pacific Island Countries occupy about 30 million square kilometers, the land area constitutes only ~1.8% of the total. The population is ~7.5 million, with 5.5m in Papua New Guinea alone. Being located among the most vulnerable regions in the world to the increasing intensity and frequency of natural and environmental disasters, Pacific SIDS face disproportionately high economic, social and environmental consequences. The adverse effects of climate change and sea level rise will only exacerbate this situation. Management of waste of all types continues to be a pressing problem while the coastal and marine resources are being threatened due to human as well as climatic impacts. Freshwater, land, biological diversity and renewable energy issues feature prominently in almost all regional development discussions. The deteriorating condition of the Pacific environment present considerable challenges to the region's sustainable development aspirations.

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<sup>2</sup>. Professor and Director, START (System for Analysis Research and Training) – Oceania Secretariat, University of the South Pacific, Fiji.

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### **Sustainable development context**

In an ever-globalising world the situation of Pacific SIDS continues to be one of exposure and growing vulnerability with an increasing inability to respond. Pacific SIDS acknowledge that sustainable development is primarily a national responsibility, but also that for us to succeed, given our acknowledged vulnerabilities, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities must be given specific expression by the international community. Furthermore, there is a need for strengthened cooperation and partnership at the national, regional and international levels. Such partnership should be broad-based and ensure involvement and participation of all stakeholders including civil society and the private sector.

The region and the individual Pacific Island nations have made a strong commitment to international efforts to prevent further irreversible environmental change and to promote sustainable development by becoming party to numerous MEAs.

In a recent meeting of Forum Island Leaders in Apia, member countries who have not embarked on the development of national sustainable development strategies (NSDS) were encouraged to do so in compliance with the Johannesburg Plan of Action and to complete the national capacity self assessment (NCSA) to enable gap identification for planned capacity building.

### **Vulnerability context**

While the world community has acknowledged time and again the special case of SIDS, the full application of that principle remains as pertinent today for the social, economic and environmental development of SIDS.

For the Pacific SIDS there are many disadvantages that derive from their small size, which are magnified by the fact that many island states are not only small but are themselves made up of a number of small islands. Those disadvantages include a narrow range of resources, which forces undue specialization; excessive dependence on international trade and hence vulnerability to global developments; high population density, which increases the pressure on already limited resources; overuse of resources and premature depletion; relatively small watersheds and threatened supplies of fresh water; costly public administration and infrastructure, including transportation and communication; and limited institutional capacities and domestic markets, which are too small to provide significant scales of economies, while their limited export volumes, sometimes from remote locations, lead to high freight costs and reduced competitiveness.

Pacific prides in high levels of biodiversity, but the relatively small numbers of the various species coupled with high degrees of endemism impose high risks of extinction and create a need for protection.

Globalisation and trade liberalization add another dimension of vulnerability to Pacific SIDS. This has severe socio-economic implications. Unable to compete, the Pacific island countries are being marginalised with increasing levels of poverty which takes different faces such as acute human deprivation, low income and endowment level or poor access to resources and opportunities. The Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI) developed by SOPAC provides an important tool for the quantitative determination of a country's environmental vulnerability.

### **Policy context**

Realising this development dilemma, Pacific Island states, with the assistance of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), have taken a leading role in discussions relating to global environmental change and sustainable development since signing the South Pacific Declaration on Natural Resources and the Environment at the Rarotonga Conference on Human Environment in the Pacific Island

in 1983. SPREP, and high-level representations from the Pacific Islands, together with other non-Pacific Island nations, under the umbrella of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), have strongly represented the region in international lobbying at fora, such as the Earth Summit, the Barbados Conference, World Summit on Sustainable Development and for the preparations towards the International Meeting in Mauritius.

The region and the individual Pacific Island nations have made a strong commitment to international efforts to prevent further irreversible environmental change and to promote sustainable development by becoming party to numerous environmental conventions and treaties, such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Ramsar Convention to protect mangroves and wetlands, the Montreal and Kyoto Protocols to address problems of the breakdown in the Earth's protective ozone layer and global warming, to mention only a few. They have, with the assistance of SPREP, UNDP, AusAID and the USP, also made a strong commitment, particularly over the past decade, to addressing the issues of environmental protection and sustainable development at the local and community levels.

Noting the burden of reporting for SIDS on a variety of MEAs, the region calls for simplified reporting procedures and harmonization of reporting requirements.

### **Financing context**

The establishment of effective sustainable development financing mechanisms is essential for successful implementation of sustainable development strategies. This should encompass innovative financing, such as social investment funds to help alleviate poverty and The Global Environment Facility (GEF) small grants programme is now being extended to the Pacific and will provide opportunities in this regard. Additional sources of seed funding needs to be identified.

The link between the national development plan and the annual budget allows government to look at what is feasible to be funded from national resources and then, where possible, to look for development assistance funding as appropriate. In this respect it is vital that both capital and recurrent costs for projects in support of the national plan are accurately reflected in the budget. In an environment of shrinking overseas development assistance funding, development partners are more critical when looking at sustainability of activities than before.

Demonstrated financial commitment to implementation of the national plan could also open up overseas development assistance opportunities. A strong national plan allows a move away from the situation where wish lists or shopping lists are taken to donors (as has been the case in the past with "Development Budgets").

For climate change adaptation planning, the option of establishing a regional financial facility is being investigated. Such a facility might help to secure access to additional financing for the region, including from new donors, and could help to improve coordination among donors and beneficiaries, as well as between the various regional organisations. Its operations would need to be efficient, low-cost, transparent, accountable and complement and utilise capacity in existing regional organisations

### **Capacity context**

Capacity building for sustainable development in Pacific SIDS remains a high priority, including capacity issues related to strengthening legal and legislative framework.

The success of Pacific SIDS in implementing the development blue prints at the national level will depend on effective human, institutional and technical capacity related to policy development, monitoring of implementation and coordination, especially through the support of national and regional organizations.

According to regional consensus, in the area of capacity-building, international and regional support and assistance would be welcome for the proposed establishment of a consortium of tertiary institutions for capacity development and education, and for standard-setting for sustainable development in small island developing states. There is a need to ensure that sustainable development education and training provides linkages between sectors such as water, energy, land and coastal zones. There should be a national-level commitment to ensure that education maintains a strong relevance to local conditions, notably by reviewing curricula so that they meet the needs of communities. Practical applications of education in management and participatory skills are needed, as well as information and communications technology and vocational training. Applications of science and technology and targeted and internationally important research are vital to improved understanding and decision-making leading to sustainable development.

There is a need for strengthened regional mechanisms for cooperation to share information and lessons learned, to promote regional and interregional exchange and to undertake joint projects and research activities, thus enhancing the generation and dissemination of information to support the implementation of sustainable development in island States. Knowledge generation and management are important factors here. A critical requirement in implementing national sustainable development strategies is a supporting infrastructure for the effective exchange and movement of information.

Pacific SIDS recognize that there are new opportunities afforded by the rapid new developments in ICT to overcome limitations of isolation and remoteness and build their resilience. These new opportunities include areas such as e-commerce, improved early warning, telemedicine and distance learning. The University of the South Pacific is a global leader in distance and flexible approaches to learning.

It is recognized that science and technology is a crosscutting issue for all sectors of SIDS' sustainable development. Targeted investments for SIDS appropriate science and technology capacity is critical, given the increasing importance of science and technology in building resilience in SIDS. The international community must increase its support for regional organizations in order to promote the incorporation in national sustainable development strategies of appropriate science and technology elements and support for science development in SIDS, while also providing promotion and protection for traditional science and technology which includes local and indigenous knowledge and management practices.

Whilst access to education in the Pacific countries has improved considerably over the last decade it is still a fundamental challenge of sustainable development and capacity building for the long term. In this regard education strategies and action plans that encompass the wide ranging needs for improved access to and quality of education need to be implemented.

### **Mainstreaming context**

For overall Pacific progress, the leaders have expressed full support for a new *Pacific Plan*, which is intended to be the main instrument for promoting a new Pacific vision, deliver real benefits for the Pacific peoples by proposing concrete plans for the enhancement of economic growth and sustainable development. The Plan Taskforce, managed by the Secretary General, is to be made up of senior officials of member countries and key regional organisations.

It is widely recognised among Pacific SIDS that there are causes beyond their direct control that impede the full and effective implementation of the BPOA. The most important among them is Climate

challenge - climate change, climate variability related extreme events and sea-level rise. This is not just an environmental issue, but also an economic, social, and political issue for Pacific Island countries. It strikes the very heart of their existence. The impacts, and in particular the related economic and social shocks, pose serious political and national financial management issues for Pacific Island countries. Climate change, climate variability and sea-level rise adversely affect GDP, balance of payments, budget deficits, foreign debt, unemployment, and living standards.

In addition to this, there are other issues too and these include:

1. Overall decline in overseas development assistance
2. Decline in commodity prices
3. Loss of preferential trade arrangements
4. Global pressure to reduce the size of the public sector
5. Increase in the cost of imported fossil fuels
6. Instigation of some donor driven projects that may be inconsistent with BPOA

In order to address these development challenges, Pacific SIDS are engaged in in-country strategic planning and action as well as international negotiations aimed at minimising external impacts.