

## SWOT Analysis for Participatory Research in the Pacific

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### Agenda 21. Principles:

10. Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens at the relevant level.
20. Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development.
21. The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all.
22. Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and support their identity, culture, and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development.

The common vision provided by Agenda 21 is based on an open exchange of information at all levels of society and between all interested parties. Where barriers to information flow exist, conflict follows. The case histories summarized in the preceding two sections of this report offer abundant examples of conflicts and constraints in the gathering, analysis, and use of environmental information for economic decision making.

The greatest and most debilitating barrier in flow of information for sustainable decisions on resource use is the sharp divide between the colonial-imposed European government system, usually based almost entirely in one city, and the hundreds of small, isolated rural villages scattered on different islands or separated by difficult terrain. There is actually better interchange of environmental information and ideas between the countries, via regional organizations, than between the national governments and their own village people. It is as if the rural villages continue to exist as separate, isolated groups with local needs, interests and knowledge quite separate from the regional and national visions.

Most countries have some form of provincial government. In the Melanesian countries of PNG, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji the provincial governments are distinct political entities, but suffer from even greater financial and manpower constraints than the National governments. In Polynesian and Micronesian countries, the "provincial" government structures are extensions of the national governments. Information exchange between the provincial and national governments is generally done by individuals, like extension agents, whose jobs bring them back and forth between the national capital and the provinces.

### How the European style government differs from the shadow traditional governance.

European	Traditional
Centrally Located	Widely distributed

English or French Language	Island or even village specific language
European Cash Economy	Barter or local cash economy
Export Oriented Extraction of Resources	Resources for survival and small markets
Large Scale resource development	Small scale resource development
Private Ownership (businesses/land)	Common ownership
Weak monitoring capability	Strong monitoring capability
Pitiful enforcement capability	Absolute enforcement capability
Relies on foreign funding	Semi self reliant
Relies on foreign expertise for resource assessment	Relies on direct observation for resource and self-assessment.
Policies imposed from foreign nations via colonialism and now via assistance	Home grown
Other directed - welfare state (adopted by necessity).	Self directed - welfare state (adopted by preference).
Unsustainable without major revisions	3,500 years of proven sustainability

Villages in all countries have their own autonomous, traditional government system based on one form or another of a council of elders. In some countries, such as American Samoa, this secondary government system pervades the whole society and acts as a secondary National Government.

The bulk of the population of the Pacific islands relates, on a day to day basis, to their village government system. Since the villagers are the resource owners, it is the village government system that makes the final decisions on resource use. The village elders are likely to have, or have access to, a considerable body of local knowledge about their own resources.

The examination of how [conflicts arise](#) in resource use plans in the Pacific islands supports the Agenda 21 vision for improving information linkages between the local, national and regional bodies. The regional organizations have recently begun a [major effort](#), in concert with the World Bank, to improve information exchange between themselves and their member countries which includes a component to improve information flow to the public.

The ESCAP country and local case studies on "integrating Environmental Considerations into Economic Decision Making Processes" revealed a number of Pacific island countries and regional organizations that are in the experimental phase of improving the links between the local, national and regional levels. These efforts are generally described as "participatory." They take the form of participation in gathering research information (such as Participatory Rural Appraisal), setting up community based resource use plans, and more recently, developing long range sustainable development policy starting with the local (village) government's own vision and integrating this with provincial, national and regional policy decision making processes (Participatory Integrated Policy (PIP)).

An overall analysis of the Successes, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of the Pacific islanders provides insight into the long term benefits of participatory approaches to sustainable economic policy making. analysis summarizes the ESCAP case histories and information presented in

Sections 1 and 2. It is not comprehensive nor do all the features apply equally throughout the Pacific islands, but it does provide clear support for the move towards participatory policy.

## **How do participatory methods fit with the Strengths and Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT Analysis) of the people and governments of the Pacific Islands?**

### **Strengths, Advantages, and Abilities.**

- **Strengths that can help support a participatory integrated policy for resource use**
  - Social cohesiveness of family or one-talk or church systems. If decisions on how resources are to be managed are integrated with this basic cohesiveness, they are likely to be successfully implemented and supported.
  - Willingness to share with family, one-talk or church members. Often seen as an impediment to economic development, this is a key requirement for agreeing to restrict or regulate resource use.
  - Oratory in the indigenous language, often with an excellent sense of humor and justice. Although many concepts related to sustainable development are presented in modern English jargon, they are all basic, easily understood ideas that can be discussed locally - providing someone makes an effort to bridge the language gap.
  - Able to work together, pooling labor and talent, to achieve projects that are important to the community (like building and maintaining a church). When villagers work together on a community project it gains a powerful element of support. Village nature sanctuaries are not likely to be violated whereas National sanctuaries set up at the behest of international organizations are not likely to be respected.
  - An ability to solve conflict by negotiation and unanimity or by inaction (patience). Inaction - again seen as an impediment to economic development - is frequently the key to prevention of resource abuse. A lengthy discussion at the village level on selling trees or developing mineral resources might go on for years; discouraging those with aspirations of a quick buck.
  - Strong moral and religious convictions. When the people understand what is right and what is wrong they are willing to defend the moral and righteous position in defiance of their own perceived short term economic needs.
  - A tradition of sustainable resource use. Many of the tiny villages on small islands of the Pacific have been in exactly the same place and of almost the same size for more than 2000 years. The marine and terrestrial landscape is a cultural landscape, fashioned exactly the way the people want it to be.
  - Traditional knowledge of plants, sustainable gardening practices, and marine resources. Individuals within the island villages have considerable knowledge of how to use and maintain their local environment on a sustainable basis. There are a number of efforts currently underway to gather this information. Some of the most insightful methodologies for fisheries resource use were derived from listening to elder fishing chiefs.

### **Advantages**

- Relative food security. With few exceptions, Pacific islanders currently have enough food to eat. But their local food security is in constant danger from natural threats such as drought and storms. Their present health is a vital advantage compared to countries where their first priority is not starving to death.
- Equitable climate and scenic beauty. As with food security, climate security allows Pacific islanders an opportunity to treat their financial and resource needs with leniency. In harsh climates necessity may force people to use every resource to survive. Hurricanes and droughts do happen in the South Pacific and were it not for rapid aid supplies, the climate might seem less hospitable.
- Low population densities (with some local exceptions). There is still room to experiment and expand in most Pacific islands. Land is available for new agricultural efforts - providing the land owners want to become involved in them.

- General lack of valuable resources and geographic isolation (in all but PNG, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia and Fiji) reduce the threat to the small populations of strong foreign competition. This is an odd advantage, but indigenous peoples throughout the world often suffer when they are the custodians of resources of great value to more powerful peoples.
- Community control of land (sometimes marine) resources. National governments often bemoan custom land as a curse because without ultimate control of the land government becomes almost impossible unless, of course, the custom owners participate in governance.
- Lack of ethnic problems (except Fiji, Northern Mariana, and New Caledonia). When ethnic groups fight each other the environment often suffers. Each ethnic group seems intent on blaming the other for a country's problems. Most Pacific islanders can only blame themselves for unsustainable behavior. And this is a major advantage when attempting to reduce policy conflict through participatory methods.
- Freedom of religion. Pacific islanders are mostly Christians, but include nearly every kind of Christian imaginable. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage for participatory policy making. The advantage is that a mono-religious environment can be highly inflexible while a multi-religious community develops a sense of compromise for practical matters. The disadvantage is that meetings might need to be held several times in the same village to reach the whole community.
- Democratic societies (Tonga included). This is essential to participatory policy methods as it assures the right for everyone to have some say in their governance - and to vote out politicians who interfere with the public will.

#### **What do Pacific Island governments do well?**

- Co-operate regionally on international matters. Sustainable development policy and an understanding of sustainable resource use has spread rapidly throughout the region because of the hospitable and democratic regional organizations.
- Obtain foreign aid and assistance. The small governments of the Pacific have been highly successful at gaining funds, equipment, and guidance from the metropolitan countries. This will be an obvious advantage in the development of an information economy.
- Pacific islanders mediate internal disputes well. There is a unique sense of justice in the Polynesian and Micronesian countries. Senior government officials in Polynesia and Micronesia are often master social strategists. This can be of great advantage providing they are willing to participate in a participatory process.
- Maintain law and order, peace and harmony (with some obvious, but minor, exceptions). Somehow this does not extend to enforcing national laws concerning economic and environmental issues. But crimes of a physical nature are dealt with rapidly and effectively.

#### **Weaknesses of the people and governments of the Pacific Islands relating to sustainable development:**

- **What could be improved by participatory processes?**
  - A sense of self-sufficiency in contrast to the pervasive "dependency role" assumed by many communities (and Governments).
  - Bridging the gap between European and Island governance.
  - Methods for information gathering.
  - Information recording and use.
  - Socially permissible systems for information exchange, vertically and horizontally (professional cross-sectoral committees are a step in the right direction on the government level).
  - Community level understanding of resource problems and economic opportunities of sustainable development.
  - Community appreciation of their own resources and capabilities compared to the desire for western goodies inspired by the media and by overseas travel.
  - Responsible behavior on the part of resource users.

- Time management and efficient use of the limited staff.
- Career development and opportunities for youth
- Harmonizing government policies to minimize conflicts.
- Establishing a common vision for the future.

**What is done badly that might be improved by training in participatory methodology?**

- Public communications.
- Enforcement of environmental and economic laws and regulations.
- Business, especially in rural areas.
- Accounting of all kinds.
- Recording traditional resource management information.
- Reading and writing communications.
- Sharing authority.
- Listening to the youth.
- Learning from the villagers and resource users.
- Recognition of the gap between colonial export policy and subsistence needs.
- Recognition of the ecological basis of the economy.

**What should be avoided that might be facilitated by participatory processes?**

- Dividing the country into two major sectors with conflicting objectives; export oriented, cash and foreign dependant national government versus subsistence oriented, self-sustaining local communities.
- Making government policy without consideration of and participation by all interested parties.
- Liquidating natural assets (soil, forests, minerals, marine resources) to buy non-essentials and transient, throw-away technology.
- Confusing scientific issues with political loyalties (Scientific issues are often less important than maintaining solidarity. A professional dare not contradict a superior's opinion or position regardless of the facts).
- Confusing moral issues that need the involvement of the church with government policy.
- Selling or misrepresenting non-existent resources to foreign investors.
- Using prime agricultural land to grow low-value crops for export.

**What external opportunities and threats facing the people and governments of the Pacific island countries might be influenced by participatory methods?**

**Opportunities the Pacific Islanders don't control but would like to take advantage of:**

- **Where good chances face the Pacific islands that could be improved with the full co-operation of the villagers?**
  - The perception of the Pacific islands as idyllic, peaceful and relatively sustainable countries invites the interest of people in industrialized urban areas. (South Pacific Island Paradise Syndrome - SPIPS).
  - Tourism, based on SPIPS, is considered to be one of the main opportunities for the Pacific island countries. It is already a major earner of foreign exchange in New Caledonia, Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa, the Cook Islands and Tahiti. Most governmental and regional tourism agencies already have an integrated participatory policy process involving local communities at all stages of a tourism development plan.
  - The sub-region is a favorite for aid donors, as the countries are, for the most part, democratic, obliging, and polite. Yet aid donors are increasingly aware of the need for performance, especially in terms of sustainable resource use. Participatory techniques can help improve on the ground progress towards sustainable goals and tie in with the global action plan Agenda 21.

- The Pacific Council of Churches offers a powerful source of assistance and information throughout the sub-region that links with all nations through the World Council of Churches. Given encouragement from government and regional organizations, the Churches could become a key part of all participatory processes in the Pacific islands.
- The offshore Tuna fishery is one of the world's largest and most valuable fisheries, and distant water fishing nations are willing to pay (perhaps more) for the right to fish in the EEZs of the Pacific island countries. The tuna fishery management and research programme is a perfect example of how a participatory process is supposed to work, albeit it is limited to the National/Regional levels.
- Improved communications (e.g. Internet) enables small countries to reach a global audience to find individuals who might be interested in particular kinds of tourism and or investment opportunities. An information economy, unhindered by a "distance tax" offers one of the best opportunities for future employment and education for the youth of the Pacific.
- Regional co-operation is strong as most of the countries share common problems and seek common solutions yet do not threaten each other economically or politically. Development and deployment of participatory methodologies is facilitated by this regional co-operation.

#### **What are the interesting trends that will influence sustainable development?**

- Rapidly improving alternative energy sources, including solar and hydrogen energy is reducing dependency on foreign fuel supplies and increasing the potential for rural development and participation.
- The requirement for EIA and sustainability for international bank loans. EIA's include a component on the impact of a project on local communities.
- The global dominance of the WTO (Like the UN, the organization has a potential for small country representation and influence). It is not certain how this will impact such issues as forestry, organic foods, and resource use but there will undoubtedly be a major change in resource trade in the Pacific as a result of WTO policies.
- The global hunger for organic foods in a world where most agricultural land no longer qualifies as being free of chemical pollution. Organic farming and preparation of organic foods is well suited to small scale, village level industry, and a great enhancement to land management.
- Increasing price of sustainably harvested tropical hardwoods will encourage village level forestry as opposed to large scale foreign operated logging.
- Increasing value of scenic beauty and the image of peace and harmony in a world of stress (The illusion of a Tropical Island Paradise is more appealing every day).
- Extensive land and sea biodiversity provides a valuable genetic resource for pharmaceutical and agricultural development in great demand in the industrialized world. Local knowledge of the value of organisms for medicinal purposes and of plant relationships has important economic potential.

#### **What are the external threats facing the Pacific island countries that might be abated or mitigated by the improvements in linkages between local, national and regional organizations ?**

- **What obstacles do the Pacific island countries face?**
  - Decreasing food security, calling for a more efficient use of land and sea resources.
  - Health problems from poor nutrition caused by improper diets of "convenience foods." Specifically heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.
  - Increased problems with agricultural pests due to biologically stupid commercial agricultural practices.
  - Sea surface pollution and consequent lowering of marine resource resilience, requiring greater care in nearshore marine resource use.
  - Rising sea levels and incidence of tropical cyclones due to climate change requiring fewer people settling in low-lying coastal areas.

- Increasing incidence of bad weather (floods and droughts) in the metropolitan countries reduce agricultural production in those countries and this increases prices of imported foods presently essential to survival (rice, flour, tinned meat and fish), needing improved local food supplies and dietary information transfer.
- The obvious economic disadvantages of distance from economic markets and small size, which increases the need for self-reliance and local co-operation.
- Lack of natural resources of value (e.g. Except for Melanesian, most countries have no valuable mineral resources, a diverse and unstable inshore fishery, few forest resources even for internal use, limited agricultural land beset with land tenure disputes).
- Decline in foreign aid. If a country begins to show solid improvements towards sustainability it is much more likely to attract further support.
- Unsustainability of, and dependence upon, regional programs set up with foreign assistance.
- Decline in technical and scientific advisors assigned to countries and regional organizations means that less assistance must be utilized more efficiently.
- Plummeting budgets of international organizations again demand greater efficiency of what aid is available. And, in turn, international organizations must improve on the ground progress.
- The rise of anti-immigration politics in New Zealand, Australia and the United States will swell population numbers in the Pacific islands that now rely on emigration to counterbalance population growth. This will result in a need to involve people, especially youth, in policy decisions at all levels.
- Reduction of tourism during global recessions can rapidly deflate economic spirits, increasing the need for self-reliance and a fall-back system of subsistence barter.
- Development projects that utilize time, effort and resources but siphon profits out of the country. Such projects are less likely when all stakeholders have an opportunity to debate their pros and cons in an EIA.

#### **What is the competition doing?**

- Increased competition from in-country tourism development in New Zealand and Australia will increase the need for Pacific island tourism destinations to present the best possible aspect, and this requires public participation in maintaining village and public property tidiness.
- WTO removal of trade barriers defeats preferential trade agreements. This may result in poor opportunities for manufacturing in the Pacific islands and increase the need for activities for unemployed people, especially youth.
- Increased population and development in Asia promotes unsustainable harvesting of forestry and fisheries resources in the Pacific. Although rural islanders are conversant with the problems inherent in resource abuse, the existing policy conflicts between government levels erodes community solidarity against large scale development.
- Boycotts of unsustainable activities reduce opportunity to liquidate natural assets such as tropical forests, gold, and marine products (black coral, precious coral, sea turtle products, giant clam shells, and other handicrafts that use endangered species). Villagers who rely on handicraft sales for added income need to become aware of such problems and produce materials that do not endanger the wildlife.

#### **Can the Pacific islands keep pace in a rapidly changing world?**

- The global explosion in computer technology requires early training of youth in computer literacy (computers are common in primary schools in Australia, New Zealand and the United States and nearly ubiquitous in secondary schools). The Pacific islands are falling behind, unable to obtain and maintain computers for schools. Participation in national and international data gathering projects can assist schools in learning and applying practical skills leading to sustainability
- Software updates are an annual or semi-annual event but many government agencies are using software that has been extinct for a decade. Participation in regional and international information exchange programs can provide government workers with up to date software that can facilitate their work.

- Skills in repair and maintenance of electronics and mechanics require updating on a regular basis.
- Communications are increasing in both volume and complexity in all fields of resource information. There is so much of interest that small government agencies cannot hope to canvas the literature even in narrow fields, such as organic farming, biological pest control and marketing of organic products. The rapid advancement of data storage and retrieval on Internet can help governments keep up to date and, at the same time, provide information needed by global policy making bodies.

### **Bad debt and cash-flow problems plague the Pacific island governments.**

- Obtaining development funds is difficult for the private and government sectors in the Pacific islands. When projects are hampered by conflicts over land or other resources, investors are frightened away. By encouraging participation of the resource owners at the very outset of development policy making, many of these conflicts can be resolved.
- Imports have exceeded the value of exports for so many years most Pacific islands have acquired massive foreign debt.
- Currency evaluation and even the printing of money is controlled by foreign nations.
- Foreign investment is now seen as extremely risky due to a long history of project failures in the region.
- Increased auditing of foreign loans and aid funds reduces opportunities to skim funds for on-going government costs that are normally not included in aid grants.

### **Extending the concept of Social Obligations**

The key to obtaining and using environmental assessment and monitoring information, and to harmonizing resource use policy, is found in the acknowledged strengths of Pacific islanders, sometimes idealized as "The Pacific Way." The ability of island communities to work together (within family, one-talk or church groups) is perhaps the greatest asset for sustainable resource use in the region. Social pressures enforce the basic concept of sharing with equality, and the importance of altruistic behavior. People regularly do things that is to their own economic disadvantage to conform to socially accepted behavior. This is the missing link between environmental policy and action.

Extending the concept of social obligation to cover the long term protection of the living resources is inherent in many traditional belief systems of the Pacific islands. But these understandings have been or are being lost as the traditional values are eroded by a variety of forces. The modern problem is understanding the scientific truth that:

- Living resources, including the soil, the forests, the coral reefs, and the fresh water systems are part of the fabric of the people and their society.
- Living systems have limits and needs.
- They can be irreplaceably damaged.
- Living resources are supposed to be used, but also cherished. To damage them is against the best interests of everyone in the community and contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

Government officers complain of a lack of co-operation from communities regardless of ownership rights of the resources. There are innumerable examples throughout the Pacific of rural communities destroying their own resource base, practicing irresponsible and destructive agriculture and fishing; selling forests and standing by while foreign companies clear-cut mountain slopes and pollute water supplies the villagers depend on. Education campaigns, even where successful in instructing villagers about environmental issues, have had little success in changing people's behavior. The problems on the community level are the same ones hampering the adoption of sustainable practices on the government level;

1. Governmental adoption of responsibility for the survival of the resources and consequent alienation of community and personal responsibility.



2. Money and the temptations of all it can buy (actively promoted by export ethics of government economic development policy and foreign assistance programs).
3. Lack of Church involvement with environmental issues and subsequent lack of understanding of the moral component of resource abuse.
4. Poor understanding of the real needs of the living creatures and the links between the resource base and the well being of the people.
5. Poor definition of specific actions needed and why they are needed.
6. Unwillingness of governments to shift production and marketing to small scale, sustainable, environmentally friendly enterprises (see reason 2, above).

This is a positive feedback loop. The more the government tries to push development the more people become involved in the economic loan/repayment/loan cycle. The more the government tries to control resource use through laws and regulations the less responsibility people (and the Church) take upon themselves. This promotes individual lack of compliance with regulations and generates conflict and lack of understanding between government agents and resource users. Credibility and co-operation are further damaged by the use of foreign scientists whose studies are unlikely to be understood (or reviewed) by the resource users. Financial, human and living resources are wasted on unsuccessful large-scale projects and get rich quick schemes that further alienate communities and cause governments to push development even more, starting another cycle.

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