

The National Capacity Self Assessment Project in Solomon Islands

The NCSA Project is a national project funded by the Global Environmental Facility, implemented by the UNDP, and executed by the Environment and Conservation Division in the Solomon Islands. The project focuses on three important UN International Environmental Conventions. The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), UN Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The overall project aims are to:

1. Conduct an assessment of the local capacity to address global and national environmental issues and concerns;

2. And to develop a plan for the implementation of key activities to achieve capacity building needs as identified through the assessments, particularly those relating to the CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD.

The following discussion concerns the major findings from the stock assessment undertaken earlier this year in the Solomon Islands.

UNCBD

The Solomon Islands progress in fulfilling its obligations is reported to be limited by so many capacity issues. This has resulted in a lot of environmental problems not being effectively addressed. There is however work being undertaken by international and local environmental NGOs.

There are significant information gaps regarding biodiversity and the procedures necessary for information gathering. In addition, dissemination of knowledge is weak or non-existent. The existing biodiversity legal framework has problems that must be attended to, and existing laws need to be enforced.

The government's heavy reliance on revenues from forestry and fisheries operate as a disincentive to regulating

these industries for biodiversity values. As a result, there is virtually no mainstreaming of biodiversity considerations into government policies and decision-making.

The Environment and Conservation Division enjoys the support and goodwill of the NGO community, who are willing to assist the division in facilitating



environmental projects. However, the division needs to enhance its legal capacity to coordinate national biodiversity conservation.

The Solomon Islands have a number of highly skilled individuals working in both government and NGOs. Given an established system, all the local skill available could be efficiently coordinated to meet the required needs of the national environmental programme.

Major environmental issues in the Solomon Islands which been identified

include:

- Biodiversity under threat from over-exploitation
- Unsustainable use of forest resources
- Introduction of invasive species
- Illegal exploitation of wildlife
- Increase in the crocodile population
- Habitat modification and/or destruction

UNCCD

Land degradation is becoming a major issue as the country's population grows, increasing the demand for more land for peoples' livelihood. Development is also having its toll, escalating the problem of land degradation.

The challenge in addressing the unsustainable use of land in the country, will require a of expertise and skill. A participatory approach by all stakeholders is needed which requires improving the information (and developing

information) systems present, for monitoring and assessing land-use change. There is a need to mainstream the UNCCD (and the agreements within it's framework) into national policies, planning and decision-making. In doing so, raising awareness at various levels of the need to have balanced and equitable land resource decision-making, improving institutional structures and processes to maximize coordination and cooperation between communities, provinces and national agencies, and

also recognizing and embracing local, community and traditional knowledge management.

Major land degradation issues in the Solomon Islands include:

- Unsustainable agriculture practices
- Coastal erosion
- Low rural income pushing further land exploitation
- Unsustainable forest management
- Destruction of water catchments
- Pollution and improper management of wastes

UNFCCC

Climate change is like a catalyst when considering environmental issues in the Solomon Islands. Currently coastal low-lying areas and atolls are susceptible to and directly affected by rising sea-water levels. The Solomon Islands must seriously consider developing mitigation and adaptation strategies. Like the UNCBD and UNCCD, the capacity to address all these issues remains a hurdle to fulfilling the country's obligations to the global programme.

"We must act to ensure that environment-related catastrophes do not overtake the country because of negligence."

There is a need to understand the baseline conditions in Solomon Islands, which should result in the identification and assessment of appropriate mitigation and adaptation technology. Such will require the development of expertise and skills to undertake all necessary activities.

Major climate change issues identified include;

- Impact on terrestrial and marine biodiversity
- Coastal erosion
- Destruction of forests/agriculture due to the increased frequency of cyclones
- Increased vulnerability of water resources and aquatic ecosystems
- People and environment vulnerable to effects of climate change
- Loss of soil productivity and erosion
- Effect on population health
- Coral bleaching

If all the environmental issues are dissected with the right mindframe, the need to act immediately is very obvious. The NCSA is currently engaged in the thematic assessment exercise of each convention, identifying the capacity issues and developing action plans. The implementation phase is important to ensure that environment-related catastrophes do not overtake the country because of negligence. ■



Opposite page: problem of land degradation, and loss of soil productivity. Top: Impacts of climate change and rising sea - level. Above: coastal erosion, due to high sea level and warmer climates.