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PACIFIC ISLANDS POLICY 6

# Confronting Environmental Treaty Implementation Challenges in the Pacific Islands



PAMELA S. CHASEK



EAST-WEST CENTER

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Confronting Environmental Treaty  
Implementation Challenges in the Pacific Islands

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Pacific Islands Policy examines critical issues, problems, and opportunities that are relevant to the Pacific Islands region. The series is intended to influence the policy process, affect how people understand a range of contemporary Pacific issues, and help fashion solutions. A central aim of the series is to encourage scholarly analysis of economic, political, social, and cultural issues in a manner that will advance common understanding of current challenges and policy responses.

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## Executive Summary

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The Pacific is at the crossroads of all environmental and sustainable development issues. It is one of the richest areas of the world in terms of biodiversity, yet it is also one of the most fragile and vulnerable regions. Problems are so large that none of the Pacific Island states or territories can respond to them alone. As a result, regional cooperation, mutual aid between states, and the pooling of energies and ideas are necessary.

Cooperation in such a diverse region has its challenges, as does the participation of the Pacific Island countries in a range of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). MEA processes place substantial demands on the capacity of a broad range of government agencies. At times, these international demands actually compete against domestic policy implementation for limited resources. In this context, while MEA processes may be the key to building up resources and capacities to address the full range of environmental issues over the medium to long term, in the short term they can impose significant additional stresses on smaller developing countries, like those in the Pacific.

These challenges include prioritizing environmental issues, coming to terms with the multitude of obligations that MEAs place on governments, acquiring the necessary financial resources and technical expertise, and working within environment agencies or units that tend to lack sufficient staff and financial and technical resources and have less influence in government processes and decision making than other sectors of the government.

This paper outlines the difficulties that the Pacific Island states have in fulfilling their international commitments, how they can better address these challenges, and what roles the donor community, regional organizations, the United Nations system, and nongovernmental organizations can play in this regard.



# Confronting Environmental Treaty Implementation Challenges in the Pacific Islands

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## Introduction

There is a pervasive notion that small islands are privileged to be situated in a heavenly natural environment, and that this is the main determinant of the quality of life of islanders. This convenient vision has been fueled not only by the way the tourism industry has portrayed tropical islands, but also by the fact that a majority of small-island developing states have demonstrated a relatively enviable socioeconomic performance, compared with many continental or large developing countries. Overall, the international community has tended to view island societies as relatively prosperous, and has not been inclined to appreciate the intrinsic reality of “small islandness,” which is characterized by environmental and social fragility and a high degree of economic vulnerability to many possible external shocks beyond domestic control (UNCTAD 2004).

It is this paradox that has affected the Pacific Island countries (PICs) and territories most of all. The problems facing these small entities are in some cases so large that none can respond to them alone. As a result, cooperation, mutual aid between states, and the pooling of energies and ideas is necessary within the region.

Cooperation in such a diverse region comes with its challenges, however, as does the participation of the PICs in a range of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). At the national level, operation of the MEA system requires significant time and resources to address policy considerations for negotiation, signature, and ratification of conventions. The same is true for the implementation of national commitments under ratified conventions. For small Pacific Island nations these requirements are quite large in relation to the total number of government personnel and their other responsibilities. Specifically, in the Pacific most of the responsibility for national coordination

of MEA implementation rests with a small number of personnel in environment units or departments set up relatively recently. In this context, while MEA processes may be the key to building up resources and capacities to address the full range of environmental issues over the medium to long term, in the short term they can impose significant additional stresses on smaller developing countries, like those in the Pacific.

This paper examines the difficulties that the PICs have in fulfilling their international environmental commitments. The first section of the paper provides an introduction to the region. The next section describes the MEAs that play a role in the Pacific, followed by an examination of implementation challenges. The final section provides recommendations on how these challenges can be addressed and what role the donor community, regional organizations, United Nations (UN) system, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can play in this regard.

## **A Region of 30,000 Islands**

The Pacific Islands region is unique because of its combination of geographical, biological, sociological, and economic characteristics. It occupies a vast 30 million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean (5.8 percent of the globe)—an area more than three times larger than the United States. The region stretches some 10,000 kilometers from east to west and 5,000 kilometers from north to south, with a combined exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of close to 20 million square kilometers. In contrast, the total land area—comprised of some 30,000 islands—is just over 500,000 square kilometers; of this area, Papua New Guinea accounts for 83 percent, while Nauru, Tokelau, and Tuvalu are each smaller than 30 square kilometers.

The region is home to diverse groups of indigenous peoples and cultures living in 22 countries and territories with three commonly recognized subregional constituents—Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. Across the region, Pacific Islanders speak more than 2,000 different languages. Diversity is further reflected in terms of natural resource bases. In general, Melanesian countries have almost all the land and land-based mineral resources, Micronesia occupies the greatest sea areas with the largest tuna resources, and Polynesia combines useful agriculture and marine resources (CROP 2004).

The total population of the 21 PICs and territories is just over nine million, with Papua New Guinea accounting for 64 percent and the seven smallest—Cook Islands, Palau, Wallis and Futuna, Nauru, Tuvalu, Niue, and Tokelau—together accounting for less than 1 percent. Each year as many as three million

visitors to the region swell these numbers. Notwithstanding this diversity, the island countries and territories experience a number of common sustainable development challenges due to their geographical dispersion, limited size, ecosystem fragility, isolation from external markets with related high transaction costs, and dependence on international assistance. The consequences of natural disasters, global climate change, and sea-level rise will seriously impact sustainable development in the medium to long term.

For most Pacific societies, land and coastal resources are the basis for subsistence living and commercial production. Yet, a broad range of factors today places serious strain on these resources and the communities that depend on them. Among these relentless stressors are high population growth and/or density rates, displacement of traditional land- and resource-management systems, introduced agricultural systems, poor catchment management, waste disposal, land clearance, overexploitation, poor extraction methods, damage to reefs, mining, and forest utilization. Such trends are particularly serious on smaller islands, especially atolls with limited land and water resources, and sensitive biodiversity systems.

One of the major challenges to sustainable development in the Pacific is the region's vulnerability. The islands' small physical size, relative isolation, proclivity to natural disasters, dependence on limited natural resources, and limited human resources and capacity all contribute to high levels of vulnerability. Environmentally, this vulnerability is compounded by the shortage of fresh water, land degradation, invasive species, overharvesting of natural resources, solid and toxic waste disposal, climate change and variability, and sea-level rise.<sup>1</sup>

Economically, the region is extremely susceptible to external economic shocks and changes in global markets. In most countries, agriculture accounts for more than 50 percent of exports, and, with the exception of Papua New Guinea, trade balances are highly negative. Still, most of the produce (fruit, vegetables, meat, and dairy products) for local supermarkets and for the provisioning of the tourism industry is imported from Australia and New Zealand. PICs and territories are in an extremely limited position to influence international price or trade regimes. Their access to markets has also been constrained by the increasing importance of quarantine regulations. They are almost entirely dependent on imported fossil fuel imports for power generation and transportation

**The consequences of natural disasters, global climate change, and sea-level rise will seriously impact sustainable development in the medium to long term.**

<sup>1</sup> For details, see SPREP 2004 and IPCC 2007 (especially Chapter 16, Small Islands).

(IFAD 2004, 3). Tourism is the leading sector for bringing in foreign exchange; it is a major source of employment and income generation, providing an estimated 15 to 20 percent of formal employment. Remittances from populations working abroad are a major contribution to some Pacific economies. This is particularly relevant in Micronesian and Polynesian countries, where sometimes the number of international migrants may equal the resident population.

The challenge of environmental protection in the Pacific is as varied and complex as the tens of thousands of islands, islets, atolls, reefs, rocks, and sand-

**The challenge of environmental protection in the Pacific is as varied and complex as its tens of thousands of islands, islets, atolls, reefs, rocks, and sandbanks.**

banks that make up the terrestrial portion of this vast region (Herr 2002, 41). Whether local in origin (beaches mined for concrete or lagoons polluted due to improper waste disposal) or imported (sea-level rise due to climate change), all concerns have fallen largely on policymakers who have limited capacity to meet

the challenges confronting their countries. Yet, as awareness of the extent of the environmental problems facing the Pacific islands has grown, so too has the regional and international system of treaties addressing many of these issues.

## Multilateral Environmental Agreements in the Pacific

The primary method available under international law for countries to work together on global environmental issues is the multilateral environmental agreement (MEA). This type of agreement between states specifies legally binding actions to be taken toward an environmental objective. Today, there are over 500 international treaties and other agreements related to the environment, of which more than 320 are regional. Nearly 60 percent of these date from 1972, the year of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, to the present.

Since 1992, the PICs have ratified many MEAs as they have become more independent and active in the international community. On the one hand, MEAs—especially the more recent and holistic ones on biodiversity and climate change—have been effective in the Pacific by heightening awareness of the interrelationships at stake in environmental protection and sustainable development. On the other hand, this has resulted in an increasingly complicated web of international commitments that these small island countries are not always able to handle. Table 1 provides a picture of the complexity of the MEA system in the Pacific, listing the most relevant international MEAs and

**Table 1. Multilateral Environmental Agreements**

<i>Treaty</i>	<i>No. of Pacific Island country parties</i>
1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling	6
1971 Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention)	5
1972 London Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter	6
1973/78 International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships	8
1973 Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna	6
1979 Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention)	3
1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea	14
1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer	14*
1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste	8
1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change	14*
1992 Convention on Biological Diversity	14*
1994 UN Convention to Combat Desertification	14*
1995 Fish Stocks Agreement to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea	13
1997 Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change	14*
1998 Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade	3
2000 Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety	10*
2001 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants	13*

\*A fund for developing countries is attached to the treaty.

the number of parties in the region. Several trends and patterns emerge when looking at this information. First, most of the treaties with universal or nearly universal participation in the Pacific are those that have funding mechanisms—either the Global Environment Facility (GEF) or, in the case of the Montreal Protocol, the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol. Established in 1991, the GEF is an independent financial organization that provides grants to developing countries and countries with economies in transition for projects related to biodiversity, climate change, international



waters, land degradation, the ozone layer, and persistent organic pollutants. The GEF also serves as the funding mechanism for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol, the CBD and the Biosafety Protocol, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). The Multilateral Fund was established by the Montreal Protocol in 1990 to assist developing country parties to comply with the control measures of the Protocol. As many international treaties strive for universal membership they have gone so far as to send delegations to the Pacific to encourage countries to become parties, often with promises of increased GEF funding. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly, also has near-universal ratification, largely because of the benefits that the EEZ system establishing 200-mile (320-kilometer) territorial waters under the jurisdiction of individual nations brings to the Pacific. Many of the other agreements do not have dedicated funding mechanisms or are not as relevant to the interests of the PICs and therefore have fewer parties.<sup>2</sup>

So what do all of these treaties bring to the Pacific? MEAs provide the main link with global policy, and there is growing awareness of the need to participate effectively in the development of such global agreements. This trend started in the 1980s with the active involvement of the Pacific Island states in the UN

**In the Pacific, MEAs provide the main link with global policy.**

Convention on the Law of the Sea, and it has continued with the Agreement on Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and the UNFCCC negotiations (UNEP 2000, 28).

Yet, for small countries like the PICs, participation in MEAs brings several other benefits. The first is political power. In the MEA governing bodies, as in the UN, each party has one vote. What this means is that the nine million people in the Pacific Islands, with 14 votes, have more voting power than the billions living in China, India, Japan, and the United States put together (Crocombe 2001, 627). While small Pacific Island nations will never wield much power, their votes do give them leverage, which translates to greater attention in MEA negotiations when their 14 votes are needed. With the formation of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in 1990, in conjunction with the climate change negotiations, the Island nations of the Pacific, Caribbean, Indian Ocean, and Mediterranean realized that they could help

<sup>2</sup> While this paper focuses primarily on international MEAs, it is worth noting that there are a number of regional environmental agreements in the Pacific. For a list of these, see Appendix A.

each other on a range of issues beyond climate change and speak as a single voice representing 43 states. The more international forums that they participate in, the more leverage they have—especially since trade-offs inevitably exist between MEAs.

Another incentive for participation in MEAs is financial. The generation of foreign aid has been a high priority of the PICs, and it became harder as the strategic imperatives of the Cold War faded. But at the same time, environmental issues loomed large in the Pacific Islands, especially for those Asian donors who wanted access to fish, timber, minerals, and international voting support (Crocombe 2001, 653). MEAs have proven effective in mobilizing funding for the region, while enabling participation and visibility of the region in global negotiations. For example, with the creation of the Montreal Protocol Fund and the GEF in the early 1990s, many developing countries, including the PICs, saw a new way to attract foreign aid—becoming parties to MEAs linked to external sources of funding. In fact, according to Bruce Graham, an environmental consultant in the region, the driving factor behind MEAs ratification is the funding opportunities (Graham interview 2007).

**The Pacific Island countries have ratified or acceded to many MEAs, but are now faced with the challenge of implementation.**

The PICs, like most developing countries, have ratified or acceded to many MEAs, but are now faced with the challenge of implementation. While each party faces its own unique challenges, implementation and enforcement are often made difficult by a lack of financial and human resources, the sheer volume and complexity of associated obligations and responsibilities, inconsistency in implementation regimes between countries, and occasionally a lack of political will (Koshy et al. 2005, 8).

## Implementation Challenges

It is not sufficient for governments to be concerned about environmental problems and negotiate effective treaties. Many factors influence the effectiveness of MEAs, but implementation is the central process that turns commitments into action (Victor et al. 1998, 15). Once the burden of action shifts to national governments, compliance is affected by political, legal, and administrative capacity (Haas et al. 1993, 404). Ensuring compliance with and enforcement of MEAs continues to be a matter of increasing global concern, and the need for a concerted global effort to identify and address the causes of noncompliance

or ineffective implementation has been widely recognized and studied.<sup>3</sup> Even world leaders participating in global summits on environment and development issues—most recently at the 2005 World Summit—have identified better compliance with and enforcement of MEAs among the major global challenges requiring urgent and effective responses (UN 2005).

MEAs are typically regulatory in nature—they aim to constrain a wide range of actors, including governments, industry, individuals, and agencies whose behavior does not change simply because governments adopt international commitments. Putting MEAs into practice often entails a complex process of forming and adjusting domestic policy to conform to international standards, plus there is the added complexity of coordinating activities across governments (Victor et al. 1998, 2). MEAs usually address a multiplicity of interconnected environmental, economic, and social issues, which cut across the responsibilities of different government agencies and governance levels. Given this, along with global and regional efforts, the implementation of MEAs requires coordinated activities at the national and

**MEA implementation challenges in the Pacific Island countries are exacerbated by the nature of the islands themselves.**

community levels. MEA implementation challenges in the PICs, while similar to those in many developing countries, are exacerbated by the nature of the islands themselves, which are small, widely dispersed, and challenged by limited human, financial, and natural resources. A review of relevant publications and interviews with nearly 40 representatives of governments, organizations, and NGOs in the region reveal four crosscutting themes of types of MEA implementation challenges in the Pacific: capacity building, coordination, information and data collection and sharing, and prioritization and funding.<sup>4</sup>

### **Capacity Building**

The overarching issue faced by developing countries everywhere and clearly reflected in the Pacific is lack of capacity. Capacity affects responses to and the effectiveness of MEA implementation, as well as the ability to prepare for and participate in regional and global negotiations. This key problem, identified by virtually all studies and reports, ministries, agencies, NGOs, and others, relates to the lack of institutional, financial, and human capacity to address physical, human-resource, and skill requirements. Almost all of the literature

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Weiss and Jacobson 1998; Victor et al. 1998; Haas et al. 1993; UNU 2004; UNEP 2006; and Koshy et al. 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The publications reviewed include UNEP 2000; UNU and SPREP 2002; and Koshy et al. 2005.

on implementation of MEAs does identify capacity building as a central factor, so in a sense this is nothing new.<sup>5</sup> It is still important, however.

One of the problems in addressing capacity building has been that various capacity-building programs instituted in the region have been sectoral in nature or related to a specific MEA. But many of these fail to address the need for cross-sectoral capacity as well as the need for capacity in the “upstream” aspects of policymaking, including agenda setting, framing, analysis, and policy development and design (VanDeveer and Sagar 2005, 267). In the Pacific Islands, the most abundant needs identified relate to skills, including international law, program management, communication capacities, staff training, and public and community education. Some of the specific problems include:

- lack of awareness by politicians of the significance of international environmental issues for the national and local context;
- lack of scientific and technical capacity to implement many MEAs;
- lack of knowledge of integrated coastal zone and land management practices;
- lack of information on the impact of population, poverty, and urbanization on natural resources in general and, in particular, on coastal resources;
- inadequate coordination of MEA implementation activities at the national level;
- lack of in-country MEA implementation training; and,
- overall, a lack of sufficiently trained people in national governments who understand the policy and the science of environmental issues both at the national and international levels.

There is also a lack of legal capacity. Most PICs have outdated laws in need of reform or a lack of national environmental laws and legislation. This missing legal framework for environmental issues needs to be addressed at the national level, but it is not always clear who should address it. Many government agencies do not regard environmental issues, let alone MEAs, as part of their agenda. Environment departments and ministries struggle with their own legitimacy and are rarely recognized by more powerful agencies so they have a hard time pressing their agendas forward. Yet even when laws are developed, legal and law enforcement personnel do not have the time to deal effectively

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Haas et al. 1993; Keohane and Levy 1996; Victor et al. 1998; Weiss and Jacobsen 1998; Schreurs and Economy 1997; Esty et al. 1998; VanDeveer and Dabelko 2001; and VanDeveer and Sagar 2005.

with environmental offenses and there are still difficulties in the central management and enforcement of traditional and customarily owned land.

### **Coordination**

A second problem, which builds on and overlaps with capacity building, is the lack of coordination. When it comes to MEA implementation, there is a need to coordinate activities at the regional, national, and local levels. At the regional level, there is a well-developed institutional framework for cooperation on a multitude of issues. According to a study by the Asian Development Bank (2003, 13), the key drivers of regional cooperation in the Pacific appear to be:

- the need for a collective voice in a world dominated by large countries and economic and political blocs;
- the challenges arising from isolation;
- the need for economies of scale, particularly in building appropriate knowledge and technology for the specialized but common needs of the Pacific;
- the lack of specific skills in individual countries;
- the sharing of knowledge and experience; and
- funding agencies' interest in cooperation among the PICs due to cost and strategic considerations.

Given this framework, the reality is that there are eight regional organizations that address different aspects of environmental and sustainable development issues.<sup>6</sup> Their overlapping mandates and competition for funding hamper implementation of environmental programs in general and MEAs in particular (UNU 2004).

At the national level, there is no central coordination of MEA funding or implementation. While some countries, like Samoa and Fiji, have tried to set

**At the national level, there is no central coordination of MEA funding or implementation.**

up aid coordination offices (sometimes consisting of just one person), these offices are focused on donors, not always on implementation needs. Furthermore, donors will sometimes bypass the coordi-

nation office and go directly to ministries, thus rendering the entire process moot. The issue is not really a lack of funds, but the coordination of funds.

<sup>6</sup> These include the Pacific Islands Forum, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Forum Fisheries Agency, South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, University of the South Pacific, South Pacific Tourism Organization, Pacific Islands Development Program, and Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

Each government has a GEF focal point—someone who is usually in the environment ministry and responsible for coordinating activities with other relevant ministries. However, political focal points for MEAs are often in the foreign affairs ministry or in the ministry for development planning.

At the local level, the impact of local actions, activities, and lifestyles, and NGO community and education projects do not usually take global impacts and implementation of relevant MEAs into consideration. Conversely, since many MEAs do not take public participation into account sufficiently, there is little incentive for governments to do so. Coordination at each of these levels is compounded by the challenge of vertical integration between the global, regional, national, and local levels. This is not helped by the fact that the MEAs are only now coming to terms with the need for better coordination between their own secretariats, reporting requirements, and other policies. There is a lack

**Establishment of national coordination mechanisms are often geared more toward satisfying MEA obligations, without serious effort to take the global message to the local level.**

of synergy between domestic environmental issues and the objectives of MEAs and the actions they require to be addressed. The pressure to meet MEA obligations has led to the establishment of national coordination mechanisms that are often geared more toward satisfying MEA obligations, mostly through reporting, without serious effort to take the global message to the local level. Where effective coordination exists, it is often at the project level, but this can neglect the need for coordination at the political and institutional levels that is essential for a holistic response to environmental issues.

### **Information and Data**

Another common theme that has emerged is the need for better data collection and information exchange within countries and across the region. Coupled with this is the need to utilize this information to build institutional memory and to use knowledge gained for strategic planning and priority setting. Information and data here refers to scientific and technical information, economic data, and information from national and regional negotiations and meetings. A 2004 UNU/SPREP workshop in Fiji identified a number of these challenges (UNU and SPREP 2004).

On the data collection side, there is a lack of reliable links and computer equipment to inform and update countries on environmental developments. Where they exist, national and regional environmental data sets are only loosely connected or not connected at all, and information gathered mostly stays exclusively with the agency or officer in charge. As a result, there

is often a duplication of efforts between those tasked with implementing different MEAs.

### **Funding**

“Follow the money,” everyone always says—and in the PICs funding is a big issue. It isn’t so much that there is a lack of funding coming into the region from bilateral and multilateral donors, but there is a lack of effective funding mechanisms, specific funding to support implementation of regional agreements, recipient-driven funding, and coordination among donors and between donors and recipients. Finally, the focus on project funding rather than program funding has led to too many short-term projects with little lasting gains.

Most foreign aid in the region is provided by bilateral donors who therefore play a large role in determining priorities and implementation strategies. As a result, the PICs themselves rarely determine their own environmental priorities at the regional, national, or local levels.

**The Pacific Island countries themselves rarely determine their own environmental priorities at the regional, national, or local levels.**

Since so many of the projects and programs are donor driven, environment funding is often not sufficiently incorporated or mainstreamed with development assistance. This, in conjunction with the lack of both donor and project coordina-

tion, leads to duplication in certain areas, absences in others, and poorly integrated projects overall. Ironically, in some cases too much funding is provided for specific MEA implementation activities, and the governments cannot manage it effectively.

In brief, the PICs, like many developing countries, face many challenges in addressing both national environmental issues and their international environmental commitments. But, unlike in larger developing countries, these challenges are magnified because of the scale—the problems are daunting, the number of people with the necessary scientific and legal qualifications is limited, and the lack of ability to prioritize is compounded by donor-driven funding. Capacity building, horizontal and vertical coordination, information and data collection and sharing, and harmonization of funding are crucial for a number of reasons. They improve effectiveness of MEAs in the region, enhance the ability of the Islands to implement MEAs, and improve environmental quality and natural resources management on the ground where it really matters.

## Bridging the Implementation Gap

Given all of these challenges, just how do the PICs prioritize their environmental goals while bridging the MEA implementation gap? To overcome the challenges of capacity, coordination, data and information availability, and dissemination and funding, it is essential that actions be taken at multiple levels by multiple actors. National governments are clearly at the forefront of domestic MEA implementation. This is a huge challenge for Pacific Island bureaucracies that do not have the human resources or technical expertise. However, they are not the only actors involved, and effective coordination among all actors is essential to bridging the gap.

Due to their small size and lack of resources, the Pacific Island nations as individual units have limited impact in the international arena. Therefore, much of the work by the Island states has been collaborative, including through numerous regional organizations. A collective regional response to global initiatives has been the hallmark of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) for the past 50 years. Currently, regional organizations range from those of a political and economic nature (e.g., Pacific Islands Forum) to specialized bodies that have been established to address specific issues: fisheries (e.g., Forum Fisheries Agency), non-living resources (e.g., South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission), environment (e.g., Pacific Regional Environment Programme), and tertiary education (e.g., University of the South Pacific). The Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (CROP) was established to coordinate these organizations.

**Pacific Island nations as individual units have limited impact in the international arena, so much of the work by the Island states has been collaborative.**

The Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is the regional body responsible for promoting cooperation and assisting its members with building capacity to address issues of environmental management and conservation. SPREP traces its origins back to a regional symposium in 1969 that recommended the appointment of an ecological adviser to the South Pacific Commission (SPC). In the mid-1970s, a regional environmental program was established as part of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Seas project, and, by 1980, what came to be called the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme was established as a shared activity between the SPC and the South Pacific Forum (now the Pacific Islands Forum). In 1991, SPREP became an independent organization, and moved to its current headquarters in Apia, Samoa, in 1992.<sup>7</sup> SPREP's membership includes 25

<sup>7</sup> For more details on the origins of SPREP see Herr 2002 and Carew-Reid 1989.



states and territories, including the “metropolitan countries” of Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and France.

MEA secretariats themselves and other UN agencies also have roles to play in MEA implementation. In some cases the secretariats themselves are responsible for encouraging PICs to ratify different MEAs and facilitating implementation in areas such as capacity building, information dissemination, and funding.

The bilateral and multilateral donor community is also a player. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in 2008 net official development assistance (ODA) to the Pacific was nearly \$1.3 billion per year, of which about 91 percent was provided by bilateral sources—primarily Australia, Japan, New Zealand, France, and the United States.<sup>8</sup> The rest came from multilateral agencies, including the Asian Development Bank, European Commission, International Monetary Fund, UN Development Programme, and World Bank. (See Table 2.) The top two sources were Australia and New Zealand, which together provided close to 58 percent of the total funds. Agriculture, forestry, and marine resources topped the list and accounted for about 10.7 percent of the total. Environment received about 2 percent of the total (OECD 2008). While the region as a whole does not get a large amount of ODA compared with developing countries, it includes 14 of the top 30 per capita ODA recipients (UN Statistics Division 2010). How this funding is used and the links between development and environmental financing are crucial to effective implementation.

Finally, NGOs and civil society also have roles to play. Rex Horoi, executive director of the Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific International and former ambassador from the Solomon Islands to the UN, has created what he calls the “two-ice-cream-cones paradigm” to describe what is necessary to integrate better coordination between national governments and civil society. (See Figure 1.) His model illustrates the idea of the top-down approach to policy design and the bottom-up strategy to development in which action and policy demand not only accountable and transparent but functional communication linkages between them as well. In an interview in Suva, he argued that one of the key failures of MEAs is that they are supposed to be implemented at the highest levels with no local input. MEAs need to recognize public participation, and governments need to know their national responsibilities.

<sup>8</sup> The United States and France give aid primarily to their current and former territories.

**Table 2. Official Development Assistance (ODA) Flows into the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (2008)**

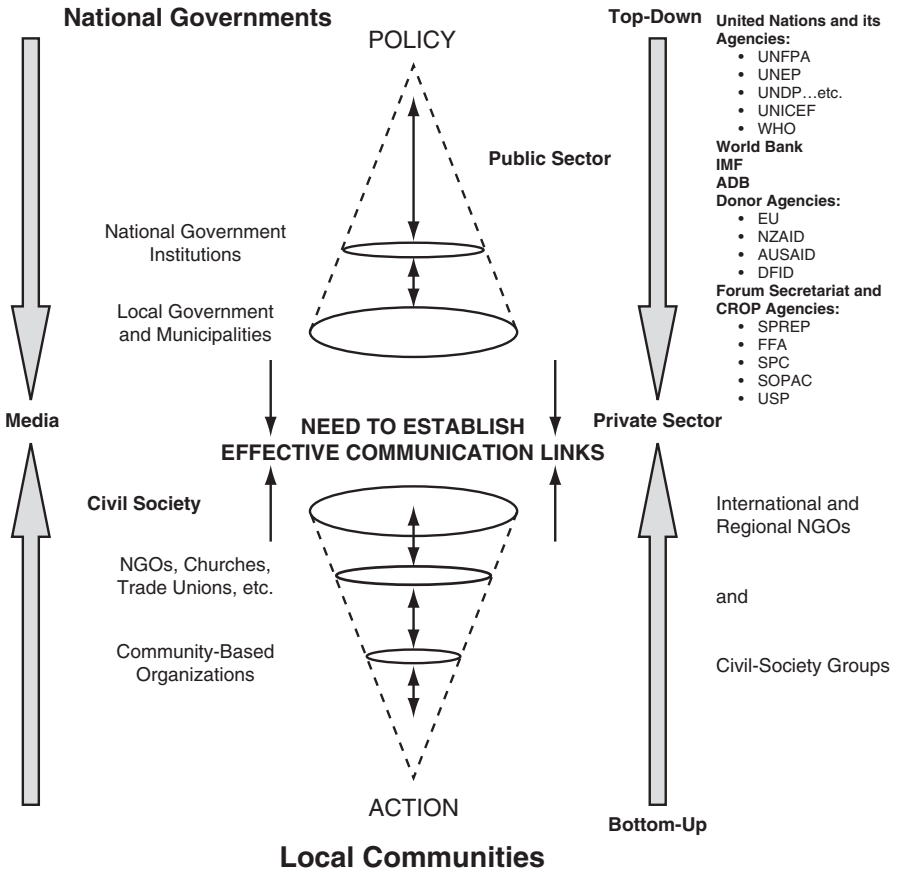
	<i>Net Bilateral ODA (US\$ million)</i>	<i>Net Multilateral ODA (US\$ million)</i>	<i>Net Total ODA (US\$ million)</i>	<i>Net ODA Per Capita (US\$)</i>	<i>Percent of Bilateral Aid</i>
<b>Self-governing countries</b>					
Cook Islands	4.49	.06	4.55	370.8	99
Fiji	33.73	14.24	47.94	51.5	70
Kiribati	19.99	6.34	26.33	271.8	76
Marshall Islands	50.51	1.71	52.22	826.6	97
Micronesia, Federated States of	86.53	4.29	90.82	843.5	95
Nauru	29.02	1.52	30.54	2,217.0	95
Palau	40.59	1.28	41.87	2,022.6	97
Papua New Guinea	357.81	49.91	407.72	70.1	88
Samoa	26.03	14.68	40.71	214.8	64
Solomon Islands	218.76	7.87	226.63	389.9	97
Tonga	23.19	1.51	24.70	207.5	94
Tuvalu	14.52	.82	15.34	1,483.7	95
Vanuatu	88.99	4.10	93.09	432.0	96
<b>Non-self-governing territories</b>					
American Samoa	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
French Polynesia	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Guam	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
New Caledonia	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Niue	16.39	1.60	17.99	12,458.4	91
Northern Mariana Islands	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Tokelau	21.43	0	21.43	14,954.6	100
Wallis and Futuna	130.41	.73	131.14	8,606.7	99
<b>Total</b>	1,162.39	110.66	1,273.05		

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee. Query Wizard for International Development Statistics (QWIDS). [stats.oecd.org/qwids](http://stats.oecd.org/qwids) (accessed April 12, 2010). Figures for U.S. and French territories are not available (NA).

## Capacity Building

Political, administrative, and technical capacity is of central importance to effective MEA compliance within both the state and civil society (Haas et al. 1993, 414). United Nations University (UNU) (2002, 31) notes that a capacity-development strategy in the PICs should take into account the facilitation of

Figure 1. Two-Ice-Cream-Cones Paradigm



Adapted and used with permission from Rex Horoi, Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific International. [www.fspi.org.fj/index.php/voices-and-choices/100-two-ice-cream-cone-paradigm.html](http://www.fspi.org.fj/index.php/voices-and-choices/100-two-ice-cream-cone-paradigm.html).

training, education, and awareness raising; facilitation of an environment where training can exist, including the availability of programs and the existence of a critical mass of people to be trained; and the sustainability of these activities, including transfer of know-how and continuity of training program themselves. Within this, all stakeholders have a role to play.

**National Governments.** National governments need to place greater emphasis on the need for technical, legal, economic, and scientific capacity building. There must be incentives to encourage students and existing bureaucrats to study in these areas. One way is to increase the number of government scholarships in environmental science, natural resource economics, environmental and international law, and other relevant topics at the University of the South Pacific or other universities.

However, unless governments start to give greater priority to environmental issues at the national level, people will still see this field as a dead end for their careers. So, greater educational incentives along with a new emphasis on career opportunities in these areas could also help bring in necessary human capacity. Unfortunately, the reality is that environment is seen as a long-term investment in a world of short-term priorities. As a result, environment departments and officials tend to be marginalized within national governments. Unless environmental issues are mainstreamed into overall development planning, receive a larger share of national budgets and no longer have to rely on GEF and other project funding, and benefit from attention at the highest national political levels, environment will continue to be marginalized and won't attract the necessary human capacity.

**Unless governments start to give greater priority to environmental issues at the national level, people will still see this field as a dead end for their careers.**

On the flip side, what tends to happen in the Pacific (as well as in other regions) is that once someone is trained and starts to receive recognition, he or she is often lured away by regional and global organizations such as SPREP and MEA secretariats. The benefits of higher salaries and relocation to Apia, Bonn, Montreal, or Geneva are attractive. While regional and global organizations need to attract good people, they cannot decimate national capacity at the same time. And they must ensure that the only chemist with expertise in persistent organic pollutants, for example, is not taken away from a national government until an adequate replacement is identified and trained.

**Regional Organizations.** SPREP has built its own capacity over the past decade by executing aid-funded regional projects. A review team coordinated by AusAID and NZAid concluded that SPREP should not be dominated to such an extent by projects and instead the SPREP secretariat should deliberately strengthen the program's technical advice, training, and institution-building functions. The strong feeling was that projects are more effective if implemented nationally or locally, and that SPREP should work "further upstream," providing technical and policy advice and assistance to members and partners (AusAID 2000). Along these lines, local residents, NGOs, and community-based organizations should be involved from the outset. There is a tendency for projects to be coordinated, run, and implemented at the regional level and then handed off to locals at the end. This does not allow for effective project implementation, and the long-term results are often nonexistent.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For an example of this, see UNDP 2002.

A number of capacity-development initiatives are carried out in the region through CROP agencies and with the establishment of various partnerships to support these activities. Further efforts need to be made in reviewing existing initiatives and increasing the accessibility of partnerships and of related information for PICs in order to better gear them toward the needs of individual countries (UNU 2004). The UNU Fiji workshop further recommended the

**There is a need to do more in-country training and capacity building rather than bringing in one or two people per country for workshops.**

development of a regional approach to capacity development, which would give the large number of donors and NGOs already active in the area of capacity assessment and capacity-development opportunities to coordinate their efforts and achieve maximum impact at the

country level. Along these lines, many people interviewed for this project agreed that there is a need to do more in-country training and capacity building rather than bringing in one or two people per country to a central location for workshops. This would ensure more training catered to the needs of a specific country or Island in addition to creating an opportunity to build greater capacity through training more people in each country.

**MEA Secretariats and the UN System.** A number of MEA secretariats have conducted capacity-building workshops in the region, often in conjunction with SPREP. While these regional workshops have been successful, they have been aimed at government officials and focused on national reporting and development of national strategies, plans, or programmes of action. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and SPREP have done capacity building on both project management and international negotiation.

There has been little if any capacity building that addresses implementation, particularly in the area of data collection and analysis as well as such topics as vertical integration of implementation activities, which could assist the PICs in meeting their obligations. While it is not solely the role of MEA secretariats to run such workshops, there could be better coordination with SPREP and UNDP, for example, to take the capacity building to the next level by holding workshops in each country that are geared to more specific, local capacity needs.

**Donor Community.** Many donors contribute to capacity-building activities in the region as well as ensure that capacity-building activities are built into projects they fund. However, these donors must ensure that the projects and programs they fund have community-based components that involve building the

capacity, meeting the needs, and taking advantage of the expertise of local populations. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2007, 13), recipient countries need to take the lead in determining priority programs of capacity development, while donors can help by better coordinating their technical assistance with country priorities and fully involving partners when commissioning technical assistance.

**NGOs.** International NGOs, such as the London-based Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development (FIELD), have been providing advice and legal expertise to AOSIS during climate-change negotiations. In fact, the early drafts of what became the 1997 Kyoto Protocol were developed by AOSIS with assistance from FIELD. In some cases, FIELD experts have been on Pacific Island government delegations to climate change negotiating sessions. A former Greenpeace expert now represents Tuvalu at international negotiations. While this has helped to increase the influence of the PICs at international negotiations, some argue it hasn't done much to help build local capacity. As one former SPREP official commented, Australians or other foreign nationals shouldn't be speaking on behalf of the PICs. When secretariats provide funding for delegates to attend a Conference of the Parties (COP) or other session, and someone from FIELD goes instead of a government expert, no capacity building takes place. An NGO representative in the region commented that while FIELD lawyers are useful in climate negotiations, they are not always trusted by national governments because while they have negotiating expertise, they are not from the Pacific. NGOs that have expertise—whether in negotiating or implementing MEAs—should work with national governments rather than replace them.

**NGOs that have expertise in negotiating or implementing MEAs should work with national governments rather than replace them.**

### **Coordination**

Even in small Island states where it appears that everyone knows each other, there are still problems with coordination—within national governments, between regional organizations, among donors, and involving all stakeholders.

**National Governments.** Domestically, the task of coordinating the implementation of environmental commitments is facilitated by the designation of national focal points or lead agencies, which are technically the most competent ministry or department related to a particular agreement. Some MEAs may require two or more national focal points because of the cross-sectoral

nature of the agreement. Committees or offices established to coordinate and synergize various MEA reporting and implementing activities could reduce unnecessary duplication and maximize the actions of small bureaucracies. Many governments have political focal points in the foreign affairs ministry but GEF focal points are often in the environment department/ministry and turf battles develop over who should have control. Other ministries are often not even part of the picture. For example, Tonga was having trouble getting co-financing for a GEF-funded UNCCD project when the environment department was trying to develop the proposal on its own. However, co-financing possibilities were available in agriculture and, had the agriculture ministry been involved, the project would not have been delayed.

In the Pacific Islands, a few governments have set up coordination offices, but they are usually focused on aid coordination rather than MEA coordination. This is the reality since MEA implementation cannot happen without foreign aid. But the reliance on foreign aid sets up turf battles between ministries

**Reliance on foreign aid sets up turf battles between ministries and departments, which, in effect, serve as disincentives to coordination.**

and departments, which, in effect, serve as disincentives to coordination. As long as MEA implementation is largely reliant on foreign assistance, this culture of scarcity will continue to hinder coordination. One SPREP official argued that if all aid and MEA implementation issues

were coordinated through a central office—not only in environment departments—greater coordination and cooperation at the national level and with relevant stakeholders might occur. Furthermore, he argued, environment departments should take more of a monitoring and assessment role, leaving a cross-sectoral office to deal with MEA implementation and funding.

**Regional Organizations.** Coordination between the Pacific regional organizations also needs to be strengthened. These entities tend to compete for significance and funding, and operate narrowly within the frameworks of their own data sources, networks, paradigms, and training. A particular concern is that despite the need for coordination, the regional organizations do not appear to work well together on initiatives affecting the region's environment and natural resources. The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is reassessing the regional organizational structure to improve coordination and reduce the areas of overlap and conflict. Governments and the PIF should be encouraged to make progress in this area, which would improve resource flows, cooperation, and implementation on the ground.

SPREP needs to develop a systematic approach, with an appropriate strategy and adequate core resources to assist members with a selection of key conventions (AusAID 2000). One such project that has been successful was the handbook developed by SPREP and UNU that supports the environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals and hazardous waste in the South Pacific region through the examination of interlinkages between the four chemicals conventions (Mougeot 2003). These conventions (Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm, as well as the regional 1995 Waigani Convention<sup>10</sup>), ban persistent organic pollutants, require prior informed consent before shipping toxic chemicals, and ban the transboundary movement of hazardous waste.

**MEA Secretariats and the UN System.** There have been efforts in recent years to improve synergies between the various MEAs and coordinate reporting and the development of action plans and strategies to reduce the burden on parties. For example, many countries currently have national environment management strategies, national sustainable development strategies, poverty reduction strategies, national development strategies, national biodiversity strategies and action plans, UNCCD national action plans, UNFCCC national adaptation programmes of action, and Stockholm Convention national implementation plans. For small developing countries, this load—in addition to annual or biennial reporting—is too much of a strain on limited budgets and personnel. Therefore, secretariats should continue to promote synergies between MEAs, especially in reducing the burden of national reporting and strategy development.

**The proliferation of international meetings is a particular challenge in countries with small bureaucracies and few people trained in either negotiation or implementation.**

Another challenge is the number of meetings that take key policymakers out of the country for at least 100 days a year when the real challenges are at home. Foreign travel represents a large opportunity cost when key officials do not have time to implement projects on the ground because they are attending international meetings. The proliferation of meetings is clearly part of the larger MEA and global environmental governance reform agenda and affects all

<sup>10</sup> The Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within the South Pacific Region (Waigani Convention) opened for signature in Waigani, Papua New Guinea, in 1995 and entered into force in 2001. SPREP serves as the convention's secretariat. For more information, see [www.sprep.org/Factsheets/waigani/factsheetwc001.htm](http://www.sprep.org/Factsheets/waigani/factsheetwc001.htm).



countries, but it is a particular challenge in countries with small bureaucracies and few people trained in either negotiation or implementation. Rationalizing and coordinating the number of meetings per year and ensuring that dates and locations are known far in advance will help the PICs better utilize their limited human resources by first determining which meetings are the most important to attend, given national priorities and interests, and then pooling national and regional expertise in preparation for the meetings.

**Donor Community.** When it comes to the donor community, some argue that unlike other regions, the issue is not necessarily a lack of funds but rather the coordination of funds. The issue of aid coordination goes beyond the Pacific.

In March 2005, 100 countries and donor organizations recognized the imperative of managing aid more rationally by endorsing the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, an ambitious plan to reform the system of aid delivery. In 2006, the OECD completed a first round of monitoring, and the results demonstrated that in half of the developing countries signing on to the Paris

**Several donor officials admitted that geopolitical interests continue to be the primary motivation among bilateral donors and hold much more sway than the goals of the Paris Declaration.**

Declaration, partners and donors have a long road ahead to meet the commitments they have undertaken (OECD 2007, 9). While almost all of the officials representing bilateral and multilateral donors in the Pacific who were interviewed for this paper claimed to be taking the Paris Declaration commitments seriously, several of them admitted that larger geopolitical interests continue to be the primary motivation among bilateral donors and hold much more sway than the goals of the Paris Declaration.

The issue of coordination must be dealt with in several ways. Bilateral aid is often negotiated through treasury or foreign affairs ministries whereas GEF funding goes through environment departments or ministries. At the national level, different ministries must ensure that aid flows are cross-referenced, whether through a single aid coordination office or other mechanism. Second, bilateral and multilateral donors must work together to ensure that aid is coordinated across donors and across ministries. For example, Australia and New Zealand, despite different aid priorities, have begun to coordinate much of their aid to the region. However, other donors need to be involved for coordination to be truly effective. As one New Zealand official commented, they want to work with others to build a foundation but other donors would prefer to give a roof or a door or a window. For example, Japan tends to provide industry-driven funding (solid-waste facilities, ports, and airports). China is driven

by regional fisheries resources, gas, and mineral resources in Melanesia and is trying to shut out Taiwan. Taiwan is trying to gain international recognition in the region. Neither China nor Taiwan is bound by the Paris Declaration, so achieving harmonization with them will not be easy. Finally, donors must take their Paris Declaration commitments seriously.

**NGOs.** There is also a need for greater coordination and information sharing between environmental and non-environmental stakeholders. For example, since environmental NGOs work primarily with environment ministries, it is often hard to get the attention of foreign affairs, finance, and development ministry officials, commented an NGO representative in Fiji. There is just much more interest in development than environment in those ministries. The role for civil society here is to help government officials to see the linkages—why, for example, is climate change an issue for women? Why does biodiversity conservation affect agricultural productivity? Environmental and non-environmental NGOs must integrate environmental issues into national policy issues. Civil society, for instance, has played a part in translating MEA provisions into national policies. Fiji forestry department officials expressed interest in emission trading with Australia because an environmental NGO showed them that they can get funding for biodiversity conservation through emissions trading.

### **Information and Data**

Information is power, and governments and other stakeholders don't always want to disseminate relevant information because information can bring opportunities and resources. Once again the culture of scarcity predominates. The key to improving data and information collection and sharing is to stress the benefits and shift focus from perceived penalties.

**National Governments.** Proper information flow and management within agencies or ministries and among stakeholders involved in policy planning and actual implementation is critical. For example, agriculture and forestry officials don't always want to share information that may help environment departments address MEA-related issues because the environment officials may then reap the financial benefits. Thus, to improve availability and accessibility of information and data relating to various MEAs, respective policies, planning processes, and implementation activities, the perverse incentives linked to funding must be addressed.

The UNU Fiji workshop noted that horizontal information flow is already improving at the national level, although a further strengthening is desirable. Vertical exchange of information—between various levels of officers and

management, for example—is equally important and requires further promotion. When frequent personnel replacements and changes are a reality, it becomes even more important to establish an institutional memory to retain existing knowledge and data. Key resource persons, who need to be more involved in sharing information across national governments, include the focal points for MEAs and those in charge of contacts with donor governments and agencies. Beyond governments, universities and research institutions, as well as NGOs and private sector organizations also are repositories of information and should be included in any improved vertical information flow (UNU 2004).

**Regional Organizations.** National governments value SPREP's assistance in information sharing, training, public media work, publications, reproduction of materials, and MEAs. The provision of technical advice is a key role for SPREP, but also one that needs greater resources and attention to satisfying members' particular information needs (AusAID 2000).

Regionally and internationally, there is an overflow of information, especially through the Internet, but national focal points often do not have the time or the technical means available for a thorough analysis. Therefore, SPREP should further develop information sharing as its principal mode of service to members and partners. One way to develop a sustainable information flow would be to establish a regional clearinghouse mechanism that would be supported by the various CROP agencies. The UNU Fiji workshop suggested that tasks could include support for development of national positions and priority setting; cross-sectoral analysis for the implementation of MEAs; regional coordination; schedule development for upcoming international negotiations, meetings, and training opportunities; development of information materials; and liaising with MEA secretariats. Information analysis and the filtering of relevant data should also be included in the tasks of a regional clearinghouse mechanism (UNU 2004).

**MEA Secretariats and the UN System.** MEA secretariats and UN agencies tend to rely on national reports to gauge a country's progress in MEA implementation. However, many of the PICs are behind in submitting national reports and, as a result, secretariats have little choice but to assume that they are out of compliance. To help countries better share national information with secretariats, the MEAs need to recognize that not all articles, decisions, and work programs are relevant to the PICs. They should streamline the reporting process to enable PICs to fill out only relevant sections of the national report forms. Having to complete the forms in their entirety is a time-consuming process compounded by lack of available staff. The MEAs must also recognize

that a lot of community-based organizations, villages, and NGOs have quite a bit of data and information that they have gathered over the years, and this material should be considered when reviewing national reports. If the MEAs encourage governments to utilize and disseminate some local data and information, national governments will be more likely to incorporate this information into their reports and into the overall MEA implementation.

**Donor Community.** According to the OECD (2007, 13), donors need to improve the transparency and predictability of aid flows by sharing timely and accurate information on intended and actual disbursements with budget authorities. At the same time, national governments need to be more assertive with donors and throw off the culture of scarcity mentality—ensuring that there is high-level support for aid harmonization. While there is evidence over the past few years of better exchange of information between donors themselves and between donors and recipients so as to avoid duplication in certain areas, there really is not much harmonization yet. Greater transparency and information sharing needs to take place during all phases of the aid process—project and program development, disbursement of aid, and accounting.

**NGOs.** NGOs are positioned to play an important role in information collection and dissemination at the national and regional levels. While most countries have some form of environmental legislation, there is a need for heightened public awareness. NGOs have been able to play a part in this aspect of implementation, and when implementation is done at the community level, there has been a good response. For example, the UNDP/GEF-funded Pacific Islands Oceanic Fisheries Management Project tasked the WWF South Pacific Programme, based in Fiji, with promoting nongovernmental stakeholder and public awareness of oceanic fisheries management issues and strengthening NGO participation in oceanic fisheries management.<sup>11</sup>

**The time scale involved in addressing environmental problems doesn't lend itself to long-term data collection by a results-oriented society.**

Local communities usually know their own environment better than anyone. They see changes in fish catch, increased pollution, decreased rainfall, or erratic crop production. Utilizing local populations to collect data and submit it to national or regional authorities that can then aggregate and disseminate this information needs to be enhanced throughout the region. Yet, one of the

<sup>11</sup> For more information on this project, see [www.ffa.int/gef/node/75](http://www.ffa.int/gef/node/75).

challenges is that people like to see results quickly and the time scale involved in addressing environmental problems doesn't lend itself to long-term data collection by a results-oriented society. There is room for community-based organizations and NGOs to serve as the go-betweens and assist in data collection and information dissemination—a role that brings the MEAs to the community. The more aware members of communities are, the more likely they are willing to contribute to data collection. For example, the WWF South Pacific Programme has raised awareness about climate change by participating in Earth Hour. During this annual event, millions of people around the world turn off lights and other electric appliances to demonstrate how people can cut individual energy consumption in their day-to-day lives and thus reduce greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>12</sup>

### **Funding**

Money drives MEA implementation and the determination of national environmental priorities. However, the aid industry is so complicated that many are baffled by the sheer number of aid actors, funds, and programs.<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to ascertain just how much ODA goes into various MEA capacity-building and implementation activities. The OECD Creditor Reporting System does have data on aid activity on the three Rio conventions (CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD) as well as aid activity targeted to environmental policy. But, since so much ODA goes to multiple objectives, it is hard to come up with reliable data. For example, aid for sustainable forest management may be categorized under agricultural aid. Aid activity targeted for good governance programs could also include projects aimed at better environmental governance.

**National Governments.** The Pacific Island governments need to engage in a dialogue with bilateral and multilateral donors to ensure that a greater percentage of aid is recipient driven and meets national environmental and development priorities. Until there is greater aid rationalization and coordination, the culture of scarcity and the competition between government ministries and departments will continue. In addition, there will continue to be a plethora of redundant projects that don't accomplish anything in the long term. By

<sup>12</sup> For details about Earth Hour in Fiji, see [www.wwfpacific.org.fj/wherewework/country/fiji/news/?192825/fiji-switches-off-for-Earth-Hour](http://www.wwfpacific.org.fj/wherewework/country/fiji/news/?192825/fiji-switches-off-for-Earth-Hour).

<sup>13</sup> According to the OECD, there are more than 200 bilateral and multilateral organizations channeling official development assistance. Many developing countries may have more than 40 donors financing more than 600 active projects and may still not be on track to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals (OECD 2007, 9).

improving their ability to determine national priorities and sell these to potential donors, national governments have an opportunity to change the aid flow from being largely donor-driven to more recipient-driven.

**Regional Organizations.** SPREP is important to overseas aid donors as a regional, intergovernmental, technical-coordination agency. Donors rely on SPREP to understand the region's environment and biodiversity issues and to organize projects in locally appropriate ways. There has been a trend toward larger aid projects that are regional, integrated, and complex. The rationale for this is that it should be possible to apply to these projects a high standard of management and administration and achieve economies of scale. There is concern that SPREP, largely because of its own funding concerns, has been preoccupied with implementing projects and that these have often not met the basic needs of its members. There is also recognition of the drawbacks with this system, including loss of local ownership and local capacity building from inappropriate regional projects (AusAID 2000).

SPREP should be more proactive in ensuring that its priorities and strategic plans are communicated effectively to donors. The organization also needs to try to ensure greater core funding or funding that is not earmarked for specific projects so that it can ensure that its core staffing needs are met and that there is greater coordination of various projects and integration of existing projects into programs. Most important, however, is the need to get away from opportunistic funding. If a donor is interested in funding a specific project, SPREP should also ensure that the project also contains elements that are consistent with its strategic plan as well as regional priorities.

**MEA Secretariats and the UN System.** While MEAs do not always provide funding to countries for treaty implementation, they often establish trust funds to help developing country delegates attend meetings. In most cases, without these funds developing countries would not be able to send anyone. Along with the daily subsistence allowance (DSA) that is attached, these trust funds have led to the growth of the international MEA meeting "industry." For some delegates, the DSA may be the equivalent of many months' or even a year's salary. As a result, many government officials vie for the opportunity to attend MEA meetings and collect the DSA to supplement their meager incomes. The result is that some delegates don't want to give up a good deal and send a more appropriate person to represent their country; such would be the case if a foreign affairs official attends a scientific working-group meeting. On the other side, some ministries decide to share the wealth and send a different person to each meeting. When government officials do not understand the nature of

intergovernmental meetings or the topic under discussion, they are not able to adequately represent their country's interests. This results in what one official calls "tourist" delegations. To resolve this problem, which goes well beyond the PICs, secretariats and parties should address the perverse incentives of DSAs and find ways to ensure that the most qualified delegates attend meetings.

**Donor Community.** A common problem with government-to-government aid is that both donor and recipient politicians, parties, and officials are often more concerned about benefit from the aid for themselves, than about it reaching those most in need. Some donors who try to benefit the disadvantaged cannot get the aid past the gatekeepers—the politicians and officials who often manipulate it for their own benefit (Crocombe 2001, 557). Thus, in a sense, donors, in conjunction with recipients, have the ability to make or break MEA implementation.

As a case in point, Italy funded a \$10 million renewable energy project in the Pacific. Coordination was done through the Pacific Island ambassadors to the UN in New York, the funds were sent directly to governments, not

through any regional organizations, and some of the projects duplicated other ones already out there.<sup>14</sup> This is an example of what the PICs and the donor community should avoid. Donors must be willing to work through aid coordination offices and see the bigger picture instead of just focusing on their own funding pri-

**Some donors who try to benefit the disadvantaged cannot get the aid past the gatekeepers—the politicians and officials who often manipulate it for their own benefit.**

orities. On the other side, the PICs should encourage donors by establishing aid coordination offices and linking development assistance with environmental programs and projects. PICs also need to work with donors and regional organizations to make sure that projects fit into larger programs that will continue to bring benefits once the initial funding periods are complete.

Donors also need to give more attention to SPREP. Some donor offices attach a low priority to a regional program focused narrowly on the environment and prefer to deal with natural-resource issues as a component of development projects. Donors have also contributed to SPREP's program being excessively "projectized"; that is, having short-term, focused projects at the expense of longer-term programs. SPREP has formulated projects that match both donors' interests and gaps in its own action plan, but donors have their own priorities and strategies, and may not be willing or able to be flexible

<sup>14</sup> For more details, see Embassy of Italy 2007.

(AusAID 2000). Australia and New Zealand have been receptive and are providing more untied aid to SPREP, and other donors should follow suit so that SPREP can build up its core capacity and effectiveness.

With regard to multilateral donors, one place where funding data is available is the GEF. Since 1991, the GEF has provided financial and other capacity-building support to the PICs to enable them to meet their obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UNFCCC. More recently, the GEF is providing support for implementation of the Stockholm Convention on POPs and the UNCCD. As of 2007, the GEF had financed 69 projects in the region, of which 61 were enabling activities totaling \$44.874 million.<sup>15</sup> Of this total, approximately 62 percent (\$27.6 million) has gone to Papua New Guinea. The average funding to each of the other 13 countries is \$1.3 million. One-third of the funding has gone toward CBD-related activities (GEF 2007a).

Officials from both GEF implementing agencies in the Pacific (primarily UNDP) and Pacific Island governments believe that despite existing funding levels, PICs would benefit more from small grants than from medium and large projects. There is limited absorptive capacity in the region, and the only way to create a large enough project to qualify for funding is to develop regional projects, which do not always meet the needs of individual countries. PICs have a difficult time coordinating regional projects and much of the administrative work has been left to SPREP. Ironically, these activities don't always support SPREP's strategic plan and divert SPREP officials from its implementation. SPREP officials also end up doing most of the GEF project proposals because many countries do not have the capacity.

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In May 2007, the GEF addressed some of these issues by announcing additional funding for PICs. GEF chief executive officer Monique Barbut announced a \$100 million grant package to be spread over three years in quick-disbursing grants. She also said that rather than attacking problems project by project, the new programmatic approach will allow countries to focus their strategies on a clear set of priority issues for the global environment, build and

<sup>15</sup> This figure only includes regional and national projects and does not include global projects of which one or more PICs may be part. Enabling activities provide financing for the preparation of a plan, strategy, program, national communication, or report to fulfill commitments under one of the MEAs.



capture synergies, and apply a common set of tracking tools to monitor progress (GEF 2007b). This announcement is promising; however, unless the process is streamlined and small grants are allowed, the region will still have difficulties in applying for the funding, getting the necessary co-financing, and successfully absorbing and implementing the project.

**NGOs.** Governments are often reluctant to admit that NGOs and community-based organizations can contribute to national implementation of MEAs. In some cases, NGOs are seen as a threat to national sovereignty, and, in other cases, reliance on NGOs may be seen as an admission of government ineptitude. Fortunately, there are successful programs and projects that demonstrate that NGOs and national governments can work together.<sup>16</sup> While NGOs and governments may often compete for the same funding, it would be beneficial to create more NGO-government partnership projects that could be financed from a variety of sources, including those that focus on NGOs and those that focus more on governments and regional organizations. This could ensure that more funding reaches the ground level and assists in MEA implementation at the local level.

## Moving Forward

During the last three decades, governments have taken on an increasing amount of international environmental commitments, even though they lack

**Efforts to control international environmental problems have been carried out incrementally rather than holistically.**

the human, financial, and technical capacity to implement them. This has not been helped by the fact that efforts to control international environmental problems have been carried out incrementally rather than holistically. Each set of issues has been considered separately,

independently of possible common underlying causes, such as population growth, patterns of consumer demand, and industrial production practices (Haas et al. 1993, 423). At the same time, the growing demands of development, ensuring food security, and generating employment for ever-increasing

<sup>16</sup> For example, see the Pacific Invasives Initiative, [www.issg.org/cii/PII/](http://www.issg.org/cii/PII/); Coral Reef Initiatives for the Pacific, [www.crisponline.net/](http://www.crisponline.net/); Micronesia Challenge, [www.nature.org/wherewework/asiapacific/micronesia/howwework/](http://www.nature.org/wherewework/asiapacific/micronesia/howwework/); and the climate change program of the WWF South Pacific Programme Regional Office, [www.wwfapacific.org.fj/what\\_we\\_do/climatechange](http://www.wwfapacific.org.fj/what_we_do/climatechange).

populations have placed a huge strain on the earth's finite natural resources. The perception by some governments that the imperatives of national economic development, social advancement, and poverty alleviation need to be given priority over obligations relating to environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources has had a negative effect on implementation of environmental commitments (UNEP 2006). While some countries have the ability to develop the necessary implementation architecture, many developing countries, especially in the Pacific, have faced more serious challenges in meeting their international environmental commitments.

Perhaps the most important lesson learned from this research is that effective implementation can only happen if there is greater cooperation and coordination among all of the major stakeholders involved in both environment and development: national governments, regional organizations, MEA secretariats, donors, NGOs, and civil society. While the recommendations and policy prescriptions presented here are not exhaustive, are not easy to do (in fact, some may prove to be politically impossible), and will not bridge the implementation gap overnight, hopefully they will lead to greater discussion in the Pacific region and among donors about crucial changes that have to be made if these Island nations are going to meet their commitments and address national and local environmental challenges.

Why should we even be concerned? Why is there an urgent need for renewed and concerted efforts to address these challenges, especially in small countries that don't contribute much to the global environment or economy? These Island states represent a microcosm of the environmental problems faced by many developing countries. While their small islandness makes them unique in many ways, the challenges of capacity, coordination, data and information collection and dissemination, and funding mirror those faced around the world. Thus, efforts to address some of these challenges at the micro level could provide useful lessons for other countries. And this all comes back to the question of the overall effectiveness of MEAs. Environmental treaties are not effective unless they are implemented. In places like the PICs, strict enforcement measures may not be the answer, but innovative solutions to compliance problems just may ensure progress in the right direction.

**Effective implementation can only happen if there is greater cooperation and coordination among all of the major stakeholders involved in both environment and development.**

## Appendix A

### Regional Environmental Agreements in the Pacific

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While this paper focuses primarily on international MEAs, there are also a number of regional MEAs in the Pacific. Not all of the PICs are parties to all of the agreements, but this list gives a general idea of regional scope. Some of the prominent regional agreements are:

#### **Ocean Governance and Fisheries**

- 1979 South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency Convention
- 1982 Nauru Agreement Concerning Cooperation in the Management of Fisheries of Common Interest
- 1990 Convention for the Prohibition of Fishing with Long Driftnets in the South Pacific
- 1992 Niue Treaty on Cooperation in Fisheries Surveillance and Law Enforcement in the South Pacific Region
- 2000 Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean

#### **Chemicals, Hazardous Wastes, and Marine Pollution**

- 1985 South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Raratonga)
- 1986 SPREP Protocol for the Prevention of Pollution of the South Pacific Region by Dumping (SPREP Dumping Protocol)
- 1990 SPREP Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Pollution Emergencies in the South Pacific Region (SPREP Pollution Emergencies Protocol)
- 1995 Waigani Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movements and Management of Hazardous Wastes within the South Pacific Region (Waigani Convention)

## **Biodiversity**

- 1976 Convention on the Conservation of Nature in the South Pacific (Apia Convention)

## **Land and Marine Resources**

- 1986 SPREP (Noumea) Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region (SPREP Convention)

## Appendix B

### Interviews

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The author would like to thank the following individuals who consented to be interviewed for this project. Some of the interviewees have since moved on to other positions, but their titles at the time of the interviews are included here. The information collected from these interviews appears throughout the text, but the author respects the wishes of the interviewees who asked that their comments remain anonymous.

- Andriamihaja, Misa. Program officer, Energy and Environment, UNDP, Apia, Samoa; April 16, 2007.
- Benzaken, Dominique. Coastal management adviser, SPREP, Apia, Samoa; April 17, 2007.
- Brown-Vitolio, Kate. Action strategy adviser, SPREP, Apia, Samoa; April 17, 2007.
- Buchanan, Felicity. Deputy director, Environment Division, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Wellington, New Zealand; March 21, 2007.
- Chandra, Alvin. Environment associate, UNDP, Suva, Fiji; June 29, 2007.
- Chape, Stuart. Program manager, Island Ecosystems, SPREP, Apia, Samoa; April 17, 2007.
- Chapman, Bruce. Program manager, Pacific Futures, SPREP, Apia, Samoa; April 17, 2007.
- Chung, Chris. Director, International Section, Australian Department of the Environment and Water Resources, Canberra, Australia; July 6, 2007.
- Clarke, Pepe. Legal adviser, IUCN Regional Office for Oceania, Suva, Fiji (interviewed in Wellington, New Zealand); July 24, 2007.
- Cornforth, Roger. NZAid, Wellington, New Zealand; March 21, 2007.
- Cozens, Peter. Director, Centre for Strategic Studies: New Zealand, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand; June 14, 2007.
- Fairbairn, Paul. Project manager, Community Lifelines Project, SOPAC, Suva, Fiji; June 29, 2007.

- Fernando, Ashvini. WWF Regional Office for the Pacific, Suva, Fiji; June 28, 2007.
- Fry, Greg. Director of studies, Graduate Studies in International Affairs, ANU College of Asia & the Pacific, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia; July 5, 2007.
- Fry, Ian. International environmental officer, Department of Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Government of Tuvalu; Funafuti, Tuvalu (interviewed in Canberra, Australia); July 5, 2007.
- Geidelberg, Dimitri. NZAid regional manager, Suva, Fiji; June 28, 2007.
- Graham, Bruce. Graham Environmental Consulting, LTD, Wellington, New Zealand; March 12, 2007.
- Griffen, Frank. Pollution prevention and waste management adviser, SPREP, Apia, Samoa; April 17, 2007.
- Hills, Terry. AusAID, Canberra, Australia; July 6, 2007.
- Horoi, Rex. Executive director, Foundation of Peoples of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji; June 29, 2007.
- Jarvenpaa, Sirpa H. Regional director, Pacific Subregional Office, Asian Development Bank, Suva, Fiji; June 27, 2007.
- Koshy, Kanayathu. Director, Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji; June 28, 2007.
- Lal, Padma. Sustainable development officer, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Suva, Fiji; June 29, 2007.
- Lui, F. Vitolio. Deputy director, SPREP, Apia, Samoa; April 18, 2007.
- MacKay, Ken. Director, Institute for Marine Resources, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji; Friday, 29 June 2007.
- Miles, Gerald. Regional director, External Affairs/Asia Pacific, The Nature Conservancy, Brisbane, Australia; July 17, 2007.
- Mills, Peta. Environment Thematic Group, AusAID, Canberra, Australia; July 6, 2007.
- Nobs, Beat. Swiss ambassador to New Zealand and the Pacific, Wellington, New Zealand; May 1, 2007.
- Payton, David. Director, Special Relations Unit, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Wellington, New Zealand; March 19, 2007.
- Peteru, Clark. Environmental legal adviser, SPREP, Apia, Samoa; April 17, 2007.
- Ronneberg, Espen. Climate change adviser, SPREP, Apia, Samoa; April 17, 2007.
- Thorburn, Roberta. Manager, Climate Change, Energy, Water, and Waste Management, Pacific Environment Team, AusAID, Canberra, Australia; July 6, 2007.

- Tiraa, Ana. Island biodiversity officer, SPREP, Apia, Samoa; April 17, 2007.
- Tuqiri, Seremaia. WWF Regional Office for the Pacific, Suva, Fiji; June 28, 2007.
- Wendt, Neva. Australian Council for International Development, Canberra, Australia; July 5, 2007.
- Wickham, Frank. Human resource development training officer, SPREP, Apia, Samoa; April 18, 2007.
- Wilson, Tom. NZAid, Wellington, New Zealand; March 21, 2007.

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SPREP: *See* South Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

UN: *See* United Nations.

UNCTAD: *See* United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

UNDP: *See* United Nations Development Programme.

UNEP: *See* United Nations Environment Programme.

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## The Author

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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Popular literature and the entertainment industry commonly portray the Pacific Islands as a homogeneous, tropical, and timeless Eden where life is leisurely and free from care and the problems of the twenty-first century. The region's tourist industry itself does its utmost to promote that very image and first-time visitors to Hawaii today are often unprepared to discover that Honolulu, for example, is a modern metropolis with high-rise buildings and freeways.

Located in the world's largest ocean, Pacific nations and territories are among the smallest on earth. The region is also one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse places in the world, as well as one of the most fragile and vulnerable—with Island countries often separated by hundreds of miles of open sea. In this paper, Pamela S. Chasek describes how, as a result of such circumstances, regional cooperation is necessary, albeit difficult.

Environmental issues, particularly global warming with attendant sea-level rise, are a major concern, Chasek explains. At the same time, participation in multilateral environmental agreements is particularly demanding and often beyond the capacity of the small-island entities. Not infrequently, Chasek asserts, environmental ministries within local governments are small and lack the trained personnel and sufficient economic resources to effectively accomplish their mission.

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Pamela Chasek is the co-founder and executive editor of the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, a reporting service on United Nations environment and development negotiations. She is an associate professor of political science and director of the International Studies Program at Manhattan College in New York, and in 2007 was a Fulbright Senior Scholar based at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand. Chasek is the author of numerous publications on global environmental politics.



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