

**Mind the Gap:  
Confronting the MEA Implementation Gap in  
the Pacific Island Countries<sup>1</sup>**

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## Abstract

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 the diversity of its environment. However, it is also one of the most fragile and vulnerable regions. The 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, the pooling of energies and ideas is necessary within the region.

However, cooperation in such a diverse region also 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 multilateral environmental agreements place on governments, acquiring the necessary financial resources and technical expertise, and working within environment agencies or units that tend to be under-staffed and under-resourced and have less influence in government processes and decision-making than economic development sectors.

This paper outlines the difficulties that the Pacific Island Countries have in fulfilling their international commitments, how they can better address these challenges and what role the donor community, regional organizations, the UN system, and NGOs can play in this regard.

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 fuelled, 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 just this paradox that has affected the Pacific Island countries and territories most of all. The problems facing these small nations are sometimes so large that none can respond to them alone. As a result, cooperation, mutual aid between states, the pooling of energies and ideas is necessary within the region.

However, cooperation in such a diverse region also has its challenges, as does the participation of the Pacific Island countries in a range of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). At the national level the 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, most of the responsibility of national coordination of implementation of MEAs in the Pacific 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 Pacific Island countries have in fulfilling their international environmental commitments. The first section of the paper provides an introduction to the Pacific Island Region. The next section describes the various 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, the UN system, and NGOs can play in this regard.

## **The Pacific Island Region**

The Pacific islands region is unique because of a combination of its geographical, biological, sociological and economic characteristics. It occupies a vast 30 million sq. km of the Pacific Ocean (5.8% of the globe), which is an area more than three times larger than the United States. The region stretches some 10,000 km from east to west and 5000 km from north to south, with a combined exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of close to 20 million sq. km. In contrast, the total land area is just over 500,000 sq. km, of which Papua New Guinea accounts for 83%, while Nauru, Tokelau and Tuvalu are each smaller than 30 sq. km.

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 – speaking 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 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTS) is just over 9 million, with Papua New Guinea accounting for 64% and the seven smallest PICTs – Cook Islands, Palau, Wallis and Futuna, Nauru, Tuvalu, Niue and Tokelau – accounting together for less than 1%. Each year as many as 3 million visitors to the region swell these numbers. Notwithstanding this diversity, PICTs 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 the sustainable development perspectives of PICTs in the medium-to-long term.

For most Pacific societies, land and coastal resources are the basis for subsistence living and commercial production. 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, over-exploitation, poor extraction methods, damage to reefs, mining and forest utilization continue to place serious stress on land and coastal resources, and the communities that depend on them. 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. Their small physical size, relative isolation, proneness to natural disasters, dependence on limited natural resources, and limited human resources and capacity, all contribute to a high level of vulnerability. Environmentally this is compounded by the shortage of freshwater, land degradation, invasive species, overharvesting of natural resources, solid and toxic waste disposal, and climate change, variability and sea level rise.<sup>2</sup>

Economically, the region is extremely susceptible to external economic shocks and changes in global markets. In most countries, agriculture accounts for over 50% of exports, and with the exception of Papua New Guinea, trade balances are highly negative. Still, most of the produce (fruit, vegetables, meat, dairy products) for local supermarkets and for the provisioning of the tourism industry is imported from Australia and New Zealand. PICTs 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. PICTs are almost entirely dependent on imported fossil fuel imports for power generation and transportation (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 15-20% of formal employment. Remittances from populations working abroad are a major contribution to the percentage of some PICT economies. This is particularly relevant in Micronesian and Polynesian countries, where the percentage of international migrants to the resident population can reach 100%.

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 sandbanks that make up the terrestrial portion of this vast region (Herr 2002:41). Whether local in origin (mining beaches for concrete, polluting lagoons due to improper waste disposal) or imported (sea level rise due to climate change), all of these concerns have fallen largely on policy makers who have limited capacity to meet the challenges confronting their countries. Yet, as the awareness of the extent of the environmental problems facing the PICTs has grown, so too has the regional and international system of treaties addressing many of these issues.

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<sup>2</sup> For more details, see SPREP, "Sustaining the Pacific environment: Meeting the challenges of sustainable development through effective environmental management." Apia, Samoa: SPREP, 2004. Available online at <http://www.spc.int/piocean/forum/Info%20papers/8%20SPREP%20Issues%20paper.pdf> and IPCC, "Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability" (Working Group II Report) *Fourth Assessment Report*. Geneva: IPCC, 2007, especially Chapter 16 "Small Islands

## **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. MEAs are agreements between states which specify legally-binding actions to be taken to work toward an environmental objective. Today there are over 500 international treaties and other agreements related to the environment, of which over 320 are regional. Nearly 60 percent 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. To provide a picture of the complexity of the MEA system in the Pacific, Table 1 lists the most relevant international MEAs and 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 or, in the case of the Montreal Protocol, the Montreal Protocol Fund. The Global Environment Facility serves as the funding mechanism for the UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, CBD, Biosafety Protocol, UNCCD and POPs conventions. As many international treaties have striven 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 Law of the Sea and its 1995 Fish Stocks Agreement, negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly, also have near universal ratification, largely because of the benefits that the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) system 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>3</sup>

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<sup>3</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.

**Table 1: Multilateral Environmental Agreements**

<b>Treaty</b>	<b># of PIC parties</b>
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 (CITES)	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	7
1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	14*
1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	14*
1994 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)	14*
1995 Fish Stocks Agreement to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea	12
1997 Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	14*
1998 Rotterdam Convention Convention on Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade (PIC)	3
2000 Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety	10*
2001 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)	12*

\*Indicates that a fund for developing countries is attached to the treaty.

So what do all of these treaties bring to the Pacific? MEAs provide the main link with global policy, and there is a growing awareness of the need to participate effectively in the development of such global agreements. This trend started with the active involvement of the Pacific island states in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and has continued with the Agreement on Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change 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, like the United Nations, each party has one vote. What this means is that the 9 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 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 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 this became harder as the strategic imperatives of the Cold War faded. But at the same time, environmental issues loomed large for the Pacific Islands, especially for those Asian donors who wanted access to fish, timber, minerals and international voting support (Crocombe, 2010: 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 Global Environment Facility 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.

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, Raustiala and Skolnikoff 1998: 15). Once the burden of action shifts to national governments, compliance is affected by political, legal and administrative capacity (Levy, Keohane and Haas 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 non-compliance or ineffective implementation has been widely recognized and studied.<sup>4</sup> Even world leaders participating in global summits on environment and development issues – most recently at the 2005 World Summit – have identified among the major global challenges requiring urgent and effective responses, the better compliance with and enforcement of MEAs (United Nations 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 the added complexity of coordinating activities across governments (Victor, Raustiala and Skolnikoff 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 community levels.

MEA implementation challenges in the Pacific island countries, while similar to many developing countries, are exacerbated by the nature of the islands themselves and the challenges posed by their small scale, dispersed islands, and limited human, financial and natural resources. A review of UNEP's 1999 *Pacific Islands Environmental Outlook*, the United Nations University's 2002 *Synergies and Coordination among Multilateral Environmental Agreements: Pacific Island Countries Case Study*, the Pacific Centre for

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Weiss and Jacobson 1998, Victor, Raustiala and Skolnikoff, 1998, Levy, Keohane and Haas 1993; UNU 2004; UNEP 2006; and Koshy et al 2005.

Environment and Sustainable Development's 2005 report on *Sustainable Development and the Pacific Island Countries* and interviews with nearly 40 representatives of governments, organizations and NGOs in the region reveal four cross-cutting themes of types of MEA implementation challenges in the Pacific: capacity building, coordination, information and data collection and sharing, and prioritization and funding.

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

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 policy-making, 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, programme 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/local context;
- lack of scientific and technical capacity to implement many MEAs;
- lack of knowledge on integrated coastal zone and land management practices;
- lack of information on the impact of population, poverty and urbanization on natural resources in general and, particularly, coastal resources;
- inadequate coordination of MEAs implementation activities at the national level;
- lack of in-country MEA implementation training; and

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<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.

- 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 always isn't 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 on the part of more powerful agencies so they have a hard time pressing their agenda forward. Yet even when laws are developed, legal and law enforcement personnel do not have the time to deal effectively 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: (a) the need for a collective voice in a world dominated by large countries and economic and political blocs; (b) the challenges arising from isolation; (c) the need for economies of scale, particularly in building appropriate knowledge and technology for the specialized but common needs of the Pacific; (d) the lack of specific skills in individual countries; (e) the sharing of knowledge and experience; and (e) funding agencies' interest in cooperation among the PICs due to cost and strategic considerations. Given this framework, the reality is that there are eight different regional organizations<sup>6</sup> that address different aspects of environmental and sustainable development issues. 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 up aid

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<sup>6</sup> These include Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), the University of the South Pacific, the South Pacific Tourism Organization, the Pacific Islands Development Programme, and the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)

coordination offices (sometimes consisting of just one person), these offices are focused on donors, not always implementation needs. Furthermore, donors will sometimes bypass the coordination 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. Each government has a GEF focal point 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 secretariats, reporting requirements and other policies. There is a lack 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 towards 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 and 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 workshop on Integrated Capacity development in the Pacific on Multilateral Environmental Agreements, held in Nadi, Fiji, from 15-17 March 2004, identified a number of these challenges (UNU 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 programme funding has led to too many short-term projects with little lasting gains.

The majority of 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. Since so many of the projects and programmes 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 coordination, 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.

**Summary.** The Pacific island countries, like many developing countries, face many challenges in addressing both national environmental issues and their international environmental commitments. But unlike larger developing countries, these challenges are magnified because 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. The need for capacity building, horizontal and vertical coordination, information and data collection and sharing, and harmonization of funding are crucial to improving effectiveness of MEAs in the region, enhancing the ability of the islands to implement MEAs and improving environmental quality and natural resources management on the ground where it really matters.

### **Bridging the Implementation Gap**

So given all of these challenges, just how do the PICs prioritize their environmental goals, while at the same time 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 have a limited impact in the international arena as single units. Therefore, much of the work by the island states has been in the form of collaborative efforts, including through numerous regional organizations. A collective regional response to global initiatives has been the hallmark of the Pacific SIDS for the past 50 years. Currently, regional organizations range from those of a political and economic nature (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat) to specialized bodies that have been established to address specific issues: fisheries (Secretariat of the Pacific Community in part; Forum Fisheries Agency), non-living resources (South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC)), environment (Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)) and tertiary education (University of the South Pacific). The Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (CROP) was established to coordinate these organizations.

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 programme was established as part of the 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 states and territories, including the "metropolitan countries" of Australia, New Zealand, the US and France.

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

The bilateral and multilateral donor community is also a player. According to the UN Statistics Division, in 2004, net ODA to the Pacific was in the order of US\$1.9 billion per year, of which about 87 percent was provided by bilateral sources, primarily Australia, Japan,

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

New Zealand, France and US,<sup>8</sup> while the rest comes from multilateral agencies, including the Asian Development Bank, European Commission, International Monetary Fund, United Nations Development Programme and World Bank. (See Table 2.) Of this, the average annual flow of grant funds to the Pacific for regional projects has been about US\$67 million. The top two sources are Australia and New Zealand, which provide close to 60 percent of the total funds. Agriculture, forestry and marine resources topped the list and accounted for about

Table 2: ODA FLOWS INTO THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

NAME	NET BILATERAL ODA (US\$ MILLION)	NET MULTI-LATERAL ODA (US\$ MILLION)	NET TOTAL ODA (US\$ MILLION)	NET ODA PER CAPITA (US\$)	% OF BILATERAL AID
Cook Islands	5.89	2.87	8.76	484.67	67.24%
Fiji	36.38	27.12	63.50	75.52	57.29%
Kiribati	10.06	6.63	16.69	171.34	60.28%
Marshall Islands	49.47	1.61	51.08	855.31	96.85%
Micronesia, Federated States of	85.16	1.14	86.30	786.76	98.68%
Nauru	13.60	0.08	13.68	1,021.96	99.42%
Palau	19.40	0.06	19.46	980.20	99.69%
Papua New Guinea	249.89	17.27	267.16	46.29	93.54%
Samoa	24.60	6.04	30.64	166.75	80.29%
Solomon Islands	116.79	5.39	122.18	262.31	95.59%
Tonga	14.85	4.33	19.18	188.07	77.42%
Tuvalu	5.37	2.64	8.01	770.49	67.04%
Vanuatu	34.62	3.14	37.76	182.12	91.68%
<b>Non-self governing territories</b>					
American Samoa					
French Polynesia	574.87	4.88	579.75	2,294.30	99.16%
Guam					
New Caledonia	510.00	14.89	524.89	2,256.46	97.16%
Niue	13.84	0.20	14.04	9,609.86	98.58%
Northern Mariana Islands					
Tokelau	8.38	0.05	8.43	6,130.91	99.41%
Wallis and Futuna	71.50	1.30	72.80	4,747.00	98.21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,844.67</b>	<b>99.64</b>	<b>1,944.31</b>	<b>31,030.32</b>	<b>87.64%</b>

2004 Figures. Source: United Nations Statistics Division, Common Database Accessed 1 August 2007. Available online at [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/cdb/cdb\\_help/cdb\\_quick\\_start.asp](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/cdb/cdb_help/cdb_quick_start.asp)  
All except for Fiji and Papua New Guinea are ranked in the top 30 per capita recipients of ODA.  
Figures for US territories are not available.

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

17 percent of the total. Environment received about 5 percent of the total. (ADB, 2003: 13). While the region of the whole does not get a large amount of ODA compared with other developing countries, they represent 16 of the top 30 per capita ODA recipients (UN Statistics Division 2007). How this funding is used and the links between development and environmental financing are crucial to effective implementation.

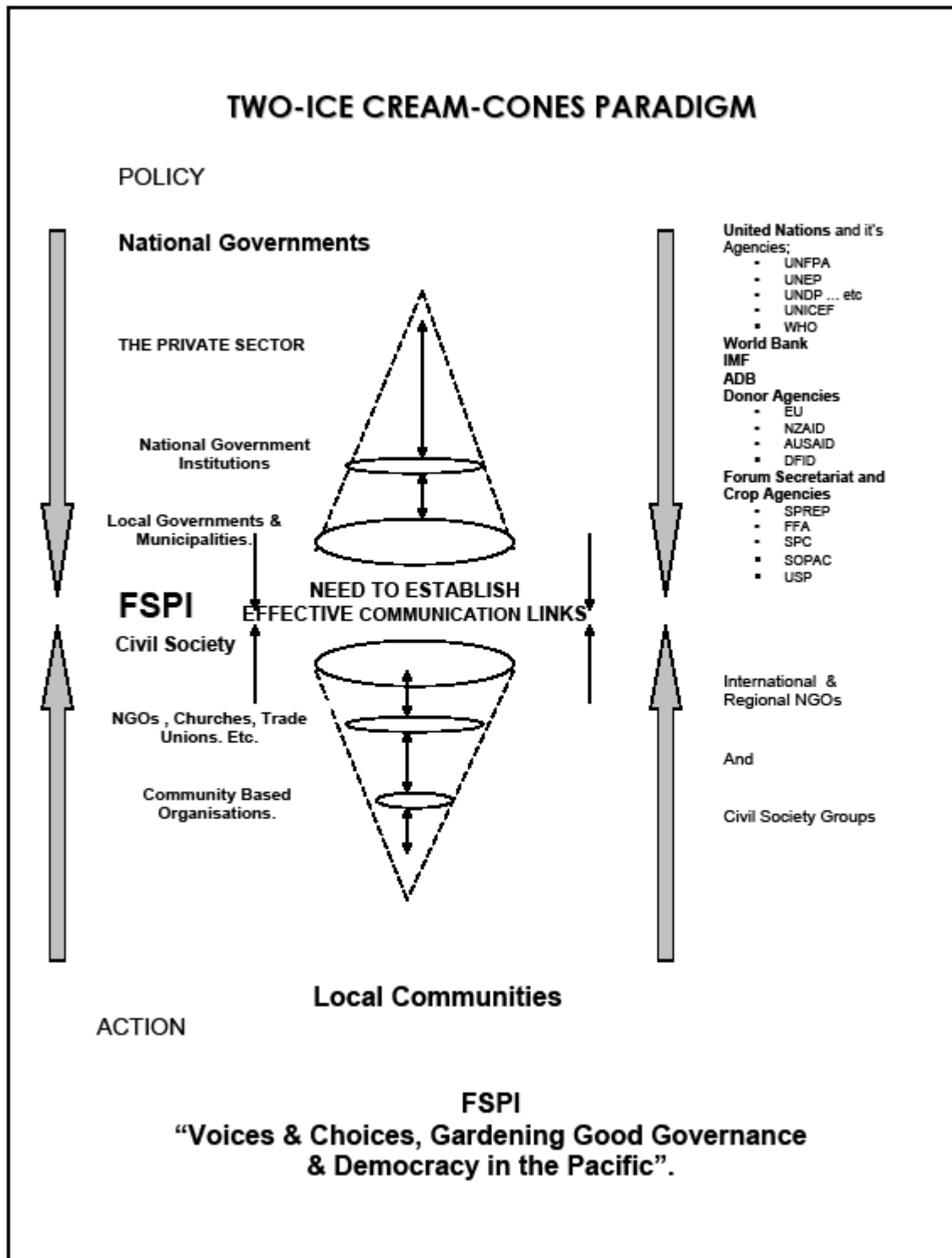
Finally, NGOs and civil society also have roles to play. Rex Horoi, Executive Director of Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific International and former Ambassador from the Solomon Islands to the United Nations, has created what he calls the “two ice cream cone paradigm” to describe what is 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.

**Capacity Building.** Political, administrative and technical capacity is of central importance to effective MEA compliance both within the state and civil society (Levy, Keohane and Haas 1993: 414). UNU (2002: 31) notes that a capacity development strategy in the PICs should take account of: the facilitation of training, education and awareness raising; the facilitation of an environment where training can exist, including the availability of programmes 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 programmes themselves. Within this, all stakeholders have a role to play.

**National Governments:** National governments need to give greater emphasis to 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



Figure 1. Two-Ice Cream-Cones Paradigm



Reprinted with permission of Rex Horoi, FSPI.

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 (don't just 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.

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 very attractive. While regional and global organizations need to attract good people, they cannot decimate national capacity at the same time and must ensure that they only chemist with expertise in persistent organic pollutants, for example, is not taken away from a national government until an adequate replacement can be 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 Secretariat and members 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 the 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 non-existent.<sup>9</sup>

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

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<sup>9</sup> For an example of this, see United Nations Development Programme 2002.

towards the needs of individual countries (UNU 2004). The UNU Fiji workshop further recommended the 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 an opportunity to coordinate their efforts and achieve maximum impact at the country level. In addition, many interviewed said 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 a specific country or island's needs in addition to creating a greater 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, 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 and 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 that they fund. However, they must ensure that the projects and programs that they fund have community-based components that involve building the capacity, meeting the needs and taking advantage of the expertise of local populations. Donors can help with this by incorporating community-based components and capacity-building into projects and programs they fund. According to the OECD (2007: 13), recipient countries need to take the lead in determining priority programmes 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 government delegations to climate change negotiating sessions, representing such countries as Micronesia. 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 COP or other session, and someone from FIELD goes instead of a government expert, no capacity building takes place. Another 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.

**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 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 it is usually focused on aid coordination rather than MEA coordination. This is the reality since MEA implementation cannot happen without foreign aid. However, the reliance on foreign

aid sets up turf battles between ministries and departments, which serve as a disincentive to coordination. Different ministries and departments do not want to share funding, and would prefer to do it on their own and reap the financial benefits rather than cooperate and have to share funding with other ministries. As long as MEA implementation is largely reliant on foreign assistance, this culture of scarcity will continue to hinder coordination. One official thought that if all aid and MEA implementation issues were coordinated through a central office – not only in environment departments – that 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. They 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 a crosscutting approach to environment work, the regional organizations do not appear to work well together on initiatives affecting the region's environment and natural resources. The Pacific Islands Forum is reassessing the regional IGO structure to improve coordination and reduce the areas of overlap and conflict. Governments and the Forum 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 with information on the four chemical conventions (Waigani, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm), which aims to support the environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals and hazardous waste in the South Pacific region.

**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, national action plans (desertification), national adaptation programmes of action (climate change) and national implementation plans (POPs). For small developing countries, this load, in addition to annual or biannual reporting is just too much. Therefore, secretariats should continue to promote synergies

between MEAs, especially in reducing the burden of national reporting and strategy development.

Another challenge is the number of meetings that take key policy makers out of the country for at least 100 days a year when the real challenges are at home. This represents a large opportunity cost when key officials do not have time to implement projects on the ground because they are attending international meetings. This is clearly part of the larger MEA and global environmental governance reform agenda and affects all countries, but 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 pooling national and regional expertise in preparation for such meetings, and determining which are the most important to attend, given national priorities and interests.

***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 Declaration, partners and donors have a long road ahead to meet the commitments they have undertaken (OECD 2007: 9). While almost all of the bilateral and multilateral donors in the Pacific 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 different 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 work, ports and airports), China is driven by regional fisheries resources, gas and mineral resources in Melanesia and 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 too much interest in development over environment in those ministries. The role for civil society here is to help government officials to see the linkages – why 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. For example, civil society has played a part in translating MEA provisions into national policies. The Fiji forestry department is now interested 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, e.g. between various levels of officers and the management, is equally important and requires further promotion. Due to frequent personnel replacements and changes, 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 the 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, the 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 themselves 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 the sections of the national report forms that are relevant and not feel obliged to complete everything – 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 that 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, and ensure that there is high level support for harmonization in both bilateral donor governments and multilateral funding agencies. While there is evidence over the past two years of better exchange of information between donors themselves and between donors and recipients to avoid duplication in certain areas, there really is not much harmonization yet. Greater transparency and information sharing needs to take place at 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 GEF-funded Pacific Islands Oceanic Fisheries Management Project tasked the WWF South Pacific Programme (based in Fiji) with promoting non-governmental stakeholder and public awareness of oceanic fisheries management issues and strengthening NGO participation in oceanic fisheries management in conjunction with the Forum Fisheries Agency .<sup>10</sup>

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 challenges to this 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

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on this project, see <http://www.ffa.int/gef/node/109>

and NGOs to serve as the go-between on issues like climate change – bringing the MEAs to the community. The more aware they are, the more likely they are willing to contribute to data collection. For example, the WWF South Pacific Programme raised awareness about climate change by participating in Earth Hour in March 2008, where millions of people from around the world turned 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>11</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>12</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 (Convention on Biological Diversity, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and UN Convention to Combat Desertification) as well as aid activity targeted to environmental policy, but since so much ODA goes to multiple objectives (gender and environment, good governance, which could include environmental governance, forests may not be covered under environment, etc.) it is hard to come up with reliable data.

**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 – the two must be linked. 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 improving their ability to determine national priorities and sell these to potential donors, national governments have an opportunity to change the aid flow from donor driven to more recipient driven.

**Regional Organizations:** SPREP is important to overseas aid donors as a regional, inter-governmental, technical coordination agency. Donors rely on SPREP to understand the

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<sup>11</sup> For more details about Earth Hour in Fiji, see [http://www.wwfpacific.org.fj/current/news/press\\_releases/climate/08\\_03\\_earth\\_hour\\_review.cfm](http://www.wwfpacific.org.fj/current/news/press_releases/climate/08_03_earth_hour_review.cfm)

<sup>12</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 United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (OECD, 2007: 9)

region's environment and biodiversity issues and to organize projects in locally appropriate ways. There has been a trend towards 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 needs to be more pro-active in ensuring that its priorities and strategic plans are communicated effectively to donors. SPREP 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 there is greater coordination of various projects and integration of existing projects into programs. Most importantly, however, is the need to get away from opportunistic funding. If a donor is interested in funding a specific project, SPREP should also build in 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. However, these funds, along with the daily subsistence allowance (DSA) that is attached, 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 (i.e., a foreign affairs official attending 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 and result 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 best delegates attend meetings.

**Donor Community:** A common problem with government-to-government aid is that “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.

For example, Italy is funding a US\$10 million renewable energy project in the Pacific. Coordination was done through the Pacific island representatives to the United Nations in New York, the funding is coming directly to governments, (Embassy of Italy 2007) not through regional organizations, and some of the projects will duplicate other ones already out there. This is an example of what the PICs and the donor community need to avoid. Donors must be willing to work through aid coordination offices and see the bigger picture instead of just their own funding priorities. On the other side, the PICs must 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 programmes that will continue to bring benefits once the initial funding period is 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". SPREP has formulated projects that match both donors' interests and gaps in its own Action Plan, however, donors have their own priorities and strategies, and may not be willing or able to be flexible (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 Global Environment Facility. 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 and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. More recently, the GEF is providing support for implementation of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Convention to Combat Desertification. As of 2007, the GEF had financed 69 projects in the region, of which 61 were enabling activities for a total of

US\$44.874 million.<sup>13</sup> Of this total, approximately 62% (US\$27.6 million) has gone to Papua New Guinea. The average funding that has gone to the other 13 countries is US\$1.3 million. One third of the funding has gone towards Convention on Biological Diversity-related activities (GEF 2007).

Officials from both GEF implementing agencies in the Pacific (primarily UNDP) and governments believe that despite existing funding levels, PICs would benefit more from small grants rather than 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 – but these activities don't always support SPREP's strategic plan and take away officials from doing so. SPREP officials also end up doing most of the GEF project proposals because many countries do not have the capacity.

In May 2007, the GEF addressed some of these issues by announcing additional funding for PICs. GEF CEO Monique Barbut announced a US\$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 capture synergies, and apply a common set of tracking tools to monitor progress (GEF 2007a). 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. However, there are a number of successful programs and projects that demonstrate that NGOs and national governments can work together.<sup>14</sup> While NGOs and governments may often compete for the same funding, it would be useful

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<sup>13</sup> This figure only includes regional and national projects and does not include global projects of which one or more Pacific Island Countries may be part. Enabling activities provide financing for the preparation of a plan, strategy or program to fulfill commitments under one of the MEAs or a national communication or report to a relevant convention.

<sup>14</sup> For example, see the Pacific Invasives Initiative <http://www.issg.org/cii/PII/>, Coral Reef Initiatives for the Pacific <http://www.crisponline.net/>, the Micronesia Challenge <http://www.nature.org/wherewework/asiapacific/micronesia/howwework>, and WWF's climate change program in the Pacific [http://www.wfwpacific.org.fj/what\\_we\\_do/climate\\_change/](http://www.wfwpacific.org.fj/what_we_do/climate_change/).

for more partnership projects that would benefit from different aid flows (those to NGOs as well as those to governments and regional organizations). This could ensure that more funding reaches the ground level and assists in MEA implementation at the local level.

## **Conclusions and Moving Forward**

During the last three decades, states have taken on an increasing amount of international environmental commitments, even though they lack 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 (population growth, patterns of consumer demand and industrial production practices) (Levy, Keohane and Haas 1993: 423). Yet at the same time, the growing demands of development, ensuring food security and employment generation for ever-increasing populations have placed a huge strain on the earth's finite natural resources. The perception by some states 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 have 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 the Pacific island countries, have faced larger challenges in meeting their international environmental commitments.

What is perhaps the most important lesson learned from this exercise 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 region and among donors about crucial changes that have to be made if these countries are going to meet their commitments and address national and local environmental challenges.

But 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 countries 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 Pacific island countries, strict enforcement measures may not be the answer, but innovative solutions to compliance problems just may ensure progress in the right direction.

## Appendix A

### **Regional Environmental Agreements in the Pacific**

While this paper is focusing primarily on international MEAs, there are also a number of regional MEAs in the Pacific. Not all of the PICTs are members of all agreements, but they give a general idea of regional scope. Some of the important ones are as follows:

#### ■ **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 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)



## **Interviews**

The author would like to thank the following people who consented to be interviewed for this project. The information collected from these interviews appears throughout the text, but the author is respecting their wishes for their comments to be anonymous.

Andriamihaja, Misa. Programme Officer, Energy and Environment, UNDP, Apia, Samoa; Monday, 16 April 2007.

Benzaken, Dominique. Coastal Management Adviser, SPREP: Tuesday, 17 April 2007.

Brown-Vitolo, Kate. Action Strategy Adviser, SPREP: Tuesday, 17 April 2007.

Buchanan, Felicity. Deputy Director, Environment Division, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Wednesday, 21 March 2007.

Chandra, Alvin. Environment Associate, UNDP, Suva, Friday, 29 June 2007.

Chape, Stuart. Programme Manager – Island Ecosystems, SPREP: Tuesday, 17 April 2007.

Chapman, Bruce. Programme Manager – Pacific Futures, SPREP: Tuesday, 17 April 2007.

Chung, Chris. Director, International Section, Australian Department of the Environment and Water Resources, Friday, 6 July 2007.

Clarke, Pepe. Legal Adviser, IUCN Regional Office for Oceania: Tuesday, 24 July 2007.

Cornforth, Roger, NZAid: Wednesday, 21 March 2007.

Cozens, Peter. Director, Centre for Strategic Studies: New Zealand, Victoria University of Wellington, Thursday, 14 June 2007.

Fairbairn, Paul. Project Manager, Community Lifelines Project, SOPAC, Friday, 29 June 2007.

Fernando, Ashvini. WWF Regional Office for the Pacific, Thursday, 28 June 2007

Fry, Greg. Director of Studies, Graduate Studies in International Affairs, ANU College of Asia & the Pacific, Australian National University: Thursday, 5 July 2007.

Fry, Ian. International Environmental Officer, Department of Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Government of Tuvalu: Thursday, 5 July 2007.

Geidelberg, Dimitri. NZAid Regional Manager, Suva, Fiji, Thursday, 28 June 2007

Graham, Bruce. Graham Environmental Consulting, LTD: Monday, 12 March 2007.

Griffen, Frank. Pollution Prevention and Waste Management Adviser, SPREP: Tuesday, 17 April 2007.

Hills, Terry. AusAID; Friday, 6 July 2007.

Horoï, Rex. Chairman, Foundation of Peoples of the South Pacific, Friday, 29 June 2007

Jarvenpaa, Sirpa H. Regional Director, Pacific Subregional Office in Suva, Fiji  
Asian Development Bank, Wednesday, 27 June 2007.

Koshy, Kanayathu. Director. Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development,  
University of the South Pacific, Thursday, 28 June 2007.

Lal, Padma. Sustainable Development Officer, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat: Friday, 29 June 2007.

Lui, F. Vitolio (Vito). Deputy Director, SPREP, Wednesday, 18 April 2007.

MacKay, Ken. Director, Institute for Marine Resources, University of the South Pacific,  
Friday, 29 June 2007.

Miles, Gerald. Regional Director, External Affairs/Asia Pacific, The Nature Conservancy:  
Tuesday, 17 July 2007.

Mills, Peta. Environment Thematic Group, AusAID: Friday, 6 July 2007.

Nobs, Beat. Swiss Ambassador to New Zealand and the Pacific, Tuesday, 1 May 2007.

Payton, David. Director, Special Relations Unit, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
and Trade: Monday, 19 March 2007.

Peteru, Clark. Environmental Legal Adviser, SPREP: Tuesday, 17 April 2007.

Ronneberg, Espen. Climate Change Adviser, SPREP: Tuesday, 17 April 2007.

Thorburn, Roberta. Manager - Climate Change, Energy, Water & Waste Management,  
Pacific Environment Team, AusAID: Friday, 6 July 2007.

Tiraa, Ana. Island Biodiversity Officer, SPREP: Tuesday, 17 April 2007.

Tuqiri, Seremaia. WWF Regional Office for the Pacific, Thursday, 28 June 2007

Wendt, Neva. Australian Council for International Development, Thursday, 5 July 2007.

Wickham, Frank. Human Resource Development/Training Officer, SPREP: Wednesday, 18 April 2007.

Wilson, Tom. NZAid: Wednesday, 21 March 2007.

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