

Solid Waste Management in the Pacific

The Way Forward

Background:

The solid waste work at SPREP has been following a logical progression over the last few years. The sequence has been:

Phase 1: Development of the Regional Strategy in close consultation with all our Members:

Phase 2: Providing our Members with:

- a) assistance to develop complementary National Strategies;
- b) technical documents to assist with specific challenges such as on-going financing through economic instruments, self-financing recycling systems, etc; and
- c) sharing successful examples of the various aspects of waste management from across the region.

Phase 3: The next logical implementation phase for SPREP is to move to facilitating specific projects in country while maintaining the regional roles of information dissemination, best practice sharing, capacity building, etc.

SPREP staff and the Members have been working within the context of the Regional Solid Waste Strategy adopted at the 16th SPREP meeting in 2005, following which, a regional priority setting meeting was held to establish the top ten activities for the period 2006-2007. This Action Plan was re-visited in November 2007. There had been much progress in the provision of technical resources from SPREP, draft National Waste Strategies completed (but most not yet formally approved by Governments) and some good in-country projects. In light of this, there was little change in the priorities.

At the most recent meeting, the following top three foci were significantly rated higher:

- 1. *Landfills***
- 2. *Financing Waste Management***
- 3. *Ensuring Political and Public support***

These and the other priorities, provide a very clear direction and mandate for SPREP's work within the context of the Regional Strategy. The other priorities are *Bulky wastes, National Strategies, Training and Capacity Building, Regional Integration, Electronic waste, Waste Oil, Recycling, Legislation and enforcement, Organics and composting.*

At the 18th SPREP Meeting, recognizing the significant negative impacts to tourism, health and environment, a number of Members express a strong desire to progress their waste management “on the ground”. Moreover, Australia’s representative made the comment that, as solid waste is not directly funded through the Global Environment Facility (GEF), donors and Members will need to monitor progress closely to ensure that solid waste does not get left behind the globally funded areas such as POPs, climate change and bio-diversity. The Meeting resolved to make Pollution Prevention including solid waste, as the focus for Country Reports at the Annual Meeting in September 2008.

Existing situation:

Capacity and Commitment

As mentioned, solid waste work has “cascaded” from adoption of the Regional Strategy, to formulation of National Strategies, and finally to implementation tools and guidelines. There now exists a significant body of resources, both on SPREP’s website and DVD-based libraries and films and elsewhere. The other area of progress has been in formulating National Waste Strategies. However, to date, the formal adoption and incorporation of most strategies into the National Sustainable Development Strategies and hence the Budget by National Governments has not occurred. While this does not mean waste work has ceased or is not following the Member’s draft Strategy, it does usually mean that there is a “business as usual” approach and a questionable commitment. ***Strong political commitment will be pivotal to accessing and utilizing the new tranche of resources.***

Technical capacity is challenged as waste moves into more integrated and sophisticated agendas. All SPREP Members have a number of graduates of the JICA–WHO–SPREP training courses but this only touches on the skills and connections needed to prepare cabinet briefings on issues like funding mechanisms, private sector development and community engagement strategies. Modern waste management requires a network of officers attuned to the issues and capable of advising governments on difficult and costly problems.

Project versus day-to-day funding

Solid waste management, by its very nature, requires a constant and predictable source of funds. The amounts are significant and necessitate stringent efficiency in any up-grades as poor design can often commit Members to an expensive and somewhat unnecessary obligation.

Waste Collection generally represents about 75% of the system costs, and that is often carried by Local Government, while National Governments focus on the lesser costs of landfill, etc. Project and donor funding are well suited to specific infrastructure projects like landfill or the purchase of a collection fleet but the operational costs require a local funding source, whether that is hypothecated import or GST/VAT taxes, container deposit schemes, or parallel charges like electricity levies. ***It is this issue, probably more than any other, that now hampers significant improvements in the Pacific’s solid waste management.***

Nothing breeds success like success

On the other hand, the recent rapid turn-around in the RMI has some important lessons for all. In that case, after many years of decline in waste management, the government appointed a semi-autonomous authority to manage waste and removed it from the under-funded Local Government. This focus and funding has meant that Majuro is now being serviced regularly, the town is cleaner and, most importantly, and donors are showing interest in contributing again. The lesson from this and the Samoan and Kiribati successes is that strong political support at the national level is a pre-condition for significant improvements in waste management. ***It would seem from this and other examples that SPREP and its Members need to focus on encouraging some immediate and visible improvements to build support and form a basis for further work.***

Emerging Opportunities:

External Funding:

There are two major potential sources of funds for Pacific waste management that have emerged over the last year. The AFD (French Overseas Aid) Solid Waste Initiative which has \$6m spread over 3 years and the GEF-PAS, the details of which are still emerging.

The AFD initiative is scheduled to be presented to the AFD Board for approval during 2009, and proposes to disburse US\$6 million over three years. This is made up of US\$2 million administered by SPREP for regional projects, US\$2 million for sub-regional and US\$2 million for in-country projects. These latter components will be funded through a private consultancy as will general administration of the project. **To assist Members in developing project proposals for funding under the sub-regional or in-country components, SPREP sought and was granted US\$ 100k by the AFD.** SPREP Members' senior representatives were first given notice of this opportunity at the Regional Action Planning Forum in November 2007, and a subsequent Circular was sent out in February 2008.

The very short project term of three years for the AFD Initiative necessitates a very efficient process of project formulation, approval and delivery. This represents a significant challenge to all.

Under the GEF-PAS process, a number of countries have listed integrated waste management as a priority. How this will play out within the limitations of the GEF funding windows is difficult to predict but, at this stage, it appears that there will be some significant funds flowing into solid and related waste issues over the next 5 years. The key element to this opportunity will be in the integration of waste management with the funding windows. ***Whether this be linking solid waste to the obvious ones like POPs or dealing with the consequences of waste in climate change or water quality, SPREP's expertise in assisting Members prepare fundable project proposals, will be critical.***

Internal Funding:

Aid under the AFD Initiative and the GEF-PAS programme are project-based, and therefore do not address the day-to-day funding issues of operating any waste system. Indeed, in the past, project funding sometimes has caused an increase in operating costs which further burdens the countries. To address these on-going funding problems requires strong political support, as the on-going funds will need to be internally generated through taxes or charges. In addition, the project funding must be built around assisting an efficient waste system that can be sustainably funded. SPREP has provided some high level advice on this to Members but more focused proposals tailored to the specifics of individual Members are now necessary. This is an obvious focus for SPREP but ***gaining sufficient public and political support for increasing taxation will be greatly assisted by building the momentum through some prior successful popular projects.***

Opportunities for Integration:

Solid waste management is a fundamental issue at the grass roots community level. It is well known that waste management is a useful first and visible step in engaging the public on more difficult issues such as coral reef management, climate change adaptation and groundwater pollution. For this reason, improving waste management has a much wider role across many of SPREP's areas of endeavor and the Pacific's need for sustainable development.

Just as importantly, solid waste management can and should be integrated with some of the other waste issues such as POPs and other hazardous wastes, and any other waste issue that offers a synergy. Some projects also have a natural integration into a sub-regional or regional scope such as the successful POPs in PICs hazardous waste clean-up project.

Finally, recovering resources can play a significant role for economic and social development. Recycling has proven to be very useful in promoting the involvement of the private sector in waste management, while composted organics have benefits for reducing water and chemical use in farming and promoting a better diet through home gardening. On the other hand, litter has the potential to make or break tourism growth. Thus, waste management has far wider spin-offs than often immediately considered.

Issues:

SPREP and its Members are at the beginning of a new phase of Pacific solid waste management and are well positioned to maximize the opportunities. Most countries have National Solid Waste Strategies in completed or draft forms, SPREP has a strong set of Pacific-specific best practice guidelines and other technical papers, and finally there is the prospect of significant funding for up-grading and expanding waste services. Moreover, there are now Pacific-based examples of innovative and cost-effective solutions such as the Majuro successes, the Samoan landfills, the integrated Tongan system and the Kiribati Recycling Scheme.

Unfortunately, looking at the existing situation, it is clear that there are a number of issues or barriers working against rapid improvement in Solid Waste Management, which SPREP will need to focus on.

1) Waste management as a national political focus

Put simply, waste management is not politically “sexy” and consequently may attract less attention and funding from national politicians than is required. Many are overwhelmed by the growth in waste that has come as a consequence of economic development and lifestyle changes and their despair leads to reluctance to get involved.

SPREP’s International Waters Project did some ground-breaking work in quantifying the economic impacts of inadequate waste management. Results like USD\$7.5 million p.a. in the Cook Islands, US\$5.6 million p.a. in Tonga and 1.6% of GDP in Palau give an indication of the national economic consequences if waste management is not funded appropriately. *It is quite clear the costs of inaction can exceed the costs of action.*

In many places, the general public also sees the waste problem as largely insoluble, as it has simply grown worse gradually and so the public often exert little pressure on their representatives to fix it. For SPREP and its Members to motivate the public and political support necessary for improving waste management, we will have to continue to raise the profile of successful Pacific examples and show that *improving waste management is both achievable and affordable.* This will raise the public momentum for such changes to continue.

The other issue is the need to expand SPREP’s facilitation beyond the confines of government. *Waste is as much a social and economic issue as environmental.* Until the general population is involved, aware and active, some may be inclined to ignore the waste issue and the constant operational funding that it requires. Countries that include the private sector and general population in processes like strategy development and recycling systems seem to have a more robust base for waste improvement.

2) Operations/Policy disconnect

In many countries, day-to-day waste management is carried out by Local Government or sometimes by operational departments like Works. *In a lot of our Members’ governance structure, day-to-day waste management is a local government responsibility and so there are significant jurisdictional issues that complicate progress.*

Similarly, increasing national revenue to assist local government is not popular. In effect we are asking national governments to possibly risk their political popularity by increasing taxation and then passing the funds to another level of Government. To negotiate such an arrangement requires skill and persistence and a sound and well funded communications strategy to ensure the public understand the need and support the outcomes of any increase in taxation. *Recent successful examples using economic instruments have shown this is quite achievable and has actually increased government popularity.*

3) **Public engagement**

One of the lessons learned from the Kiribati situation is the value of good community engagement. The sustained effort by the Government of Kiribati, the Kaoke Mange project and then the IWP built awareness in the community, which now has created a strong momentum for continued improvement. ***Not only does public participation make the jobs of waste managers easier and cheaper, but it also means that the government gets some political credit for its efforts.***

Many of the people who work in waste management are not familiar with social marketing and media engagement – it is well outside their expertise and comfort zone. Also, publicizing yourself, even in the context of work improvements, is seen in many Pacific cultures as “grandstanding” and this further reduces enthusiasm for public or media activity. Specific training has been successful in mitigating this and providing the tools to take the communications work forward. This is an aspect of the work that cannot be over-looked if the other aspects are to progress.

4) **Capacity and Empowerment**

The waste staff in many Member countries do not feel empowered to try to improve the system. Taking on a significant project represents an opportunity for failure which could jeopardize their current status. Success often does not see them promoted, so only personal satisfaction and commitment or political impetus can overcome this hurdle. In addition, modern waste management requires a cross-sectoral approach, which is beyond the experiences of many Local Government staff.

The capacity building work SPREP has done (often in conjunction with JICA and WHO) has remained largely theoretical for most of our attendees as they do not immediately utilise it in their countries. Any training that isn't practically applied soon after the session is usually lost. Thus, SPREP and JICA have recently shifted their training to have a more country-specific delivery. While it is too early to say that this has been successful, it appears that this has delivered more appropriate and inclusive country-specific training which can then be immediately utilized in the delivery of the chosen waste projects.

As well, SPREP concentrated on imparting technical skills in waste when quite often, it is core bureaucratic skills that are under-developed. ***Skills such as project management, budget administration and communication delivery will be as important as designing the financial systems to deliver self-funding recycling.*** Staff in Member countries are reluctant to take on new projects if they know that it is likely to be beyond their current skill level and the project doesn't include appropriate training in those skills. This is aggravated by the fact that each funding agency or project often has different project formulation and reporting requirements.

5) **Workshop/short visits**

SPREP has focused on facilitating in-country workshops in the past. **While the week-long workshop approach has been useful for some activities, such as developing draft strategies, it won't achieve the impetus that is needed for the next phase of solid waste management.** The participants at these workshops do benefit, however they typically return to a busy work load and schedule, made worse by a week's worth of work accumulated during their absence. The attendees then get consumed by the day-to-day requirements of their position; consequently, progress made during the workshop quickly slides into history. This is not simply a Pacific problem, it happens the world over. This approach will certainly not cement the progress made during the workshop nor get any of the immediate improvements needed to build momentum.

Clearly, there needs to be some changes in how SPREP and the Members handle this next phase of solid waste management if there is to be maximum improvement gained. Overcoming these issues will not be quick and will require significant periods to be spent in each specific country to raise the profile and opportunities of waste management across a wider range of players than SPREP has previously. A possible technique would be for *a senior member of SPREP management to engage high level bureaucrats and/or politicians to agree to a mutually-agreed work plan.* The SPREP Solid Waste staff or specific technical consultants could then move forward within that project plan during a subsequent extended stay in country (a month or longer). Another advantage of having a high profile SPREP officer introduce the issues of solid waste is that the local media and politicians will be alerted to the situation and possibilities of improvement. The agreed work plan would require both SPREP and the member government to meet certain milestones and time frames. If milestones aren't met, the work program would be suspended until a new agreement can be struck that addresses why the original has not worked.

While investing a month in one specific country may seem a lot, it may actually be a more cost-effective approach than the week-long workshops with their attendant travel and transit costs. Also, the SPREP work has more likelihood of getting traction and the SPREP staff would be on hand to assist the Member's staff with a multiplicity of issues in person rather than by email as is often the case now. A potential downside of this more intensive and focused assistance model is that there may be less generalized regional coverage each year. It will also reduce the ability of SPREP to deliver on requests for immediate assistance. The trade-off is that the assistance and capacity development that SPREP provides will be more functional. In addition, it is hoped that the extra resources that the AFD project will bring will more than negate any lessening in regional delivery.

The mutual obligation process of agreeing to a work plan will ensure that SPREP's and the Member's resources are maximized. If issues develop in country that delay or preclude progress, SPREP can then re-direct its resources into Members who are not experiencing such difficulties. Thus, progress continues in spite of the inevitable glitches that occur at the project level.

Proposal for Delivery Phase of Solid Waste Work

- a. Re-focus waste delivery onto a country-specific project basis while maintaining regional information dissemination, particularly on the best practice countries and projects to alert decision-makers to improvements in waste management.
- b. Senior SPREP management negotiate a year long work program with milestones at Ministerial level and gain significant public profile for the agreement to improve waste management.
- c. Trial a new approach of SPREP staff spending a much longer period in country to try to build momentum and also help with the difficult initial project implementation phase. Regular return visits with capacity building sessions would be scheduled as the project proceeds.
- d. Initial projects would be chosen for their likelihood of success and public profile as well as their impact on the waste system in order to build momentum and political / public support. Projects would be those identified by Members as among their highest priority.
- e. All projects to have a strong community engagement strategy and capacity building to build and maintain support.
- f. Assist Members to seek sponsorship (if necessary) for each project.
- g. Use project delivery to enhance capacity for generic skills like project management, not just technical skills. In this way, capacity building would be “action learning” based on the project and would have a very strong project management and communications component. This would make the process more useful and attractive for those more peripheral to the core of the waste project.