

FINAL (MPS)
1 July 2006

**NATIONAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
OF COMMITMENTS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMMES IN THE COOK ISLANDS**

**Prepared For the
UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS (UNDESA)**

July 2006

Disclaimer

The views provided in this report are those of the author alone and do not necessary represent the views of the Cook Islands government or its agencies unless where stated.

Executive Summary

During the 1995 national crisis and subsequent economic reform programme (ERP), several national consultation forums saw key policy measures and economic structural changes introduced. These had considerable influence on current national sustainable development initiatives including the draft NSDP and NESAF.

Drastic measures were adopted, including introduction of new key legislations such as PERCA Act, MFEM Act, PSC Act to support the ERP, prudent fiscal policies, downsizing of the public service, changes in taxation regimes, establishment of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), privatization of key government assets and a private sector-led economy.

The results have been dramatic, with mass migration of Cook Islanders overseas as well as fast recovery of the economy within five years. However, since 1999, concerns have focused on the impact of the reforms, which has ranged from political instability through regular changes in government. This has prompted key stakeholders to call for a national development plan to guide future development. Stakeholders want to avoid misguided decision-making and a possible return to the pre-ERP years.

The Cook Islands has made moderate progress in implementing sustainable development programmes including the development of a National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP).

The draft NSDP is a comprehensive plan focusing on sustainable development priorities and targets for the Cook Islands over the next five years (2007-2011). The NSDP is being formulated as a national strategy which transverses all sectors. The NSDP therefore influences the focus of this report.

The NSDP has eight (8) guiding principles and nine (9) strategic goals. The draft nine development goals were focused on the following priority areas of Good Governance, Human Development Programmes, Economic Development, Infrastructure, Utilities & Transport, (*National Coordination and Development Planning*), (*Cultural Diversity*), National Security and International Relations.

At the 2003 National Development Forum, representatives from the broader community decided to formulate the NSDP. The National Development Strategy, National MDGs Strategy and National Sustainable Development Plan were combined into a single strategy called the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2006-2010.

The NSDP will be completed by the National Policy Coordination Division of the Office of the Prime Minister and the National Advisory Committee; with help from the Government of Italy, NZAID, ADB, Forum Secretariat, UNDP and SPREP.

Key policy frameworks governing the implementation of the national sustainable development programme include the Agenda 21, BPOA, Mauritius Strategy, the Pacific Plan, and the MDGs.

Several sectoral plans were drafted to support the NSDP. These include the: National Environment Strategic Action Framework 2005-2009; draft Education Strategic Plan 2006-2020; draft Marine Resources and Industry Plan 2006-2009; National Waste

Management Plan; Cook Islands Tourism Master Plan 2006-2015; draft Health Sector-Medium Term Strategy 2006-2009; National HRD Strategy and the Infrastructure Master Plan which is currently being prepared with ADB assistance. These plans were the outcome of sectoral consultations and national forums.

Several national decision-making bodies, with broader community representatives as members, are involved in sustainable management programmes. They include the National Planning Task Force Committee, Rarotonga Environment Authority; National Environment Council; Annual Budgetary Appropriations Committee; NSDP Advisory Committee; National Waste Management Committee; National MDGs Committee; National Biodiversity Steering Group Committee; National Climate Change Country Team; National Waste Management Committee; National Disaster Risks Management Council; National Water Safety Project Committee; Public Expenditure and Review Committee (PERCA); Outer Islands Development Grant Fund Committee (OIDGF) and Aid Capital and Coordinating Committee (ACCC).

Community-wide consultations were conducted through the NSDP and national MDGs programmes. These stakeholder consultation forums provided baseline information for developing the NSDP strategies. Other national forums which followed the 2003 National Development Forum were also opened to the broader community. They included the National Good Governance Forum 2004, National Health Sector Advance Forum 2004 and the National Environment Forum 2004. Subsequent sub-sectoral meetings and workshops were also conducted including the influential annual Outer Islands mayoral forums.

In 2003, Cabinet appointed a joint NSDP Process Management Unit between the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) to manage the NSDP process and monitoring of implementation of the NSDP.

The joint coordinating unit became dysfunctional after most of the key staff left government in 2004. The National Policy Coordination Division of the OPM continued with the task of formulating the NSDP. In 2003, Cabinet also approved the National Planning Task Force which has 32 members including broader community representatives. This committee became dysfunctional too.

Other key government agencies such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Internal Affairs, MFEM, Ministry of Works, Ministry of Justice were appointed by Cabinet to lead the designated working groups for: Health Sector; Education Sector; Social Welfare; Infrastructure, Utilities and Transport; Economic Development; Good Governance and National Security. Focus groups memberships consist of broader community representatives. The focus groups like the National Planning Task Force were enthusiastic at the beginning but eventually lost interest and momentum.

Regular changes of leadership had an effect on the overall commitment and participation of planning personnel, Working Group members and National Planning Task Force committee members. The politicization of the process was a distraction to the NSDP planning staff. The high turnover of planning staff and limited number of skilled planners available was most discouraging. Government budgetary commitments were also disappointing. Additionally, TA supports from regional organisations were inconsistent except for the FORSEC contributions.

The National Policy Division of the Office of the Prime Minister and the NSDP Advisory Committee will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the NSDP.

About 66% of the indicators adopted for the NSDP have data coverage. Some of the indicators used were from the MDGs programme while most were adopted from sectors and industry standards.

The national budgeting process is done on an annual basis and there are high risks to this short term focus approach, thus the reason for the development of the NSDP. Government agencies and NGOs seeking annual government budgetary appropriations were expected to show linkage of their annual work programme outputs to the NSDP when bidding for financial support.

Currently, the MFEM financial expenditure and revenue reporting policies are quite robust with monthly financial reports submitted from all agencies. Non-compliance and fraudulent activities have been subjected to PERCA and MFEM audits, withholding of monthly bulk funding, personal reprimand and even referrals to the Crown Law Office and Cook Islands Police Department for further investigation.

National sustainable development priorities are guided by the Annual Budget Policy Statement, sector strategies and departments' annual business plans. The environment sector priorities are guided by the NESAF 2005-2009.

In terms of dollar values, the total foreign aid to the Cook Islands in 2005/06, is about NZ\$21.714 million (about 10.6% of GDP).¹ These are valuable funds and contribute to the implementation of sustainable development in the Cook Islands.

Overall, donor contributions to the Cook Islands environment sector were estimated at over NZ\$8.4 million in the period from 2002 to 2005.

The Cook Islands government would like to acknowledge the assistance to its sustainable development programmes from the ADB, NZAID, AusAID, GEF via UNDP, UNEP, SPREP and UNESCO, FAO, Japan (JICA), EU (CTA), China and CIDA.

The Aid Management Division of the MFEM is managing and coordinating aid effectiveness with a focus on delivery and targeted assistance in the areas of highest priority. All aid projects are vetted by the Aid Capital and Coordinating Committee.

Key Recommendations of the Review

It is suggested that UNDESA and all NSDP stakeholders be mindful of the following recommendations:

- a. It is recommended that the NSDP Advisory Committee prepare contract/s for local consultant/s to complete the NSDP as soon as possible.
- b. It is also recommended that the NSDP Advisory Committee prepare and adopt a strategy for the endorsement process including conducting a national forum and for implementation of the NSDP.

¹ MFEM. (2005).

- c. It is recommended that the NSDP Advisory Committee prepare the structural mechanisms, organisations, responsibilities and budgetary needs for promotion, implementation, monitoring and reporting of the NSDP.
- d. It is recommended that Parliament establish a new National Planning Office within the Office of the Prime Minister with a mandate to manage the development and implementation of the NSDP.
- e. The government and NGOs are urged to seek Parliament approval and appointment of the National Sustainable Development Committee to oversee the NSDP formulation and implementation.
- f. Key stakeholders are urged to find common ground for closer working relationships and sharing of resources, information and project responsibilities to prevent the stifling of implementation of the NSDP as a result of poor communication.
- g. It is recommended that current arrangements for collaboration between government, NGOs and private sector continue to be fostered.
- h. Government must provide the necessary resources to NGOs and local community groups to continue to take the lead in sustainable development promotions and awareness campaigns at local community level.
- i. It is important and recommended that the NSDP be translated into the Maori language to allow the common people to understand their national responsibilities under the NSDP.
- j. It is recommended that enabling activities in key priority areas identified in the report such as water etc. which have no national strategies, policies and legislation to guide development on both national and community levels, be conducted. Updated policies should be formalised as essential.
- k. It is recommended that donor partners provide the necessary financial support for the completion and implementation of the NSDP, including the final consultations forum.
- l. It is also recommended that donor partners provide support to capacity building activities identified in this report and the NCSA project which are directly aimed at providing support to sustainable development programme.
- m. It is important that the NSDP should be promoted as apolitical as possible. This is recommended and the input of NGOs is crucial in this regard.
- n. There are significant policy matters such as the political reform process, public sector reform, etc which will continue to have significant impact on sustainable development programmes in the Cook Islands. These policies need to be taken into account when implementing the NSDP or other future sustainable development programmes.

Glossary

| | |
|----------|---|
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| AMMAG | Avana-Muri Marine Management Action Group |
| AusAID | Australia Agency for International Development |
| BPOA | Barbados Programme of Action |
| CBDAMPIC | Capacity-building for Development of Adaptation Measures in Pacific Islands Countries |
| CBOs | Community-Based Organisations |
| CEDAW | Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women |
| CIANGO | Cook Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations |
| CIDA | Canada International Development Assistance |
| DSAP | Development of Sustainable Agriculture in the Pacific |
| EIA | Environmental Impact Assessment |
| EU | European Union |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| GHG | Greenhouse Gases |
| GIS | Geographical Information System |
| HRD | Human Resources Development |
| IWP | International Waters Program |
| MMR | Ministry of Marine Resources |
| MOA | Ministry of Agriculture |
| MOH | Ministry of Health |
| MOW | Ministry of Works |
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| NBSAP | National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan |
| NCSA | National Capacity Self Assessment |
| NES | National Environment Service |
| NESAF | National Environment Strategic Action Framework |
| NGOs | Non-Government Organisations |
| NIWA | National Institute of Water and Atmosphere (NZ) |
| NSDP | National Sustainable Development Plan |
| NZAID | New Zealand Agency for International Development |
| OMIA | Office of the Minister for Outer Islands Administration |
| PICCAP | Pacific Island Climate Change Assistance Program |
| PIREP | Pacific Island Renewable Energy Project |
| REAP | Rarotonga Environmental Awareness Program |
| SPREP | South Pacific Regional Environment Programme |
| SOPAC | South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission |
| TAU | Te Aponga Uira |
| TCA | Takitumu Conservation Area |
| TIS | Taporoporoanga Ipukarea Society |
| UNCBD | United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity |
| UNCCD | United Nations Convention for Combating Desertification |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Program |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |
| WSSD | World Summit for Sustainable Development |

Table of Content

| | |
|--|-----------|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 3 |
| I. INTRODUCTION..... | 9 |
| A. OVERVIEW OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE COOK ISLANDS | 9 |
| II. PRIORITIES AND TARGETS | 11 |
| A. PRIORITIES AND IDENTIFIED STRATEGIES | 11 |
| B. COHERENCE AMONG STRATEGIES AND RELATED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION | 14 |
| <i>Vertical Coherence between National and International Priorities.....</i> | <i>14</i> |
| <i>Horizontal Coherence between Priorities and Strategies.....</i> | <i>19</i> |
| C. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION BY PRIVATE SECTOR, CIVIL SOCIETY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OUTER ISLANDS..... | 23 |
| D. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT | 30 |
| <i>Institutional Structures for Sustainable Development.....</i> | <i>30</i> |
| <i>Institutional Actors.....</i> | <i>31</i> |
| <i>Interagency Mechanisms.....</i> | <i>33</i> |
| E. OUTCOMES AND MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION..... | 36 |
| <i>Indicators and Monitoring.....</i> | <i>36</i> |
| <i>Budgetary Appropriations and Aid Effectiveness.....</i> | <i>37</i> |
| <i>Prioritisation.....</i> | <i>38</i> |
| <i>Annual budgetary appropriation to the National Environment Service.....</i> | <i>39</i> |
| <i>General ODA Contributions to the Cook Islands.....</i> | <i>39</i> |
| <i>Environmental ODA Contributions to the Cook Islands.....</i> | <i>40</i> |
| <i>Aid Management.....</i> | <i>41</i> |
| <i>Outer Islands Development Grant Fund (OIDGF).....</i> | <i>41</i> |
| III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 44 |
| A. GENERAL COMMENTS..... | 44 |
| B. RECOMMENDATIONS | 45 |
| REFERENCES | 46 |

I. INTRODUCTION

A. OVERVIEW OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE COOK ISLANDS

Since signing the fundamental principles and agreements for achieving sustainable development at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Cook Islands has slowly taken on various national sustainable development programmes to meet its Agenda 21 commitments.

Sustainable development is not a new concept to the Cook Islands, though recently the term was mostly attributed to painful experiences such as the 1995 economic reform programme (ERP). Past economic development programmes, especially during the 1950s to 1980s, were mostly “free for all development” processes.

These were agricultural based and heavily driven with little consideration of the impact on the land and surrounding environment. Most importantly, negative implications have emerged over the last 10 years as results of these development activities.

Lagoons and coastal zones have been stressed as result of negative effects from past and present land-based pollution and terrestrial runoff as well as unsustainable resource use and the impact of climate changes and cyclones.

Over the last 30 years, tourism has grown to become the dominant economic sector nationally. It has also contributed its share of concerns regarding the continuing lagoon and foreshore problems, waste management, environmental conservation and protection issues, as well as other resource use and management considerations.

In 1987, the government established the National Environment Service. This was followed by the adoption of the Conservation Act 1987, which was later repealed by the Rarotonga Environment Act and recently the Environment Act 2003.

During the 1995 national economic reform programme (ERP), several national consultation workshops saw key policy measures and economic structural changes introduced that would have considerable influence on current national sustainable development initiatives. The MFEM Act, PSC Act and PERC Act outline new policy measures on public sector financial management, private sector driven economic activities, and good governance principles.

The momentum from the reform saw the update of other key legal frameworks such as the Public Health Act 2003, Marine Resources Act 2005 and Environment Act 2003. Other existing and new legal frameworks were also formulated or are in the process of sectoral review or Parliamentary approval including the Biosecurity Act, Water Resources Management legislation, Buildings Standards and Control Regulations, Land Use Act, Intellectual Property Rights legislation, Natural Resource Management legislation, National Disaster Risk Management legislation, Islands State Governments Act as well as Outer Islands Councils’ environmental and natural resources management by-laws.

Preoccupation with the economic and public sector reform programmes and their impact during the late 1990’s saw little in terms of identified sustainable development programmes being implemented other than those tied to the ERP. Pacific Type 2 Initiative

projects within various sectors and departments have not been well promoted and implemented.

Difficulties experienced in producing the Cook Islands WSSD NAR, BPOA NAR and NSDP underscore the need for key regional organisations to continue provide technical assistance and financial support to local planning and policy development programmes.

In 2002, the Cook Islands conducted a community-wide consultation process culminating in a national workshop in preparation for the national assessment report for the WSSD in South Africa. The WSSD NAR and subsequent NAR for BPOA+10 in 2003 highlighted the outcome of past strategic policies for sustainable development in the Cook Islands. The current NAR will contribute to that stocktaking process and provide guidance in terms of future direction to assist implementation and monitoring of the NSDP.

In 2003, the government conducted another national forum and agreed to a national process to formulate a 20-year National Vision and next medium term National Sustainable Development Strategy to replace the 1995 ERP. Cabinet agreed to combine the National Development Strategy, National MDGs Strategy and National Sustainable Development Plan into a single strategy called the National Sustainable Development Plan. This is currently being finalised for adoption in July 2006, the start of the government fiscal year. Implementation is expected to start in August 2006.

II. PRIORITIES AND TARGETS

A. PRIORITIES AND IDENTIFIED STRATEGIES

National Sustainable Development Plan

The draft NSDP is a comprehensive plan focusing on sustainable development priorities and targets for the Cook Islands over the next five years (2007-2011). The NSDP is being formulated as a national strategy which transverses all sectors.

According to the 2003 NSDP Process Development Report, the expected outcomes of the NSDP include the following.²

- Co-ordination of government and private sector efforts towards a national vision
- Specificity so that all policy and short term (annual) plans disseminate from the National Vision and plan
- Set up the framework for medium term and long term development
- Broad based awareness by the community of future development
- Consistency and predictability in the actions of government in the development of our nation

One of the important outputs of the 2003 National Forum was the call for the development of a 20 year national vision. Although several ideas were collected for further analysis during the 2003 National Development Forum, no new national vision was agreed upon.

During early elaboration of the NSDP process, the Process Management Unit (PMU) and National Planning Task Force continue to recall the current national vision due to its relevance, familiarity and durability.

The current vision was developed during the 1995 national crisis and deliberation of the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) at the National Retreat, at the Rarotongan Hotel in November 1997.

National Vision

“To enjoy the highest quality of life consistent with the aspirations of our people, and in harmony with our culture and environment.”

“Te oraanga tu rangatira, kia tau ki te anoano o te iti tangata, e kia tau ki ta tatou peu Maori ete aotini taporoporoia ote basileia.”

The current NSDP Advisory Committee decided to retain the current national vision to guide future goals.

The primary objective of the NSDP was also formulated to support the national vision:

² PMU (2003).

'To build a sustainable future that meets our economic and social needs in partnership with government, the private sector and local, regional and international stakeholders, without compromising prudent economic management, environmental integrity, social stability and the needs of future generations'.

The national vision is further reinforced by the following eight (8) guiding principles of the NSDP.

1. Sustainable Development Is A National Responsibility For All Cook Islanders
2. Democratic Principles, Basic Human Rights, Respect for Cultural, Religious and Ethnic Diversity And The Rule Of Law
3. Equitable Economic Development And Universal Access To Basic Health And Education And Environmental Sustainability Are Essential Prerequisites For Poverty Alleviation, Social Harmony And National Security
4. Special Needs of the Outer Islands and Disadvantaged Groups Are Recognized
5. National Development That Reflect Appropriate Regional And International Commitments
6. Good Governance Promoted Through Participatory Decision-Making Process At All Levels Involving Key Stakeholders, Including Community, Non-Government Organizations, and Government Agencies
7. Coordinated And Harmonised Access To, And Effective Use Of, National Resources And Development Partner Support From Bilateral, Multilateral Development Partners And Regional Organizations
8. International And Regional Foreign Relationships And Partnerships Must Be Based On Mutual Respect In The Interest Of The Cook Islands

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These principles, together with the six priority areas identified during the 2003 National Development Forum (NDF), post-NDF consultations, the Cook Islands Constitution and regional and international commitments, have led to the formulation of nine (9) national development goals and strategies as illustrated in Annex 1.

The draft nine development goals were focused on the following priority areas :

- Good Governance,
- Human Development Programmes,
- Economic Development,
- Infrastructure, Utilities and Transport,
- Natural Resources and Environment
- *National Coordination and Development Planning*
- *Cultural Diversity*
- National Security
- International Relations.

NSDP Process

There are expected outcomes from the NSDP process which includes:³

- Policy directives – e.g. land legislation, political reform etc

³ PMU (2003). Considerations for the NDS. Process Management Unit. MFEM/OPM. Government of the Cook Islands.

- Establish Prioritisation Criteria
- Establish a robust process of decision making
- Media releases by Working Groups on progress and interim outcomes of research to date (approved by PMU)
- Awareness of long term ramifications in regard to decision making
- Capacity building in long term strategic thinking within and without government

Several groups were involved in the NSDP process including the National Planning Task Force Committee, the NSDP Process Management Unit (PMU). The NSDP is being completed by the National Policy Coordination Division of the Office of the Prime Minister and the current National Advisory Committee.

This process was initially led by the PMU and National Planning Task Force until both became defunct in 2004. Apart from the technical advisers sourced from regional organisations, the NSDP preparations were mainly implemented by local government personnel and NGOs.

Financial and technical assistance were received from the New Zealand Agency for International Assistance (NZAID) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). These were appropriated towards the 2003 National Development Forum and post-Forum activities including consultations.

The Forum Secretariat, UNDP and SPREP provided technical assistance during the NSDP process, especially in drafting the strategy. While there were inconsistencies in the TA support, the government of the Cook Islands acknowledged this support, especially during the drafting phase of the NSDP.

It is important to note that the nine (9) national development goals and strategies of the NSDP (Annex 1) have not been prioritised yet and therefore not ranked. This is an important part of the strategy and work is still needed on prioritisation, ranking and preliminary valuation of the strategies for annual budgeting purposes.

Apart from editing and minor amendments, this is probably the main work programme component for finalisation before adoption of the NSDP in July. It is important that government and donors provide the necessary resources to complete the NSDP.

Support for a National NSDP Forum to allow stakeholders to finalise and adopt the strategy in July 2006 will be needed.

B. COHERENCE AMONG STRATEGIES AND RELATED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

Vertical Coherence between National and International Priorities

International and Regional Priorities

Several policy frameworks guide the implementation of sustainable development programme within the Cook Islands. These include the Agenda 21, BPOA and recently the Mauritius Strategy, the MDGs, and the Pacific Plan.

The Pacific Plan and the MDGs programmes were probably highly influential in the formulation of the NSDP. These programmes have provided guidance in terms of the Cook Islands' regional and international obligations including poverty reduction strategies.

Pacific Plan (regional strategy)

The Pacific Plan is a regional strategy to address the many challenges facing Pacific Islands countries today and in the future through the strengthening of mechanisms for cooperation and integration of responses. This is an example of where a regional strategy has been positively integrated into the NSDP.

The main goal of the Pacific Plan is to: *“Enhance and stimulate **economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security** for Pacific countries through regionalism.”*

The plan is aimed at achieving the following:

- i. Promote economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security;
- ii. Strengthen regional cooperation and integration in areas where the region could gain the most through sharing resources of governance, alignment of policies and delivery of practical benefits;
- iii. Strengthen support for current programmes, develop new initiatives and advocate for the needs of the Small Island States, particularly given their limited capacity and fragile and vulnerable environment, including to climate change;
- iv. Promote and protect cultural identity, regional inclusiveness, sub-regional representation, human rights, gender, youth and civil society;
- v. Reform the Forum and the regional institutional mechanism;
- vi. Clarify Members' own understanding and appreciation of regionalism with a clear perception of the benefits and costs; and
- vii. Build strong partnerships between Member countries, Pacific territories, regional and international organizations and non-state organisations.

The regional Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat agency recently advertised a Pacific Plan Small Islands States (SIS) Programme Officer position to specifically coordinate and facilitate SIS countries programmes and assist meet their Pacific Plan requirements and priorities. The Cook Islands is one of six members of the Small Islands States (SIS) in the Pacific.

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) also recently employed a Pacific Plan Desk Officer with Forum Secretariat assistance to administer and coordinate national activities

under the programme. This programme is naturally linked with implementation and monitoring of the NSDP.

This is an important contribution by the Forum Secretariat and will also contribute to the internal policy development capacity of the OPM.

National Millennium Development Goals Programme (international strategy)

The Cook Islands MDGs programme was initiated in 2002 after several regional workshops on social developments called for the national government to adopt the MDGs goals. A national MDGs workshop in March 2003 between government and civil society representatives led to the development of a draft Cook Islands National MDGs Work Plan.

The work plan consisted of three components;

- The National MDGs Advocacy Program;
- The preparation of the National MDGs Report and;
- The integration of the MDGs into the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP).

In November 2003, the government established a National MDGs Working Group to oversee implementation of the work plan and report on progress. Work plan activities include the integration of the MDGs into the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) process. The National MDGs Report serves as a progress report as well as an information and advocacy tool for the NSDP.

The inter-linkages between the 8 MDGs and the 9 strategic priority areas in the NSDP were identified as crucial to the successful implementation of both programmes. The NSDP priorities cut across the three pillars of sustainable development and demonstrated the relevance and usefulness of the MDGs framework as a tool to monitor the progress of implementing national sustainable development policies.

The Cook Islands Association for Non Government Organizations (CIANGO), in collaboration with the government, is spearheading the MDGs and NSDP public awareness campaigns. This will make sure that the MDGs reach the "grassroots" population.

The National MDGs Report was compiled by the National MDGs Working Group under the stewardship of the National Policy Coordination Unit of the Office of the Prime Minister. Technical advice and funding support towards the implementation of the Cook Islands MDGs work plan and reporting of progress were provided by the Country Team in the United Nations Sub-Regional Office in Samoa.

Where appropriate, some of the MDGs, targets and indicators have been modified and tailored to specifically suit and reflect the Cook Islands' interests. The Cook Islands NGOs suggested an additional Goal 9 on Improving Governance and the inclusion of Non-Communicable Diseases to Goal 6 as important amendments.

It is expected that adopted indicators and measures for Goal 9 will become important factors to gauge the progress on the issue of good governance nationally. The call for decisive leadership across all sectors of Cook Islands communities is important in achieving the objective of this goal. The objective of Goal 9 is to ensure integration of the

principle values of the Millennium Declaration, in particular good governance across all sectors.

Apart from the Agenda 21, MDGs and BPOA, other international and regional instruments such as the Conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change, Desertification (Land Degradation), Law of the Sea, CEDAW, MARPOL 73/78, Pacific Tuna Fisheries Agreement, ICAA, SPREP, Waigani, PACER, PICTA, and EU-ACP Cotonou Agreements reflect some of the important areas of interest to the Cook Islands. The Cook Islands has ratified and committed itself to implement and enforce these international legal frameworks and policies. These obligations have also been considered within the NSDP.

It is difficult to view outright benefits for the Cook Islands from the implementation of some of these policies especially where there is limited implementation capacity and supporting structures.

Key challenges for vertical cohesiveness between national and international priorities

Some international instruments such as the UN Convention of Biological Diversity, UN Framework for the Convention of Climate Change and UN Convention to Combat Desertification (Land Degradation) have been implemented on a GEF project funding basis with limited commitment of national resources.

At best, there has been selective and piecemeal approach to their implementation and resourcing. The Cook Islands does not have an official programme for some of these important Conventions.

As a matter of on-going concern, some international and regional instruments such as PICTA and PACER are not well understood by key agencies in government let alone the national policy makers. So far, capacity development for facilitation and implementation of PICTA and PACER has been at official and policy levels.

One of the issues of concern when implementing the Conventions obligations at national level is the selective nature of donor funding and international funds. This makes it hard for some of the national priorities within the NSDP to be addressed. Another national complaint about the support from international and regional financial mechanisms is the lack of funding for programmes for implementation of international obligations other than enabling activities. This is understandable where strategies, policies and legislations capacities are inadequate. However, there are important priorities which are outside the scope of many international donor interests.

Vertical Coherence between National and Local Communities Priorities and Strategies

In terms of local communities' priorities and strategies, these are reflected in each of the 10 inhabited island administrations' 5-year strategic plans, annual business plans, NGOs/CBOs strategic plans and business plans as well as in the outcomes and reports of various national forums and community consultation meetings. It is fair to say that the integration of community interests in the NSDP and other sectoral plans has been successful.

One of the important sectoral sustainable development strategies is the NESAF.

National Environment Strategic Action Framework (NESAF)

In 2004, a National Environment Forum discussed and adopted the National Environment Strategic Action Framework (NESAF) 2005-2009. The framework provides guidance and direction for achieving sustainable social and economic progress for the Cook Islands by using local natural resources and environment wisely. The NESAF continues to build on existing programmes established by the 1992 National Environment Management Strategy.

The NESAF focuses on three target programmes including Management of Natural Resources; Pollution Prevention and Waste Management; and Climate Change, Variability, Adaptability and Mitigation. The Institutional Support Mechanisms, and Implementation and Monitoring programmes provide administrative and implementation support to the target programmes.

The NESAF has four strategic goals:

- Goal 1: Enhance the management, protection and sustainable use of our natural resources.
- Goal 2: Reduction and prevention of environmental degradation from waste and all forms of pollution.
- Goal 3: Increase resilience by strengthening national capacities for climate change, variability, adaptation and mitigation
- Goal 4: Improve our institutional support and implementation mechanisms to manage our environment in a sustainable manner.

The overall mandate for formulation of the NESAF was given by the National Environment Act 2003.

The NESAF was then discussed, clarified and endorsed by the first National Environment Forum. The main chapters considered the NESAF as it focused on three (3) target programmes including; Management of Natural Resources; Pollution Prevention and Waste Management; and Climate Change, Variability, Mitigation and Adaptability.

Seven (7) priority areas were examined and the National Environment Forum recommended these to guide future policy directions: Biodiversity, Species and Ecosystems Conservation; Land Use and Resources Management; Ocean, Coastal and Foreshore Resources Management; Fresh Water Resources Management; Economics and Development; Waste Management, Sanitation and Water Quality; and Climate Change, Variability, Mitigation and Adaptability. These programmes are directly linked to ecological systems.

The fourth chapter presented was the Institutional Support Mechanisms which profile Planning, Policy and Legislations; Finance and Administration; Capacity Building; Information, Communications and Technology; Partnerships; and International Obligations. Implementation of the NESAF will cost an estimated NZ\$20.755 million.

The areas of focus within the NESAF also were covered by the NSDP. In fact environmental strategies were lifted from the NESAF as these are relevant to the NSDP.

Key challenges for vertical cohesiveness between national and community priorities

Important issues that need to be addressed when linking national strategies to community and island level plans. These include traditional land tenure and customs, management of respective authorities and the lack of skilled planners.

The outer islands still retain strong traditional land tenure systems and customs which complicate the enforcement of national legislation and the implementation of national strategies. Unless island council bylaws are adopted in relation to key legislations this could prove a stumbling block and has been the case with the new Environment Act and NESAF.

There are different authorities on each of the outer islands which can complicate implementation of national plans. It is important to manage this group of leaders which include the Aronga Mana (traditional leaders), Island Councils, Island Secretaries and Members of Parliament. There have been numerous incidents where national and community programmes and projects suffered because of disagreement between these leaders.

This problem of limited numbers of policy makers and planners is spread across the private sector, NGOs and local communities. These sectors have found it difficult to develop their plans let alone linking these to the NSDP.

In the environment sector, there is consistency between the NESAF and community strategies as indicated by the NGOs/CBOs Small Grants Programme (SGP). As highlighted in their Country Strategy Report for the Cook Islands/GEF Small Grants Programme, NGOs/CBOs environmental strategies were directly lifted from the NESAF which they had proposed as their areas of responsibility during preparation of the NESAF and the national environment forum.

In terms of social cohesiveness, NGOs/CBOs have been leading advocates of social development programmes including disability strategies, Aids prevention and awareness, senior citizens' programmes and child welfare programmes. These are driven at village levels by community leaders and volunteers and supported by the Public Health and the Ministry of Internal Affairs divisions for social welfare and gender development.

Not all social policies are well linked between national and community programmes. There is no national programme for the care of senior citizens other than fortnightly allowances known as old age pension. Te Are Pa Taunga and Are Pa Metua programmes are volunteer programmes which provide facilities for senior citizens to meet and be entertained. Disability programmes in the outer islands have just been implemented by the Cook Islands Disabled Society, with assistance from NZAID and EU-ACP.

Decreasing economic activities and depopulation in the outer islands is a major concern. The NSDP has considered policy measures to address this problem. However, this is an on-going concern and government need to commit itself to addressing this dilemma.

Community concerns with water security in the outer islands especially the Northern Group islands, have prompted government and donor agencies to improve water catchment capacities by restoring old water tanks in local villages and providing

discounted plastic water tanks for households. Several island communities have been supported through this initiative and this is likely to continue on other islands due to its positive impact on water resources.

The establishment of community-based “raui” (or natural protected areas) is well accepted practice in the Cook Islands. Traditional leaders and community leaders have been the main advocates of these practices and are well supported by the national government with technical assistance provided by the Ministry of Marine Resources and the National Environment Service.

In terms of economic policies, CBO contributions to national economic policy discussions are represented via their NGO representatives. Politicians also tend to relate well to their constituencies priorities which are often not in the best interests of the Cook Islands. Often these priorities are at odds with conventional economic realities and require a delicate balancing act, especially between outer islands communities and the government.

Horizontal Coherence between Priorities and Strategies

Several sectoral plans were drafted to support the NSDP. These include the National Environment Strategic Action Framework (NESAF) 2005-2009; draft Education Strategic Plan 2006-2020; draft Marine Resources and Industry Plan 2006-2009; National Waste Management Plan; Cook Islands Tourism Master Plan 2006-2015; draft Health Sector-Medium Term Strategy 2006-2009; National HRD Strategy and the Preventive Infrastructure Master Plan which is being prepared with ADB assistance.

All ten Outer Islands Councils and Administrations have an island strategic plan. According to OMIA which produce these plans, they will need to be reviewed and new plans drafted during the 2006/07 FY. Relevant strategies and considerations from the current policy statements had been incorporated into the NSDP.⁴

These plans were the outcome of sectoral consultations and national forums following the 2003 National Development Forum. There has been community-wide interest in updating and developing new strategies for sectors in the aftermath of the National Development Forum. One of these new strategies, the NESAF, provided other sectors and the NSDP outlines of sustainable development strategies for future considerations.

While these sectoral plans have considered environmental and sustainable development concerns to be addressed within the sectors involved, integration of sustainable development strategies into these plans have been selective.

For example, the first draft Tourism Master Plan in 2004 which called for a geo-tourism lead industry concept was toned down by key stakeholders to accommodate more general market tourism interests. The first draft was heavily favorable to sustainable development concerns compared to the final draft.

The Preventive Infrastructure Master Plan formulation process now being prepared has considered climate proofing in the approach to developing the plan. This means that the government infrastructure development projects over the next 20 years will consider

⁴ Upoko (2006)

preservation of the environment as well as the protection of each island from climate change impact.

Implementation of the National Waste Management Plan is coordinated by the Waste Management Division of the Ministry of Works. However, the MOW, NES and MOH are all responsible individually for the successful monitoring and regulatory management of wastes lines, effects and impacts. Thus far since formation of new waste management facilities and improvements in legislations and regulations, there has been increasing improvement in the management of waste. The use of just two legislations, the Public Health Act and Environment Act, seem to be adequate for current waste management needs.

The Marine Resources and Industry Plan 2006-2009 is another strategy that considers environmental and sustainable development concerns but with primary focus on maximising economic development of national marine resources. The MMR is implementing an Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Building project in partnership with the National Environment Service (NES) under NZAID funding assistance. This on-going project allows both agencies to develop their own capacities and competencies in areas of common interests.

The ADB-sponsored Legal and Institutional Strengthening of Environmental Management and previous TA projects have started formulating legislations and frameworks in key areas mentioned above including water resource management, biodiversity prospecting, trade in endangered species and ozone-depleting substances.⁵

The same project has drafted regulations under existing legislations including Environment (Atiu) Regulations; Environment (Aitutaki) Regulations; Environment (Biodiversity Conservation) Regulations; Environment (Environment Protection Fund) Regulations; Environment (Mi tiaro) Regulations; Environment (Permits and Consents) Regulations; Environment (Suwarrow National Park) Regulations; Environment (Takuvaine Water Catchment) Regulations; Environment (Waste Licensing) Regulations and Public Health (Sewage) Regulations.⁶

The project also drafted the new Atiu Bylaws 2006, Aitutaki Bylaws 2006 and the Mitiaro Bylaws 2006.⁷ Mangaia is currently seeking support to draft its new Environment (Mangaia) Regulations as well as new Mangaia Bylaws 2006.⁸

Draft Sewage Regulations have been completed by the Public Health Department to support activities related to improving septic tank storage systems and sewage treatment around homes and businesses, especially in high risk areas. Whilst there is no National Waste Management Act, general waste management concerns have been addressed by the Public Health Act 2003 and the Environment Act 2003.⁹

The Marine Resources Act 2005 is another important piece of legislation to be adopted with important provisions related to resource management and marine environmental quality monitoring, especially on negative impacts on foreshore, lagoon and ocean processes and ecosystems.

⁵ De Romilly et al (2006).

⁶ De Romilly et al (2006).

⁷ De Romilly et al (2006).

⁸ Upoko (2006)

⁹ Upoko (2006)

Attempts to develop a comprehensive national legislation and policy for water have been delayed until recently due to claims of lack of technical support and resources. Recent developments include the formation of a National Water Safety Committee to drive the development of a National Water Safety Plan with help from SOPAC. The completion of the Water Resources Management Bill 2006 is a significant achievement by the ADB Legal and Institutional Strengthening of Environmental Management project.

Key challenges for horizontal cohesiveness between priorities and strategies

While there is general understanding between heads of government ministries and Island Secretaries about the links between their sectoral and community plans and the NSDP, further links between them and regional and international policy frameworks are not appreciated. This is especially true at the community and outer islands level where information on regional and international programmes were not always available.

Ministries of government and SOEs have been found to be territorial and defensive during the early NSDP process. Most of these agencies feared changes but some were understanding and proceeded to link their sectoral and corporate plans with the NSDP.

One of the difficulties experienced with agencies in terms of implementing their strategies is that sustainable development priorities tend to be lost in the implementation process. This is due to operational difficulties caused by constraints on agencies' financial, staffing and administrative and technical support resources. During any budgetary crisis, agencies tend to focus on core services and any non-core activities get dropped. Most often environmental concerns or sustainable development issues are placed behind core sectoral priorities. This was the case during the ERP and recent government annual budgetary retrenchments.

Some government agencies have not been able to develop or update their strategies. Part of the reason for the lack of progress is the lack of skilled local policy analysts and planners. This is also reflected in the delays in drafting of the NSDP.

There are major gaps in terms of policies, strategies and legislations needed to support the NSDP. The following areas will require technical support in terms of review, completion, amendment and drafting of new policies, strategies and legislation. These areas include natural resource management, water, building standards and control, hazardous wastes and pollution, physical infrastructure development and maintenance, land use and survey, foreshore, forestry and chemicals management.

Limited technical and legal capacity locally has also caused problems including lengthy delays in reviews, the amendment and drafting of new policies, plans and laws. These problems tie the hands of officials in regard to enforcement and oversight.

Draft Disaster Risk Management legislation and strategies are yet to be formalised. These legal frameworks will provide direction and support for the effective planning and management of mitigation, preparedness, and response and recovery efforts. Meanwhile, there seems to be a lack of urgency to complete these important policies despite the need to improve all aspects of national disaster and emergency crisis management.

The negative impact from the poorly implemented devolution policy of government in 1997 is still affecting government organisational structures and responsibilities. Problems

include the lack of clear roles and responsibilities between agencies, leading to poor implementation, enforcement, prosecution and administrative support.

Inconsistencies in policies have also been noted between regulatory agencies. Health inspectors have been known to approve certain certification processes to applicants while they meet health policies but not NES environmental requirements. Similar situations have also occurred between the Building Control Division of MOW and NES over vetting processes for projects. On-going discussions between Tourism, Public Health, MOW and NES have been focused on better coordination between agencies, especially on the enforcement and vetting processes.

The digging of roads is another good example of the confusion in policies. There has been little coordination between MOW, Telecom Cook Islands and Te Aponga Uira (Rarotonga electricity supplier) in terms of the installation of cables and pipelines leading to unnecessary repetition of work on Rarotonga roads. One of the focuses of the NSDP was to improve the coordination between utility providers' programmes.

During the 1996 ERP, central government services including government administration, education, infrastructure, health and agriculture in the outer islands were decentralised. Administrative powers were devolved under each island administration and were supported by OMIA as the national coordinating agency for the outer islands programmes.

Health, education and agricultural services have since been returned to the central ministries as result of poor performances in the outer islands. However, some programmes remain under the operation of OMIA, both officially and unofficially. These often overlapped with central agency programmes including forestry, livestock, and crop production programmes, infrastructure and water.

For example, the Water Works Department of MOW is only responsible for water resources on Rarotonga while OMIA is responsible for the outer islands. This is also the case with infrastructure, where MOW is responsible for Rarotonga while OMIA is responsible for supporting development and maintenance of infrastructure in the outer islands.

In terms of technical support, capacities have been spread thinly between the MOW and OMIA which is basically a duplication of efforts and resources. Limited technical capacity has been one of the main causes of incomplete and delayed projects in the outer islands.

The Water Works Department has implemented projects in the outer islands on water resources, effectively duplicating OMIA's activities in the outer islands.

Integration of environmental issues into the national education plan tends to be easy but difficulties have been experienced with transformation of that policy into school curricula and into the classrooms. There is limited numbers of skilled teachers with environmental teaching backgrounds and there is need for environmental training programmes for teachers.

The Cook Islands has an effective Public Health family planning programme but it is inconsistent with decreasing population concerns. The introduction of a re-population strategy to counter labour shortages is an important issue for the NSDP to address.

C. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION BY PRIVATE SECTOR, CIVIL SOCIETY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OUTER ISLANDS

General Comments on Public Participation and Levels of Engagement

Since the 1995/96 ERP started, Government has little option but to recognise the Cook Islands Chamber of Commerce and the Cook Islands Association of Non-Government Organizations (CIANGO) as “strategic partners” in creating jobs, income, wealth and security of livelihood during the economic crisis. CIANGO is the umbrella NGO in the Cook Islands.

There are several national decision-making bodies with broader community representatives as members, involved in sustainable management programmes. These include the National Planning Task Force Committee, Rarotonga Environment Authority; National Environment Council; Annual Budgetary Appropriations Committee; NSDP Advisory Committee; National Waste Management Committee; National MDGs Committee; National Biodiversity Steering Group Committee; National Climate Change Country Team; National Waste Management Committee; National Disaster Risks Management Council; National Water Safety Project Committee; Public Expenditure and Review Committee (PERCA); Outer Islands Development Grant Fund Committee (OIDGF) and Aid Capital and Coordinating Committee (ACCC).

Three committees have all non-government members on them including the Rarotonga Environment Authority, the Annual Budgetary Appropriations Committee and the PERCA Committee. Other committees are chaired by government agencies depending on which agency has the most interests and responsibilities.

Community-wide consultations were conducted through the NSDP and national MDGs programmes. These stakeholders’ consultation forums provided the baseline information for developing the NSDP strategies. Other national forums which followed the 2003 National Development Forum were opened to the broader community including the National Good Governance Forum 2004, National Health Sector Advance Forum 2004 and the National Environment Forum 2004. Many outer islands representatives including NGOs and CBOs were invited and brought to Rarotonga during these national forums which were mostly successful.

Community meetings in villages on outer islands and within the Vaka Districts on Rarotonga allowed for better accommodation of local peoples’ viewpoints. Village meetings have mixed success and this problem was addressed by using community and stakeholder training and educational workshops as additional forums for NSDP discussions.

Civil Society

Thirty-five (35) NGOs are registered under the Incorporated Societies Act of the Cook Islands while a further forty six (46) were unregistered community-based organisations (CBOs).¹⁰ Seventy (70) of these NGOs are registered or affiliated to CIANGO. NGO and CBO memberships are overwhelmingly dominated by women.

¹⁰ CIANGO. (2006).

Of these CIANGO members, about 10 NGOs are involved and heavily focused on environmental causes at national and international level.

Environmental groups include the Taporoporoanga Ipukarea Society (TIS), WWF-Cook Islands, Avana-Muri Marine Management Action Group (AMMAG), Rarotonga Environment Awareness Programme (REAP), Red Cross Cook Islands, Mangaia Tangaeo Rangers, Mitiaro Itiki Rangers and the Takitumu Conservation Area (TCA) Trust.

These NGOs have provided communities with a platform for lobbying for government and international support on specific public environment issues. These include the declaration of the island of Suwarow as a national park, the Kakerori (Rarotonga Flycatcher) Protection Project, other endemic species monitoring projects, water quality monitoring, other biodiversity projects, waste management, community rubbish clean-ups and collections, and recycling, national protected areas (rau'i), promotions and information disseminations, environmental education and awareness, vulnerability and adaptation capacity assessments and disaster preparedness and responses.

Recently, the CIANGO in partnership with the UNDP and the Government of the Cook Islands formalised the Cook Islands-GEF Small Grants programme. This programme is aimed at addressing and funding NGO and CBO environmental programmes in local communities. These concerns have been adopted by the NSDP as they were drawn from the NESAF strategies.

It is obvious that the NGOs have been frustrated with the slow progress on the completion of the NSDP. Recently, the Group for Political Change (GPC), one of the influential and effective government "watch dogs" made up of women representatives, has been calling for the NSDP to be completed and for the general public to comment on it before its adoption.

Private Sector

The Chamber of Commerce contributions to commerce and trade activities and the environment sector need to be acknowledged as they were a key link and instrumental in coordination, facilitation and involvement of the private sector businesses in national debates on important policy issues. It is highly active in being critical and where necessary providing support to government in terms of decision-making.

It claims to have 98 active members representing the following groups: Accommodation Council, Tourism Council, Tours and Transport, Pearl Guild, Importers and Exporters, Offshore Banking and the Restaurant Association.

The Chamber of Commerce is well represented on all of the national committees related to sustainable development mentioned above. Their representatives on the NSDP National Planning Task Force and recently the NSDP Advisory Committee have contributed much to the process and drafting of the NSDP as well as keeping their sector well informed.

Members of the Tourism Industry Council Environment Committee which is a sub-committee of the Tourism Industry Council took a keen interest in the NSDP. Concerns about the environment problems and carrying capacity limitations of the lagoon environment around Rarotonga prompted the industry to look for sustainable

development measures in the future. The committee is focused on environmental issues likely to have an impact on the tourism industry and has adopted a voluntary self-regulating and monitoring Tourism Environment Charter.

Local consultants have been assisting government agencies with their enabling activities in terms of capacity building and institutional strengthening. Most of these programmes involve elaboration of environmentally related strategies, policies and regulations or legislations as well as capacity buildings and institutional strengthening exercises. These consultants have not been fully engaged in the drafting of the NSDP by the government due to claims of lack of funding. This is where development partners could also have contributed to the process by providing funding for local consultants for their assistance.

Vaka and Outer Islands Communities

The integration of the Outer Islands interests into NSDP is crucial. During the early phase of the process it was decided to form a focus group that will go out to the Outer Islands to do consultations in the islands communities.

The islands of Aitutaki, Mangaia and Mitiaro were visited and meetings conducted as part of the NSDP/MDGs consultations and awareness campaigns. However these activities were implemented by the PMU instead of the outer islands working group. The outer island working groups did not make any progress apart from a couple of meetings.

Aitutaki which has a strong capable and vocal community actively participate in the process. They were represented on the National Planning Task Force committee. There was universal support and acceptance for the NDS on the island.

There was a proposal for the creation of strategic development committees on each of the islands where initial consultations were implemented. However, only the NSDP focal points were established at the time. The emphasis was to establish the link and create a channel so that outer island views can be presented.

Currently, all Island Councils and communities have expressed their support for the NSDP. This cohesiveness was necessary so that the NDS will result in the co-ordination of local and central government initiatives.¹¹

Youths

Youths contributions and participation in the NSDP process is well acknowledged. Most of the PMU members were youth members and involved in youth programmes and organisations such as community voluntary groups, church youth groups and the National Youth Council. The PMU also visited secondary schools to discuss the future expectations of high schools students and their teachers. Youths concerns such as drug use, alcohol abuse, suicide, HIV/AIDS, lack of job skills and educational qualification have been reflected in the NSDP.

Development Partners Support

¹¹ PMU (2003).

Relationship with international development partners' continue to be strong with the Italian Government, NZAID, AusAID, ADB, SPREP, UNDP, and FORSEC lending financial and TA support to the NSDP process. Other development partners such as CIDA, WWF, GEF, SOPAC and the SPC are participating locally in sustainable development programmes at community level.

While regional and international organisations and foreign governments continue to lend support to NGO and CBO sustainable development programmes there is need for proper coordination to prevent duplication of efforts. This will maximise the impact of using limited resources.¹²

The NSDP PMU collaborated with the NGOs about the community consultations using their experiences, contacts and sharing of funding and personnel resources. This is especially important in the outer islands where the costs of traveling can be expensive and time consuming.

It is also important that local resources such as local consultants are used to finalise the NSDP for ownership and costs saving purposes.

There has been active interest and participation by development partners in the Cook Islands environmental programmes since 2002.

Effectiveness of Public Participation and Levels of Engagement

To a certain degree, many of the follow-up national workshops and forums to the National Development Forum in 2003 provide some indication of the effectiveness of the consultation efforts by the government in terms of seeking community priorities and input in national development processes.

Since 2003, community inputs in follow-up meetings and national forums have been highlighted and continuously repeated for government to consider.

However, there has been progress as new natural resources and environmentally-related plans and regulations have been developed as result of stakeholders calling for improvement in environmental and resource management regimes.

The preparation of the NESAF was a national and cross-sectoral effort rather than an environment sector effort alone. The NESAF has improved stakeholders' understanding of the linkages and responsibilities between agencies across sectors in relation to the environment.

It is now a common part of any programme formulation in the Cook Islands for the private sector, NGOs or community groups' representatives and especially CIANGO to participate with government members on project committees.

Traditional leaders now expect government to provide advice on matters related to natural resource and environmental management.

¹² CIANGO. (2006).

Communities in the Outer Islands also expected to be consulted directly or via their representatives through other government workshops, forums and meetings on Rarotonga.

One of the important trends in recent meetings has been the use of Maori language for discussions in national meetings especially where there are significant inputs from NGO representatives from the outer islands.

The translation of consultation materials and conducting of presentations in the Maori language is important especially in the outer islands. These have been successfully applied in many consultation meetings.

These participatory processes have been extended to the implementation phase of the NESAF. The private sector has taken on recommendations by the NESAF for more input in addressing the need to send solid waste to New Zealand for recycling. Material from cardboard boxes, aluminium cans, plastics bottles, glass, and vehicle parts have been collected for recycling by the private sector.

NGOs and CBOs have also taken on more responsibilities as recommended by the NESAF. Priorities are being implemented by NGOs under the Cook Islands GEF Small Grants Programme and other NGOs projects which they pledged to implement during the formulation of the NESAF.

In 2002, two (2) NGOs including TIS and REAP were actively involved in implementing environmentally-related programmes.

In 2006, six (6) additional NGOs, including the Avana-Muri Marine Awareness Group (AMMAG), WWF Cook Islands, Red Cross Cook Islands, Mitiaro Itiki Rangers, Mangaia Tangaeo Rangers, and Islands Sustainable Alliance Cook Islands (ISACI) have join the TIS and REAP to address environmental problems.

These do not include community-based organisations.

These organisations form the platform for lobbying for government and international support on community environment issues such as the declaration of the island of Suwarrow as a national park, water quality monitoring, the protection of wetland areas, beach areas, islets (motu), waste management, community rubbish clean-ups and collection and recycling, national protected areas (rau'i), information dissemination, environmental education and awareness, vulnerability and adaptation capacity assessments and disaster preparedness and responses.

A result of having a clear process, especially with broader participation by stakeholders in the formulation process of the NESAF, is that we are seeing more environmental programmes and projects implemented than before in the Cook Islands. There is an also better organisation by the NGOs of their affairs and programmes. This has come about as a result of better understanding by stakeholders of their responsibilities.

Government is also encouraging communities to take charge of the management of their resources. It recently suggested as a matter of budgetary policy for matured pine forests on Mangaia and Atiu to be harvested to assist with the cost of maintaining the forestry programmes and for future forestry initiatives. There is continuing discussion on this matter.

The Development of Sustainable Agriculture in the Pacific (DSAP) Phase 1 and 2 programme implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture has gathered much need support from local communities. Planting of new drought-resistant crop varieties especially taro and other root crops and vegetables was aimed at improving the national food security situation.

The IWP Takuvaine Water Catchment Management project was aimed at encouraging local communities to take responsibility for ensuring that local water resources are well managed for irrigation and other uses and to improve the quality of accessible drinking water. The community project committee produced a Takuvaine Water Catchment Ra'ui Management Plan. Legal implications as result of implementation of this plan will be supported by the newly drafted Environment (Takuvaine Water Catchment) Regulations.

A climate change programme was initiated as part of the CBDAMPIC project to collect and record traditional knowledge on local weather information and climatic forecasts from local community elders. This project has received important information on traditional early warning systems and forecasting of extreme weather patterns.

The ADB has assisted the funding of the new landfills and sewage treatment tanks for both Rarotonga and Aitutaki. It also continues to provide TA grant projects for climate proofing of infrastructure, policies and communities; legal and institutional strengthening of environmental management in the Cook Islands, strengthening disaster management and mitigation including the development of a Preventive Infrastructure Master Plan.

NZAID and AusAID harmonised their bilateral aid programme to the Cook Islands in 2004 and this is currently administered by NZAID. NZAID and AusAID hold annual negotiations with the government on their Forward Aid programme.

NZAID/AusAID have contributed through their bilateral and multilateral programmes, financial and TA assistance for water tanks in the outer islands, water quality testing and monitoring, waste management, development of the NESAF, NSDP and other sectoral policies, National Environment Forum, community environmental education, awareness and promotions, disaster recovery and reconstruction, and including infrastructure development projects.

NZAID/AusAID is a member of two key decision-making committees such as the Aid Capital Coordinating Committee (ACCC) and Outer Islands Development Grant Funds. Meetings at this level are normally conducted on a monthly basis.

The GEF through the UNDP, UNEP, and SPREP has provided funding for the National Capacity Needs Assessments (NCSA), NBSAP and NBSAP Add-On projects, Climate Change National Communications, Vulnerability and Adaptation as well as Mitigation projects, International Waters Programme (IWP) projects, UNCCD reports and disaster-related programmes.

The GEF via the UNDP also initiated the Cook Islands-GEF Small Grants Programme specifically for local NGOs and CBOs.

At the beginning of 2006, a national GEF Dialogue Workshop was conducted to improve national capacity in terms of understanding GEF policies, priorities and funding

mechanisms. Very few local professionals understand GEF policies and can develop GEF project proposals.

Key challenges in public participation and levels of engagement

One of the major problems in dealing with the outer islands is the high cost of conducting stakeholder consultations with small islands populations and communities spread out over an area of 2 million square kilometres. The PMU understood this concern from the beginning and it was decided to join other national programmes such as the MDGs for joint consultations and awareness exercises. This was aimed at reducing the cost of consultations as well as adequate coverage within the timeframe allowed and resources available.

Decisions made at these meetings have been integrated in budgetary appropriations and policy statements to varying degrees of success. In many cases government has been slow to act on these priorities due to limited capacity and resources.

However, while there has been active participation by NGOs and CBOs, the level of contribution to informed discussions was mixed depending on the level of exchanges and skills of representatives engaged in meetings and forums.

An area of concern and where many consultation meetings fail to get the message across is when technical subjects are being discussed. This is a problem in the environment sector where new terminologies especially in scientific-centered programmes such as climate change and biodiversity tend to be difficult for the common person to understand.

One of the important challenges for government is to call for another national forum for the general public and communities to discuss the implementation process and adopt the plan. This exercise will require more funding.

Another challenge for the NSDP is how to continue to share resources and knowledge between the general public, development partners and the government during the promotion and implementation of the NSDP.

Funding is a major constraint and financial support will be needed to promote and monitoring of the NSDP especially in the outer islands.

There have been areas where collaboration activities between the PMU and NGOs have produced good results and these activities need to be strengthened. Other avenues for collaboration also need to be assessed.

One of the main constraints in accessing GEF funding is probably the timeframe taken from the time of project proposal submission to the receiving of funds. However, this is currently considered in planning and project design timeframes.

D. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Institutional Structures for Sustainable Development

Following the National WSSD Forum in 2002, a WSSD Steering Committee was established and a Sub-Working Committee formed to complete the WSSD National Assessment Report (NAR).

Only the Sub-Working Committee has been active in facilitating sustainable development programmes including establishing the NSDP process and preparing the National Development Forum in 2003. This committee was dissolved in 2003. The NSDP Working Committee is currently responsible for guiding the completion of the NSDP.

Other national decision-making bodies are involved in sustainable management programmes, including Rarotonga Environment Authority, National Environment Council, Annual Budgetary Appropriations Committee, National Sustainable Development Committee, National Waste Management Committee, National MDGs Committee, National Biodiversity Steering Group Committee, National Climate Change Country Team, National Waste Management Committee, National Disaster Management Committee and National Water Safety Project Committee.

Current institutional arrangements allow the OPM and MFEM to facilitate and coordinate NSDP activities using internal personnel and resources.

To progress implementation of the NSDP, government will need assistance to establish a National Planning Office with dedicated resources to effectively monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation across all sectors. This will ensure that the NSDP programme is well coordinated and other institutional structures are also active and effective.

The NCSA thematic assessment profiling of national capacity needs to support the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements is continuing. While this is an environmental sector projects, the outcomes will have significance influence and greater effect on strengthening of institutional capacities across sectors. It is expected to be completed by the end of July 2006. A national capacity-building Plan of Action will be developed based on the outcome of the thematic assessment and is expected to be completed before the end of 2006.

Government has been conducting local training programmes as well as offering university and other tertiary institution scholarships to local students. These have been offered through the National Human Resources Development Office. Other government agencies and NGOs have conducted training programmes within their sectors related to development of their own internal capacities.

Local personnel also have short term training attachments to regional institutions in Fiji, Samoa, New Zealand, Australia and Japan on resources and environmental management and technical programmes. Most of these attachments were funded by development partners mainly NZAID, AusAID, Japan, EU amongst others.

Key challenges in terms of institutional structures

Formulation of the NSDP was generally difficult for many reasons. It has been made even more difficult due to enabling environments and governing structures being not fully employed or in place and insufficient local budgetary funding from government. Responsibilities between statutory and government agencies were also vague and in many cases obsolete or inadequate.

The Cook Islands does not have a formal national WSSD programme and WSSD coordinator. This is a major weakness in the government's attempt to meet its national obligations under the WSSD, BPOA and MDGs.

The Cook Islands government does not have a dedicated official planning department after it was dissolved and lost within the restructuring programme of the ERP in 1995/96. Since then sectoral planning has been based on annual budgetary policy statements which raises the risk of development policies and programmes that are unsustainable in the long term. This is why the NSDP, as a long term development guidance tool, is urgently needed.

It is proposed that government reestablish a National Planning Office as soon as possible. There is also need to strengthen and improve the capacities of the National Policy Coordination Unit of the Office of the Prime Minister as the unit is severely depleted of qualified personnel due to high staff turnover.

Other priority areas with weak institutional structures have been recommended for improvement including water and disaster management. A stand-alone National Water Authority was recommended to be established as priority for government to firmly deal with continuing water problems instead of the current structural set-up which is ineffective. The National Disaster Management Office is still a one-man band and needs to be reorganised to take on greater responsibilities under the proposed draft legislation and policies.¹³

Preliminary results from the NCSA thematic profiling project suggested the following key areas of institutional capacity constraints and needs: Limited numbers of local technical personnel and researchers; limited enforcement capacities; identified key sectors lack appropriate legislations, policies and strategies; roles and responsibilities of stakeholders not always clear; weak institutional structures for forestry, water, land use and survey management; limited capabilities of laboratories and research facilities; lack of database on technologies and detailed assessment of technology needs and transfer processes; lack of quality data and poor data management; limited numbers of functioning computer networks and databases; limited trained staff in media educational programmes and inconsistencies in the levels of resources committed by government and donors for CCD initiatives.¹⁴

Institutional Actors

The two key government Ministries leading the NSDP process and elaboration of the NSDP were the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM).

¹³ Upoko (2006)

¹⁴ Upoko (2006)

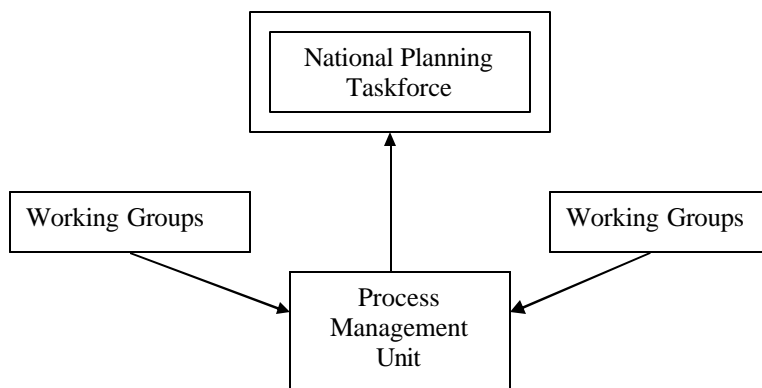
The National Policy Coordination Division of the OPM is responsible for coordinating the development and monitoring of the implementation of national policies. The MFEM Act gives the MFEM the mandate to develop prudent economic and financial policies.

In 2003, Cabinet appointed a joint NSDP Process Management Unit (PMU) between the OPM and MFEM to manage the NSDP process and monitor implementation of the NSDP. These unit members consist of personnel from the National Policy Coordination Unit and Economic Policy Division of the MFEM. The PMU Terms of Reference details described their duties and responsibilities as follows:

1. Members shall provide secretariat responsibilities to the Working Groups (WG) created for the NDP process.
2. Members shall provide secretariat responsibilities to the National Planning Task Force created for the NDP process.
3. Members shall be responsible for implementing PMU work plan activities or provide assistance to the PMU Manager and ADB TA; where necessary and as stipulated in the PMU work plan and/or (draft) Process Document for the NDP, leading to the completion, adoption and implementation of the NDP process document and the NDP.
4. Members will carry out tasks delegated by the Manager where necessary as stipulated in the PMU work plan and/or (draft) NDP and within a reasonable amount of time.
5. Members will be responsible for reporting to the Manager, members of the PMU, and members of his/her WG, no later than 5 working days of each major Working Group exercise, outcomes of Working Group exercise as identified in the PMU work plan and/or (draft) Process Document for the NDS
6. Members will report to the Manager and other PMU members, the outcomes of individual NDP related activities recently implemented and/or completed, at scheduled PMU meetings.
7. Members will assist the Manager and Task Force Chairpersons in maintaining healthy and engaging relationship with the general public regarding PMU activities and NDP progress.
8. Members will openly communicate with the Manager and between members of the PMU, ADB TA, National Planning Task Force, Working Groups, members of the public, and the media in accordance with PMU communications strategy and the Media and Public Relations Strategy outlined in the Process Document for the NDP.
9. Members will assist the Manager in preparations for the transitional phase, from formulation to implementation, during and leading up to the completion of the NDP.

Unfortunately, the PMU became dysfunctional after most of the key staff left government in 2004. The National Policy Coordination Division of the OPM continued with the task of formulating the NSDP to date.

NSDP Process Structure 2003



Key challenges in terms of institutional Actors

The main cause of the breakdowns in process structures was the regular changes of leadership (Prime Minister and Chief of Staff) as well as governments since 2003. The Cook Islands has five governments since 2003. Regular changes of leadership had an effect on the overall commitments and participation of planning personnel, Working Group members and National Planning Task Force committee members. The politicization of the process was a distraction to the planning staff. The high turnover of planning staff and limited number of skilled planners available were most discouraging. Government budgetary commitments were also disappointing. Additionally, TA supports from regional organisations were inconsistent.

Government need to provide the necessary resources for the OPM to complete and implement the NSDP.

Interagency Mechanisms

The national steering committees mentioned previously provide a mechanism for cooperation between key stakeholders with common interests. For example, the National Waste Management Committee is chaired by the Office of the Prime Minister and representatives on the committee include MOW, MOH, NES and NGOs.

In the case of the NSDP process, the sectoral Working Groups provided a mechanism for cooperation, and the exchange and integration of ideas and views for addressing current and future sectoral problems.

In 2003, Cabinet also approved the National Planning Task Force which has 32 members including broader community representatives. The committee became dysfunctional as well.

The National Planning Task Force was composed of selected representatives of a broad-based cross-section of the community. There were three chairpersons chosen from

outside of government. The Task Force terms of reference reflect on the following duties and responsibilities.

The Task Force is a consultative body that will:

- Provide guidance to the PMU and the Focus Groups in the preparation of the NDP;
- Comment and make recommendations in relation to the organisation and representation at the National Forums;
- Review and make recommendations on the outcomes of the Forums; and
- Review and make recommendations on the work of the Focus Groups processed through the Project Management Unit especially in relation to the NDP.

Other key government agencies such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Internal Affairs, MFEM, Ministry of Works and Ministry of Justice were appointed by Cabinet to led the designated NSDP Working Groups for the Health Sector; Education Sector; Social Welfare; Infrastructure, Utilities and Transport; Economic Development; Good Governance and National Security.

The working group memberships consist of broader community representatives including the Chamber of Commerce and CIANGO. The focus groups were enthusiastic at the beginning but eventually lost interest and momentum.

Working groups were formed to provide expertise in establishing sector specific strategies and consequent progress monitoring. The following sectors were considered necessary to the NSDP: Social development (education/health), infrastructure and economic development. Crosscutting issues considered include the environment, human resources, community/private sector participation and good governance. A working group for the outer islands was also considered with the OMIA chairing the committee. The working groups Term of Reference highlighted the following duties and responsibilities.

1. Identify priority areas/issues
2. Devise a plan of action and timetable. This will involve determining -What needs to be done? How to address the issues? Who needs to be consulted? Timeframe.
3. Report Timetable/Action-plan to Process Management Unit. Within these reporting dates is also a schedule of media releases. It is envisioned that each group will have a media release every 4 to 6 weeks that will be circulated by the PMU.
4. Timeliness is important but the quality of the consultation and output should not be compromised.
5. Initially the focus groups should define 35 quantifiable goals for each sector. These goals should as much as possible encompass the general aims of the whole sector and industry.

Key challenges for interagency mechanisms

The NSDP working groups failed due to lack of clear direction from the PMU about progress and the NSDP process. Members were preoccupied with their own agendas and interests and often did not turn up to meetings or provide appropriate information to the PMU.

One difficulty is that there was lack of direction to proceed and a lack of clear responsibilities for key stakeholders involved.

Media and Communications Strategy

During the early stages of the NSDP, the PMU developed a media and communications strategy with its main aim of keeping the communities in touch with the programme. The objective of this process is to prepare people for change to minimise transitional disruption.¹⁵This was achieved by keeping the general public informed and by engaging public responses to major events and developments in the process. The strategy was a success for the duration of its implementation for it raised the profile of the NSDP.

¹⁵ PMU (2003).

E OUTCOMES AND MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Indicators and Monitoring

For monitoring purposes in general, there are eighty eight (88) indicators in the NSDP. About 66% of the indicators used have data coverage. About 22% were social development indicators which were reflected and adopted from the National MDGs Report.

With regard to the NSDS indicators' relevance to Agenda 21, the indicators were matched with the NESAF indicators as well MFEM economic and financial policies indicators as represented in their Annual Economic Reports.

Year 2002 and 2005 data will be used as baseline indicators for both monitoring of implementation progress and reporting to key stakeholders within sectors and industries. It is difficult to set solid future targets against many of the indicators due to weaknesses in the national data available.

The National Policy Division of the Office of the Prime Minister and the National Advisory Committee will be responsible for monitoring the implementation the NSDP.

There is a need to provide training and set up mechanisms, policies and personnel to monitor and evaluate progress. It is also important that progress reporting on the NSDP national obligations and implementation requirements under Agenda 21 or the Pacific Type 2 initiatives is achieved.

It is assumed that adoption of the current NSDP will instigate improvement in planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting of sustainable development programmes overall, especially within sectors.

In terms of environmental sector monitoring, the EIA process is probably one the most effective monitoring processes applied in the Cook Islands. Unfortunately, it only applies to Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Atiu and Mitiaro due to their acceding to the Environment Act and selectively on other islands. Despite this situation, the EIA process has been applied for major construction and infrastructure projects on all islands as a matter of policy for government and NZAID.

NGOs have also become a part of the monitoring processes through their own vigilant assessment of social development activities through community surveys, field testing, awareness and educational programmes.

The Cook Islands continues to collate baseline data and establish databases for future reference. This is a priority area and has been identified as a national constraint due to the lack of quality data and functional databases. Furthermore, the need to translate data into spatial information context (i.e. GIS) to assist with decision making at all levels has been highlighted widely as a key component for better planning.

The assistance of development partners' is also needed to assist with training in data collation and analysis and data management.

Local government agencies are collaborating with universities and regional institutions such as NIWA, SOPAC, PTWC, SPC, NOAA, WMO, CSIRO, USP, SPREP, NZAID, and AusAID in support of technical and research programmes, information networking and accessing capacity building opportunities and new technologies .

Government agencies are using remote sensing technologies to monitor and collect data on environmental change as well as natural resource utilisation in areas of national interests. These data have led to changes in farming practices and formulation of lagoon (whole ecosystem) management plans.

The Cook Islands conducted its national assessment review and process to complete the National Report for the WSSD in 2003 and BPOA in 2004. That was the first comprehensive assessment of NSDP related programmes nationally.

Meanwhile, government and NGOs annual policy statements, annual reporting and budgetary appropriation processes provide information needed for monitoring and tracking progress to sustainable development programmes.

NESAF assessment and formulation, sectoral thematic assessment and profiling, damage assessments and vulnerability and adaptation assessments by key stakeholders have provided the additional background information for what has been achieved to date.

The NESAF will undergo a mid term review towards the end of 2007 which will provide additional monitoring and assessment information on implementation of environmental programmes and for further improvement in the consultative processes.

Budgetary Appropriations and Aid Effectiveness

Currently, the MFEM financial expenditure and revenue reporting policies are quite robust with monthly financial reports submitted from all agencies. During the ERP, a set of stringent fiscal policies was adopted to manage its financial resources and control its use. Non-compliance and fraudulent activities have been subjected to PERCA and MFEM audits, withholding of monthly bulk funding, personal reprimand and even referrals to the Crown Law Office and Cook Islands Police Department for further investigations. The national budgeting process is linked to these fiscal policies.

The national budgeting process is done on an annual basis. It is initiated in January and finally passed by Parliament before July 1st, the beginning of the government fiscal year. The process starts with the preparation of the annual Budget Policy Statement and by law must be finalised before March 30th. Government Ministries and agencies, including NGOs expecting financial support or applying for annual financial support from government were obligated to submit their annual business plans and sector plans before March 30th as well. The business plan would comprise their annual work programme outputs. This is the current basis for the national budgetary appropriations.

In the coming fiscal year, Government agencies and NGOs seeking annual government budgetary appropriations were expected to show linkage of their annual work programmes outputs to the NSDP when bidding for financial support.

Sustainable development priorities were guided by the Annual Budget Policy Statement, sector strategies and departments' annual business plans. The environment sector priorities are currently guided by the NESAF 2005-2009.

Government, through its annual budgetary appropriations, will provide most of the resources needed to ensure effective implementation of the NSDP. The amount of budgetary resources available will be determined by the economic performance of country, tax revenue of government, and the ability of government to borrow as well as ODA support.

The NSDP-Budget link is the most vital link in the national planning process. Even the best strategies require adequate resourcing in order to be implemented and the failure of certain national plans to deliver has been, more often than not, attributable to the weakness in this link.¹⁶

Prioritisation

The prioritisation of resources and programmes for national funding including the NSDP takes into consideration Economic, Environmental and Social/Cultural (EES/C) factors. The following criteria are often applied to all prioritisation of decisions especially those related to environmental and natural resources development programmes .

International Relevance

Responsiveness and relevance to external environment (regional and international trends/needs/drivers-WSSD/MDG/security/terrorism/ICT/globalisation/trade)

Involved in sustainable competitive advantage

Environmental integrity

National Relevance

National dependency now or in the future

Consistency with other strategies nationally (national relevance)

Provide adequate flexibility for the nation with regards to development

Conforms to the nations vision and long term goals (still in development)

Nationally feasible (job creation etc)

Local Community Relevance

Consistency with local (island and village level) strategies.

Consistency with local (island and village level) needs and well-being.

Consistency with local (island and village level) demands.

The process involves the development of a matrix with the NSDP goals or objectives or strategies or projects selected on one axis while the above criteria are selected on the other axis. Goals, objectives and strategies are given weighting from 1 to 10, with 10 being most feasible and 1 the less feasible in relation to the criteria stated. The weightings are added and listed in priority with the highest score rated as priority, while a lesser score means less priority.

The first sets of criteria were aimed at addressing international obligations under the WSSD, MDGs, BPOA and so forth. The second set of three were based on national relevance while the rest conforms to community interests.

This prioritisation process was used for the NESAF and will be applicable to the NSDP as well.

¹⁶ PMU (2003). National Sustainable Development Plan. Process Management Unit. MFEM/OPM. Government of the Cook Islands.

Annual budgetary appropriation to the National Environment Service

The total percentage of the annual national budget appropriations for the National Environment Service has slightly increased in value from 1.0% in 2002 to 1.49% in 2005.¹⁷

The total value of government appropriations to the NES for the period is about NZ\$2,796,467. This funding is appropriated for outputs and priority areas identified in the NESAF, the NBSAP and other related strategies for support.¹⁸

A local environment funding mechanism, the Environment Protection Fund (EPF) has received about NZ\$380,000 annually over the last eight (10) years. This amounts to just over NZ\$1 million from 2002 to 2005. Airport Departure Tax fees are collected by the Customs Department. Out of the NZ\$30.00 fee, the total EPF component is NZ\$8.50. The Ministry of Cultural Development also receives \$1.50 for their cultural and traditional heritage development programme.¹⁹

The EPF is aimed at the tourism sector to capture the environmental cost of the tourism sector from impact on local resources and environment. The fund supports domestic rubbish collection, management of Rarotonga and Aitutaki landfills, awareness and education, environmental studies and monitoring, NES support and other smaller community projects.²⁰

NESAF Budgetary Estimates

The total cost of the NESAF programmes amounts to NZ\$20.755 million. There were 154 programmes spread over five years of implementation. Seventy five (75) programmes are scheduled for implementation during fiscal years (FY) 1 and 2, while forty one (41) programmes were earmarked a short to medium term priorities and will be addressed from 2006-2007. Thirty eight (38) programmes are deemed medium to long term priorities and will be addressed and reviewed during the later part of the NESAF from 2007-2009, pending progress in addressing pressing concerns during FY 1 and FY2. The immediate to short programmes will cost NZ\$9.395 million while the medium to long term programmes will cost NZ\$11.360 million.

General ODA Contributions to the Cook Islands

In terms of dollar values the total foreign aid to the Cook Islands in 2005/06, is about NZ\$21.714 million (about 10.6% of GDP).²¹ This includes \$4.0 million from the Republic of China for the construction of the National Police Headquarters. The Cook Islands -EU 9th EDF National Indicative Programme (NIP) provided €3.1 million under the A-envelope and B-envelope to focus on improving the delivery of social services in the outer islands and for natural disaster recovery and against future cyclones.²² NGOs received 15% of the National Indicative Programme (NIP).

¹⁷ Upoko (2006)

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ Upoko (2005).

²¹ MFEM. (2005).

²² CIANGO. (2006).

Over 57% of annual foreign aid contributions to the Cook Islands were provided by NZAID and AusAID. Both agencies have harmonized their programmes in the Cook Islands in September 2004 and currently administered by NZAID. Their current contribution to the Cook Islands is \$12.4 million. New Zealand has pledged \$3.0 million in 2005/06 to support the cyclone recovery programme. AusAID has also pledged \$3.5 million to extend the life of the Cook Islands Police Patrol Boat "Te Kukupa."

Current general ODA allocation to the Cook Islands to improve basic social services and civil society programmes was about 28%. Additionally, about 23% of the total ODA went to support capital projects in the Outer Islands. Other national capital projects costs about 37%. ODA contributions for trade activities, especially fisheries and agriculture, have been limited with less than 5% of the total ODA going into these sectors. Overall, less than 10% of the total ODA contributions to the Cook Islands went to other trade related activities programmes such as tourism; business enterprises and the Small Business Enterprise Center (SBEC).

Environmental ODA Contributions to the Cook Islands

The total value of direct development partners' grants mainly through GEF to support core National Environment Service programmes, is about NZ\$1,320,946.²³

According to NES, from 2002 to 2005, the NBSAP -Add On project received about NZ\$622,297 while the International Waters Programme received NZ\$297,000 and Biosafety received about NZ\$143,260. Climate change programmes through the Second National Communications and CBDAMPIC received about NZ\$142,886. Environment education and awareness programme received about NZ\$9361. The NCSA programme received about NZ\$103,142 and NZ\$300,000 to manage the removal of Ozone Depletion Substances (ODS) project.²⁴

Waste management (MOW) received from ADB and NZAID over \$3 million dollars which was mostly appropriated towards the construction of the new waste management facilities on Rarotonga and Aitutaki. The physical construction part of the project started in 2002 and was completed in 2004.

Development partners also provided assistance in other sectors with sustainable development activities. Disaster recovery received NZ\$3,000,000, the Meteorological Service received about NZ\$18,399 and the Ministry of Agriculture received for its DSAP programme is NZ\$210,000. The Ministry of Marine Resources received NZ\$500,000 for the period. The National Environment Service also received NZ\$400,000 from NZAID. The outer islands received funds through the OMIA valued at NZ\$2,974,394. The total amount of funds received from donors for the period for sectors with sustainable development activities is estimated at NZ\$7,102,793.²⁵

Overall, the amount of donor contributions to the Cook Islands environment sector was estimated at over NZ\$8.4 million for the period from 2002 to 2005. The Cook Islands government would like to acknowledge the assistance to its environment and related

²³ Upoko (2005)

²⁴ Upoko (2006)

²⁵ Upoko (2006), MFEM (2005/06)

sectors from the NZAID, AusAID, GEF via UNDP, UNEP, SPREP and UNESCO, FAO, Japan (JICA), EU (CTA) and CIDA.²⁶

In December 2005, the CIANGO, GEF via UNDP in partnership with the Government of the Cook Islands formalised the Cook Islands-GEF Small Grants programme. The programme is aimed at addressing and funding NGO and CBO environmental programmes in local communities.²⁷

The Cook Islands-EU 9th EDF National Indicative Programme (NIP) provided €3.1 million under the A-envelope and B-envelope to focus on improving the delivery of social services in the outer islands and for natural disaster recovery and against future cyclones.²⁸ NGOs received 15% of the National Indicative Programme (NIP).

Aid Management

The Aid Management Division of the MFEM manages and coordinates aid effectiveness with focus on delivery and targeted assistance in the areas of highest priority.

Most foreign aid projects are vetted by the Aid Capital and Coordinating Committee. Committee members were from the OPM, MFEM, NDHRD, OMIA, MOW and NZAID. Cabinet was required to finally give approval to these projects. Areas targeted by the donor agencies include community initiative schemes, outer islands infrastructure development, education, health, economic growth areas, gender development and human resources development.

Outer Islands Development Grant Fund (OIDGF)

An Outer Island Development Grant Funding (OIDGF) scheme and a Community Initiative Scheme (CIS) have been developed in partnership with NZAID/AusAID. The OIDGF was established in 2000 as means of funding private sector and community projects in the outer islands. Committee members are made up of OMIA, MFEM, NZAID, BCI and SBEC.

The OIDGF core objective is to facilitate investments in physical and human capital projects that can generate substantial increases in productivity, revenue and employment opportunities in the outer islands.²⁹ The fund does not compete with commercial banks and supports projects that usually cost less than \$100,000.

Project proposals for business development are processed by the Bank of the Cook Islands (BCI) before being vetted by the committee. Cabinet and NZAID were required to finally give approval to these projects. The OIDGF provides 30% funding for start-up private businesses in the outer islands. The BCI also provides loan facility to the project up to 70% of the total project budget.

²⁶ Upoko (2006)

²⁷ Upoko (2006)

²⁸ CIANGO. (2006).

²⁹ AGRICO LTD. (2003).

Community proposals are processed by the Aid Management Division to ensure that these meet the funding criteria. Cabinet and NZAID were required to finally give approval to these projects as well. The fund is currently being reviewed by the Aid Management Division (MFEM) and NZAID.

Key Challenges for Monitoring, Implementation and Financial Supports Mechanisms

The lack of an appropriate national planning unit and weakened national policy division in government highlights the complexity of the situation. It also raises questions about the ability of the Cook Islands to meet its responsibilities for monitoring and implementation of international and national sustainable development obligations.

There are gaps in terms of dedicated mechanisms or processes including policies for the monitoring the rate of development of resources and land use activities, even on Rarotonga.³⁰

Critical studies and surveys on the carrying capacity and baseline information need to be conducted, collected and translated into management strategies especially on stressed systems such as ecosystems, species, natural resources and land forms including slopes as well as coastal, lagoon and wetlands areas.³¹

The lack of appropriate data makes it difficult to set out broad national indicators and this is reflected in the use of more detailed sectoral indicators in the NSDP. This is due to limited characterised baseline data within many government agencies at the national level. The fact that quality sectoral data were hard to access means trends were difficult to gauge. A national project is recommended to develop appropriate sectoral indicators.

The national budgeting process is currently done on an annual basis and there are risks to this short term focus approach to budgetary appropriations, thus the reason for the development of the NSDP.

There is weakness in the current draft NSDP linkage to the budgetary process due to strategies not being prioritised and ranked for appropriation purposes. The draft NSDP strategies have also not been valued for the same reasons, and this is one of the important issues that need to be finalised before the NSDP is adopted.

This is also important if the integration process of each sector or outer islands were to be considered fairly and equitably. This part of the process is also crucial if the interests of sectors and communities were to be aligned probably to the NSDP.

The Cook Islands Government has not considered tax incentives for the use and adoption of various environmental friendly products and services.

Instead, the government is removing import taxes on all products apart from vehicles, tobacco, alcohol, fuel, pig feed and vegetables from July 2006. This policy has implications of more waste and pollution.

³⁰ Upoko (2006)

³¹ Upoko (2006)

There is a need for government to introduce regulatory fees for the use of natural resources such as water.

Another critical area of concern for the government is the limited capacity in project management within government agencies. The private sector also does not fare well in this area. This has been evidence in slow utilisation of donor funding by government agencies or non-government agencies over the years.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. *General Comments*

1. As a result of this brief national assessment, the following general conclusions can be drawn on the national sustainable development process in Cook Islands, especially the formulation of the NSDP:
 - a. The NSDP is not completed and will require both TA and funding support to get it finalised and implemented.
 - b. The current national staffing levels within the National Policy Coordination Division which were given responsibility for the elaboration and completion of the NSDP have inadequate skills and inexperience to complete the NSDP. This is reflected in their struggling to complete the plan.
 - c. There have been activities in various sectors aimed at improving both national and sectoral regulations and legislations to guide the implementation of NSDP and other sustainable development processes especially needed for effective intervention, integration, oversight and enforcement.
 - d. Some key sectoral plans and policies have also been improved to provide support to the NSDP and other national initiatives.
 - e. There are priority areas still lagging behind in terms of effective legislations and strategies.
 - f. Unless appropriately addressed, capacity weaknesses in key supporting NSDP management and implementation structures nationwide will continue to affect integration of sectoral priorities and the longer term implementation of sustainable development programmes including the NSDP in the Cook Islands.
 - g. The national sustainable development committee has not been established and the WSSD working group committee has been inactive since 2003.
 - h. The Cook Islands does not have national planning office and the limited availability of planning expertise locally both in government and the private sector institutions has been reflected in the delays and difficult process taken to prepare the NSDP.
 - i. There have been calls by NGOs to complete the NSDP and return the final plan to key stakeholders for final endorsement.
 - j. There are interests from both government agencies and non-government organisations to collaborate and implement the NSDP.
 - k. Partnership arrangements between government agencies and non-government organisations have been successful throughout the NSDP process and should be strengthened. This is especially true of community consultations, promotional and awareness programmes.
 - l. The cost of broad based consultations in the outer islands is high and not sustainable. Other means of collecting stakeholders input need to be facilitated.
 - m. Despite experiencing hiccups since 2003, funding and technical assistance from development partners have provided much needed support to the NSDP process and was particularly successful during the initial consultations and formulation of the NSDP strategies.
 - n. Funding assistances will be required for the implementation of the NSDP.

- o. Uncertainties about the political leadership and governance situation will continue to have significant impact on the adoption and implementation of the NSDP despite both major political parties openly supporting the NSDP.
- p. It is difficult to assess the impact on the implementation of the NSDP as result of changes during the current round of appointments on the vacant positions of Heads of Ministries in government. New Heads of Ministry appointees will be expected to start their new three year contracts from July 1st 2006.

B. Recommendations

2. It is suggested that UNDESA and all NSDP stakeholders be mindful of the following recommendations:
 - o. It is recommended that the NSDP Advisory Committee prepare contract/s for local consultant/s to complete the NSDP as soon as possible.
 - p. It is also recommended that the NSDP Advisory Committee prepare and adopt a strategy for the endorsement process including conducting a national forum and for implementation of the NSDP.
 - q. It is recommended that the NSDP Advisory Committee prepare the structural mechanisms, organisations, responsibilities and budgetary needs for promoting, implementation, monitoring and reporting of the NSDP.
 - r. It is recommended that Parliament establish a new National Planning Office within the Office of the Prime Minister and give it the mandate to manage the development and implementation of the NSDP.
 - s. The government and NGOs are urged to seek Parliamentary approval and appointment of the National Sustainable Development Committee to oversee the NSDP formulation and implementation.
 - t. Key stakeholders are urged to find common ground for closer working relationships, sharing resources, information and project responsibilities to prevent the stifling of implementation of the NSDP as a result of poor communication.
 - u. It is recommended that current arrangements for collaboration between government, NGOs and private sector continue to be fostered.
 - v. Government must provide the necessary resources to NGOs and local community groups to continue to take the lead in sustainable development promotions and awareness campaigns at local community level.
 - w. It is important and recommended that the NSDP be translated into the Maori language to allow the common people understand their national responsibilities under the NSDP.
 - x. It is recommended that enabling activities in key priority areas such as water etc. which have no national strategies, policies and legislation to guide development activities nationally and in local communities, be conducted and updated policies formalised as essential.
 - y. It is recommended that donor partners provide the necessary financial support for the completions and implementation of the NSDP, including the final consultations forum.
 - z. It is also recommended that donor partners provide support to capacity building activities identified in this report and the NCSA project which are directly aimed at providing support to the NSDP.
 - aa. It is important that the NSDP be promoted as apolitical as possible. This is recommended and the input of NGOs is crucial in this regard.

- bb. There are significant policy matters such as the political reform process, public sector reform, etc which will continue to have significant impact on sustainable development programmes in the Cook Islands. These policies need to be taken into account when implementing the NSDP or other future sustainable development programmes.

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