

Regional Support for REDD+ Readiness in the Pacific
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I will begin first with a very brief introduction of the Pacific. PNG is the largest country of the whole group while many countries are very small. You can see that the Pacific comprised a lot of ocean with very little land so it is a challenge for us in terms of sustainable management of our natural resource, including forests and lands.

In this region, thousands of islands are scattered over 33 million square kilometers, about one-third of the earth's surface, but only 2% of that is land; population is around 8.5 million, PNG alone is close to 7 million out of that number; 60% of the world's languages, PNG has more than 800 alone which presents a lot of challenges in terms of communication and etcetera. Three main sub-groupings of the Pacific; Melanesia which comprises the bigger countries of PNG, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and Polynesia which includes Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands and others, , and Micronesia which mainly comprises of the smaller Pacific Island countries. We therefore have an enormous diversity in size, in population, etc, which as I said earlier presented significant challenges in terms of communication, transportation and so on.

For example, if I travel from Fiji to the northern part of the Pacific that will cost me three times more than if I travel to Heathrow and back to Fiji. That just shows the kind of cost that we face in the Pacific when dealing with our issues. Of course our small size and remoteness from the market means that our competitiveness in terms of trade is very low and that is a major challenge for us. Climate change is a major issue because we have some of the most vulnerable places in the world.

Given the many challenges that the Pacific faced, our people, way back in 1947, with a number of cosmopolitan countries decided to form an organization which could provide support to its member countries and territories in terms of technical advice in the areas of agriculture, fisheries, forestry, education, and health. The Secretariat of the Pacific Committee was established as the South Pacific Commission way back in 1947. We are therefore as old as FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Membership comprised of 22 Pacific Island countries and territories and the cosmopolitan members including Australia, France, New Zealand, and the United States of America. Our headquarters is based in Noumea, New Caledonia, which is a French territory, and we are headed by a Director General. We used to have 3 divisions but this has now increased to 6 due the on-going reform within the organisation. Our staff complement has also increased from 300-plus staff to the more than 600 staff we have now, based mainly in New Caledonia and in Fiji. The Land Resources Division, which forestry is part of, is based in Suva, Fiji.

Our core functions are capacity building, recognizing the lack of capacity in most of the areas that

²¹ <http://www.spc.int/>

we are involved in i.e. in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, education, and health. We also do capacity supplementation, especially for the smaller countries which cannot afford to build and maintain capacity in those areas. We also deal with transboundary functions like in biosecurity and health.

In the Pacific, where most of our people are rural dwellers, forests and trees contribute a lot to their well-being. During past natural disasters like flooding and cyclones, forests have enhanced the communities' ability to cope with the effects of these. So, when we talk about climate change, forests and trees can provide some useful solutions to how we are going to cope and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

But we certainly need to deal with the issues of continuing deforestation and forest degradation like in many other countries. In the larger Melanesian countries of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu, the economic benefits provided by forests are very important, but unsustainable practices continue to be an issue. Other direct causes of deforestation include agricultural clearing and mining. Mining, in particular, will be a major issue for some of our countries, given the increasing demand for minerals from large economies like China.

We have a lot of challenges in the Pacific when we are trying to move towards managing our forests and its resources in a better manner and more sustainable manner. We have a lot of things like inadequate legislative and policy framework towards sustainable forest management. The lack of enforcement, the lack of resources in terms of capacity and funding, bearing in mind our narrow-based economies, relying on one or two main products. The balancing of short-term economic interest and the long-term interest is therefore a major challenge for us.

This slide shows what is currently happening in the Solomon Islands where sixty percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings are derived from log exports. To achieve this, they are over-cutting their forests by more than three times their annual cut. The bottom chart shows what is supposed to be the annual cut about close to 300,000 cubic meters, but the top chart shows that the cut is actually more than 1 million cubic meters per annum. The challenge therefore in most of our countries is in trying to balance the short-term economic interest with a long-term need of sustainable forest management.

In many of our forestry meetings and other gatherings the lack of resources in terms of expertise and funding are always mentioned as the major obstacles for us moving towards or implementing Sustainable Forest Management measures.

The REDD+, in terms of REDD+ Readiness therefore provides us an excellent opportunity to access new forestry funding that is going to support many of our countries in terms of implementing measures on forestry to move them towards sustainable management.

For that, we have a number of projects already in the Pacific, both bilateral and regional. UN-REDD is operating in PNG and Solomon's; we have the SPC/GIZ Regional Project²² which is operating from Fiji but covering a lot of countries in the Pacific, in fact there are two projects implemented by GIZ²³ and funded by BMZ²⁴ and BMU²⁵, and of course the Japanese government through JICA are supporting Papua New Guinea and Samoa. JICA is also providing regional support through us in a number of areas.

As mentioned already, if you look at the this pie chart, you will see that Papua New Guinea's forest comprised of more than 80%, close to 90% of the total forest area in the Pacific. If you add on Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Vanuatu which comprised the other Melanesian countries, that is actually about 96% or 97% of the total forest area in the Pacific Islands countries and territories. But that does not mean that the smaller island states do not consider their forests and tree resources very important for them. If you take out the Melanesian countries' part of the forests and trees, you will see 50% forest cover, even 70% in some of these countries which means that although they are small, they still provide vital contributions to the wellbeing of their people.

Looking quickly at the deforestation in the three sub-groupings of Melanesia, the medium-sized countries and the small island atolls. The red graph shows the deforestation rate in the Melanesian countries. But if a close analysis of this is done, most of this will be in Papua New Guinea, and a little bit in Fiji and in the Solomon's some while in Vanuatu the situation has stabilized. The interesting one is the green line, which is for the medium-sized Polynesian countries showing an increasing forest cover. A close analysis of that will show that it has really to do with a change in forest classification, which means for us in the Pacific, like what has been mentioned for Papua New Guinea already, getting the right data, the right information in terms of our forests and tree resources, is an important challenge for us to try to sort out in terms of going through the REDD Readiness Process.

The land ownership system is quite important in the Pacific. Most of the countries in the Pacific except for Tonga, which is a kingdom where the most of the land is owned by the King and the Nobles, forests and lands are owned by communities. In Papua New Guinea, 97% of their land is customary owned; 88% in Fiji; 95% in Solomon; 97% in Vanuatu. This will be good in terms of community participation and will ensure the successful in implementation of REDD projects on the

²² http://www.spc.int/lrd/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=478&Itemid=44

²³ German Agency for International Cooperation: <http://www.giz.de/en/>

²⁴ German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development: <http://www.bmz.de/en/>

²⁵ German Federal Environment Ministry

ground. But if you look at the last column, the registration of customary land, only Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru and Palau have undertaken registration of most of their lands. This therefore will be a major challenge as land disputes, etc, could easily arise when trying to implement projects on REDD+ in most of the countries. Especially in Papua New Guinea, if you look at 97% ownership with little or no registration at all, it will be a big challenge to work through when trying to implement REDD+ projects in that country.

That brings me to the regional approach we are pursuing for REDD+ in the Pacific. Knowing that we probably only have the Melanesian countries which can realistically go through with the process of REDD+ Readiness and participate in any REDD+ system later on, we also need to somehow bring in the other countries that have the forests and trees which are vital to them and which have issues that need to be tackled such that they continue to contribute to the well-being of the people. Our regional support for REDD+ Readiness in the Pacific comprises of three main components: one is a Regional REDD+ Policy Framework that will enable not only larger countries but also smaller countries to be supported in the various areas like exchange of information and expertise, that would support them towards the better management of their forests. A Regional Information Portal is for information exchange, and of course, we also support a number of countries in terms of National REDD Readiness. This work is the focus of the SPC/GIZ project on climate protection through forest conservation in the Pacific Island countries.

I just mentioned briefly at this point what is happening in Fiji, because when we talk about the regional mechanism we are fortunate that Fiji is already ahead of most of the countries in the Pacific which means that the countries will be able to learn from the experiences and lessons from what is happening now in Fiji.

The Fiji REDD Readiness Program, again with the support of GIZ, began in 2009 and they are following a phased approach, beginning with a REDD+ Policy and they have also started to work on an MRV System²⁶, doing forest inventory, forest cover change, forest carbon stock assessment, and are also developing and finalizing a REDD+ Strategy which is going to include guidelines on safeguards, FPIC process²⁷ and financing. Also under that they are going to be implementing a number of pilot projects, which are going to provide them the lessons learned in terms of FPIC process and the safeguards and so on.

Also, under that strategy will be our financing guidelines to be used by the country. I want to mention that at the moment we have a REDD+ Steering Committee comprising of different stakeholders in the country which is driving the whole process of strategy formulation in Fiji. We are hoping that Fiji will complete its readiness phase within the life of the current GIZ project supporting the process.

²⁶ Monitoring, Reporting And Verification Systems

²⁷ Free, Prior and Informed Consent Process:

<http://www.focusweb.org/sites/www.focusweb.org/files/FPIC%20on%20REDD.pdf>

In the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, one of the important things that we do quite successfully is regional coordination. We need to work in partnership with others to effectively deal with the forestry issues of the Pacific. For example, in September of last year, we were able to organize a Regional Technical Meeting on Forestry²⁸ where the main focus was to discuss a roadmap for the formulation of the Regional Framework Policy on REDD+.

Our ability to coordinate with other donors, other agencies, and other partners is very important for us to bring in the stakeholders and the agencies and the partners who will be able to help us and support us in discussing the way forward for the Regional Framework Policy on REDD. In this regard, we were able to organize our meeting with the support of GIZ; JICA; UN-REDD; FAO; UNDP²⁹; New Zealand Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forest; and CSIRO³⁰.

At that meeting we were able to agree on a roadmap for the drafting of the Regional REDD+ Policy Framework to be presented at the 2012 Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services Meeting³¹ and also to be endorsed by the Ministers' Meeting in Papua New Guinea which is going to be held in September. Hopefully, by the end of these meetings we will have a Regional REDD+ Policy Framework endorsed for the Pacific.

Some of the components of the framework that we will be working on will include: Regional drivers of deforestation and strategies to address regional leakage issues; regional guidelines on MRV and reference levels, methodology, safeguard monitoring tools and methodology; regional communication, which is very important; collaboration and information sharing; and capacity building needs and/or opportunities.

The basic principle will include the sharing and coordination of capacities, services and expertise; enhancing existing regional facility to provide training and technical services on MRV; regional roster of experts which allow us to tap into other people's resource in terms of expertise quickly to support other countries; and strengthening regional capacity in international engagement which is very important for us as well.

In addition to discussing and formulating the Draft Policy Framework, we also, at the same time, are already dealing with the MRV technical issues on the ground and we are fortunate of the JICA support in that respect. We currently have a JICA adviser with us who has the appropriate

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http://www.spc.int/lrd/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=846:spc-organises-pacific-regional-forestry-technical-meeting&catid=53&Itemid=29

²⁹ United Nations Development Programme: <http://www.undp.org/>

³⁰ Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization: <http://www.csiro.au/>

³¹ www.spc.int/lrd/index.php?option=com_docman&task

expertise and skills required to provide some of the required support.

Under the FAO Project on Monitoring, Assessment, and Reporting on Sustainable Forest Management which was funded by the government of Japan, we were able to formulate a draft manual for the Pacific on how to set up, implement and maintain MAR³² systems. We are continuing to work on this, enhancing the methodology and hopefully we will be able to refine, publish and share it with our colleagues very soon.

The other MRV technical issues that we are supporting in our countries include remote sensing, forest inventory, regional biomass allometric modelling which we are going to be doing especially in the Melanesian countries of Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon's, and Vanuatu.

In conclusion, when we pursue REDD in the Pacific, our focus we will continue to be on the need for REDD+ to support Sustainable Forest Management. The second is the need for us to continue implementing and organizing more relevant awareness and training on REDD+ at all levels. Our communities' understanding and knowledge of REDD+ needs to be improved considerably for them to be able to participate in a very effective manner, otherwise, they will continue to be bystanders to the management and utilization of their own forest with little or no direct benefits at all. The need to develop appropriate policies and institutional frameworks for REDD+. Some countries have tried to pursue REDD+ programs without a national policy framework which has created significant problems for them

An important question for us is how can smaller landowners in Pacific Island countries and territories benefit from this kind of scheme? When we talk about landownership in the Pacific, those people have small parcels of land. The challenge is how we can group them together to become a sufficiently large area where REDD+ can work We are hoping that the Regional Policy Framework for REDD+ that we are working on will provide us some direction and an umbrella for us to be able to do this.

³² Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting Systems