

Lessons for Pacific Islands environmental initiatives: Experiences from IWP National Coordinators

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Acronyms

CROP	Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific
GEF	Global Environment Facility
ICWM	integrated coastal and watershed management
IWP	International Waters Project
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NTF	National Task Force
PCU	Project Coordination Unit
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

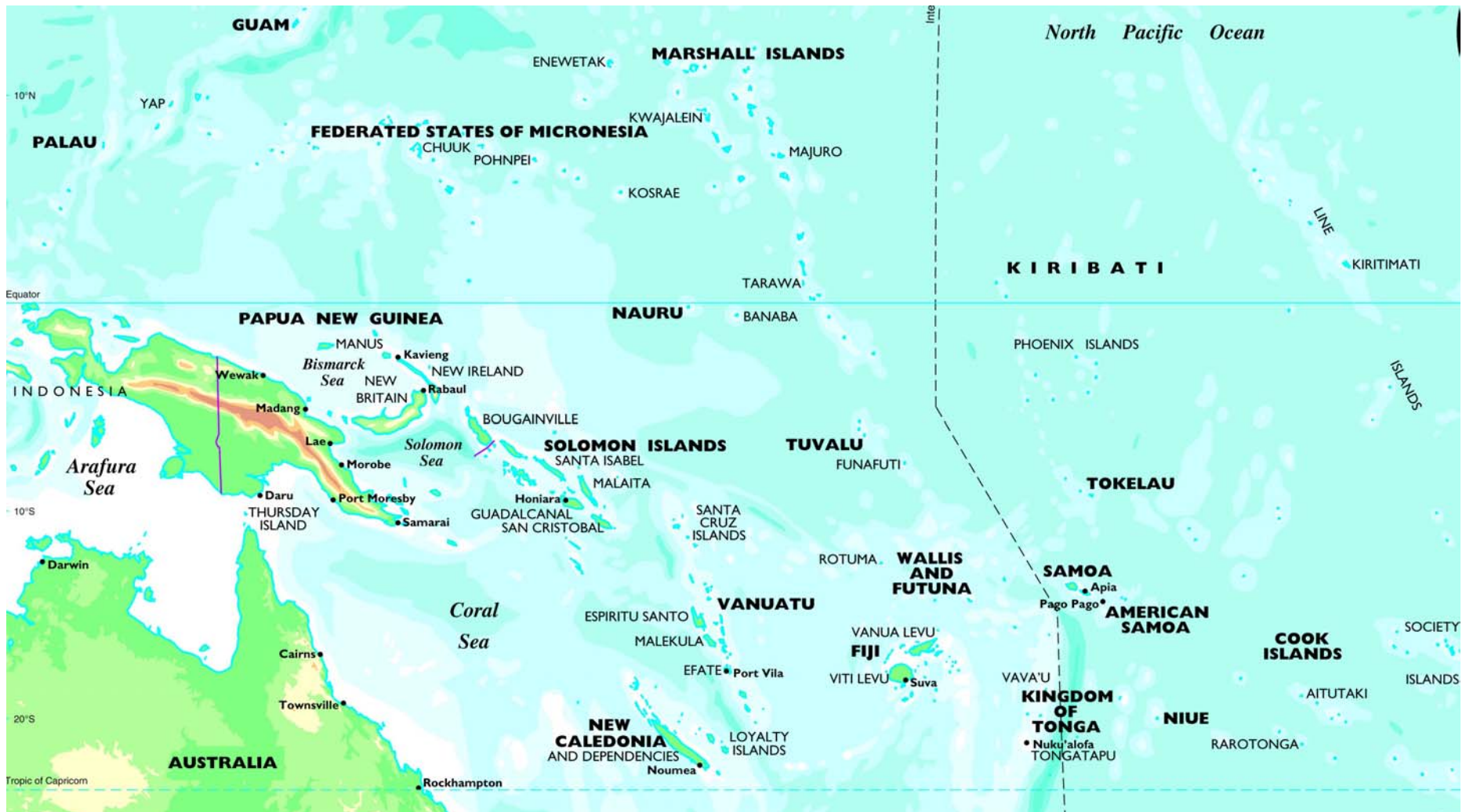


Figure 1: Map of the Pacific Islands

Summary of lessons from IWP National Coordinators

Introduction

This summary document provides an overview of twenty lessons learned through the International Waters Project¹ (IWP), which was active in 14 Pacific Island countries over a seven-year period (2000–2006). IWP was intended to address the root causes of environmental degradation related to transboundary issues in the Pacific. The project was financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) under its International Waters Programme, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme and executed by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), in conjunction with the governments of the 14 independent Pacific Island countries: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The project supported national and community-level actions that address priority environmental concerns relating to marine and fresh water quality, habitat modification and degradation and unsustainable use of living marine resources through a 7-year phase of pilot activities, which started in 2000 and concluded (in terms of support at the regional level) in early 2007.

The theme and location of each pilot project was selected on the basis of community and government consultation. Each project adopted an interdisciplinary approach involving the three pillars — economic, social and environmental — of sustainable development. Each project was intended to address the root causes of degradation affecting one or more of four focal areas:

- marine protected areas
- coastal fisheries
- freshwater resources
- waste reduction.

The lessons described in this publication are derived from the achievements and problems faced by thirteen National Coordinators during their involvement with IWP.² It is hoped that these lessons will inform future regional environmental work in the Pacific. For the sake of clarity the twenty lessons are divided into four categories:

- lessons from village level engagement;
- lessons from national level engagement;
- lessons for future project design and implementation; and
- lessons from regional level engagement.

¹ IWP is formally titled Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme of the Pacific Small Islands Developing States.

² The lessons are the outcomes of two workshops held in Samoa and attended by the IWP National Coordinators (from 28 November to 2 December 2005, and from 13–17 March 2006).

A: Lessons from village level engagement

Lesson 1: Careful choice of the pilot site is critical

One of the most critical factors influencing the success of the IWP pilot projects has been the choice of sites. Communities that choose to be involved in the project were committed to the process from the outset. In contrast, in communities that did not initiate their own involvement — some did not ask for “expressions of interest”, and in some instances the decision about the location of pilot initiatives was politically motivated — it took considerable time for the National Coordinators to convince the community that being involved in the IWP initiative was worthwhile. Two key lessons can be drawn from the initial engagement with pilot communities: pilot sites should be chosen carefully and efforts should be made to not give communities false expectations.

Pilot sites need to be carefully chosen. IWP’s experience indicates that there is no optimum method for choosing pilot sites. Instead, the important element is the explicit commitment of the villagers to the project’s aims. For villagers to write expressions of interest is not enough. Project teams need to verify that information put forward by a village is accurate and ensure that the villagers are fully conversant with project objectives. Each project should identify key criteria for the choice of pilot site. Significant features are:

There is no optimum method for choosing pilot sites. The important element is the explicit commitment of the villagers to the project’s aims.

- active village council/representation that is respected throughout the community;
- an absence of inter-community rivalry;
- honesty and ability of villagers to hold village representatives accountable; and
- the environmental problem to be addressed is agreed upon and understood throughout the village.

Care should be exercised to ensure community expectations are realistic. This is particularly important at the start of an initiative when expectations are often at their highest. Visiting and/or talking with representatives from a dozen villages should be avoided when the project will ultimately engage with only one or two pilot sites. When advertising for expressions of interest, initial publicity should clearly explain the scope of the initiative and its objectives. If possible, foreign acronyms or project names (such as IWP) should be avoided to prevent confusion. When commencing work in a village, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) could be discussed and documented. In particular, the agreement should detail the different stakeholders’ roles and functions, including those of villagers.

In Niue an MOU was signed by the village council, the local member of Parliament and the National Task Force Committee chair person. In Samoa, the MOU was signed by the village chiefs, the Ministry of Natural resources and the Samoan Water Authority. In both cases, the agreements were particularly helpful in providing clarity and managing expectations.

Lesson 2: Respecting local cultures and institutions is important to building partnerships with communities

It is vital to respect and work with local customs, traditions and institutions; the importance of this should not be underestimated. The sustainability and ownership of projects is dependent on initiatives being accepted and driven by local people. Every attempt should be made to ensure that external initiatives are sufficiently flexible — and adequate time is allowed — to enable their adaptation to local cultures and institutions.

The way a project approaches a village must be culturally informed and appropriate. All project staff should understand and respect traditional cultural protocols and knowledge. Working with and adapting to local ways of doing things should be integral to a project. In some cases this may mean accepting that drinking kava, chewing beetle nut and/or story telling for half a day is not “wasting time” but is rather essential to building trust and relationships.

Adequate time must be allowed to engage with the community. The project timetable should be flexible enough to enable staff to react appropriately to the formalities of community protocol. The timetable should enable staff and/or consultants time to develop an understanding of the extent of indigenous knowledge, and to incorporate such knowledge into project activities. There must be enough flexibility to enable the initiative to develop at the community’s pace, with leadership provided by the community. The time required is often underestimated, if it is planned for at all. In future projects of this kind, adequate time should be allowed to ensure that these customary and traditional formalities are not bypassed at any level of engagement. Sufficient time must also be allowed to enable the use of participatory tools (see Lesson 3).



Figure 1: Meeting with community representatives in Riiken, Yap State, Federated States of Micronesia

Lesson 3: Choose tools – including participatory and economic analysis, and communication methods – wisely, and allow adequate time for implementation

Participatory tools are useful for generating a village-wide understanding of the root causes of environmental problems; in particular, Participatory Problem Analysis and village management plans were found to be helpful. The sustainability of work undertaken at the local level has been underpinned by the community owning — and driving — the IWP pilot projects. In some cases the initial participatory problem analysis has been a key process in enabling villagers themselves to identify realistic solutions to environmental problems. The process of villagers identifying problems and seeking their own solutions facilitated greater community ownership. Participatory processes — and in particular training of local staff in the use of these tools — takes time, however. The time frame to allow for thorough processes of this nature needs to be built into environmental programmes. Although IWP was extended to a seven-year initiative, in practice many IWP National Coordinators had only three years to work with their communities, and this was not enough.

Projects delays can be significant: Although the IWP project formally began in 1999, the project documentation was not signed by GEF until 2001. Many of the NCs were not recruited until 2002 or 2003, and some NCs were replaced, with new NCs recruited in 2004 and 2005. Furthermore, the process of selecting pilot villages was often protracted, taking nearly a year in the case of Niue.

The economic analyses have also been useful, and helped strengthen the links between work at the community and national levels. Economic analysis has drawn the attention of respective Governments to the cost of environmental damage. In particular the economic valuations (conducted in the Cook Islands, Tonga, and Fiji), cost benefit analysis (carried out in Tuvalu), and the study on willingness to pay for waste services (in Kiribati) have all helped to promote the economic benefits of improved resource management in these countries.

Furthermore, the IWP has made commendable use of communications tools at local and national level to change behaviours. The use of radio, competitions, simple leaflets in local languages, drama, and television have led to improved programme focus, raised awareness of issues and increased interest and involvement in IWP activities. However, building a solid social marketing campaign and fostering behaviour change takes a long time. Some IWP pilots are still struggling with locally sensitive issues such as the management of liquid waste and the penning of pigs. Projects wishing to influence behaviour change need to ensure adequate time is built into programmes to allow for the achievement of long-term behaviour change.



Figure 2: Volunteers participating in reef flat monitoring training at Makefu, Niue

Lesson 4: Recognise and address village expectations and needs

Projects should go some way to meeting local expectations and needs. In rural communities, there were two particular concerns: the need to support local capacity building (for both men and women), and to provide seed money for local infrastructure.

Support for human resource capacity building was not explicitly recognised in the IWP project design, project document or, consequently, in the project budget. Nevertheless expectations were high about what community groups could do for themselves (collecting baseline information, project design and planning, monitoring, assessing environmental damage and cost benefit analysis, etc.). However no explicit budget was allocated to support capacity building in these activities. Future projects of this kind need to ensure that there is adequate funding to ensure in-country capacity building and/or training of trainers programmes at the local level, to ensure that facilitators are capable of carrying out expected processes effectively.

Funds should be made available to pilot villages for small infrastructure development projects. The National Coordinators feel that this could be done through cost sharing initiatives where the project provides basic materials but the skills and labour are provided and funded locally. Seed money could pay for demonstration projects which could then be used to leverage external funding. IWP's low-cost or no-cost approach has sometimes been problematic, and the contradiction of a large expensive international project working in remote under-resourced villages with a no-cost/low-cost philosophy is not lost on villagers. Small amounts of seed money for community priorities could ensure sustainability of local initiatives and help maintain interest in long-term environmental initiatives.



Figure 3: IWP building under construction in Chea, Marovo Lagoon, Solomon Islands

B: Lessons from national level engagement

Lesson 5: Lead Agencies should be encouraged to lead the project

A key lesson from the national level is the importance of ensuring that each Lead Agency is encouraged to lead national implementation of international projects such as the IWP. Projects such as the IWP should be located in the appropriate department, with coordination teams relating to department hierarchies rather than directly to the National Coordinators.

In future environmental initiatives, the onus should be on the coordination team (in this case the PCU) to acknowledge local protocol, and listen to and work with the government's objectives, rather than imposing its priorities on Lead Agencies. Projects have a short timeframe. If pilot initiatives are to be sustainable they have to be strongly supported or led by the host government. Time needs to be taken, and cultural protocols followed, in order to ensure that Lead Agencies accept responsibility for an initiative. To increase potential support and leadership, project objectives need to be congruent with those of the Lead Agency.



Figure 4: Villagers from the IWP-PNG pilot project village of Barakau, Papua New Guinea

Lesson 6: Build capacity at National level

Future projects of this kind should ensure an adequate budget for capacity building at national level. Technical training and support should be provided to National Coordinators in order to provide them with the skills they need to carry out the variety of tasks expected of them. Capacity building support could also be provided to National Task Forces and Lead Agencies.

Indeed, Lead Agencies often had limited resources (both human and financial) to adequately contribute to the IWP. Due to the design of the IWP around three focal areas (with those focal areas being chosen by countries at a rather late stage) some Lead Agencies have found themselves coordinating work outside of their mandate and/or area of expertise (this was true in Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and Samoa). This has been problematic. IWP had an inadequate budget to build capacity within poorly resourced and staffed Lead Agencies. Providing more training and support for Lead Agencies could potentially have increased national level buy-in, and the potential sustainability of IWP work. Furthermore, capacity building of the National Coordinators would have added to the strengthening of local Lead Agencies at the completion of IWP, when staff are absorbed into government line positions.

National Coordinators have had to carry out participatory processes, develop communications strategies, coordinate the scholarship programme, and become advocates or lobbyists for policy and legislative reform, as well as be technically proficient in their own discipline.

Lesson 7: Projects should not have a “one size fits all” approach to National Task Forces

In the majority of cases, the National Task Forces (NTFs) did not live up to expectations. Members often missed meetings, were ill-informed about IWP work and, in some cases, were motivated by financial incentive. Future projects should carefully consider the role and function of national advisory committees and learn from IWP’s experiences. While the involvement of national committees is potentially useful, a standardized approach may not be appropriate across the region. The following are suggestions:

- NTFs could give more prominence to local level leadership. Elders, chiefs or representatives from pilot villages could be key members of NTFs. Furthermore, NTFs could meet periodically in pilot villages (rather than in the country capital).
- Community members need to be compensated for their time and services when attending project meetings, and this should be recognised by donors, and built in to the project design.
- Only those who have a direct interest in, or knowledge of, the focal area should be on advisory committees.
- Members of advisory committees could be invited to visit pilot sites and engage more actively with community-level work.

Lesson 8: Economic evaluation work was an effective tool in assisting national-level advocacy

Money talks. The National Coordinators found the economic analysis work particularly useful. Where economic studies were done on the costs of environmental degradation it helped significantly in bringing the environmental issue to the attention of national leaders. National level decision makers were often surprised by the effects of polluted water on health or the additional costs to the state of rubbish that was not being recycled (see Table 1 below with results from study undertaken in Palau). Future projects should make use of economic analyses to guide and support project activities. In the case of Niue, the cost–benefit analysis work was carried out by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) created an opportunity for cross collaboration with another regional organisation.



Figure 5: PPA discussions about Crab Bay MPA in Lakatoro, Malekula, Vanuatu

C: Lessons for future project design, implementation and coordination

There are also lessons from IWP for future project design, implementation and coordination. The National Coordinators wished to highlight the following lessons.

Lesson 9: Develop clarity about the role of support teams (such as the PCU) and establish ways of working that reinforce Lead Agency leadership

The role of the PCU and the Lead Agency should be clearly defined in an MOU and agreed to by both parties. The role of coordinating teams is often ambiguous; in the case of IWP, it was not clear whether the PCU was a management team, an administrative support team, a team that provided technical advice, or all of the above. Terms of reference for the PCU were never drawn up and distributed. Ambiguity often led to confusion between the PCU and the National Coordinators and their Lead Agencies with respect to roles and responsibilities. The IWP PCU should have taken the form of a technical support team with technical expertise in the focal areas of the project.

The project should be designed in such a way as to give maximum support to Lead Agencies, and the latter should be entrusted with carrying out the agreed initiative in line with the project guidelines. This means ensuring that Lead Agencies are fully aware of the project requirements, budgets, and reporting responsibilities; within this framework, they should be given the freedom to carry out the programme work in their own way. It is important that projects of this nature are designed in such a way that they are fully integrated into the Lead Agency's work and are not (as has happened frequently within the IWP pilots) stand alone units or projects within the Lead Agency.

Furthermore, the behaviour, practices and processes put in place by the coordinating body (the PCU) should reinforce country-level ownership of the project. Each aspect of the way coordinating teams relate to country level pilots needs to be examined. Each process needs to reinforce national ownership and leadership; for example, publications by coordinating bodies need to fully acknowledge the work of the country teams.

Lesson 10: Keep initiatives manageable: Don't try to carry out 14 pilots across the Pacific with a support team of four

The IWP has been working in 14 Pacific Island countries spread over an area of 38 million square kilometres – almost one sixth of the earth's surface and three times larger than China. The logistical difficulties of supporting pilot projects over such a large area, from a Secretariat based in Apia (which has direct flights to only a handful of Pacific Island countries) has been enormous. Providing adequate and appropriately targeted support to each National Coordinator, Lead Agency and Task Force has been a major issue facing the IWP, as has the difficulty of achieving cross-regional learning and ensuring adequate PCU support. A repercussion is that many National Coordinators feel that inadequate support has been provided to country pilots. Those National Coordinators feeling least served come from the countries hardest to reach. An important lesson for future initiatives is keeping the project manageable both at regional and at national levels. Start small and learn from the successes rather than trying to do too much too quickly.

Lesson 11: Be realistic about time frames, particularly when project administration is complex

Future project of this kind should be more realistic about timeframes. The logistical and structural constraints of having a project financed by GEF, executed by the UNDP and implemented by SPREP in conjunction with 14 host countries has created difficulties from the perspective of the National Coordinators. IWP suffered from protracted bureaucratic difficulties in its establishment, which resulted in a shortened time frame to deliver behavioural changes that are known to take years, if not decades, to achieve. Though the project documentation for the IWP was completed in 1999, it was not signed by the GEF until 2001. The PCU office was not established until mid-2001, and most National Coordinators were recruited during 2002 or early 2003. In effect, therefore, the National Coordinators have been working for approximately three and a half years on each pilot initiative. This is a relatively short time for a community-based, country-driven initiative that aims to raise awareness and then change behaviour and practices at both the local and national level.

Lesson 12: Project design needs to be easily understood, culturally appropriate and flexible

A number of lessons identified by the National Coordinators related specifically to the project design. The IWP project document was complex and, to many, impenetrable. The inaccessibility of the document reinforced a lack of country level ownership and a dependence on the PCU. It also contributed to uncertainty about the project's overall national-level objectives (see Lesson 14). In addition to making future projects accessible and meaningful at all levels, there are other lessons for future project design:

- **Cultural awareness should be built into every aspect of project design and implementation.** Regional projects such as this should be designed locally – not in New York or Washington. Project documents should be simple, flexible and understandable to the majority of stakeholders. Cultural awareness should be built in. Projects for the Pacific should be written by people who understand Pacific Island cultures.
- **A regional project such as IWP needs to work with the priorities of the host countries.** Greater flexibility is needed in future initiatives so that the project can adapt and support governmental objectives. In some cases, the IWP initiative was felt to be imposed from the outside (particularly in the way it addressed local environmental problems) rather than as an initiative that supported the ongoing work and existing priorities of the national government.

Where appropriate, focal areas need to be determined before National Coordinators are recruited. Some National Coordinators were selected prior to the IWP focal areas being decided. As a result, these National Coordinators had inappropriate technical expertise for the work that they were asked to undertake. Future programmes of this type should ensure that adequate numbers of appropriately trained staff are recruited locally to carry out the work after the focal area of work has been determined by the national government's Lead Agency. National Coordinators should also complete a performance review every year with their Lead Agency to ensure that both the individual and organisational needs are being met.

Lesson 13: Sustainability should be integral to the project

The sustainability of an initiative can be measured by the extent to which the benefits of the initiative can continue after outside project funding ends. Unfortunately, IWP did not include a sustainability strategy from the outset, and this was a major omission. It has, in some cases, led to projects being stand-alone initiatives, and not being fully integrated with ongoing government work, or aligned with the policy and direction of the Lead Agency. National coordinators have identified four factors that influenced the sustainability of the IWP pilots:

1. the degree to which the intervention is in line with the strategic direction of the host governments and supported by the Lead Agency;
2. the degree to which the pilot can potentially be mainstreamed within government activities;
3. the degree to which the pilot villages can carry on the initiative after the withdrawal of external support or financing; and
4. the ease of replication by other communities.

The lack of consideration given to the issue of sustainability throughout the lifecycle of the project has undermined the sustainability of the IWP in some countries. For example some IWP pilots are located in inappropriate departments and the salaries of some National Coordinators are disproportionately high.

In future initiatives it may be advisable to consider including in the project MOU drawn up with the Lead Agencies an agreement that National Coordinators will be employed by the government after the completion of the project. Additionally, in cases where ongoing funding is needed to sustain initial pilot project work, it may be helpful to coordinate a Development Partner Round Table discussion towards the end of the project cycle.

Lesson 14: Include monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and learning and communications strategies in projects from the outset

Future programmes of this kind need to ensure greater clarity and understanding at national level. Understanding of IWP's national level objectives has been poor. This has disadvantaged the National Coordinators, many of whom felt unclear about what they were doing until they produced national level monitoring and evaluation plans (in November 2004) and subsequent communication strategies. The project design should be clear about the objectives at all levels, and should incorporate ongoing monitoring and evaluation and learning processes (developed in consultation with the Lead Agencies and National Coordinators) from the outset. Ongoing assessments — particularly participatory assessments by those involved at local and national levels — should be built in to the programme design so that they influence ongoing programme decisions and revisions.

One potential benefit of regional programmes is the learning across and between countries. This has not happened as well as it could have within IWP, in part because of the widespread use of consultants to produce research reports, which few National Coordinators have read (see Lesson 16). Beyond the National Coordinators meetings and IWP training courses, no provision and mechanisms were set up for exchanging experience and learning between countries, even for those working in the same thematic areas. Future environmental initiatives of this kind should investigate ways to ensure peer support and learning between countries.

Communications strategies play a strong part in learning. Communications strategies need to be developed at the outset and have a strong regional focus in order to share learning and best practice across the region. Furthermore, the early development of a joint communications programme would have greatly assisted SPREP in integrating donor funded projects into core work programmes, thereby ensuring greater potential for sustainability.

Lesson 15: Regional projects need to have clear guidelines for National Coordinators

Project guidelines need to be clear, to ensure they are fully understood by both Lead Agencies and National Coordinators. Clear guidelines need to be developed explaining approval processes for the purchase of reasonable infrastructure such as boats (for coastal fisheries work), cars, equipment, communications facilities, etc. This would eliminate the vast disparity in infrastructure which now exists between countries involved in the IWP. Some National Coordinators have no transport and very basic office accommodation.

Lesson 16: Reduce the number of technical reports written by consultants

Many of IWP's technical reports were written by consultants. Although copies have been circulated to each of the participating countries, many of these have not been read by the National Coordinators or key staff of the Lead Agencies. A combination of issues has contributed to National Coordinators not making full use of these reports. These include:

- Many reports were technical in nature and not-user friendly from the perspective of the National Coordinators or the Lead Agency.
- Many did not acknowledge the contribution of the country IWP staff nor the communities which contributed to their production.
- There were too many research reports. They were costly to produce and were mainly written in an academic style for a niche audience. They didn't address practical issues of concern to those working in the pilot countries.
- There was a prevalent view that the consultants were selected by the PCU without due consultation with the countries concerned. In addition some consultants displayed a lack of cultural sensitivity and/or lack of knowledge of the Pacific.

Future projects of this kind should put more emphasis on supporting action-research to produce practical project outcomes rather than contributing to academic research. Each report should be written primarily for a Pacific Island audience, rather than for a technical or academic audience based abroad. Sadly, many of the local in-country reports that were written have yet to be published.



Figure 6: Field trip to Waila Treatment Plant during Vunisinu and Nalase villages facilitators workshop in Fiji

D: Lessons from regional level engagement

Lesson 17: Improve collaboration between CROP agencies

Future initiative of this type would benefit from better collaboration between regional organisations (including members of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific, or CROP). Some CROP agencies appear to compete rather than collaborate for funds, and some appear to duplicate their areas of work. The National Coordinators perceive that a future initiative would benefit from facilitated access by national staff to expertise from all relevant CROP member organisations. This would enable those concentrating on fisheries resources to have access to fisheries specialists (for example, from SPC, the Forum Fisheries Agency or the University of the South Pacific), while those working on solid and liquid waste management could gain access to appropriate expertise (from SPREP, the Secretariat of the Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, and elsewhere). Access to this information should be free of charge, and not on a user pay basis, as is practiced by some CROP agencies.

Lesson 18: A budget for cross-regional learning is important

Regional initiatives of this kind should have a budget to support effective cross-regional learning. The most effective way of learning is not through reading consultancy reports (and in particular not through reading technical consultancy reports). A future project of this kind should have a budget to enable appropriate staff exchanges and internships to share best practice and lessons across the region. For example, IWP could have encouraged National Coordinators to learn from each other, especially within their geographic areas of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Another suggestion, mooted late in the programme, was the establishment of a “buddy system” whereby National Coordinators are paired with others working in the same thematic area. Exchanges and discussion between Lead Agencies supporting the same focal area could also be considered.

Lesson 19: Mechanisms should be developed to share IWP learning and experience at the regional level

Mechanisms should have been set up at the initial design phase for ensuring that learning from the IWP experience is fed into SPREP and other regional bodies, including CROP organisations. For example, time could be set aside at the annual SPREP meetings for IWP consultations with Lead Agency representatives. National Coordinators should brief their country representatives to ensure that SPREP meetings and other regional bodies address some of the core concerns, particularly with regard to ongoing regional support for sustainability of the initiatives underway.

Lesson 20: Future regional work should only be undertaken if lessons have actually been learned

The National Coordinators strongly recommend that future initiatives be funded only if they incorporate the lessons from IWP (i.e. if the lesson have actually been learned). The difficulties that the Coordinators have faced in trying to carry out the project have, at times, felt insurmountable. The work of the pilot initiatives has reaped benefits in the thirteen IWP countries that implemented them, but the benefits could have been greater. Avoiding IWP’s mistakes and learning from the successes should be a prerequisite for future GEF or similar funding.