

21. LAND RESOURCES

Drafted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme

Unlocking the Potential of Scarce Land and Land-based Resources Through Integrated Planning and Sustainable Land Management

SUMMARY

Recognise that land is a scarce resource and that with growing populations there is an urgent need for effective planning and management of land and land based resources.

Recognise that 80% of land and land-based resources is owned by customary landowners so institutions and mechanisms need to be put in place to safeguard their ownership and interests while facilitating access to land for sustainable development.

Commit to an all of government approach to integrated land-use planning and management by establishing a comprehensive policy and legal framework that encourages cooperation and joint implementation between agencies and provide resources for its effective implementation and enforcement.

Engage customary landowners, the private sector, women, youth, NGOs and other stakeholders in the integrated land-use planning and management process.

Promote conservation of soil, water, forests and biodiversity through the establishment of a representative network of protected areas and the establishment of a permanent forest estate for sustainable forest production.

Consider the special needs of atoll countries for land-use that facilitates in meeting their subsistence needs in particular to adapt to the impacts of climate change

KEY ISSUES

Land tenure and access arrangements

- Land is a scarce resource in all countries of the region, 15 PICTs have less than 815 sq.km and 3 PICTs have less than 26 sq.km.
- Most PICTs have growing populations resulting in growing competing demands for land use.
- At least 80% of the land in most PICTs is under customary ownership, governments and land owners both recognise that their present and future livelihoods depend on sustainable development of their lands.
- There is a need to strengthen formal recognition, definition and registration of customary land owning groups and the establishment of formal institutions and arrangements to manage customary land including for dispute resolution
- Access to customary land is an important enabling factor for economic development and is a major consideration of investors. Financial institutions are unlikely to lend money for the

development of communally-owned land without a legal lease but these should also safeguard the interests of customary landowners including equitable benefits.

Integrated Land-use Planning and Management

- Generally there is a lack of data and information on rural land-use and management in particular scientific and technical data such as land classification and capability with this only available in Cook Islands, Fiji and Samoa. This is essential for informed planning.
- Responsibility for land and land based resources is typically vested with a number of different government ministries/agencies with limited mechanisms for coordination.
- Integrated land-use planning is a systematic assessment of land to identify the use that is best suited based on its capability, sustainability including the impacts of climate change and the needs of people. It encompasses all kinds of land-use and should provide guidance in cases of land-use conflict in particular rural land-use and urban expansion.
- Political will is essential to put in place the appropriate land-use policies and legislation and provide continuing guidance and support to land-use planning and management agencies.
- Integrated land-use planning requires an all of government approach but also needs to be participatory involving all stakeholders in particular the customary land owners, women and youth and must be at multiple levels from national, sub national, to local community level.
- Conservation is central to integrated land-use planning fully encompassing soil, water, forest and biodiversity conservation. There is a need to set aside areas that are of local or national significance or highly vulnerable in a representative network of protected areas. In some countries there is also the need to maintain a permanent forest estate to ensure sustainable forest production and management.
- At least 80% of land in most PICTs is customary owned so effective land management can only be undertaken at the local community level. Land-use planning needs to be carried out with local communities and their resulting management efforts well supported by trained and well resourced field advisers and extension officers with incentives to encourage good management accompanied with strong enforcement against bad practice.

Atoll countries require special attention focusing on subsistence needs and agro-forestry. The setting up of the Kiribati based Centre of Excellence for Atoll Agriculture Research and Development should facilitate identification of atoll land-use practices.

BACKGROUND

The Pacific Island region covers about 551,483 square km of land, of which 98% is in the larger Melanesian countries, 0.6% or just about 3,300 square km is shared by Micronesian countries and 1.4% or just over 8,000 square km is shared by Polynesian countries. Of the 17 Micronesian and Polynesian countries, 15 have land areas less than 815 square km while Nauru, Tokelau and Tuvalu have less than 26 square km¹.

Customary ownership is the dominant form of land tenure in the Pacific region. In most countries it accounts for more than 80 per cent of the total land area. Under such systems, the land generally

cannot be sold or bought. It can, however, generally be leased. Ownership is not always clear-cut and resolution of disputes can be difficult. Very few countries have land tenure systems that ensure minimal potential for conflict, and even fewer have systems in place that allow the full economic potential of land to be unlocked, while at the same time ensuring that the ownership of the land remains with the traditional resource owners and that they have access to sufficient land to meet their subsistence livelihood needs.

While there is significant variation across PICTs, agriculture and forestry activities provide the greatest source of employment, household income and exports. However there is increasing competition for land in particular from urban development and tourism. Often the land being competed for is prime agricultural land along the main coastal and river plains. Because of their small geographic and demographic size, their remoteness and their vulnerability to natural disasters, the sustainable development of land resources for agriculture and forestry is crucial to food and nutritional security, enhanced livelihoods, socio-economic development and environmental protection, in line with sustainable development practices.

The fifth regional meeting of heads of agriculture and forestry services (HOAFS) and the third meeting of ministers for agriculture and forestry (MOAFs) that took place in September, 2012 in Nadi, Fiji, addressed the threats of rising food insecurity associated with rising imported food prices and shrinking national food production; the threat that rising temperatures and sea levels pose to the region's forest resources and food production systems; and urbanisation, which poses threats to the management of the region's agriculture and forestry resources, and to the health of its populations. It was stressed that the Pacific region's population is booming, with estimates indicating that it now exceeds ten million and is expected to reach fifteen million by 2035. Also highlighted was the fact that the Pacific region will need to increase food production by more than 50 per cent in order to meet the demand without significantly increasing the prices.

High population growth rates along with increasing urbanisation will severely challenge existing land use systems, with high demand for housing, employment, and farming systems to produce enough food to feed the growing population. The demands for land for agriculture, grazing, forestry, wildlife, tourism and urban development are greater than the land resources available. This places a lot of pressures on land resources, particularly marginal land and native forests. The intensification of agricultural production using current methods and also the shift to marginal lands may lead to unsustainable land development and increased land degradation, soil erosion, loss of plant nutrients, increased pest and disease infestation, reduction in soil depth, and decreased soil water-holding capacity.

It is essential to promote land-use planning so there is a systematic assessment of land in order to select land uses that will best meet the needs of the people, while safeguarding their resources for the future. This planning should be integrated to consider all kinds of land use, including agriculture, rangeland, multiple-use permanent forests, forest plantations, wildlife conservation, urbanisation and tourism. Land use planning can also provide guidance in cases of conflict between rural land use and urban or industrial expansion, by indicating which areas of land are most valuable and best suited each use. Land-use planning should integrate information about the suitability of the land, the demands for alternative products or uses and the opportunities for satisfying those demands on the available land or land resource for now and in the future.

Integrated land use planning and management needs effective consultation among policy makers, resource owners and developers. A number of countries have taken steps towards a coordinated, whole-of-government approach and also include NGOs, the private sector and other community organisations. A ridge to reef focus is encouraged because in a small island setting ecosystems are

closely interconnected. Sustainable land management is not the domain of one particular agency but a shared responsibility so it is essential that there is an integrated planning process.

Women in the region play an important role in ensuring that sufficient, safe and nutritious food is provided to their families. In many islands, women are the prime producers, generating incomes mainly from agriculture and other land-based activities, which are also most directly impacted by public decisions, laws and planning related to land management. Mainstreaming women in the design and implementation of policy, programmes and projects aimed at promoting sustainable land management is therefore crucial.

A key challenge in most countries is the movement of youth away from rural areas. Mainstreaming youth issues into all land development by providing mechanisms by which young people can articulate their specific needs may encourage more youth into rural land-use. Consideration must be given to the type of platform that will encourage young involvement in land development. The increased participation by youth is necessary and vital to facilitate food and nutrition security. In order to make a long-term impact on land use, today's youth must be equipped with effective land-use decision-making tools and the capacity to utilise them.

Land degradation is a key concern in the region with XXX Pacific island countries being party to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Land Degradation (UNCCD). Many of these countries have formulated their National Action Plans for Sustainable Land Management with some aligning it to the global strategy for UNCCD² but implementation tends to be limited to pilot sites. Awareness raising and the introduction of appropriate technologies and practices are key to mainstreaming implementation into the wider farming community and other land users.

The setting aside of areas for forest conservation and production, biodiversity conservation and water supply as permanent or long term estates are essential for sustainable development. These areas should be identified and clearly demarcated as part of integrated land-use planning. Customary landowners need to be consulted and agree to these permanent estates, actively participate in its management, benefit and where relevant equitably compensated for its use. These protected areas should be designated and managed according to IUCN protected area categories that allow a wide range of uses and management regimes³.

In atoll countries basic subsistence needs take precedence. They include developing productive atoll farming systems, improving agriculture and agro-forestry practices in particular to attract youth and women and identifying new crops and methods adapted to the impacts of climate change for local consumption. This need for a specific approach suited to the needs of atoll communities is demonstrated by the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for Atoll Agriculture Research and Development in Tarawa, Kiribati⁴.

REFERENCES

¹ SPC. 2012: 42nd CRGA Working Paper Agenda Item 3.2

² UNCCD 2007: Decision 3(COP.8) 10 Year Strategic Plan and Framework to enhance the implementation of the convention

³ Lockwood M, Worboys G, Kothari A. 2006: *Managing Protected Areas – A Global Guide: Earthscan*, pp.73-100

⁴ ESCAP 2010: *Pacific Regional Report for the 5-Year Review of the Mauritius Strategy for Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for Sustainable Development of SIDS*

KEY DOCUMENTS & HYPELINKS

For Pacific country parties reports to the UNCCD the weblink is: <http://www.unccd-prais.com/Data/Reports>.

For National Action Plans on SLM the web link is: <http://www.unccd.int/en/regional-access/Pages/regionaldocuments.aspx?ctx=nap®ion=Asia&reportType=National>