



2nd Executive Board Meeting

2 – 4 September 2020

Agenda Item 5.2: COVID-19 Impacts on SPREP

Purpose of paper

1. To provide an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SPREP programmes and projects in 2020 and the Secretariat response to ensure that work programme and budget delivery is maintained to the highest level possible.

Background:

2. States of Emergency (SOE) and international border closures in response to the COVID-19 (CV-19) pandemic began to be put in place by SPREP Member countries and territories at the end of March 2020. This situation has continued into July and is likely to continue to at least the end of 2020.
3. SPREP as a regional organisation has responded to the CV-19 situation by:
 - Following SOE directives in countries where SPREP staff are based. In Samoa this meant that HQ staff were home-based from end-March to end-May. In Fiji, Vanuatu and RMI where project and regional office staff are located, staff followed national directives.
 - In June Apia-based staff returned to working in the office. Some staff were permitted to return to their home countries prior to border closures and some have been able to return to Apia while others have been unable to do so because of continuing travel restrictions.
4. Travel restrictions and border closures have had a major impact on SPREP's normal modalities for delivering support to Pacific island countries and territories. This situation has been addressed as much as possible by refocussing service delivery through virtual and remote mechanisms.
5. Nevertheless, while the Secretariat has been able to maintain support to Members, CV-19 restrictions have had an impact on the delivery of projects, particularly those for which in-country engagements have been planned and budgeted.
6. Unfortunately, CV-19 restrictions have compounded the slow start to a number of significant projects during 2018-2019 (as noted by 29SM) due to delays in donor approvals. These projects had consequently planned for full implementation in 2020.
7. While some elements of projects can be re-adjusted for virtual and remote delivery this is not possible for all in-country project activities and has required some components of in-country project delivery to be postponed for the remainder of 2020. This has also resulted in a reduction to forecast expenditure. The Secretariat continues to monitor the budget on a monthly and quarterly basis and the budget expenditure January-May and forecast to end-2020 is:

	Actuals Jan-May 2020	Budget 2020	Delivery rate	Budget Variance	Monthly Budget	OUTLOOK 7 mths remaining	Forecast 2020 Total	Percentage of Forecast 2020
Climate Change Resilience	1,409,853	16,357,819	9%	(14,947,966)	1,363,152	7,575,818	8,985,671	55%
Island & Ocean Ecosystems	1,701,926	6,086,939	28%	(4,385,013)	507,245	3,594,372	5,296,298	87%
Waste management	953,246	6,590,513	14%	(5,637,267)	549,209	2,992,653	3,945,899	60%
Environment monitoring	427,737	1,803,698	24%	(1,375,961)	150,308	751,885	1,179,622	65%

8. In order to establish the budget forecast the Secretariat has analysed in detail the impact on work programme delivery for the remainder of 2020 by each technical programme. The full analysis is annexed but in summary:

Technical Programme Delivery for 2020	IOE	EMG	WMPC	CCR
Action achievable directly	43.1%	21%	8%	29.4%
Action achievable virtually/remotely	46.5%	73.7%	28%	53%
Postponed to 2021	7%	5.3%	60%	5.9%
Uncertain/partial	3.4%	-	4%	11.8%

9. While the Island and Ocean Ecosystems Programme (IOE) has retained a relatively high percentage of directly implementable activities the majority of work across all programmes is being achieved through virtual (in the cases of workshops and training activities) and remote means, for example, through local consultants. The presence of in-country project staff and contractors in Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands has also contributed to maintaining in-country delivery and momentum – highlighting the value of outposted offices and staff.
10. This means, with the exception of the Waste Management and Pollution Control Programme (WMPC) that programmes currently have a relatively low percentage of activity postponement to 2021 based on the current analysis. Nevertheless, project and activity delivery through virtual and remote mechanisms still impacts on meeting budget targets as a consequence, for example, of the reduction in expenditure on travel, hiring meeting venues and various contractual costs. In the case of WMPC, there is significant postponement due to the high level of practical in-country delivery WMPC projects: EDF-11 PacWaste Plus and the Australian government funded Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP).
11. The Secretariat will continue to monitor the impact of the CV-19 pandemic on the work programme and budget and adjust its response to programme delivery accordingly. As soon as Pacific Members' border open, and travel restrictions are lifted, full in-country programme delivery will be resumed.

Recommendations

12. The Executive Board Meeting is invited to:
- Note** the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SPREP 2020 work programme and forecast reduction in expenditure of the 2020 budget; and
 - Note** the Secretariat actions to manage the consequences of these impacts to maintain delivery of support to Members to the highest level possible.