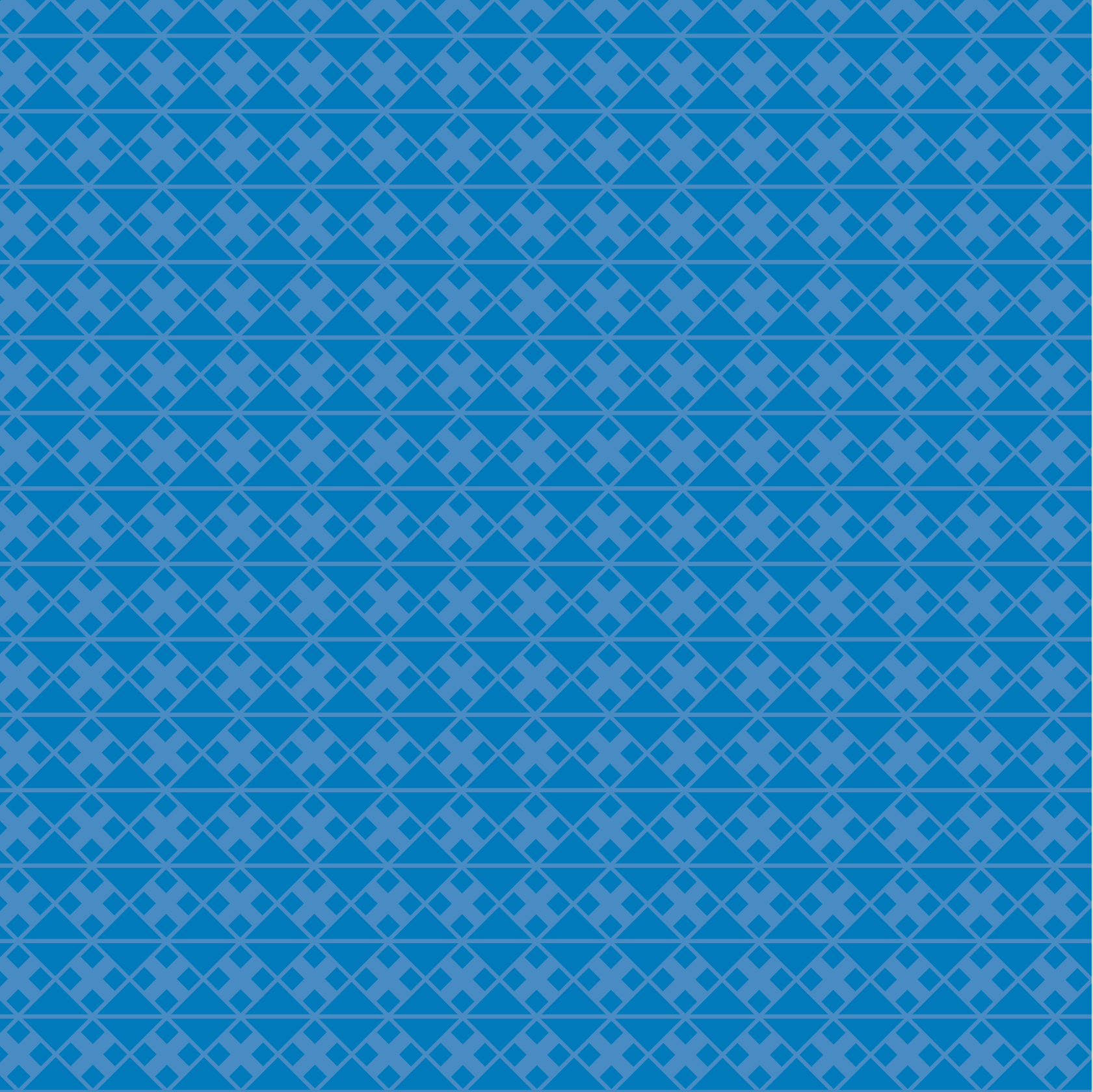


Lessons in Conservation for People and Projects in the Pacific Islands Region



PETER HUNNAM



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Cover photo:

Two villages made peace to create Vathe Conservation Area in Vanuatu, which contains the last intact alluvial and limestone forest in the country.

Introduction

The extensive Pacific Islands region comprises around 30,000 islands scattered across the vast central Pacific Ocean. The island groups and sea areas are divided into 22 countries, with a total population of around 6 million people. The great majority of people live in relatively small and isolated coastal or rural village communities, and remain closely reliant on their local natural resources for subsistence and economic development. Customary resource tenure systems prevail, in diverse, fluid, and adaptable forms, and provide an essential foundation for management of resource uses and conservation. The region contains extensive biological diversity of global significance, including coral reef, coastal and open ocean ecosystems, unique island communities, and large numbers of endemic species of island plants and animals. The biodiversity of small islands and their surrounding shallow sea areas is highly vulnerable to human impacts from over-exploitation, habitat destruction, and introductions of invasive, alien species.

In the 1980s there was increasing international recognition of the significance of the ecology and biodiversity of the South Pacific, and also of the ineffectiveness of previous conservation efforts, which focussed on designating State protected areas with inadequate regard for local participation, cultural factors or ecological sustainability of resource uses. In the early 1990s, the pilot phase of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) financed the design and implementation of the South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme (SPBCP). It was intended as a major programme for the whole region, aimed at devising and demonstrating effective and culturally appropriate approaches to the conservation of nature in the Pacific Island countries (PICs). The SPBCP was implemented from 1992 until 2001. Seventeen conservation projects were undertaken involving local communities in twelve of the fourteen independent PICs that had been eligible for support.

A comprehensive, independent, terminal evaluation of the programme was carried out over the final six months.¹ It reviewed the wide range of programme activities carried out and the results obtained, and evaluated the achievements of the programme against the original plan and the objectives that had been set.

This report presents a summary of the evaluation, and describes the lessons that are apparent from the SPBCP, and are applicable to future conservation efforts. Lessons are discussed under three headings:

- Biodiversity Conservation as Part of Sustainable Development;
- Local Communities at the Centre; and
- Improving Programme Delivery.

¹ South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme, Terminal Evaluation Mission, Final Report, July 2002. Also referred to as the SPBCP Terminal Evaluation Report.

Evaluation Summary



The South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme (SPBCP) was a multi-country conservation initiative undertaken from 1992 to 2001, with grant funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), managed by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The SPBCP was designed to “develop strategies for the conservation of biodiversity by means of the sustainable use of biological resources by the people of the South Pacific.” It was to work through country Lead Agencies to trial approaches to local community-based conservation.

The overall conclusion from the terminal evaluation is that the Programme did not achieve these objectives, largely because of flaws in direction and implementation. While a number of activities were completed with some measure of success, “the sum of the parts” did not make the “whole” that had been envisaged in the Project Document; a proven model for community-based biodiversity conservation did not emerge, and the Programme did not make the expected contribution to conservation of the biological resources that underpin rural community life and livelihoods in the region. There are gains in some of the detail, but the Conservation Area Projects initiated under the SPBCP did not come close to demonstrating the integrity and momentum that heralds sustainability.

The concept underlying the SPBCP was, and remains, highly relevant. It embraced biodiversity in the Pacific islander sense of being an integral part of traditional societies, administered through customary systems of resource tenure. Though changed, these still apply in many parts of the island

◀ **Elementary school teacher Evelyn Palo (right) and her mother Susan Palo plant pepper plants in their forest garden in Vathe Conservation Area on Espiritu Santo Island in Vanuatu. They rely on forest and marine resources for their livelihood.**

region. The translation of this concept into field application was never going to be easy – the social issues of tenure being so complex, national Lead Agencies often weak, and ecological sustainability of local economic development unproven. However, the Programme’s management failed to grasp the true nature of biodiversity management in a local community context. It was not able to define an approach and develop a suitable process that would lead to the protection of significant biodiversity in a context of sustainable use of local biological resources.

Designed for five years, the SPBCP was twice extended, to a total of ten years. The changing timeframe meant that, on two occasions, periods of uncertainty were followed by a changed planning horizon — and the proportion of budget consumed by administration rose appreciably. Over this time, seventeen community-based Conservation Area Projects (CA Projects) in twelve Pacific Island countries were supported, and regional strategies to protect turtles, marine mammals and birds were developed. The add-on “species component” of the Programme was not integrated with the CA Project activities, either in the project design or in practice. The focus on rare and endangered species protection restricted scope for presenting conservation in an ecosystem context. However, it was designed this way and, as such, was executed successfully by SPREP in accordance with the Project Document.

The Project Document provided for the local CA Projects to be managed by national Lead Agencies providing CA Project Managers who were to work in support of community-driven initiatives, with stakeholders represented on Conservation Area Coordinating Committees (CACCs). The CACCs were to employ Conservation Area Support Officers (CASOs). Most Lead Agencies were government departments of environment or conservation. The SPBCP made little use of non-government organisations (NGOs) as partners in implementing the

Programme, even though their involvement as Lead Agencies had a number of advantages that of over Government agencies.

The Project Document made clear that delivery through national agencies was an important measure to develop local ownership and to lay a foundation for sustainability. Yet though the fragile state of institutional development among member government agencies was recognised, neither resources nor capacity development for Lead Agencies was specified in the Project Document, nor provided subsequently during implementation, when the need became glaringly obvious.

Regional delivery of the SPBCP led to many frustrations and difficulties for all parties. The Project Document justification for “regional delivery” was weak, even though it did envisage national level execution of community-based projects – with regional level guidance and support. In practice, the SPBCP was directed from the regional headquarters of SPREP. This approach was unrealistic, inefficient and ineffective. The considerable cultural and resource tenure variations within the region, and the vast distances involved in travel between island countries, argue for national and local approaches, except where sub-regional groupings could be useful for technical support and for exchanges of skills and experience.

A reluctance to engage, link with and complement other agencies and projects addressing community-based resource management, as was proposed in the Project Document, left the SPREP to “go it alone.” In particular, it did not draw on the community level rural development experience of the South Pacific Community (SPC) – a type of experience that SPBCP needed and that SPREP lacked.

An examination of policies, programmes and activities designed or implemented in the region by intergovernmental organisations, by governments and by NGOs since SPBCP results began to emerge reveals no SPBCP impact. Nor was the body of information on the region’s biodiversity much improved until the late acquisition of additional biodiversity data through the trialling of an approach to community-based biodiversity monitoring.

For a regional programme, the administration costs forecast at design were reasonable. However, Programme exten-

sions without additional funds for administration caused their proportion to increase, from 30% to 52% of the budget. UNDP support costs increased from 1.7% to 4.3%, and CASO salaries from 4% to almost 9%. Species protection activities were allocated 7% of the design budget and this was maintained at about 8% of expenditure. The proportion spent on income generating activities dropped from a designed 24% to an actual 4.5%, and the important CA establishment and management expenditure fell from a budgeted 22% to a little over 7%.

SPREP, UNDP, and participating country government delegates formed an overall management committee for the SPBCP, the Multi-Partite Review (MPR). However, its membership and operating procedures made the MPR ineffective as a governing body. A Technical and Management Advisory Group (TMAG) met annually as a technical backstop for the Programme, and was able to identify emerging problems and offer pertinent advice. However, it proved to be an inadequate mechanism for asserting the need for change during implementation. Internal monitoring of the Programme was also inadequate, and the risk identification and management measures of the Project Document were simplistic and superficial. No risks were identified (although there were many) for the community level of Programme engagement.

Though the duration of the SPBCP was twice extended, no revision of the Project Document was undertaken. This is viewed as a serious omission. Had the opportunity been taken to address a number of issues identified by the TMAG and by the Mid-Term Evaluation, the results emerging from the final years might have been better.

The SPBCP was not managed well by SPREP as a regional initiative in facilitation, coordination, and strengthening of conservation efforts in each country and locality. The Programme was not established or implemented as an integrated or linked component of the inter-governmental agency’s overall mission, despite the fact that for six of SPBCP’s ten years the Programme Manager was also the agency’s Conservation Division Head. He and his staff were sometimes required by the SPREP Director to become involved in SPREP activities that were not part of the SPBCP. UNDP

objected to the Programme Manager being distracted from the Programme by these extra duties, but SPREP was reluctant to change the arrangements.

The multi-level financial and administrative reporting system adopted for the Programme’s management was a major hindrance to effective action, especially at the community level. The rigidity with which UNDP required its National Execution (NEX) guidelines to be applied contributed to this problem. A large amount of unnecessary expense in money and time was required to keep the Programme going administratively. There was regular tension between the Programme management and CA Projects over reporting and cash flows.

The seventeen Conservation Area Project sites cover a wide range of tropical island ecosystems, including some, such as lowland tropical rainforest ecosystems, of international significance. Many encompass their country’s best examples of certain ecosystems and most include some threatened and/or endangered species. A wide range of interactions between humans and natural resources operated in the selected areas.

While the sites were well chosen for their significant biodiversity, the Programme management’s focus was too strongly on “protected areas” rather than on people in a biodiversity context. Coupled with other distractions, this meant that the crucial task of engaging communities and other stakeholders in an empowering process of management planning for the use and protection of their biodiversity did not eventuate. There was an overemphasis on outputs such as inappropriate Project Preparation Documents (PPDs) for each local CA at the expense of establishing and sustaining a process that would engage the communities and generate local “ownership.” In particular, much greater attention was required throughout the Programme to the systematic strengthening of local capacity and enabling of local action.

There is a place for a conventional “protected area” approach to biodiversity conservation. However, the circumstances of Pacific islander life and livelihoods, and the complexities of customary land and sea tenure and use rights, dictate that this can only be achieved through sustainable resource management approaches in a landscape context in

which people’s needs are addressed. This perspective was recognised in the Programme design, but was not elaborated and not carried through in execution. Nor were the important ramifications of gender differences in biodiversity conservation action and impact recognised and addressed.

The establishment of a cadre of Conservation Area Support Officers (CASOs) with experience and skills that could be used widely in natural resource management at community level was a good Programme result. The CASOs gained an experience that can be of service to Pacific Island communities in a range of biodiversity management activities. The CASO was a good model for multi-tasked, adaptive extension work at the community level. Unfortunately, the Programme’s assistance was delivered too narrowly to CASOs, local ownership of CAs was underdeveloped, and no broader institutional support was provided to sustain local initiatives beyond the life of the SPBCP.

Some useful effort was applied to developing capacity for income generating activities (IGAs) and some creditable reports and manuals resulted. The Project Document had proposed “initiation” of these activities and had not intended that they be carried through to establishment. SPBCP management found they were engaged in a complex area of community activity in which they had little experience. It proved difficult to avoid a tendency for IGA interventions to be perceived by communities as rewards for biodiversity protection measures rather than as an integral part of a local community’s development agenda.

The underlying rationale for community-based biodiversity management expressed in the Project Document remains relevant. It is, in fact, of fundamental importance for the future of Pacific Island countries in that it is the only effective and lasting approach to poverty avoidance and alleviation. The need for the type of result intended through the SPBCP intervention is now pressing. The evaluation concludes that while a further, ex-post evaluation is not warranted, the SPBCP sponsors and SPREP have a moral obligation to provide some follow-up to the participating communities, rather than simply to close off the SPBCP and move on to other projects with other communities in other locations.



Lessons in Conservation for People and Projects in the Pacific Islands Region

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AS PART OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Biodiversity conservation in the Pacific Island countries requires wider strategic thinking and planning, to get beyond pre-conceived and conventional approaches. Narrow, protectionist approaches are of marginal interest or relevance to Pacific islanders. The most appropriate and effective strategy is through the management of resource uses.

There is an outstanding need to devise and demonstrate effective, appropriate ways of conserving the biological diversity of the Pacific Islands. The SPBCP was concerned too narrowly with establishing protected areas and did not achieve its objective of piloting successful conservation strategies to be championed and emulated.

Options for conserving biodiversity are to stop its use (i.e., to try to “set it aside”), or to use it in ways that do not degrade its natural values, by limiting the types of exploitation, their timing, intensity, or techniques employed. The close dependence of Pacific islanders’ lives and livelihoods on local natural resources means that the latter approach is more realistic and likely to be more effective.

There is a significant urgent need in the PICs to develop and promote uses of biodiversity that are sustainable, for subsistence

◀ **Pastor Asotasi Time and his son rest between Sunday masses in a traditional Samoan hut by the sea in Uafato village in Uafato Conservation Area. Pastor Time serves on the village committee that manages the conservation area, which includes one of Samoa’s last intact forests.**

and commercial purposes, across the range of agricultural, forestry, fisheries and tourism development activities.

Conservation efforts must be in line with these priority renewable resource management sectors. Successful conservation outcomes result from development activities being ecologically sustainable in terms of sites, species, and methods used, and from controlling unsustainable uses, destructive practices, and threats such as invasive species.

Biodiversity conservation must be designed and promoted as an integral component of ecologically sustainable development. Conservation projects cannot be carried out effectively in isolation of mainstream social and economic programs, either at the level of local communities or nationally. Conservation efforts must understand and work with the economic, social, and political interests which surround them.

To be effective, biodiversity conservation must become a social, political and economic priority, rather than of minor, marginal interest and relevance. The approach must be to ensure that conservation is shaped and recognised as the cornerstone of sustainable development and is therefore an important valid business for government and private agencies concerned with economic and social development and the use of natural resources, in fisheries, forestry, agriculture, mining, and tourism.

Conservation programmes must be developed as integral components of local, national and regional strategies for economic and social development. In target local areas, programmes like the SPBCP must provide genuine contributions to economic and social development, rather than being short-lived attempts to buy coopera-

tion for biodiversity protection schemes. They must deliberately include specific development objectives for participating villages, in terms of incomes, infrastructure, welfare and educational services, and use of natural resources, and strive to establish effective strategies to achieve these objectives.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES AT THE CENTRE

Conservation of the biodiversity of a place must be meaningfully integrated with the lives and economies of local people. In the Pacific Island countries, this means centring conservation efforts strongly on local communities, whose survival, culture, and prosperity depend on local resources being used sustainably.

Conservation is essentially a social issue requiring democratic involvement of the people and local communities whose lives and livelihoods are most affected. Conservation efforts are more likely to be successful and sustained if they are driven by participatory processes and communal decision-making, in which local communities have the central role.

In the Pacific Island countries, local people must be recognised and empowered as the primary stakeholders and central participants in conservation projects, because of their tenure rights and knowledge concerning the local biodiversity, environment and natural resources, and because their lives and livelihoods are closely reliant on continued resource health and productivity.

There is an outstanding need in many PICs to secure realistic, viable futures for rural and coastal village communities, and natural resource management and conservation provide the essential foundation for sustainable rural life and livelihoods. For small island communities, moving on, emigrating, finding “greener pasture” is normally not an option. They have to thrive – or lead impoverished lives – with the consequences of their resource management actions, and the impacts of others

on those resources. Areas of high biodiversity significance are often associated with low social and economic development, and conservation programmes must include assistance for poor rural communities, often isolated from services, to achieve a future in which their standards of living are improved, while cultural and biodiversity values are maintained.

Biodiversity conservation would be significantly strengthened by Pacific Island governments and national and regional institutions recognising and making more systematic use of customary tenure, local culture, community institutions and traditional ecological knowledge and management practices in their policies, development planning and programmes.

Customary land and sea tenure and use rights, shared among kinship groups associated with a local place, provide the strongest foundation on which to build conservation and sustainable development in the island countries.

The specific biodiversity priorities of local communities must be given greater recognition and attention in programmes like the SPBCP. Biodiversity for Pacific islanders is part of their cultural heritage and has strong spiritual meaning as an integral component of “land,” encompassing all land, freshwater, and inshore marine resources. Their interests are likely to be centred on agriculture, fish, forest, and other natural products, and these should form the priority focus for conservation efforts.

When rights to access resources are considered, the complexity of a community extends to individuals of other lineages. It is a daunting challenge for outside assistance to “get it right” without alienating some part of the community and undermining project success.

An assistance programme must deal carefully, fairly, and transparently with the questions of which community or communities to support, taking into account their differing status and the modern humanistic objective of targeting the most needy.

Although these principles appear to be widely supported, very limited progress in this regard has been made over the past decade. Priority attention is required to the development of effective policies, laws, and programmes that support and strengthen the rights of customary resource owners and their role as custodians of local natural resources.

A “local community” is not necessarily a simple, homogenous, or harmonious social unit. A Pacific Island village community is likely to be made up of a number of “lineage communities,” each sharing a common ancestry and tenure of a portion of land.

The term “local community” is used here to mean a relatively discrete grouping of people living in or associated with a particular local area. This association may have been over an extended period, leading to a shared dependence on one another and on their local environment and resources.

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Governments, aid agencies and NGOs interested in conservation of Pacific Islands natural resources have considerable capacity and power – through money, education, skills, knowledge, ideas, opportunities, confidence, and political access – to achieve their objectives. For

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There is a continuing dilemma of programmes like the SPBCP aiming to benefit local communities but being conceived, planned, budgeted, approved, and mobilised before any local community has an inkling of what is in store. It is a major challenge for a large aid programme to be “local community-based.” The programme

resource conservation to be effective in the long-term, a good measure of this capacity and power needs to be transferred to the local community.

communities and their local institutions have completely different priorities and perhaps little experience or confidence in organising a significant community project in an accountable or rigorous manner.

A critical look at the SPBCP raises basic questions of “ownership” and participation. Who perceived and analysed the problem, and designed and set objectives for the programme? Who gathered data, assessed the baseline, monitored results and evaluated performance? Who is best informed about programme activities, who benefited, and who learned most from the initiative? Programmes like the SPBCP need to be designed and implemented so that the answer to most of these questions is “the local community.” The answer is not for outside managers or consultants to implement project activities for a local community, but to put as much effort as required into enabling local communities and their institutions to develop and run the project activities for themselves, as completely as possible. The benefit is in the learning and capacity-building, and these come from the experience of doing, and must accrue to the local community, not outside agents.

An outside assistance programme must become transformed into the local community’s own project. The community must be able to “self select” to participate in the project, with ownership and control vested in the local community, to determine its own plans, activities,

has to bridge two worlds: on the one hand, donors, executing agencies and government partners administer disbursements in accordance with a programme blueprint and agreed procedures; on the other, participating rural village

communities and their local institutions have completely different priorities and perhaps little experience or confidence in organising a significant community project in an accountable or rigorous manner.

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In initiating a community-based development or conservation programme like the SPBCP, the emphasis must be on the community deciding to take on the programme, and inviting the outside agencies to work in the area, rather than the agencies selecting the community and proceeding to “sell” the pre-conceived programme. Community

methods, and timing, so that the design suits its own local circumstances and needs. The process introduced to develop and implement the project must be reasonable and appropriate for the local community.

be simply the idea of the community considering taking on a programme that should bring it some benefits. The process envisaged and possible steps along the way must be introduced, stressing the central role of the local community, and outlining what it would need to do and likely costs. The outside agency must confirm its commitment to assist the local community to implement the community's own project, and must make clear any interests and constraints it has.

Essential preparation in the community is to build strong participation and confidence, and to foster leadership and ownership. These preparations provide the foundation for the community to embark on its project, develop a common vision, review the problems it faces, set its broad objectives, and outline a framework of actions. The role of the outside programme is to facilitate the overall process and advise on options available to the community to deal with issues perceived.

The local project must be fully integrated with the main elements of the community's economic and social activities. Local communities tend not to be well organised for collective effort, but most have some organisational structures – associated with the local council, chief's committee, church, women's association, trade store, fishing cooperative, or other group – which form a useful, familiar starting point. It is important to build on these existing local institutions and

acceptance of a detailed programme design prepared outside must not be used as a condition for the local community to be selected as the target programme beneficiary.

At the crucial stage of initial engagement between outside executing agency and potential project community, there must

community groups, rather than require new bodies to be established to preconceived designs, as was the case with the CA Coordinating Committees under the SPBCP.

Governments must be given support to develop policy and regulatory frameworks and support services for local community biodiversity conservation initiatives.

Local communities need governments to recognise, encourage, and actively support their efforts. In all PICs there is a need to develop appropriate and effective national policies and systems for natural resource management and biodiversity

conservation centred on local communities.

For programmes like the SPBCP, IWP² and NBSAPs³ to be effective, their benefits to national development agendas must be promoted, and they must be used more strategically to assist governments to develop national policy, regulations, and facilities that promote and strengthen local community initiatives.

Programmes must include provision for government agencies to make technical resources, such as mapping, social, economic and resource data, and extension services for resource management activities, readily available to local community groups and resource owners. More emphasis must be placed on developing the role and strengthening the capacities of local government in particular to support local communities in these ways.

IMPROVING PROGRAMME DELIVERY

The ways in which programmes are designed and carried out reduce their effectiveness. Biodiversity conservation programmes are not achieving their objectives.

Programmes have become the ubiquitous vehicle for delivery of development and conservation support in developing countries, used extensively by governments, aid agencies, and non-government organisations to package activities for target beneficiaries. Over the past decade, most conservation work in the PICs has been carried out as part of a programme.

Major aid programmes like the SPBCP tend to be relatively intense, boosting management resources and activity over a short period. The SPBCP was too narrowly concerned with delivering pre-conceived solutions too rapidly and inflexibly. These characteristics limit the programme's effectiveness for biodiversity conservation, which requires locally-driven and home-grown solutions, introduced through flexible processes in order to produce lasting beneficial change.

Conservation and development programmes in developing countries have become increasingly large and complex over the past decade and cannot be managed as simple, singular projects. Rather than being introduced across multiple jurisdictions and layers of government,

Organisations are taking on substantial initiatives that comprise diverse types of actions, involve several tiers of stakeholders across diverse sectors, span multiple locations, and have budgets of many millions of dollars. The trend seems to be driven partly by agency administrators seeking cost efficiencies and partly in recognition that integrated actions are needed across

such complex initiatives must be split into a series of devolved projects.

multiple traditional sectors in order to achieve the desired results.⁴ There is a need for more long-term, low-cost projects and fewer rapid-fire, high-cost programmes. The use of programmes should be limited to situations which can benefit from short, intense interventions. More emphasis must be placed on broader strategic approaches that recognise the wider context of prevailing issues and longer term needs.

In the Pacific Island countries, it would be valuable for governments and aid agencies to restrict the use of programmes and commit resources instead to strengthening the core functions needed to govern the use of natural resources, conserve biodiversity and protect the natural environment.

More time and care need to be spent on programme preparation and design. The starting point must be a comprehensive analysis of the problem to be tackled.

It is important for programme planners, implementers, and participants to understand the exact nature and root causes of "the problem" that is to be tackled, and its ramifications across the social, political, economic, and ecological systems that form the context for the proposed programme.

There is a danger in settling prematurely on a possible solution, not thinking it through critically or locally, and not exploring wider issues or other possible strategies. In the case of the SPBCP, management became focused too early on implementing Conservation Areas to a set formula. It would have been valuable to have analysed the wide range of issues facing local community conservation efforts and to have considered other possible strategies.

² IWP ~ The Strategic Action Programme for the International Waters of the Developing Small Islands States of the Pacific is a GEF-funded, UNDP-implemented, SPREP-executed programme to establish pilot projects addressing community-based sustainable resource management and conservation issues in 14 Pacific Island countries.

³ NBSAPs ~ National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans are being developed by country parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, including the majority of Pacific Island countries.

⁴ The SPBCP was the largest single conservation project in the Pacific Islands region through the 1990s. It was implemented across many jurisdictions, in three main tiers. At the regional level, the executing agency, SPREP, was responsible through the implementing agency, UNDP, to an international financing source, the GEF. SPREP is also responsible to its 22 member governments. In each of the 14 PICs participating in the SPBCP, either a government agency or an NGO was responsible to the national government and also to SPREP as the national level lead agency. At the local level, the 17 project sites, there was need to involve a local community, village council and local government.

Problem analysis enables gaps and risks to be readily identified, programme strategy and scope to be planned with smarter objectives, and, subsequently, progress to be monitored and adjustments made with greater wisdom and confidence. All stakeholders and intended participants must be involved in the process, to gain a wider and common understanding of the context and purpose of the programme and of complementary actions that may be needed.

Assumptions made and possible influences that will remain beyond the scope of the programme can be identified through the process. External factors and their consequences must be subsequently monitored over the course of the programme and the results used to continually re-design and adapt.

Proper participation and ownership by organisations and individuals affected are essential for effective programme design and delivery. A prescriptive blueprint approach is inappropriate and ineffectual for most types of conservation and development assistance work. Solutions have to be found locally, by the people with the problem, rather than attempt to find them outside and impose them on “beneficiaries.”

The ways in which programmes are organised and managed must build in proper participation and confer sufficient ownership on people involved and affected. All who are justifiably interested in a programme must be adequately involved in its planning, design, implementation, and monitoring, and must be part also of evaluating and learning from what happens. This is the best strategy for the programme to be a successful intervention, i.e., to come up with appropriate solutions that will produce the long term desired outcomes.

There is a tendency for programme plans to be prepared in detail by outside managers and consultants, in advance and in isolation from on-ground realities. Outside agencies try to retain a high degree of control and ownership. Programme supervisors and administrators seem to prefer issuing clear prescriptions and instructions, rather than run

the risk of implementation “going awry” subsequently.

The SPBCP programme design was not narrowly prescriptive, but neither the Programme nor its subsidiary local projects were handed over sufficiently for local participants to adapt to local circumstances and needs. Programme financing and executing agencies and managers must recognise that imposed, rigid designs stifle the flexibility, responsiveness and learning-by-doing that are essential to success in many fields. It is preferable to plan an outline strategy and facilitate an adaptable process that is open to inputs from participants actually involved in implementing activities.

A programme needs to be designed and implemented as a staged process of learning and action, with monitoring incorporated automatically, to provide feedback and allow management to adapt. Monitoring must be done from the outset and throughout the programme, systematically, as an integral part of every activity, by participants, and as simply as possible.

A “process programme” can progress in small incremental stages along a continuing spiral of design, implementation, monitoring, and adjustment. This allows the programme to remain responsive and adaptable throughout its life. Components and activities can be added or altered by participants in the light of experience from project activities and as external factors change. The adaptability leads to further opportunities for learning from results and devising effective solutions.

This approach is essential where innovation, pilot activities, demonstration, and subsequent replication are important, as in the SPBCP. The Programme was a major opportunity for innovation and experimentation, to trial and develop a range of strategies for addressing prevailing biodiversity, resource management, and sustainable development issues. Unfortunately, SPBCP’s implementing and executing agencies dwelt on activity and expenditure reporting rather than evaluating substantial progress against planned results and objectives, and adjusting subsequent actions. The Programme also neglected the first

rule of monitoring, which is to establish the baseline situation and set good indicators.

Designing and implementing a programme as an incremental process enables the key players at each stage and at each level to be central participants and “own” the initiative. To be of most value, monitoring and evaluation must be undertaken by the project participants, designers and implementers themselves, so that they gain feedback directly on the effects of their actions. A routine of formative evaluation enables participants to learn from the experience and for next steps to be adjusted. It is more valuable than tacking an evaluation exercise onto the end of the programme.

Capacity building is the most important strategy for project delivery. The primary purpose of a project must be to build the capacities of all stakeholders – participants, communities, organisations, and institutions – so that they are able to undertake the initiative and subsequently extend the beneficial results beyond the life and the scope of the project.

A central objective of all outside assistance programmes must be to build the capacity of individuals and institutions involved, through empowerment, awareness raising, knowledge sharing, skills transfer, extension, training, education, and the development of institutions, systems, and tools.

Capacity building is the key to both effective participation and to sustainability. It must be developed as an integral part of each project activity.

During project planning, as an integral part of analysing problems and possible strategies, provision must be made for all stakeholders to conduct self-assessments of their capacity needs, decide on specific capacity objectives, and design appropriate capacity building measures into the programme.

Effective capacity building is based on learning by doing, by building on existing knowledge and approaches, using local

language, recognising cultural diversity and individual styles, mentoring and sharing experiences and lessons.

Programme efficiency and effectiveness are affected greatly by the ways in which information is collected, recorded, handled, stored, and shared.

Programmes generate and use considerable quantities of new information across diverse technical and administrative fields, and must invest in efficient information management and communications systems.⁵ The

SPBCP would have benefited from preparing an information and communications strategy, and from giving special consideration to using information to serve the needs of local community projects in the Pacific Islands, the most culturally- and linguistically-diverse region on earth.

For a programme to bring about changes and influence wider audiences, information on its progress, results, failures, and successes must be shared, in an accessible manner, among participants and partner groups as well as other interested parties. Programmes end but must produce a permanent information record that can be used to extend the learning to other initiatives and other organisations. The recording, use, holding, and sharing of information must be done appropriately in terms of media, languages, scope of materials, and accessibility. Free flow and accessibility of project-related information within a participating community is particularly important.

Genuine collaboration between organisations is essential to ensure efficient use of resources and effective delivery of results. Agencies have common concerns and

There is a wide range of agencies with interests and influence in conservation and development programmes. In the Pacific Islands region, many major bilateral and multi-lateral financing institutions, UN agencies, regional

⁵ A programme presents significant challenges for information management. The SPBCP was a broad, complex program, undertaken by a medium-sized organisation, with an array of partners, liaison points, sub-contractors, employees, and devolved local projects across a large geographic region. Information is generated by all parts of this system, across all administration and technical fields, throughout its life and beyond.

agendas, and must be prepared to pool their strategic ideas and resources and engage in genuine partnerships to tackle common issues. To work in partnership, each agency must be able to feel a valued part of the overall initiative, with a stake in learning from the programme, and able to contribute to its design and adaptation.

inter-governmental institutions, and international and regional NGOs are active. In each PI country there are three or four levels of government with separate 'sectoral' agencies, and numerous non-government, church, education, research, and community-based organisations and private sector businesses operating at all levels. Large projects may be major programmes of several organisations.⁶

In the case of the SPBCP, other regional institutions were not involved by SPREP as partners and developed little interest in the programme. No role was developed for national governments and they continued to view it merely as an "SPREP programme." Local community groups, villagers, and resource owners received the programme but were given little ability to determine their own local project. To too great an extent, ownership and responsibility remained with the programme management staff and the executing agency.

A programme must be designed, carried out, promoted, and evaluated recognising the array of interested and influential parties. Overlapping interests must be recognised, welcomed, and accommodated by all parties. Partnerships can link similar initiatives, gain synergies, and integrate work across sectors. Co-ownership roles and rules must be resolved to provide for joint responsibility and authority in planning and carrying out a programme. Organisations can share ownership in an initiative by adopting complementary roles. This is more effective and efficient than pursuing piecemeal approaches in isolation or competitively.

By definition, a programme is not intended to be The best way to ensure sustainability of a conservation initiative is to

sustainable. A typical programme is an intensive and relatively short-term intervention aimed at a particular problem situation, supported by an out-of-the-ordinary level of resources. The critical challenge for programme design and implementation is that, by the end of the programme, the solutions introduced must be able to be sustained without further programme inputs.

be appropriate and desirable to sustain. Programmes must not use their substantial financial and human resources to introduce measures that are too expensive or sophisticated to be maintained beyond the programme life, given the resources that are likely to be available locally. For community-based projects in developing countries, low-cost, unsophisticated, frugal measures are most appropriate, because they are most widely applicable and they are more likely to be sustained.

Perhaps the most important lesson is that programmes must be planned and presented realistically and truthfully, with regards to constraints, costs and the end-of-project situation that can be expected. All parties must have a realistic understanding of the programme's potential and likely difficulties.

An important argument for programme management and financing agencies to consider is that the end of the programme should be determined as the point at which the changes introduced are able to be sustained without the programme. Such a reversal in thinking, away from the convention of closing a programme after its time and dollar budget has been spent, would produce significant improvements to the delivery and success of aid programmes, with sustainability guaranteed.

back it up with a realistic long-term overall strategy. Expectations are kept reasonable by down-playing the programme: it is merely a short-term intensive contribution to the overall strategy. The programme ends but the initiative is kept alive by organising support for further elements of the strategy from the community, resource users, support groups, government, and other relevant stakeholders.

One crucial consideration is that the solutions or changes introduced by a programme must

⁶ For the SPBCP, besides SPREP as Executing Agency, the Financing (GEF with AusAID), Implementing (UNDP), and Lead Agencies (PIC national government office or NGO) all had valid, overlapping interests in the design, implementation, and learning from the programme.

