



## Protected areas sustain livelihoods in the Pacific Islands

The economies of the Pacific Islands Countries depend heavily on their natural resources, which are exceptionally rich but very vulnerable. In response to this challenge, FAO supports these countries with several programmes promoting biodiversity conservation, sustainable land management and sustainable utilisation of natural resources. Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and Niue account for about 25 percent of the land area of the Polynesia-Micronesia biodiversity hotspots, where the richest and most threatened reservoirs of plant and animal life can be found.

Despite this globally significant biodiversity, conservation is extremely weak and protected area management in these islands is limited. This is for a number of reasons that vary from inadequate and outdated legal frameworks to the lack of capacities and resources, resistance to change in local communities and poor coordination between stakeholders.

As a result, about one third of the endemic species on the islands face extinction. The degradation of natural resources means that people dependent on these resources are trapped in worsening local environments with fewer opportunities to make a decent living and escape poverty.

## NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, KEY FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

The FAO-GEF “Forestry and Protected Area Management” project aims at enhancing sustainable livelihoods of local communities by strengthening biodiversity conservation and by reducing forest and land degradation in Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and Niue.

The four year project focuses on six main components: (1) policy, legal and institutional reform supporting biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management; (2) extension and consolidation of the network of protected areas; (3) capacity building of key stakeholders in biodiversity conservation and sustainable land and forest management; (4) sustainable financing of protected areas; (5) marketing of biodiversity goods (i.e. organic products) and services (i.e. ecocultural tourism); and (6) sustainable land management in forest margins by promoting better agricultural practices.

## LAND OWNERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS

In Pacific societies, much of the land is owned by tribes, clans and families rather than individuals and governments, so the establishment of protected areas and other measures to promote biodiversity conservation must be done through consultation and agreement with local communities.

The “Forestry and Protected Area Management” project addresses the issues by involving owners in the design and implementation of initiatives and by demonstrating



sustainable environmental practices which have positive benefits for livelihoods.

The project currently supports the consolidation of eight existing protected areas and the establishment of fifteen new ones. The area under legal protection will therefore increase from 30 000 to 110 000 hectares with benefits for communities living in and around forests.

## CAPACITY BUILDING AND COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH

Information gathered from small-scale terrestrial and marine protected areas studies shows that management has been most effective where community based approaches have been used and local people have been given the necessary technical support and incentives to maintain efforts towards biodiversity conservation.

Through this project, FAO is strengthening the capacities of communities and other key stakeholders in areas such as biodiversity monitoring and threat assessment, income generation and modern forest and land management practices that are appropriate and locally accepted.



## INTEGRATED APPROACH, BETTER RESULTS

It is by integrating policy support, capacity building and the promotion of more sustainable practices and management techniques at community level that the FAO-GEF project is achieving better results in Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and Niue.

Benefits from the initiative include the improved representation of

important ecosystems in these countries, enhanced conservation through mainstreaming and marketing of biodiversity goods and services, increased financial sustainability for protected area management and reduced barriers to sustainable management of natural resources.

## PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Degradation of natural resources is a widespread and growing problem that can be only tackled through coordinated and collaborative approaches. In order to find and implement solutions, FAO is fostering strong partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders including national and local government agencies, regional organizations, NGOs, donors, private foundations and private sector organizations.

