

Pacific island collaboration for sustainable forestry

Pacific island countries and territories share a number of forest management challenges. Throughout the region, population growth and aspirations to hasten national development are putting pressure on forest resources, which are already limited by the islands' small size. Deforestation thus has a particularly high impact. Because the islands are low-lying they are prone to soil and water degradation and adverse effects of sea-level rise. They are particularly vulnerable to climatic variables such as cyclones and drought. Because they are small they have limited human capacity, and their wide geographic dispersion results in high transportation and communication costs, hampering exchange of goods, information, expertise and experience.

A number of arrangements are helping these countries and territories to work together.

The **Pacific Islands Forum** (formerly the South Pacific Forum) fosters cooperation among governments and international agencies. It represents Heads of Government of all independent and self-governing Pacific island countries, Australia and New Zealand, and it influences political decisions concerning forestry at the national and regional level. For example, the forum secretariat guided the development of a regional code of logging practice, which has influenced the development of national codes by several countries, including Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Meetings co-hosted by the forum also provide a mechanism for reporting to the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and FAO's Asia Pacific Forestry Commission on the region's progress

in the implementation of sustainable forest management (see www.forumsec.org.fj).

The **South Pacific Regional Environment Programme** (SPREP), established in 1982, is the Pacific region's major intergovernmental environmental organization. It has 26 members: all 22 Pacific island countries and territories, and four developed countries with direct interests in the region: Australia, France, New Zealand and the United States. SPREP provides information and advice to help member countries strengthen their environmental programmes (see www.sprep.org.ws).

The **Secretariat of the Pacific Community** (SPC), formerly the South Pacific Commission, is the oldest regional organization in the Pacific, established in 1947. Its members include all 22 island countries and territories of the Pacific plus Australia, France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. It offers technical advice, assistance, training and applied research to its member countries and territories (www.spc.org.nc). Its **Forests and Trees Programme** is the principal regional programme addressing forest management issues in the region. In consultation with the Pacific Islands Heads of Forestry, the programme developed a **Regional Forestry Strategic Plan 2001–2004**, focusing on national capacity building, promoting traditional forest-related knowledge and multiple land-use systems such as agroforestry, promoting community awareness and participation, information dissemination and resource mobilization.

The **South Pacific Regional Initiative on Forest Genetic Resources** (SPRIG), a regional project funded by AusAID covering Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Samoa and Solomon Islands, promotes sustainable management of the region's forest and tree genetic resources. It has developed species conservation strategies for ten priority species (Phase I, 1996–2000) and continues to address the problems and the potentials of forest and tree genetic resources and associated farming and forest ecosystems (Phase II, 2001–2006)

(www.ffp.csiro.au/tigr/atscmain/whatwedo/projects/sprig/index.htm).

Duplication of effort among these organizations is largely avoided (except for some slight overlap in the areas of coastal management or watersheds) through regular joint senior management meetings and through recognition of the organizations' distinct mandates and areas of operation. SPREP, for example, deals with the environment agencies in the countries, while SPC deals with forestry agencies. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, while having authority over all, generally only intervenes when forestry or environment issues have a political bearing.