

## **Fiji's Sustainable Development Bill: Integrating Environment and Development in Decision-Making**

**Government of Fiji**  
**[www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/cp2002.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/cp2002.htm)**

*As preparation for Barbados+10, each country was asked to prepare a country report on how they were meeting sustainable development in practice. The following, taken from the Fiji Country Profile, outlines Fiji's approach to sustainability.*

### **Programmes and Projects**

The formulation of the Sustainable Development Bill (SDB) is a project on its own that was funded by the ADB. The SDB would provide the legal framework within which planning and decision making authorities would ensure that natural resources, as raw materials, would be utilised for development in a sustainable manner. Under the various international and regional conventions that Fiji has ratified, national projects have been developed that would ensure that the concept of sustainable development is adopted by all sectors of the community. Under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan is in its final stages. Under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Pacific Islands Climate Change Assistance Programme enabled assessment studies on the vulnerability of coastal areas to potential sea level rise and their adaptation of protective measures and controls. Under the various waste management conventions, codes of environmental practices and waste management plans have been introduced to minimise the adverse effects of developments on the environment.

## **Status**

Fiji is at a cross-road whereby development has been taking place over a long period of time without the appropriate level for environmental consideration, and is now committed to incorporate sustainable development requirements. The Department of Environment has not yet attained the capacity to ensure a balance in decisions on development and environment. While the SDB is not yet passed, Fiji has no environment legislation. The SDB will require the formation of Environment Management Units (EMUs) within line ministries, hence forthwith allowing the formulation of environmental management policies in those ministries that manage natural resources.

## **Capacity-Building, Education, Training and Awareness-Raising**

The Department of Environment does not yet have the full capacity to undertake all activities necessary to integrate development and environment in the decision-making processes. It is understaffed to be able to develop, implement, monitor and enforce policies. It currently plays a coordinative and advisory role, particularly without an environmental legislation. The EMUs are being established in some line ministries, and with the appropriate policies developed in these ministries, they would be able to ensure environment management in their respective areas of responsibilities. The inclusion of environment in primary and secondary level education is being done through the Education Commission and the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education. Trainings have included programmes on training the trainers amongst teachers and adults in local communities. These trainings have focused on sustainable use of natural resources for subsistence and commercial purposes. The University of the South Pacific has Degree and Diploma courses on environmental science. Training through international and regional workshops and study courses has been undertaken as various institutions introduce them. In terms of environmental awareness, the Department of Environment has been conducting annual campaigns that promote the knowledge of sustainable development amongst the public and private sectors, e.g. National Environment Week and Clean Up the World Campaign. Other government departments and NGOs have been involved.

## **Information**

There are various line ministries that manage the use of natural resources, and also coordinate the development of national policies, strategies and plans. These ministries have databases of their own which focus on the current state of the resources they manage. The practice is that the information they have is shared with each other when requested. Regarding environmental data, the Department of Environment is in the process of developing a database that would store all relevant data. A network would be developed in the process with the line ministries to enable the constant updating of the data.

## **Research and Technology**

In 1993 the Cabinet endorsed Fiji's National Environment Strategy (NES). The NES was the outcome of an ADB funded project that prepared the State of the Environment Report (SOE). This involved an extensive research/study that focused on an inventory of all natural resources in Fiji, their utilisation in development, and the associated problems, e.g. pollution, land degradation, erosion, etc. The NES provided a framework whereby Government could establish institutions, policies, legislation, etc. to address the problems highlighted in the SOE. The concept of sustainable development was introduced through the SOE as a basis for integrating environment conservation with the development process.

## **Financing**

The national budget currently makes provision for the daily operational needs of the Department of Environment. This enables the Department to develop local and national programmes of activities to address environmental issues. However, donors through relevant projects provide actual funds required for the implementation of such activities.

## **Cooperation**

This has mainly been through bilateral/regional/international cooperation and agreements, conventions, Official Development Assis-

tance (ODA), i.e. bilateral cooperation with Australia and New Zealand; regional cooperation through the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP); and internationally through conventions on biodiversity, climate change, waste management, etc.

### **Decision-Making**

The Sustainable Development Bill gives effect to the compulsory process of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) by all Government ministries, departments and agencies for all proposed developments, undertakings or activities which are likely to have an adverse effect on human health, society or the environment. All EIA reports are to be submitted to the Environmental Assessment Administrator of the Department of Environment for an assessment; the recommendations are subsequently submitted to the National Council for Sustainable Development for approval. The Government's document *Opportunities for Growth*, published in 1993, contains policies and strategies for sustainable development.

Based on the recognition of the twin requirements of a high quality of life and a better environment, the Government's policy on sustainable development includes ensuring that renewable resources are used in a sustainable manner, ensuring that environmental management is an integral part of the planning and development process, strengthening of institutional capacity for sound environment management, use of environmental impact assessment studies for new project proposals, and ensuring that environmental expenditures are prioritized on the basis of best estimates of their contribution to socio-economic development.