



Government of Solomon Islands

***National Report to the United Nations Convention to
Combat Desertification***

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1. INTRODUCTION

Solomon Islands acceded to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) on 16/04/1999. According to article 26 of the UNCCD and the decisions of its Conference of the Parties (COP), and in particular decision 11/COP.1, each Party to the Convention is required to communicate, through the UNCCD secretariat, reports on measures undertaken to implement the UNCCD. This national report is the Solomon Islands' effort to meet its obligations under article 26 of the Convention and the COP decision 11/COP.1.

The report has been put together using funds made available by the UNCCD secretariat through the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme based in Apia, Samoa, in the South Pacific. The late submission of this report is due mainly to unfavorable or difficult national circumstances and the very late processing of funds that were made available for the work.

The Solomon Islands participation in the UNCCD has not been at a level, which could be at par with the other Rio conventions. This is basically attributed to the very slow process adopted in communicating matters to the National Focal Point. Consequently Solomon Islands has not been able to produce its first national report and has attended only one of the meetings of the COP so far. In relation to the meetings of the COP, communication relating to and the travel arrangements itself for national representatives were usually inconvenient and so late that delegates could not get tickets in time to travel. We hope that with this national report things will improve.

2. BACKGROUND

Solomon Islands lies in the tropics, north of Australia and east of Papua New Guinea in the South West Pacific between latitudes 5° S and 12° S and longitudes 152°E and 170° E. It comprises a double chain of six major high islands and nearly a thousand other smaller islands, islets, atolls and cays. It is the second largest country in the insular Pacific, after PNG, with a total land area of 28, 369 sq km. Its' sea area, including the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is 1.34 million sq km. The country has sea borders with Papua New Guinea in the west and Vanuatu in the south – east. It's EEZ borders with Australia and New Caledonia in the South and with the open seas in the North.

The Solomon Islands climate is typically tropical, with daily temperatures of 22° C to 31°C through out the year in the coastal areas. Mean annual rainfall ranges from 3000 – 5000 mm and varies with topography, latitude and island orientation towards prevailing winds. The wet season in the Solomon Islands is around November to April, whilst the dry season occurs in the middle months of the year, around May to September.

Natural forest cover in the Solomon Islands is more than 80% even though intensive natural logging is reducing this figure at a fast rate. Coral reefs are also a major feature of

the country's coastal marine environment. Most of the coral reefs are still in pristine conditions but increasingly under pressure from unsustainable harvesting and other unsustainable human practices. The Pacific Environment Outlook states that 8 % of the coral reefs are at high risk and 42% at medium risk.

According to the 1999 National Population Census, the population growth is 2.8%. This is a decrease from a high of 3.5% during the 1986 census. In Pacific standards this is still a very high population growth. The national population density is 13 persons per sq km. This is a rise of about 2 persons per km from the last ten years. In Pacific standards though, this is still a very low density. In the provinces, Central Province has the highest population density (35), followed by Malaita (29), Temotu (22), Guadalcanal (11), Makira- Ulawa (10), Western (8), Choiseul and Isabel (5) and Ren-Bel (4). Honiara City has a population density of 2,244 persons per sq km.

Land degradation

Land degradation is the most significant UNCCD issue in the Solomon Islands. This issue has been exacerbated by the continuing unsustainable logging which is currently the largest economic sector following the events of the last two years. The logging industry in the Solomon Islands is led by Asian companies, mostly Malaysian in origin, and do not have a good record of doing a good job. It has been estimated from a major inventory work done in the country that the commercial forest will be logged out within the next ten years. With the current rate continuing at an alarming rate, that time is fast approaching.

Subsistence activities of the rural population have also contributed to land degradation. This is especially so in areas where there are high population density. An obvious example is in the northern part of Malaita province. As a large part of the national population will continue to be rurally based and depend on subsistence activities, this problem is most likely to continue.

Large agricultural and forestry developments have also contributed to the problem. The main activities are the oil palm plantations in the Guadalcanal Plains and another one, which is currently being developed in the Western Province at Vanghunu Island. In terms of the forestry developments, many plantations that were established by the government have been of concern. Studies on land quality need to be done to ascertain land quality changes in these areas.

Forest depletion

Industrial logging continues to be the main activity responsible for forest depletion, land degradation and other negative effects, in the Solomon Islands. It is not the only cause of land degradation in the country however. Shifting cultivation from subsistence farmers, which make up more than 80% of the national population, is also responsible for land degradation. The methods of slash and burn that subsistence farmers do use in land clearing for their subsistence gardens in some of the islands is also a cause of land degradation that needs to be addressed.

In 1976 the area of cleared land as determined by Hansell and Wall was 1951 sq km. In 1993, the area of degraded forest as determined by the Forests Inventory project was 2560.5 sq km. This represents an increase of 31% of cleared land within 18 years. As logging activities has continued in the last few years, the figure would have definitely increased. Natural disturbances have also played some role in shaping the forests of Solomon Islands. Most notable are the effects of cyclones and drought.

Invasive species

A number of invasive species occur in the country. These are mostly terrestrial as not much is known of the marine invasives. Most of what is known are also alien invasives even though there are also local native invasives. The invasives are poorly documented and not well known. The following species are the most common known occurrence: Cane toad (*Bufo marinus*), black twig borer, rhinoceros beetle, fruit flies, crazy ant, little fire ant, tilapia, pig, dog, cat, pacific rat, ship rat, house mouse, red jungle fowl, Indian myna birds (*Acridotheres tristis*), paper mulberry (*Browsonaetia papyrifera*), *Merremia peltata*, African tulip tree, wild tamarind (lead tree), guava, giant sensitive plant and rain tree etc. Some native species have also been known to become alien invasives in other countries. The most common example of this is the Brown Tree snake (*Boiga irregularis*), which has decimated the avifauna population in the island of Guam.

The effects or damage that these invasives have done must have been substantial but poorly known. One of the most known effects is the economic damage that fruit flies have caused to the agricultural sector exports. Many of the country's agricultural primary products could not be exported due to the infestation of these fruit flies most of which have been recent arrivals from Papua New Guinea through Bougainville. In terms of ecology, the most damage is in terms of species displacements and eventual extinction. Most of the bird extinctions have been thought to be the cause of invasive cats. The ferocious feeding habits of pigs must have had significant effects on soil stability and on species loss. One of the easily observed effects of the invasives is that by the fish, tilapia, which has displaced and decimated native river fish species and populations in the rivers and streams of the island of Guadalcanal.

There has not been much management programmes carried out to address the problem of invasives in the country. Biological, chemical or any integrated control programmes on the invasives are still unheard of and surely the negative impacts of the invasives are sure to continue.

Drought

There have been drought events experienced in the Solomon Islands even though the country has an annual rainfall of 3500-5000mm per annum. Drought events in the country are basically influenced by the climatic phenomenon, El Nino and La Nina. Certain areas of the country are especially prone to drought conditions. These are mostly atoll islands and areas that are directly subjected to prevailing winds. The documentation

of these events is also poor and not much has been done in the past or even at present to prepare people and communities about any looming drought events.

For most rural or local communities, the effect has been lower water tables, and unproductive subsistence local gardens, all of which, give rise to water and sanitation issues and food security. The effect of drought conditions on other larger industry is poorly known. It certainly had major effects on the agriculture sector in terms of production but this has not been evaluated and documented. Its effects on the fishing industry are not well documented and therefore more work needs to be done to understand the issue and to put in place programmes that can help people to plan and prepare for such an event.

3. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

STRATEGIES AND PRIORITIES ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND OR POLICIES.

National strategies and priorities fall within the entire national development planning and policy framework. For any given period, this is guided mostly by the policies of the ruling political governments and needless to say, changes from time to time and gives rise to varying inconsistencies. Political governments' policies are translated into action programmes for the entire government system to implement. Coverage of relevant regional and global priorities are therefore weak but not left out. Almost all political government policies and action programmes recognise the importance of regional and global initiatives and are aware of their obligations and do cater for them. The development of the most efficient national framework or mechanism to enable an effective implementation environment for these commitments and obligations remains to be achieved or progressed.

3.1 Medium Term Development Strategy

Apart from the politically oriented action programmes of ruling governments however, there exist the national planning document, which continues to guide and direct national activities. This is currently the Medium Term Development Strategy (MTDS). The MTDS incorporates all necessary strategies and priorities for any given period and also directs all national efforts that are not covered under the action programmes of the ruling political governments.

The MTDS covers the following major areas: Macroeconomic Policy framework; Human Resources Development; Infrastructure; Natural Resources and Environment; Commerce and Trade; and, Public Service Administration. Under the section on Natural Resources and Environment the following sectors are covered: Agriculture; Forestry; Fisheries;

Mining and Minerals; Environment; Land and Urban Development, and Plant and Marine Genetic Resources.

3.2 National Environment and Management Strategy

The NEMS continues to be an important document guiding general environmental management. The document is however, already overdue for a review as focus and attention have shifted from it to other initiatives. Most of the NEMS programmes have been accomplished but there are others that are still important which need to be developed and implemented. The NEMS covered the following areas: integration of environmental considerations in economic development; improving environmental awareness and education; strengthening the resource database; protection of areas of high ecological; wilderness and cultural value; improving waste, management and control of pollution; land resource management; sustainable use of forest resources; sustainable use of marine resources; coastal environment management; and environmentally safe exploitation of non-living resources.

3.3 Poverty alleviation programme

The government through the Ministry of National Planning and Development and the Ministry of Economic Reform has developed a national policy on poverty alleviation, which it hopes will guide national efforts in addressing poverty issues in the long term. The implementation of the policy is currently affected very much by the current crisis arising out of the ethnic tensions of the last three years whereby resources have been generally lacking or have been diverted to other priority efforts, especially on peace building and reconstruction.

3.4 National Disaster Management Strategy

The National Disaster Council, which is governed by an Act of parliament, is responsible for disaster preparedness and management. It is also responsible for disaster awareness and mitigation. Currently, the NDC has a National Disaster Management Strategy, which is the focus of its implementation. The NDC comes under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

3.5 National Implementation Strategy of UNFCCC

The National Implementation Strategy of the UNFCCC, which has been formulated under the PICCAP enabling activity, is one of the most relevant policy documents in terms of the UNCCD implementation. This document is still in draft form but will provide a wider coverage of issues that are relevant to the UNCCD. This effort is led by the Meteorological Services under the PICCAP Country Team.

3.6 National Rural Integrated Development Programme

The Ministry of Provincial Government with the assistance of the UNDP accomplished a landmark achievement in the form of the National Rural Integrated Development

Programme (NRIDP) through its Sustainable Human development programme. The development of the NRIDP was through a bottom up approach and involved extensive consultations through the provinces and their communities, national government agencies, civil society organisations and other stakeholders. The NRIDP contains priority programmes and projects identified at community and provincial levels that will be the focus of implementation within the next few years. Many of the priority programmes and projects are relevant to the objectives of the UNCCD.

3.7 Land Susceptibility Study

The Solomon Islands Forests Resources Inventory project carried out a land susceptibility study on the land systems in the country to ascertain how susceptible the land systems are to some kind of deterioration if disturbed by logging or other kinds of land based activities. In doing this study, various indicators of potential instability were considered including the following: steepness, length of slope, seismicity, relief, the inherent susceptibility of the geological materials to erosion or structural failure, land system and land facet descriptions, and an independent assessment based on recent aerial photography. These indicators were used to classify the lands into relatively susceptible or relatively stable classes. When seismic and climate data were superimposed on the classes, five classes of land susceptibility were then produced ranging from least susceptible or most stable to most susceptible.

Following this study, the most susceptible land areas of Solomon Islands to deterioration are South Guadalcanal, East and South Makira, Santa Cruz, Tetepari, Central and Southern Rendova, Central Ranonga and Northern Vella La Vella.

3.8 Logging Code of Conduct

One of the major causes of land degradation in the Solomon Islands is due to large scale logging which is currently continuing at unsustainable levels as earlier mentioned. To help address many of the negative effects of this destructive industry, the government finalised a logging code of conduct in 1996 after extensive consultation with communities, forest industry, NGOs and other stakeholders. The code incorporates best practice within the forest industry and promotes high environmental standards.

In terms of land degradation and the objectives of the convention, the code has a land use management requirement and hopes to minimize soil damage (erosion, compaction, fertility decline); prevent downstream flooding due to increased run off; prevent land slips; maintain stream systems and water quality, marine and freshwater aquatic habitats, forests habitats and its regeneration capacity, and rare species and biodiversity.

3.9 Institutional Strengthening

Strengthening of institutions has been an ongoing undertaking of the government despite severe difficulties experienced in the last few years. The strengthening of the MET service weather facilities has been one that has proved beneficial in terms of weather

data, prediction, and advisories. The Ministry of land and Housing is also implementing an AuSAID funded project that is called SISLAP (Solomon Islands Land and Administration Project), which will improve capacities within that ministry to enable improved management, recording, dissemination and use of what is available or what can be made available there. The Ministry of Agriculture has also gone through some structural reorganization that will hopefully improve the ability of the ministry to address land management issues more effectively.

3.10 Conservation of Natural Resources

The emphasis at present is on conservation and sustainable use. Most resource sectors are embracing this and reflect this in policy statements and new developed legislation. As Solomon Islands is heavily dependent on its natural resources for national finances, it seems prudent and imperative that the country takes this approach. Efforts to conserve natural resources are undertaken by government agencies, provincial governments, community groups and NGOs with the assistance of multilateral and bilateral donors, international and regional organisations and the private sector.

One of the most active developments in the country is the development of protected areas as a tool for conserving natural resources and promoting sustainable development. The following have been the most notable: Arnavon Marine Conservation Area (Hawksbill Turtle rookery), East Rennell World Heritage Site, Komarindi Catchment Conservation Area, and the Central Makira Conservation Area. Efforts are underway for an underwater park at Gizo in the Western Province, Lauvi lagoon as a Wetlands site, Tetepari in the Western Province, and many smaller community management sites in the Western Province as well.

Potential areas for conservation have already been identified and some have been the focus of current efforts referred to above. Many of the potential sites though, still need further assessments and will require increased resources and capacity to be developed. With the current difficulties, the Solomon Islands government cannot do this on its own and would therefore invite partners to come in and work with communities, NGOs and provincial and national government agencies to assist in this area.

3.11 Legislation

A review of environmental law was carried in 1992 as part of a regional environmental management programme implemented through SPREP. This review enabled the country to revise a number of its existing legislation and to put in place new ones that are consistent with new concepts and approaches.

A number of relevant key legislation was therefore instituted in the last few years following the review referred to above. These include the Environment Act 1998, Wildlife Management and Protection Act 1998, Fisheries Act 1998, and the Forestry Act 1998. These new acts incorporate the precautionary principles and new concepts of sustainable development. Many of this new legislation have been the result of new

initiatives arising out of the environmental law review and the general increase in environmental awareness following the Earth Summit and activities thereafter.

In terms of international environmental laws, Solomon Islands, continues to participate fully in the major Rio conventions (Biodiversity, Climate Change and Desertification conventions) and other relevant instruments such as the Montreal Protocol, Law of the Sea, etc.

3.12 Involvement of regional organisations

Regional and international organisations continue to assist the Solomon Islands in their various area of expertise. The regional organisation are SPREP, Forum Secretariat, FFA, SOPAC, SPC, SPTO and USP. The major international organisations are: UNDP, UNIDO, AuSAID, JICA, EEC.

The regional organisations have formulated a number of regional strategies, which are relevant to the objectives of the UNCCD. These include the Regional Wetlands Action Plan for the Pacific Islands, Regional Invasive Species Strategy, Action Strategy for Nature Conservation, Regional Avifauna Conservation Strategy, Pacific Pollution Prevention Strategy, and Strategy for the Protection of the Marine Environment in the Pacific. See Table below.

Regional Strategies and lead regional agency

	<i>Regional Strategy</i>	<i>Lead regional agency</i>
1	Regional Wetlands Action Plan for the Pacific Islands	SPREP
2	Regional Invasive Species Strategy	SPREP
3	Regional Avifauna Conservation Strategy	SPREP
4	Pacific Pollution Prevention Strategy	SPREP
5	Strategy for the Protection of the Marine Environment in the Pacific	SPREP

3.13 NGO programmes

The Solomon Islands is host to a few international environmental NGOs and also has some national NGOs focusing on environment and development issues. The following international NGOs have offices in Solomon Islands: WorldLife Fund for Nature (WWF), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Conservation International (CI) and Greenpeace. The national NGOs are: Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), Soltrust, Solomon Islands Indigenous Peoples Environmental Organisation (SIPEO), and the newly established, Environmental Concerns Action Network of Solomon Islands (ECANSI). These NGOs are active in many environmental and development issues and do have a number of programmes and projects running in the Solomon Islands on resources

management issues, biodiversity conservation, alternative income generating activities, awareness and education etc. Many of them are also supplementing government-implemented programmes.

4. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK (MEASURES TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT THE CONVENTION)

Solomon Islands established its UNCCD National Focal Point with the Environment and Conservation Division of the Ministry of Forests, Environment and Conservation. The alternate focal point is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The same National Focal Point also serve as the focal point for the Convention on Biodiversity and other regional and international conventions, programmes and organisations. The same focal point also deals directly with climate change issues and with the climate change country team, which is the coordinating, and advisory body, under the UNFCCC enabling activity known as PICCAP (Pacific Islands Climate Change Assistance Programme). National coordination in terms of the UNCCD, therefore, is currently through the national focal point. There is yet to be a body established to coordinate activities.

Whilst the use of the national focal point as the coordination body is not a light task for the focal point, it also proved to be advantageous as there is and can be a lot of linkages and coordination amongst conventions and organisations' work and requirements through the use of the same focal point. With the limited capacity and resources available in small island countries such as ours, this is still the most cost-effective approach.

Decision making relating to issues and matters covered by UNCCD are usually made by more than one government agency. The most relevant ones are: Ministry of Forests, Environment and Conservation, Ministry of Energy, Water and Mineral Resources, Ministry of Lands and Housing, Ministry of Agriculture and Primary Industries, Ministry of Health and Medical Services (environmental health), Ministry of Home Affairs (National Disaster Council), and Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation (Meteorological Services). These agencies also have acts of parliament, which provide the basis and direction in their decision-making. Overall development and coordination of national programmes however, is the responsibility of the Ministry of National Planning and Development.

The Ministry of Forests, Environment and Conservation addresses land degradation issues in terms of forests utilisation and conservation. The Forestry Act 1998 is a new act that hopes to minimise negative effects and maximize benefits by promoting sustainable forests management. The logging code of conduct is also a major tool that now helps guide decision-making. The Environment Act 1998 has a major focus on development control that is done through an EIA process where, amongst other things, land and water quality issues are addressed. The Wildlife Protection and Management Act 1998 provides for the conservation of ecosystems and therefore could cater for land conservation.

The Ministry of Energy, Water and Mineral Resources also addresses land issues through its EIA requirements under the Mines and Minerals Act 1990. Its Water Resources division is responsible for water resources and its utilisation. Plans for the development of both mini and large hydro schemes brings in the involvement of their energy division as potential tracts of land can be subjected to water inundation in dams.

The Ministry of Lands is mainly responsible for land planning and its allocation. Most land information can be found in this ministry. The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for land use planning but this effort has been very weak in the Solomon Islands. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services through its Environmental Health Division is focusing efforts on water supplies and environmental water qualities.

5. CAPACITY BUILDING

5.1 Education and Training

Education and Training activities are coordinated through the Ministry of Education and Training. The formal education system is at three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. The issues of land degradation, drought and desertification are covered in the science and social science based subjects from the secondary level and upwards. This enables students to have a fair understanding of the relevant issues before leaving school, as most will not have the opportunity to advance further to tertiary level. In-service training is also coordinated through the Ministry of Education and Training and the Office of the Prime Minister for public officers. Formal training continues in overseas institutions covering areas such as land management, water resources management and other environmental related training.

5.2 Communication and Awareness

Most government agencies have their own awareness raising activities directed towards their area of responsibilities. These awareness programmes are implemented through formal programmes, relevant projects and other adhoc arrangements. The agency responsible for these awareness programmes is the Government Information Service, which is currently under the Office of the Prime Minister. Lack of capacity within that agency, however, has put the responsibility back to the individual agencies to do their own programmes. The efforts that has been seen so far involves radio programmes, newspaper articles, press releases, awareness materials such as posters, leaflets, community meetings, village theatre performances, workshops, radio talk back shows and village visits.

NGOs and other Civil Society Organisations also have similar activities using similar communication methods. Some of the NGOs have been the most active in terms environmental awareness in the Solomon Islands. The lead NGO in this area is the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) that has a national network of village-based workers through out the country. These village-based workers are people from the

villages who have been trained to carry out awareness activities and perform numerous other tasks including demonstrations of alternative development initiatives and technologies.

5.3 Human Resources Development

Planning for human development is the responsibility of the Ministry National Planning and Development. The information and data collected from the national population censuses are kept in this ministry and are used for the planning of manpower requirements. All other agencies usually submit their manpower requirements to this Ministry, who then carry out the analysis and projections for the sectors and would do other relevant tasks as required.

National agencies do carry out their training in their relevant fields but specialized training would be done outside of the country in other regional institutions. A number of agencies have carried out their needs assessment, which does help them in directing resources for training purposes. The Solomon Islands College of Higher Education does run some certificate courses in agriculture and forestry.

6. INFORMATION

6.1 Collection

The collection of information for management continues to be a challenge for a small country like the Solomon Islands. It might be right to say that most relevant UNCCD information that exists today is those that were collected during the colonial era or those that were collected some years back and could be mostly out of date. Some recent initiatives such as those of the Ministry of Lands and Housing and the Ministry of Forests, Environment and Conservation with the assistance of AuSAID have been very useful though. Most relevant information on UNCCD issues would be collected through the programmes of the Ministry of Lands and Housing, Agriculture and Primary Industries, Forests, Environment and Conservation, Water Resources division of the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Water Resources, Provincial Governments, and the National Disaster Council of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The statistics office collects and manages most socioeconomic data that are used mostly used for national economic planning.

The Ministry of Forests, Environment and Conservation collect relevant data through programme and project activities related to forests and the environment. Apart from reports, the Ministry manages two complimentary computer based information sources. The first is SOLFRIS (Solomon Islands Forests Resources Information), which is managed by the Forestry division and the second is ERMS (Environment Resources Mapping System), which is managed by the Environment and Conservation Division. These information systems are very important for forests planning especially for the forest industry.

The Ministry of Lands and Housing has the NATRIM, which has the fully digitized physical data for Solomon Islands. The base map used by NATRIM is also used by other agencies for their own systems. The Water Resources Division of the Ministry of Energy, Water and Mineral Resources collects water resources data for specific water locations but this is yet to be developed into a computer based information system. The Solomon Islands Water Authority has a system but this is only on its water infrastructures on urban areas. The geology division of the Ministry of Energy, Water and Mineral Resources has a system on geological and minerals resources but this has yet to be fully operational.

Land use information is with the land Management Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Primary Industries but there is there is no computer-based system as yet. The Ministry of Health is developing an Health Information system which will also includes some water supply information. This is again yet to be operational.

The Ministry of National Planning and Development has just recently established a population unit, which has a population information system. This unit is basically responsible for population awareness and dissemination. The Statistics Office of the Ministry of Finance has most of the socio-economic data collected from various sources, which is used by many public agencies and the private sector. Lack of resources has affected up to date collection of information by this office.

The Meteorological Services collects daily weather and climate data from its national network. This is one of the most important sources of information as far as UNCCD issues are concerned. The weather information is disseminated daily through out the country through the national radio service. The MET service also hosts the regional programme, South Pacific Climate and Sea Level Rise and Monitoring project, which collects data from a site in the capital and sent to the National Tidal Facility in Adelaide, Australia. This system also gives real time data. The MET service is also a recipient of other regional and global data being collected by other regional and global weather monitoring entities. One of the most important information that is being monitored through the MET Service is the current development of another El Nino in the Pacific, which is sure to cause other effects in the region. Most of the information systems briefly mentioned here are however affected by lack of resources and are at various level operations.

6.2 Management

Most information that are collected are either stored by governments agencies records in hard copy or get fed into new systems that are slowly being developed in the country. Whilst there has been some good effort in gathering information and keeping them in government offices and computer facilities, there is a need to do more and improve the management of available information. One of the main problems in this area is the general lack of policies and legislation to address how information is managed and to even ensure security of sensitive national information.

6.3 Availability

Information that is kept by the government is free for public access and is not restricted. The information kept by the Ministry of Lands and Housing and the Ministry of Forests, Environment and conservation are all accessed by anyone but there are some costs as well for information that are processed from the GIS systems kept in the two agencies.

Information that is in hard copies however is usually not managed properly and is difficult to locate due to the lack of proper libraries in government agencies. Documents that are kept in the national library or kept in other public accessed libraries where copies of many government-produced documents are sent can be accessed easily though. One of the main problems in making information available is the lack of a centralised information facility for users and the general lack of guide on what information is available and where they are located. At present therefore, there is still a lot that needs to be done to make information more accessible to the public and in a more efficient manner.

6.4 Use For Decision Making

The use of available information in decision-making has been satisfactory to some certain extent. All government agencies cannot function without the use of decent factual information. In general, decision making at the technical level seems to be sufficient, as technical people generally do know where to get information and what information is there. Government officers however, do face the same problems as any other person in getting to the right place for information and even getting the right information. In many circumstances, information is not available in a form that can be easily digested. If officers have these kind of inherent problems in accessing and processing information then it would certainly affect the kind of decisions that are made high up the decision making hierarchy, or at the political level when those information are used. The fact that information is too technical or not well managed for public use, makes it difficult for the layman to get what he needs for his/her own decisions.

7. RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

One of the most relevant research work done so far in the Solomon Islands as far as the UNCCD issues are concerned is the Land Resource study done by Hansell and Wall in 1974-76. This study as already mentioned earlier, categorises the land in Solomon Islands into land systems. This study was used by the Forests Inventory Project to produce the land susceptibility system, which shows, which part of the country, are the most susceptible to disturbances, natural or man made.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Primary Industries used to run the Dodo Creek Agricultural Station, which was torched during the ethnic crisis in 2000. The Ministry also runs other Research Field Stations through out the country. One of the important parts of their research activities is on soils and the valuable information should be with the government if they had not been burnt with the Dodo Creek Station.

One recent study by a research institution examined the effects of logging of natural forests on the coastal marine environment in a tropical setting. This should assist decision makers, both regulators and resource owners in examining destructive resource extraction activities and their effects on the environment and its resources.

8. RESOURCES

Availability of resources is one of the most significant constraints affecting the activities relating to UNCCD issues. As a Least Developed country, Solomon Islands has been affected by the general lack of resources to implement relevant activities. Whilst human resources are slowly building up in the country, tangible financial resources to carry out activities on the ground are still scarce. Solomon Islands will therefore rely on external assistance to finance whatever activities it needs to carry out to meet the objectives of the convention.

Collectively the government agencies that do carry out UNCCD relevant activities have an annual budget of about two million Solomon Dollars, which, is about USD400,000.00. This does not mean that agencies do spend this much on UNCCD related activities. In most cases the agencies do not get their full annual budget and so the actual resources spent on UNCCD issues may be still less.

9. COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

At the national level, coordination has been a major difficulty. Even interagency coordination has not been an easy task as resources are not at a level that could allow effective coordination. The Ministry responsible for coordinating national activity is the Ministry of National Planning and Development. Whilst this ministry has been able to coordinate the efforts in annual budgeting and development planning, quite often decisions taken at sectoral level have shown the lack of coordination and cooperation amongst national and provincial government agencies.

10. THE WAY FORWARD

The experiences of the last few years since the Solomon Islands became a party to the UNCCD indicates that there is a need to improve communication between the convention secretariat and the national focal point. At the national level there is a need to improve coordination and cooperation on land degradation and other UNCCD issues. The establishment of an advisory body would assist Solomon Islands move forward in this context. One of the main tasks of such a body would be to review all policies, legislation and programmes that have some kind of impacts and linkages to land degradation and other UNCCD issues. This review should also include the review of institutions that have responsibilities relating to land degradation and other UNCCD issues. These could direct efforts at the national level to improve coordination and cooperation, streamline national and provincial decision making processes and functions.

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