

ORIGINAL : ENGLISH

1181
VF

SOUTH PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

V A N U A T U

COUNTRY REPORT

SPREP Information Centre
Received
31 JUL. 1998

SOUTH PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

V A N U A T U

COUNTRY REPORT

1. POLICY

The Vanuatu Government has adopted a general statement of environmental policy in article 7(d) of its Constitution :

"Every person has the following fundamental duties to himself and his descendants and to others :

- (d) to protect Vanuatu and to safeguard the national wealth, resources and environment in the interests of the present generation and of future generations".

The Government is now working on the application of this policy to all areas of government activity.

2. LEGISLATION

There is little legislation at present in force on environmental matters except for partial regulations concerning forestry, mining, import of plants and animals, wild bird protection, fishing and town planning, most of which require reconsideration. The preparation of environmental legislation to meet identified problems is a priority of the government.

3. STATUS OF RESOURCES

Minerals

There are few known commercially exploitable deposits of mineral resources in Vanuatu. A small manganese mine exists at Forari on Efate, and another has been proposed on Erromango island. The Forari mine was created without environmental controls and has had a severe, but localized, environmental impact. Stricter conditions are to be placed on any new mining permits. There is some exploration for copper on Santo. Significant pozzolana clay and limestone resources exist and could provide the basis for clinker or cement manufacture.

Forestry

While there is general information on forests in Vanuatu, no complete forest inventory has been conducted to determine commercial potential. Much of the forest is secondary because of frequent cyclone damage and shifting cultivation. Most commercial Kauri (*Agathis Obtusa*) stands have already been cut, and there is now little logging of indigenous forest.

The Government forestry programme emphasises enrichment plantings on small (100 ha) widely scattered plots for village level wood production to replace imports. Some larger-scale plantings for export are being considered.

Agriculture

Subsistency agriculture using shifting cultivation is still the basis of the rural economy. On a few islands, increasing population is putting pressure on land resources and leading to a loss of forest cover. Copra production is economically significant. Plantation agriculture and pasture for cattle have been developed in the past, but most are now rundown and their future depends on substantial investments by commercial farming interests which are expected to occur only slowly as the new land policy restricts the scope for foreign involvement. An irrigated rice scheme is being considered on Santo; and soil survey has already been made and a comprehensive feasibility study will be undertaken in 1981.

Areas with Conservation Interest

Though land tenure provides basic problems in developing a national park programme, once suitable legislation for national parks and reserves, has been passed, the following areas previously identified as having conservation interest will be considered as possible parks or reserves : Reef Island; Kauri Forest; Central Erromango; Duck Lake and surrounding area; Efate; Cloud Forest, Santo.

4. ASSESSMENT/MANAGEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

There are no major environmental problems in Vanuatu at present. Government action has therefore, to be directed towards preventing such problems from developing by enacting appropriate legislation, by careful environmental planning, and by selective monitoring to identify problems before they become serious.

There could be serious pollution in Vila, if the urban population continues to grow fast. There is also a possibility of a few large agricultural projects which could raise environmental issues, such as water pollution; such projects will have to be planned carefully with the assistance of an environmentalist. However, most of the development projects are so small that the effect on environment is minimal - although over a long period the cumulative effects of many small developments could become significant. Care must be taken in order to avoid such a slow destruction of the environment through inappropriate practices in rural areas.

The quality of the waters in the lagoons and bay have been checked in the Port Vila area by the SPC Assistant Environmental Officer, Mr. Tini Lam Yuen, to determine the extent of water pollution. Though the present level of biological pollution is low, there are some areas which are vulnerable because of restricted water circulation, and some very small areas which have considerable fecal coliform counts near discharge points from septic tank seepage and storm water drainage. The Government has decided to monitor the water quality periodically.

To avoid major environmental problems in the future, the Government plans to gradually develop a set of maps and overlays as a tool for environmental planning and for identifying conflicts in resource uses. Information mapped would include :

- water catchment areas and zones of water shortage;
- forest areas with commercial potential;
- agricultural areas and soil types good for agriculture;
- fisheries resources and fish breeding areas;
- areas of nature conservation interest;
- cultural, historic and sacred sites;
- sites of known or suspected mineral resources.

Some of this information now exists or is being collected by different departments. Other surveys may be requested from international agencies. The compilation of this information will be part of the duties of the environmental officer in the Ministry of Lands, with the assistance, if required, of outside consultants.

5. ADMINISTRATION

For a small government, and, for the time being, underpopulated country such as Vanuatu, the implementation of environmental policy needs to be as simple as possible, and should draw upon existing knowledge and expertise within the government. Vanuatu does not need, and cannot afford, a large environmental administration. It is planned that a department of environment and conservation be created within the Ministry of Lands (which holds the responsibility for environment and physical planning, within the government). This department will be managed by an environmentalist responsible for proposing and implementing detailed environmental policy.

This officer may eventually require some field staff in the execution of his duties. Plans are to recruit initially, on foreign aid terms, an environmentalist who would train a national to take over this position as soon as practicable.

Terms of reference for this environmentalist would be to :

- propose to the Minister of Lands environmental policy for consideration by the Council of Ministers;
- review environmental aspects of development plans, physical plans, etc;
- coordinate departmental actions which may have an environmental impact crossing departmental lines;
- examine major development projects for their environmental effects, and,
- review environmental impact studies which may be required;
- propose and review legislation concerning environment, and,
- undertake other duties requested by the Minister responsible for the environment.

A national economic and social development committee has been recently created. It includes experts from the various Ministries who are likely to deal with environmental problems. Major environmental issues will be referred to this Committee.

A Territorial Workshop in Environmental Planning and Assessment is to be requested from SPC to provide initial training to other Government staff concerned with the environment.

6. TYPE OF ASSISTANCE REQUIRED

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following areas are given priority for assistance from the South Pacific Environment Programme. b) to h) are considered as issues which could be given regional consideration :

- a) assistance in the recruitment of an environmentalist for the department of Environment and Conservation;
- b) training of government staff in environmental management;
- c) drafting of environmental legislation to meet identified problems;
- d) preparation of resource and conservation surveys for environmental planning purposes;
- e) monitoring on request in environmentally sensitive areas (such as Port Vila coastal waters);
- f) contingency planning for major oil spill control;
- g) materials and teacher training for environmental education;
- h) assistance on request in the environmental evaluation of major development projects.
