



**In-country EIA Training
in the Pacific Islands:**
A Review of the
SPREP EIA Programme

by
Komeri Onorio

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**A Review and Evaluation of the SPREP
Environmental Impact Assessment
(EIA) Programme**

by

Komeri Onorio

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Published in September 1994
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Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to provide an introduction to the Review and Evaluation Report for the In-Country Environmental Impact Assessment Training courses conducted in the South Pacific region. This review marks the completion of a two-year programme of in-country workshops and seminars aimed at raising the awareness of environmental impact assessment in the island countries. These courses address a fundamental issue for Pacific island countries; that of how to successfully integrate environmental considerations into economic development planning.

The perception -that environmental considerations are negative and a break in economic development- is changing. Decision makers are increasingly aware of the need for careful long term environmental planning. EIA has been accepted as an important tool in bringing this about.

This review report was made possible with the financial assistance of the United Nations Environment Programme. I urge you to challenge the comments raised in the report. The comments and views are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of SPREP's management.



Vili A. Fuavao

Director

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1. Introduction

Economic development activities in the South Pacific island countries have increased in momentum in recent years, often with significant environmental effects on the limited resource base of island ecosystems.

Many development projects have had major environmental impacts that could have been mitigated or avoided through the use of appropriate environmental planning and management methods, and environmental impact assessment (EIA) in particular. However, most island governments in the South Pacific lack the necessary procedural and regulatory frameworks, the administrative infrastructure, and the expertise, to incorporate environmental management into the planning and implementation of development projects and programmes.

Island governments are turning increasingly to the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) for advice and assistance in this respect. SPREP is an organisation established by 22 Pacific island countries and territories, together with Australia, France, New Zealand and the United States, to assist South Pacific countries protect and manage their environment and natural resources. At present, SPREP is co-ordinating or supervising a range of activities directed towards the overall aim of better environmental planning and management for the region. The policy direction for these activities is provided by the SPREP 1991-95 Action Plan.

SPREP has responded to the environmental planning and management needs of the South Pacific island countries in two main ways. Firstly, it has undertaken a programme of advising twelve island governments on environmental management and encouraging the development of National Environmental Management Strategies (NEMS) by member governments. Secondly, through the NEMS requirements, SPREP has, over an 18 months period, carried out an EIA training programme for 11 Pacific island countries.

Unfortunately, many governments of the South Pacific Region still view environmental impact assessment as a hindrance and an obstacle to development. Thus, there is a clear need to increase the awareness of the nature and importance of EIA in the region, and to raise the level of skills in the use of environmental impact assessment by local environmental managers. The purpose of the SPREP training programme in EIA is to meet these two needs.

To date, SPREP has co-ordinated and taught eleven in-country environmental impact assessment (EIA) courses, in these countries:

Federated States of Micronesia	1 - 7 May, 1992
Vanuatu	29 June to 3 July, 1992
Kiribati	20 - 24 July, 1992
Fiji	10 - 14 August, 1992
Marshall Islands	21 August to 3 September 1992
Solomons	12 - 16 October, 1992
Western Samoa	9 - 13 November, 1992
Tonga	15 - 19 March, 1993
Cook islands	19 - 23 April 1993
Niue	28 June to 2 July 1993
Tuvalu	1 - 4 November 1993

This report describes the training programme and considers experiences to date. A number of changes to the courses are suggested in the light of practical difficulties with the courses. In view of the broader information being gathered through the operation of the training programme in so many Pacific island countries, a second major objective is to review some of the problems being faced by individuals or agencies trying to develop EIA systems in many of these countries. Finally, recommendations are made about how training in environmental assessment for the region might proceed from this point.

2. Format of the Training Course

The standard format of the EIA course was to begin with a half/one day seminar for senior government officials (i.e. the key decision-makers) where policy issues regarding the use of EIA were discussed. The participants were normally Permanent Secretaries and Ministers. A four-day technical training component followed, aimed at technical/managerial-level government officials, private developers, non-government officials and interested individuals.

The four-day workshop provided instruction on EIA concepts and principles, the review of EIAs, and how to conduct an EIA. In-country examples and case studies were used wherever possible. A field exercise, based on topical development issues in the host country, were undertaken in each of these courses to ensure participants gain some degree of practical experience in EIA.

2.1 Senior Officials Meeting

The purpose of this one-day meeting is simply to sell the message of environmental assessment to decision-makers, and to review possible procedures for implementing environmental assessment in the country.

In general, this meeting had not been particularly well attended by key decision-makers: almost invariably the most senior invitees (government ministers) do not attend. Moreover, even senior government officials tend to be more receptive to expatriate trainers and less enthusiastic with Pacific island instructors, especially if the instructor is from the country in training.

However, the concept of including environmental impact assessment in development planning was well supported at most of these meetings, with most discussion centred around establishing EIA procedures that are fair, balanced, and free from personal interference from one particular official.

2.2 Technical Level Course

All the four-day technical level courses ran smoothly, with good attendance by mid-level officials from a broad range government and non-government organisations. Attendances ranged from around thirty people to just over fifty.

The participants usually rated the course highly, often asking for more time. As the course evolved, more emphasis was placed on role-playing and active participation, and this definitely improved the level of interest and learning. The use of local case studies and examples were particularly effective.

2.3 Resource Staff

The courses were run by SPREP's EIA Officer, a Pacific islander, with assistance from four contracted resource staff: two from the University of the South Pacific, and two from the New Zealand Ministry for the Environment. Occasionally, staff from other agencies were used if the usual resource staff are unavailable for some reason. This level of staffing was generous, and provided sufficient personnel to deal with the various case studies and role-playing scenarios used in the course.

Importantly, at least one resource person was a social scientist who focused on the social effects of development. This aspect is often overlooked in many EIA studies in the region. Social impacts were handled by one of the contracted personnel from the NZ Ministry for the Environment, and this input was important in keeping the course balanced between the physical and social effects of developments.

2.4 Resource Material

2.4.1 Course Booklet

The booklet developed for the EIA course was improved and updated for each course, using many comments and suggestions from other interested parties. It now has a wide selection of examples from Pacific island countries, and should form a good basis for continuing the course. The layout of the booklet was improved, using illustrations and photographs to break up text and making it easier to read and digest. This booklet, the *Guide to Environmental Impact Assessment in the South Pacific*, has been published and distributed to member countries.

The main purpose of the booklet was to provide a ready and simple guide for using Environmental Impact Assessment as a planning and management tool for decision making in the Pacific islands region. It is primarily for government officials who are normally too busy to look at voluminous reference manuals, and also for private developers, non-government officials and interested individuals.

The guide also discusses the value and importance of the EIA process for government decisions about development, outlines the main steps involved in an EIA study, and gives assistance for implementing EIA procedures.

2.4.2 Videos and Slides

The audio-visual resource material used in the courses includes 12 videos, with half from the South Pacific, and the remainder from around the world. A SPREP EIA training video, *Environmental Impact Assessment: A Tool for a better future*, was completed in 1992 and incorporated into the course.

The SPREP EIA video lists examples of environmental problems in the Pacific islands that could have been avoided if proper Environmental Impact Assessments had been carried out. The video also looks at projects where EIA helped developers; and follows a developer through the process of completing an EIA, from the first contact with the local Department of Environment, through to the public hearing and granting of a business licence. The SPREP EIA video can be used as a teaching tool or as a stand-alone film about Environmental Impact Assessment.

Presenters also used the SPREP slide set, *Environmental Problems in the South Pacific*, as well as slides from a collection at the University of the South Pacific.

2.4.3 Language

Occasionally, language caused difficulties. Training presentations were in English, as it was the language of the resource people and the common language for most Pacific island countries. However, discussions were more lively in the local language, as would be expected.

In Solomons Islands and Vanuatu this was not too difficult, because Pidgin English is partly understandable by English speakers, and because one resource person could speak pidgin. However in Samoa, discussions were sometimes in Samoan and the resource people could not understand. Similar instances occurred in the Cook Islands.

In general, the working language must be English if the resource people are to provide direction to the workshop, and the course suffers if too much is spoken in a local language that the resource staff do not understand. The use of interpreters was considered several times; however, with time already at a premium in the four-day courses, constant use of interpreters would double the time required to achieve the same ends.

However, it was obvious that some participants did not fully comprehend the content of the course, particularly the more abstract concepts; or they felt better able to express cultural concerns and feelings more fully and effectively in their own language.

The only easy answer to this problem is for Environmental Agencies in the countries to design their own EIA courses, in their own languages, based on the SPREP training programmes.

3. An Evaluation of the EIA Course

3.1 Timing and Relevance

In each of the eleven countries, the EIA course was timely, as countries were developing National Environmental Management Strategies (NEMS), and introducing new environmental legislation, which invariably included environmental impact assessment regulations and procedures.

The relevance of the course was reflected in the course evaluations. With approximately 400 course participants providing written assessments, all rated the course a worthwhile use of their time. The most common complaint was that the course was too short.

It was clear from this positive reception that this type of training was desired and considered useful and interesting. The courses inevitably become involved in the fabric of national life and values, and discussions and case studies were pursued with great interest and, at times, considerable passion. There was no question, after conducting eleven courses, that these courses were valued, and that there should be further specific training to embed environmental assessment firmly in the decision-making process and national planning mechanisms of the Pacific island countries.

3.2 Possible Improvements

The format of the senior officials meeting was reviewed, as it was not as successful as was anticipated. A shorter presentation (perhaps two hours) would probably attract more decision-makers. If necessary, the invitation to this session should come from the Head of Government, so that government officials of appropriate seniority attend.

The technical section of the course relied on expatriate expertise, due to the lack of skilled personnel in the region. However, in one instance, a local scientist (initially not invited by government to the workshop) was called upon by SPREP to talk on the marine impacts of causeway building - to the amazement and benefit of fellow participants undertaking a causeway case study.

In-country courses would benefit from using more local experts to explain the concepts of physical and social effects of development to their own people. Government officials should also put aside personal jealousies, and accept and acknowledge that there is some local expertise already available in government agencies or elsewhere in-country. The broad framework of the course would continue to be developed by SPREP, but more local input would help translate those concepts into something more meaningful and relevant for the local situation.

No current resource staff directly handle environmental assessments in their work, although the Ministry for the Environment staff from New Zealand advised impact assessors and commented on completed assessments in their roles as Regional Managers. At least one resource person should be more directly involved with EIA in their work. One possibility is to use staff from an agency such as a Regional Council in New Zealand, who complete "hands-on" management of environmental assessments (the Ministry of Environment being primarily a policy-making body). SPREP now has the capacity to determine, assess and to review EIAs and therefore the concern raised here can be handled by SPREP.

Video is a very instructive medium, and it would be beneficial to identify portions of videos currently used in courses which illustrate each main point in the lectures, to better integrate the videos into the oral presentations. Towards this end, the video collection is being enlarged by obtaining the full video series from the *Tourism Council of the South Pacific* (one per country), and the full set of the *Television for the Environment* series. The slide collection was enhanced as the course moved to various countries, enabling the course presenters to better illustrate EIA concepts. Overall, it is important to continue working at better illustrating lectures with slides and videos and local examples to improve the impact of the technical information presented.

As with any other adult education, lectures involved the participants by asking them for examples and getting them to think. Some lectures were too "one way", a trend often encouraged by the participants used to a traditional or colonial "schoolroom" style of learning. Small groups of 2-3 people were frequently used to split up this situation, as well as role playing for practical work.

4. General Problems Encountered In Introducing EIA Procedures

4.1 Lack of Political Commitment

In all countries, the participants were concerned about the political level of commitment to environmental impact assessment. There is a very strong movement in the direction of improved environmental regulations and procedures in the region, through SPREP's NEMS programmes, and as a result of the UNCED conference in Rio de Janeiro. However, the situation at the political level is not necessarily greatly influenced by these developments, and government officials in most countries expressed concerns about the 'sustainability' of regulations developed through encouragement by SPREP.

A further concern linked to this is developing legislation which effectively has no "teeth"; that is, the means for enforcing the new environmental laws in many countries were poorly developed, decreasing the chances of successful implementation of the new policies.

It was interesting to note that in most countries, officials were concerned about a single minister controlling environmental impact assessment procedures, and sought to have the power rest instead in an environment board, or a cabinet sub-committee. This reflects the small size of political systems in many Pacific island countries, where powerful individuals in government can consequently control several key portfolios. Thus, a pro-development Minister, in charge of the environment portfolio, can often also be promoting "development-at-all-costs" under other ministerial responsibilities. The level of commitment to effective environmental assessment under such circumstances can be questioned.

4.2 Influence of Aid Donors

Foreign aid was, and continues to be, very important to Pacific island countries: in some countries it dominates their foreign exchange.

Depending on the source of the aid, projects may or may not receive environmental impact assessments. Korea, China, and Taiwan appear to be the main aid donors in the South Pacific without any environmental impact assessment procedures at present. Japan's environmental procedures appear to be erratic. Other major donors (including Australia, New Zealand, ADB, EC, Britain, France and USA) use EIA procedures, although they vary in how the procedures are used. For instance, New Zealand has a policy of environmental assessment for its aid projects, but is limited in what it can do in this due to lack of resources. Projects are assessed by staff whose expertise is in other areas.

The chief weakness in most procedures used by donor countries is that they are usually designed to suit the aid donor, and not the aid recipient. For example, the environmental agency in a Pacific island country might know that an EIA had been conducted on, say, an aid-funded air-strip construction project, but they often have not seen the EIA, nor participated in the process in any way. This communication gap is exacerbated by the use of consultants from the donor country to do the EIA, and who report directly to the donor agency.

The practice of aid donors, in particular the Asian countries listed above, is often unhelpful in SPREP's mandate to encourage the use of EIA in the region. To improve this situation for the region, it is recommended that SPREP:

1. *Contact donor governments who currently lack EIA procedures for aid programmes and encourage them to adopt EIA procedures that involve local national environment agencies, and to use local consultants where possible (and perhaps help train local people in this work as part of their aid effort).*
2. *Contact aid agencies that already have EIA procedures and convince them to use local national environment agencies for screening, scoping, reviewing, and decision-making in the EIA process, and, as above, encourage them to use local consultants in preparing the EIA.*

4.3 Public Participation

The countries of the South Pacific still have strong roles for traditional leaders. The introduction of environmental impact assessment procedures must account for traditional methods of decision-making, so that the regulations or procedures have "grass-root" support. The training courses have now been widened to involve traditional leaders, such as mayors or village chiefs.

The whole concept of public participation needs to be thought through from the perspective of traditional decision-making processes. On the one hand it is unwise to expect "western"-style public participation in many Pacific island communities, and more traditional means used to help affected individuals and communities express their concerns and values. On the other hand, many systems deny equal rights for women to raise concerns, and this highlights the dilemma of whether or not to press for some change in traditional processes to allow more input from women in the community. Adding to this complex situation, some societies, such as in Palau and the Marshall Islands, afford a decision-making role to women through their rights to land ownership.

This shows the importance of adapting EIA to local social and cultural conditions, and not expecting all countries to adopt a single, "western" approach, particularly for public involvement.

4.4 Custom of Traditional Land Ownership

About 80% of land in most Pacific countries is still in traditional hands. The government does not necessarily control development of these lands held by traditional land owners. For example, forest companies making logging contracts routinely deal with landowners, and the government has little influence, except through other channels such as financial or taxation controls.

The landowners are usually families, often with some members absent from the area. This raises problems when major decisions must be made as decisions are usually collective. Moreover, for environmental protection the dispersal of land use decision-making among so many individuals makes EIA education very difficult. The people who really need to know about EIA are the land use decision-makers, and they are numerous and hard to reach through normal training programmes. However, where possible, the SPREP EIA training courses are now trying to include some traditional landowners in the training process, usually community leaders.

4.5 Lack of Local Consultants

EIAs will remain a foreign concept and an imported technology until they are undertaken and completed locally - by islanders themselves. For many specific components of an EIA, local consultants are better able to assess the effects of a proposal, and especially for social effects. SPREP is attempting to establish a network of local consultants who can conduct most EIA work needed in each country.

5. Recommendations for Future Directions in EIA Training

5.1 Expand SPREP's EIA Training Programme

The EIA training programme should be expanded to increase awareness and actual use of EIA in Pacific island countries. Policy-makers must become more aware of the vital importance of carefully managing development, with its risk to human and environmental health if it is not. It is recognised that the success of other SPREP programmes depend to a large extent on this improved awareness.

Therefore, a second round of training courses for the island countries of the region would be valuable. They would have similar objectives to the current courses---raising awareness, and technical training---but would be more carefully targeted. The 5-day technical course should be more advanced than the present course, aimed at a smaller group of people who have obviously benefited from the first round of training. These people would form the nucleus of a local group of consultants who could be seconded from their existing positions to work on specific project assessments.

This awareness course would strengthen and broaden the establishment of EIA procedures in each jurisdiction. The course would be specifically aimed at the other centres of power in society, as well as the government officials. For example, it should involve customary land owners, churches, chiefs or village elders.

5.2 Adapt EIA practices to the Pacific islands' situation

Linked to the first recommendations, research is needed to adapt western-style EIA practices to cultures with different power structures and decision-making systems, and different land ownership customs. Work is currently being carried out to make EIA relevant to less developed countries around the world, but it is necessary to focus some of that effort on particular issues that are immediately and practically important for adopting EIA in Pacific island countries.

5.3 Integrate EIA with National Planning

It is important to address the issue of integrating EIA with national planning procedures. Unless integration occurs, EIA will always be a relatively weak instrument for environmental management and protection in the face of development pressures.

SPREP can play a vital role in encouraging the process of integrating EIA into the national planning process, and has completed a work programme to help achieve this. The major objectives of this 1994-97 programme are to:

- ✘ define and develop the role of EIA in relation to sustainable development objectives in national planning processes;
- ✘ identify and trial criteria for evaluating sustainable development;
- ✘ seek, evaluate and discuss community perceptions of environmental risks in community workshops;
- ✘ improve the understanding of community needs, to gain a better understanding of the EIA process, including its limitations, and its relation to achieving sustainable development;
- ✘ develop guidelines incorporating case studies and environmental criteria to assist Governments and other developers to implement EIA locally; and,
- ✘ further develop SPREP's capability to respond to requests from member governments for assistance in EIA needs.

A series of specific programme activities are currently being designed to meet these objectives.

6. Conclusions

EIA training has achieved a great deal in a short time in Pacific island countries. In particular, there is strong local support for the process. However, it is important that this basic groundwork is used to help construct effective EIA systems that are in tune with local needs and customs.

Issues such as **land ownership** and **public involvement** must be addressed to develop procedures that suit the varied social and cultural systems in the region. Member governments must also be encouraged and assisted to **link EIA more closely with their actual decision-making processes**.

SPREP is planning programmes to follow up the current initiatives and to build on the successes seen to date.

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