



Pacific Land

Sustaining our environment, economies and way of life

Global event, regional relevance

The Pacific theme for this year's World Environment Day on 5 June is *Pacific Land: sustaining our environment, economies and way of life*. World Environment Day is a global initiative that aims to empower people to become active agents of sustainable and equitable development, raise awareness about environmental issues and advocate partnerships.

The global theme for this year is: Don't desert drylands. Although the Pacific region may not have deserts, many of the islands are undergoing various forms and extent of land degradation.

SPREP is encouraging its member countries and territories to coordinate national activities to mark this day.

Land degradation

Broadly defined, land degradation is any form of deterioration of the natural potential of land, which adversely affects ecosystems and peoples' livelihoods. Causes of land degradation include changing weather patterns, increasing human populations and a host of other complex interactions between the socio-economic and bio-physical processes.

Only 2% of the Pacific is land, yet Pacific islanders live in and rely on the rural subsistence economy. Due to the relatively small size of the islands, any disturbances to the land can impact on the surrounding marine environment and ultimately on the livelihoods of families and communities.



Pacific Islanders heavily depend on their natural resources for their livelihoods.



Largely associated with World Environment Day, tree-planting is a key activity to reducing the affects of land degradation caused by deforestation.

Many Pacific islands are experiencing the affects of land degradation. Countries with bigger islands like Fiji are experiencing soil loss at very high rates. Studies are revealing losses of between 20 and 70 tonnes per hectare per year; this is partly due to agriculture and forestry activities coupled with high levels of rainfall. In the Solomon Islands the rapid decline in areas of natural forests by unsustainable logging is a main cause of land degradation. This is associated with increases in runoff and sedimentation and threaten coastal lagoons and other marine ecosystems. In Nauru, and some parts of PNG, land degradation has been the direct result of historic, extensive or intensive mining activities. Atoll countries like Kiribati and Tuvalu are experiencing increased salinity of soils due to salt-water intrusion that is affecting plant growth.

National strategies and mechanisms are required to address these affects; including establishing watershed management plans, conducting research to identify critical areas, reviewing and developing appropriate land-use legislation and regulations.



Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme

How SPREP is supporting the Pacific

Under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Parties are required to plan, develop and implement National Action Programmes (NAPs) to guide on-going work in combating land degradation and mitigating the effects of drought.

SPREP is working with its Members, particularly countries who are Parties to the UNCCD, to prepare national plans to combat land degradation.

SPREP will be working closely with other regional organisations to foster stronger integration of regional initiatives and strengthen environmental governance.

Regional synergies

Closely linked to the development of NAPs is the GEF-funded National Capacity Self-Assessments (NCSA) and development of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Medium-sized projects (MSP).

Links between SPREP's programmes

The development of the NAPs provides SPREP with the opportunity to strengthen interlinkages between its various programme components particularly in the areas of conservation, adaptation to climate change, solid waste management, pollution prevention, support for meteorological services, training, education and social communications.

At the national level, countries will be encouraged to identify the inter-linkages between land degradation and other thematic areas eg: forestry management and agriculture development.

For more information on SPREP Secretariat's role with the above initiatives please contact Frank Wickham (HRD/ Training Officer) frankw@sprep.org.

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

The challenge to combat land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought was recognized by world leaders over the period leading up to the Earth Summit in Rio during 2001 with greater attention placed on the arid regions of the world.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was adopted in 2004. Fourteen Pacific Island independent states have since become Parties to the convention, committing to addressing the causes and effects of land degradation.

The convention highlights the need for a bottom-up approach with people and communities playing an important role in planning and implementing measures to combat land degradation, encourages an integrated approach to addressing the complex causes and effects of land degradation, and emphasizes the need for stronger partnerships and for the provision of an enabling environment to support such measures. It also recognizes the links between land degradation and poverty and encourages the establishment of a national and international economic enabling environment that provides opportunities for sustainable development.

Table 1: Status/progress of NAP development in the Pacific region

Country	Status/progress
Niue, Palau	NAP completed
Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu	NAP development began in 2005 with funding assistance from UNDP and UNCCD.
Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu.	NAP development beginning in 2006 with funding assistance from UNDP GovPac Project.

