

**United Nations Workshop on National Sustainable
Development Strategies in Pacific Island Developing States
New York
4-5 May 2006**

Background Document¹

Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, and, more recently, the Pacific Plan², all call upon countries to develop national sustainable development strategies.

1. Workshop on National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS)

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development, (UN DESA/DSD) is convening this Workshop from 4 – 5 May 2006 to review NSDS development in fourteen Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS). During the workshop, participants will assess the status of development and implementation of NSDS in participating countries, share and discuss best practice, and work toward advancing the country work already begun. Designated National Focal Points will present the situation in their respective countries focusing on key issues including:

- a. Current status with respect to a National Sustainable Development Strategy;
- b. Expected goals and output of the NSDS;
- c. Mechanism(s) in use for broad participation of stakeholders (including civil society representatives) in the NSDS and other national development planning and decision-making processes;
- d. Major achievements or best practices in planning, developing or implementing an NSDS;
- e. Main challenges; and,
- f. Recommendations for next steps.

A number of organizations with specific activities in the Pacific Region have agreed to cooperate to support participating countries in achieving their NSDS goals. These include, in addition to UN DESA/DSD, the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Pacific Operations Center (UN-EPOC), the United Nations Development Programme Pacific Sub Regional Centre (UNDP/PSRC), and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). Other organizations, such as the Global Environmental Facility, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Asian Development Bank, are invited to participate should they so desire. This workshop provides an opportunity for the members of these organizations to share information with country participants regarding ongoing and planned activities, and discuss how they can best support NSDS development and implementation in the Pacific Region.

¹ Prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Division for Sustainable Development (DSD)

² See Section 3.

The workshop will also discuss monitoring of NSDS and the role of indicators therein. UN DESA will present background information on the topic, and country representatives are invited to express their experiences and needs.

2. Commitment to National Sustainable Development Strategies

At the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), governments committed to develop national strategies for sustainable development, building on and harmonizing the sectoral economic, social and environmental policies and plans already existing and being implemented in their respective countries³.

In 1997, at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly to review Agenda 21, governments reaffirmed that national sustainable development strategies are important mechanisms for enhancing and linking priorities in social, economic and environmental policies⁴. The outcome document called upon all countries to complete, by the year 2002, the formulation and elaboration of national sustainable development strategies that reflect the contributions and responsibilities of all interested parties.

Most recently, the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) underscored the importance of national sustainable development strategies, and called on states to take immediate steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and to start their implementation by 2005.⁵

Meanwhile, Governments at the 2000 Session of the General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration, reaffirming their support for the principles of sustainable development, including those set out in Agenda 21 and adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.⁶ The related Millennium Development Goals include a mandate to “integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources”⁷.

The Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (BPOA), adopted in 1994, acknowledges that, because SIDS development options are limited, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) present special challenges to planning for and implementing sustainable development⁸. Considering the chronic resource constraints which SIDS face, human, technical and financial, the BPOA emphasized the importance of regional and sub regional cooperative programmes in support of national sustainable development in SIDS⁹.

³ Agenda 21, Chapter 8, paragraph 8.7

⁴ *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August–4 September 2002 (A/CONF.199/20, available at: <http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/636/93/PDF/N0263693.pdf?OpenElement>), pp.1-5.

⁵ JPOI, Chapter XI, para 162 (b)

⁶ A/56/326, Report of the Secretary General: Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, Goal 7, target 9

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ BPOA Preamble, paragraph 11.

⁹ Ibid.

Further, at the International Meeting to Review Implementation of the BPOA, held in Mauritius in January 2005, States once again called on the international community to assist SIDS in completing their NSDS by 2005. Specifically, the Mauritius Strategy,¹⁰ calls for Small Island Developing States:

- to meet the JPOI 2005 target and to incorporate the guiding principles of sustainable development into nationally-owned poverty reduction strategies as well as all sectoral policies and strategies;
- to develop appropriate national targets and indicators for sustainable development;
- to improve legislative, administrative and institutional structures in order, inter alia, to develop sustainable development strategies, policies and plans, and to create and empower interdisciplinary and communally representative advisory bodies for sustainable development; and
- to facilitate the participation of civil society in all sustainable development initiatives and to involve youth in envisioning sustainable island living.

In October 2005, States from the Pacific region met at the Pacific Regional Meeting to follow up on the Mauritius Strategy. The importance of a national sustainable development enabling environment was again stressed, and emphasis was given to the need for implementation to be driven and coordinated at the national level.

Later, on October 26, Pacific Island Forum Leaders adopted The Pacific Plan, in which Leaders agreed¹¹ to develop and implement NSDS in all member countries by the end of 2008, using appropriate cross-cutting and Pacific relevant indicators.

3. UN DESA/DSD Project to Develop NSDS in Pacific SIDS

In response to the inter-governmental decisions and in order to assist countries in achieving their NSDS goals and priorities, UNDESA in 2005 formulated a three-year project funded by the Government of Italy. The Project aims at assisting the Pacific SIDSs with capacity building and institutional strengthening, and by specifically supporting the development of national sustainable development strategies. In this regard it should be noted that an NSDS need not be seen as an independent, new plan, or as a separate planning process alongside existing ones. Instead it should constitute an adaptation of existing processes with a view to shaping an overall strategy that promotes sustainable development.

Specifically, the Project will:

- a. Review existing national and sectoral development strategies, to determine the scope for rationalizing and synchronizing NSDS in each State, with the necessary regional and international support;
- b. Facilitate a broad exchange of experience on strategic policy making, addressing institutional, legal and capacity development issues, promoting a participatory approach to decision-making, and building consensus among Pacific SIDS on the most appropriate

¹⁰ Mauritius Strategy, para 74 (b) – (h)

¹¹The Pacific Plan, Initiative 5.1

application of the United Nations Guidelines for the formulation of National Sustainable Development Strategies;¹²

- c. Assist Pacific SIDS to develop national sustainable development strategies, or their equivalent;
- d. Where countries have already developed and implemented their NSDS, or its equivalent, review and recommend how, where and when key national processes and mechanisms to promote intra- and inter-sectoral coordination and harmonization of activities that explicitly reflect addressing the three pillars of sustainable development in an integrated manner may be improved; and
- e. Identify other areas of assistance required by the countries of the region to facilitate the development of national sustainable development strategies.

To effectively achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the project is implemented in two phases:

Phase One focuses on the preparation of national assessment reports by national consultants recruited by UN DESA, and the convening of an international workshop, to help share national experiences and agree on a common approach to the development and implementation of National Sustainable Development Strategies. It is envisioned that this meeting will result in agreement on the way forward in Phase Two.

Based on results from Phase One, Phase Two, will, as funds permit, focus on interventions in a selected number of countries, best placed to further development and implementation of an NSDS.

4. Current Status

After the initial project presentation on the occasion of the Mauritius Meeting (January 2005) UN DESA/DSD has held regular consultations with New York based Pacific SIDS Permanent Missions to the United Nations to discuss the scope, individual activities and timing of project implementation. In addition, UN DESA/DSD has consulted with members of the voluntary partnership and relevant offices of the United Nations System.

To facilitate project implementation, UN DESA contracted with an international project consultant, Mr. Russell Howorth, who has extensive experience and knowledge of the Region, to assist with project management.

Thirteen countries have to date identified National Focal Points. These are Cook Islands, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

¹² Prepared by UN DESA/DSD for the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development., second preparatory session, 28 January – 8 February 2002. Reference DESA/DSD/PC2/BP13

Of the countries that have nominated National Focal Points, eleven have proposed national consultants for recruitment by UNDESA/DSD. These include Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

The national consultants have been contracted to prepare national NSDS assessment reports to be finalized no later than 30 June 2006. To date, UN DESA/DSD has received two such drafts and has been made aware that several more are forthcoming.

The Workshop 4 – 5 May 2006 represents the first project activity which gathers all parties to the project. It is expected that recommendations will be made as to the next steps in project implementation.

5. Next Steps

The most important outcome of the workshop should be a better understanding of what the next steps in DESA project implementation should be in order to facilitate the development of appropriate NSDS or elements thereof. Participants are therefore strongly encouraged to share their views and discuss these with everyone involved and with UN DESA/DSD in particular.

As stated in the project document, a selection will be made of two or three pilot countries, as resources permit, that are found to be best placed to begin developing or implementing an NSDS. UN DESA/DSD will determine a feasible selection in consultation with candidate countries, upon completion of the workshop and after analyzing the results of national assessment reports.

It is also hoped that the workshop will produce focused and practical suggestions for activities, including how the voluntary partnership can most effectively provide assistance to countries of the region in order to support the completion of NSDS.