

ENVIRONMENT: READYING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Strengthening capacity to face challenges

A new, four-year project on climate change readiness is to be implemented in Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu. The project will focus on practical, long-term adaptation strategies in land management, agriculture and forestry. Senior officials from the environment, agriculture and forestry sectors of the three countries met in Suva early February to set directions and identify outputs for the Pacific-German Regional Programme on Adaptation to Climate Change in the Pacific Island Region, as it will be known. The Euro 4.2 million programme is being funded by the Federal Republic of Germany. German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), the implementing agency, will work in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). The programme, which will be based with SPC's Land Resources Division in Suva, complements the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change, 2006-2015. At the meeting, Fiji delegate, Epeli Nasome, Director of the Fiji Department of Environment, highlighted the cross-cutting impact of climate change and the need to streamline climate change into the policies and plans of all sectors. Added value: 'Aleki Sisifa, Director of SPC's Land Resources Division, supported his comments, stressing the added value to be gained from integrating possible interventions with other relevant activities being carried out in the project countries and by regional agencies.

The project will directly strengthen the capacity of SPC to respond to the needs of Pacific countries facing climate change challenges. Included in this capacity development will be improved communication and information tools to enable SPC to act as a hub for information exchange and advice on climate change issues relating to agriculture, forestry, and land management. Advice and services will cover the identification of resistant/resilient plant species for tree and crop production and the compilation of best practices for adaptation and mitigation in agriculture and forestry. The "information hub" will be linked to existing regional and international information portals and sites. Support for Vanuatu and Tonga will include integrating climate change issues and adaptation strategies into land use policies and planning. This is an important step in building the resilience of local farming communities to climate change, given that its impact will be intensified by poor land use practices and limited land use options. SPC has already taken steps to identify resilient crops, trees, and livestock and will be introducing these climate-change-ready technologies to farming communities.

In Fiji, programme support will focus on developing the knowledge and capacity required to participate in the international carbon market through REDD (reducing emissions through avoided deforestation and forest degradation).

Pilot sites: The feasibility of integrating REDD into the international carbon market is under review. But it is widely recognised that avoiding deforestation will be an important strategy in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

It is anticipated that some agreement on the mechanism will be reached at the UNFCCC COP 15 (Conference of the Parties) in Copenhagen, December 2009. In the meantime, the programme will work with Fiji authorities to increase stakeholders' knowledge of

carbon market processes and strengthen institutional capacity with the aim of creating an enabling environment for REDD mechanisms.

The programme envisages the establishment of selected pilot sites where resource owners and users will be trained, thus enabling their active participation in the process.

Russell Nari, Director-General of Vanuatu's Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, emphasised the need to effectively coordinate activities and resources: "With so many projects going on right now, we need to identify synergies in the countries and build on them. Projects need to be complementary of each other."

Tonga and Fiji representatives agreed with him that coordination and integration of activities would be crucial to the long-term effectiveness of the project.

In March and April, Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu will each hold national planning meetings to further define their project operating plans.

- For more information, please contact lrdhelpdesk@spc.int