

http://www.sprep.org/article/news_detail.asp?id=693

Press Release: Pacific Year of Climate Change 2009

Working with nature to adapt to climate change impacts

Majuro, Marshall Islands, 20 October, 2009 - Nature can be used to help the Pacific adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Known as Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA), this form of adaptation is about protecting and strengthening a healthy natural environment to help communities build resilience and become less vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Ensuring that we pinpoint and carry out ways to manage conserve and restore our ecosystems will ensure that our natural environment can continue to provide ways to enable people to cope with the impacts of climate change.

“Unless we maintain the integrity of ecosystems and the services that they provide, it will compound the impact of climate change issues by reducing their economic and livelihood benefits for people,” said Mr. Stuart Chape, the Programme Manager of Islands Ecosystems at the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

Mr. Chape made a presentation on ecosystem based adaptation at the Pacific climate change roundtable in the Marshall Islands this week with Dr Padma Lal, Chief Technical Adviser with IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Oceania based in Suva.

SPREP provides technical assistance in integrating different environmental aspects, many required for successful EbA and works in partnership with a number of different partner organisations that are also concerned with promoting EbA, such as IUCN and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC).

“The value of this approach, if applied properly means that the whole country needs to take on ecosystem based adaptation. Working at the community level is vital but it also needs to be driven at the national level as ecosystem services function at all scales in a country,” stated Mr. Chape.

“For example, the ecological relationships between water catchments, forests, rivers, lagoons, and coral reefs need to be linked to viable development options that do not compromise adaptation to climate change.”

An example of EbA is to protect mangroves or strengthen other coastal vegetation that lines our shores which helps maintain a defense against storm surges that can damage homes along the cost, roads and services. At the same time, by having healthy mangroves or coastal vegetation helps protect fish resources for Pacific livelihoods. There are many ways that using EbA as a climate change adaptation method will be more beneficial to Pacific communities.

2

Using natural environment options are often more suitable than constructing physical infrastructure and does not always need technical and financial expertise. Ecosystem based adaptation can also make best use of traditional management practices.

“The level of our vulnerability to climate change depends upon our resources and

what we have got. If we don't take the proactive step by minimising our risks by conserving our mangroves or coral reefs, for example, we are increasing our vulnerability," said Dr Lal.

Strengthening our environment can take longer than other methods of adaptation. It can be likened to a long term investment into our natural surroundings that takes time to mature, but once the investment does mature the benefits reaped are plentiful as our natural environment can do more than simply protect, it also supplies us with resources for livelihoods and our Pacific way of life.

Our natural environment provides us with food, material for shelter, medicine and our economic income. If we strengthen our environment it can help protect us also. If we degrade our natural environment this means when we do have climate change impacts such as water surges or cyclones we cannot rely upon our natural resources systems to support and protect us anymore.

"This is a concept which is based upon everything we've been endorsing for the last 30 years in terms of ecological sustainable development," said Mr. Chape.

"What it really comes down to is we need to get on top and apply ecological sustainable development in order to provide ourselves with the best basis for adapting to climate change."

SPREP will focus on ecosystem based adaptation next year as part of the International year of biodiversity under AUSAID funding for the International Climate Change Adaptation Initiative (ICCAI).

Notes:

The Pacific Climate Change Roundtable will be held from 19 – 21 October. It will be followed by a half day meeting by UNDP on the 2009 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report on Climate Change on Thursday 22 October.

The remainder of the conference time will be a closed session for Pacific Islands Countries to assist for preparations on the coming United Nations Framework for the Convention on Climate Change 15th Conference of the Parties.

Working papers on the 2009 Pacific Climate Change Roundtable can be found at:

http://www.sprep.org/climate_change/PYCC/roundtable.htm

For more details please contact SPREP's Climate Change Adviser Espen Ronneberg in the Marshall Islands on T: (692) 456 1966 E: eronneberg@gmail.com

Contact Name Nanette Wontoon

E-mail nanettew@sprep.org

Phone (685) 21929

Fax (685) 20231