

Cook Islands Country Presentation PACC

Introduction.

The Cook Islands is made up of 15 small islands distributed over two million square kilometers of the South Pacific Ocean. Approximately 70% of the population of 20,000 lives on the largest island of Rarotonga which has a land area of 67 square kilometres. Rarotonga is also the capital and the foundation of the country's dominant driver of growth, the tourism industry. Around 20% of the population lives in the Southern Group of Outer Islands within 300 km of Rarotonga. The remote Northern Group of Outer Islands are more than 1,250 km from the capital. They comprise atolls with sandy clay soils and have little arable land. But they benefit from large, productive lagoons that support pearl farming, and are also the main base for the country's fishing industry.

The four cyclones that struck in 2005 highlighted environmental vulnerability of the economic and social infrastructure of the country. The Cook Islands like most small island nations in the Pacific experience extreme climate events, such as tropical cyclones, intense periods of rainfall or droughts, high winds, sea surges and high air temperatures. These have the potential to significantly impact or damage the physical infrastructure of the nation.

Climate proofing measures are needed to reduce the impact of these weather events on the infrastructure and the Government's scarce resources. Global climate scenarios forecasts increased frequency and intensity of extreme climatic events that have the potential to perpetuate the cycle of damage and consequent setbacks to planned development and economic growth.

The Government acknowledged the need for consideration of a long-term national climate change adaptation strategy, including the strengthening of the capacity of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Planning (MOIP) to address climate change vulnerabilities.

Strategies related to PACC

The Cook Islands Government has articulated its vision in the National Sustainable Development Plans (NSDP) as follows To enjoy the highest quality of life consistent with the aspirations of our people and in harmony with our culture and environment.

This vision is underpinned by its strategic objectives ofTo build a sustainable future that meets our economic and social needs without compromising prudent economic management, environment integrity, social stability, our Cook Islands Maori culture and the needs of future generations.

In addition, the NSDP has confirmed three development goals which are relevant to the Cook Islands PACC components and these are;

Goal 4; Sustainable use and management of our Natural Resources

Goal 5; Strengthened and affordable basic infrastructure, transport and utilities to support national development

Goal 6; Safe, Secure and Resilient Communities

2. Adaptation Initiatives in country for PACC.¹

The country has recently begun a programme of activities relating to the preparation of its second national communication under the UNFCCC, national capacity self-assessment, and sustainable land management under the UNCCD with funding support through the enabling activities of the Global Environment Facility.

Cook Islands, along with Federated States of Micronesia, also had the benefit of an Asian Development Bank Technical Assistance programme of Climate Adaptation in the Pacific Islands (CLIMAP). CLIMAP was designed to assist the Cook Islands to adapt to current and future climate risks through use of the Climate Change

Adaptation through Integrated Risk Reduction (CCAIRR) framework and methodology, to demonstrate a risk-based approach to adaptation and to mainstreaming adaptation. A number of case-studies were carried out in the Cook Islands to show why and demonstrate how reducing climate-related risks is an integral part of sustainable development. Climate-related risks are already high for communities and infrastructure and these are likely to increase considerably with climate change, variability and climate extremes. CLIMAP studies have shown that for infrastructure projects, it is possible to avoid most of the damage costs attributable to climate change, and to do this in a cost-effective manner, if climate proofing is undertaken at the design stage of the project.

Cook Islands also participated in a global programme on Assessment of Impacts of and Adaptation to Climate Change in Multiple Regions or Sectors (AIACC). The aim of this project was to develop a second generation of integrated assessment methods and models, including the incorporation of 'human dimensions' of vulnerability and adaptation options and economic evaluation procedures.

Cook Island nationals were supposed to have been trained under this programme to use these new integrated assessment model scenarios of coastal inundation on Aitutaki with financial support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), through the System for Analysis, Research and Training (START) programme, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the United Nations Environments Programme (UNEP).

A number of smaller projects relevant to or focusing on climate change are currently under way in the Cook Islands including the Red Cross Capacity & Vulnerability Assessment aiming for better disaster preparedness, along with the aforementioned SOPAC EDF9 and ADB projects coordinated by the newly Emergency Management Cook Islands office and developing capacity and legislation for climate related

¹ Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change; Cook Islands – Report of In-Country Consultations

disaster risk reduction in country. There is also the Cook Islands National Environment Service/ WWF South Pacific joint climate change project titled 'The UNFCCC: Facilitating Implementation and Participation in the Pacific' with the objective of strengthening the ability of developing countries to effectively participate in and to foster the implementation of the UNFCCC by building government capacity and by mobilizing relevant and influential stakeholder groups in key countries.

Finally there are a number of ongoing activities providing important information for assessment of climate change impacts and adaptation needs particularly for coastal management including NTF Sea Level Monitoring Project, NIWA Island Climate Update, AusAID Seasonal Climate Forecasting (SCOPIC). SOPAC's Marine Resources Monitoring and Bathymetric Surveys for the Pearl Industry in the Northern Group, and Cook Islands Marine Resources Institutional Strengthening project.

3. Institutional Arrangements.

The PACC Cook Islands in country consultations report recommended for the NES International Division to continue facilitating the Climate Change activities. It has actively been working with various government agencies and communities to promote the risks associated with Climate change.

However, since the PACC-Cook Islands climate change activities is focussed on climate proofing outer island infrastructure the report further recommended that the Office of the Minister for Island Administrations (OMIA) be considered as the executing and implementation agency for PACC Cook Islands, working in close collaboration with CIIC, AMD and the CIAA.

At present OMIA and the MOW has merged to form the Ministry of Infrastructure & Planning (MOIP) and this agency will now be directly involved in the PACC Cook Islands activities. It makes good sense to go down this track as MOIP is responsible for the delivery of the relevant technical support, the planning and management of Infrastructural services in Rarotonga as well as the outer islands. This makes easier to plan for the integration of adaptation activities identified in the programs.

Climate change covers a wide range of areas. It is therefore critical that NES continue to be involved especially through the maintenance existing working arrangement with the International division

4. Co-financing confirmation.

While there has been approval given for co-financing of past projects, no project has been approved for adaptation and nothing concrete has occurred on the ground.

The Preventative Infrastructure Master Plan has identified a number of critical infrastructure projects on the outer islands that will need to be implemented in the next ten years or so

These are reviewed annually according to Government set priorities and funded as resources become available. The project areas covered are;

- Harbours
- Water
- Roading and supporting infrastructure
- Energy
- Airports
- Government Structures
- Cyclone Shelters – Northern Islands

The MOIP has also started the required preparatory activities (Feasibility studies and Project Designing) on most of these projects especially those on the top of the priority lists. Once approved for funding, the Project Implementation documents are done and the project implemented.

The Cook Islands Government is open to the consideration of co- financing any infrastructure projects. What it will require is the identification of the most suitable project for this purpose and the undertaking the required agency and community consultations and the undertaking of the relevant technical review and design to meet expected project outcomes.

Annually the CIGOV allocates \$2.4NZD for Outer Islands Infrastructure development. This year however, this has been withheld due to the global recession and the country's on going commitments, like the WYN Championship and the SPMG which is expected to start in the next two months. On the top of that NZAID also allocated funds through it OID program for Outer Islands Development. Thus opportunity for co-financing is available but the timing is critical.

5. Pilot Demonstrations Areas and Projects.

A number of areas have previously been considered for adaptation activities in the Cook Islands. These include;

- Mauke harbour
- Manihiki Airport protection
- Mangaia harbour

Because of various reasons the adaptation activities proposed for the above projects were not able to be implemented. At present the Manihiki airport is under construction and upgrade. A construction contract has been awarded for the Mangaia harbour and the final design bids are now being assessed for the Mauke harbour

There are a number of areas and projects for consideration under this PACC Cook Islands project especially in the area of coastal zone management. The project includes the following;

- Upgrade of the Penrhyn Harbour
- Upgrade Nassau Harbour stage 2
- Upgrade of the Tauhunu harbour in Manihiki
- Upgrade of the Tukao harbour in Manihiki

Apart from the Nassau harbour, the Penrhyn and the Manihiki harbours are identified in the Preventative Infrastructure Master Plan (PIMP) and already prioritised for implementation in the coming two years

6. Challenges

The main issues likely to impact the delivery of PACC Cook Islands activities include,

- competing demands on staff time as there is at present no staff fully committed to this initiative at present,²
- Inadequate staff, resources, equipment and incentives to support the project will contribute to lack of commitment.
- Issues relating to the land identified for adaptation activities as well as mobilising community buy in will need to be addressed as part of the project
- Lack of institutional knowledge, technical capacity as well overall understanding of the project can lead to lack of support for the projects at government and community levels and limits the integration of climate change adaptation activities into the development of infrastructure on the islands.
- Lack of timely availability of development funds can also affect the delivery and implementation time of adaptation activities

7. References

Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change; Cook Islands – Report of In-Country Consultations

², Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change; Cook Islands – Report of In-Country Consultations