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Introduction

This volume is a tribute to the work of the late Dr Albert Nita, who was a senior lecturer at the University of Papua New Guinea from 1993 and a prolific writer and adviser on environmental and sustainable development issues. It was sparked by a presentation he made at a workshop on National Sustainable Development Strategies in Pacific Island States organised by the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 4–5 May 2006.

It was clear from the workshop discussions that some interesting experience had been gained in small island states of the Pacific in sustainable development planning since the UN Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. But it was also clear that the lessons of the past needed to be consolidated and further steps implemented that would bring sustainable development principles and processes into the heart of national and regional development planning.

This report represents the preliminary publication of a wider set of experiences and lessons from small island developing states (SIDS) on integrated and participatory sustainable development planning. They are presented as a means of initiating a debate about what steps can be taken to support a new wave of sustainable development actions that will begin to reverse the continuing global decline in natural resources and the ecosystem.

While a range of different terms are used in describing sustainable development (a number of which are used in this report), the peoples of the Commonwealth face the challenge of pursuing development paths that are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable. In 1987, the seminal *Brundtland Report*¹ defined sustainable development as:

... development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

This broad definition of sustainability raises some interesting questions about how societies can deliver an equal range of development choices for both present and future generations, and what form or direction such development must take if it is to be sustainable.

Sustainable development broadly requires that the welfare of the present generation does not increase at the expense of that of future generations and that society's well-being does not decline over time. The next generation can only enjoy as much well-being as the present one if it has the same 'stock of capital' available to it. Capital stock can be thought of as comprising three kinds of capital: **natural capital** such as forests, air, water, soil and biodiversity (normally referred to as environmental resources);

human capital (human resources, skills, and knowledge);² and **human-made capital** (manufactured capital and goods, machinery, infrastructure and buildings).

Sustainability therefore requires that, at a minimum, a country should maintain a constant stock of aggregate capital over time. Decisions need to be taken about the acceptable limits of substitution between natural, human and human-made capital. The process of negotiation and decision-making, and the risks and uncertainties that it involves, is a political one that requires effective capabilities in governance and in science and technology.

The experiences of sustainable development planning examined in this volume highlight the critical role that effective institutional arrangements and ‘voice’ have in making sustainable development a reality. As Padma Narsey Lal states in Chapter 4:

The time has come to focus on the ‘how’ aspects of operationalising sustainable development.

Fully integrated sustainable development is a particularly important concern for small island developing states, which are among the most vulnerable countries in the world. SIDS have a limited land mass, and this creates sharply competing demands and development pressures on natural ecosystems from economic activities and the need for shelter, water and fuel. It also brings the relationship between different sectors of the economy very close together. Poor farming practices which create soil run-off, or effluent discharge from hotels, can rapidly degrade coastal zones, affecting fisheries and tourism alike. Because of their size, SIDS are unable to capture economies of scale in their domestic markets, and their political, managerial and technical capacities. An integrated approach will help to address the administrative and financing constraints that SIDS face. They are also characterised by open economies in which international trade is more significant than it is in larger states, and they tend to rely on a limited number of external markets and a narrower range of commodities. Remoteness implies higher costs for energy, transportation and communications, while extreme weather events can sometimes eradicate a country’s gross domestic product (GDP) overnight. Ocean and coastal zones form the basis for well-being and development in SIDS, so the health of these environments is critical. Coastal areas tend to be densely populated and may be low-lying, making SIDS especially vulnerable to rising sea levels, climate change and climate variability.

Saki Hirano reviews the steps that SIDS have taken in formulating national sustainable development strategies and shows that some key challenges remain. Among them are practical approaches that enable a wide range of stakeholders to participate in prioritisation and the allocation of resources, and to ensure that effective data are available to support decision-making.

Albert Nita uses a case study of Papua New Guinea’s national sustainable development strategy to examine the important role of consultation and participation, not just by civil society, but by all relevant parts of the government and administration. He concludes that risks in the process are closely associated with institutional factors (includ-

ing inter-agency linkages), approaches to decision-making, monitoring and review, political stability and capacity.

Padma Narsey Lal reviews the significance of ocean and marine resource management to small states in the Pacific Ocean and emphasises the critical need for effective co-ordination among regional organisations and harmonisation of national planning and budgetary and prioritisation processes, including sectoral plans. Based on its past experience, the region has embarked on significant approaches encompassing national sustainable development strategies and ecosystem-based management, which have the potential to overcome past constraints to sustainable development.

David Barrett provides a detailed review of the policy challenges for small states in implementing renewable energy and energy efficiency and conservation (EE&C) technologies as part of their energy security and sustainable development strategy. He examines the requirements for policy support, process champions and appropriate financing mechanisms that will help them to overcome their dependence on conventional energy. He also stresses the need for national policies that will build capacity and communicate objectives in relation to sustainability.

Finally, **Lino Briguglio, Kanayathu Koshy, Leonard Nurse and Poh Poh Wong** provide a review of the programmatic and institutional approaches taken by small states at a regional level to address the threat of climate change. By its very nature, this issue is cross-cutting, integrated and brings together economic, social and environmental aspects of development. While small states face many challenges in mainstreaming climate change into development policies, the authors show that there are opportunities for improved sustainable development outcomes as a result of a focus on these concerns.

With the increasing emphasis on climate change, particularly in SIDS, it is important not to lose sight of the broader drive towards sustainable development, since this will provide a basis for resilience and adaptation. Some of the chapters in this volume show the important interrelationships between different sectors in small states. Societies need to be equipped to make decisions about sustainable development pathways not only within particular sectors such as fisheries or energy, but more generally as well. The report shows the critical importance of institutional and governance factors in underpinning this process, and the distance still to be travelled to synthesise the lessons learned so far. Ultimately, the aim must be to use these lessons to bring about change.

Notes

- 1 *Our Common Future*, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the *Brundtland Report*), Oxford University Press, 1987.
- 2 Increasingly, the concept of social capital, which includes culture, social cohesion and social stability, is also regarded as an important element of sustainable development.