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Risk, Consultation and Participation in the Creation of a National Sustainable Development Strategy in Papua New Guinea

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Introduction

Sustainable development is the concept of the pursuit of long-term economic and social growth without reducing the quality of the environment. It is especially relevant to the survival of small states, although difficult to implement, even where it can be adequately defined for operational purposes. The successful outcome of the pursuit of sustainable development in small states requires an analysis of the capacities for action, the constraints and the inherent risks. One approach to achieving sustainable development takes place within government systems, where planning agencies are able to enhance their overall planning, implementation and monitoring roles by creating and implementing an NSDS through consultation and participation. This article examines the consultation and participation experience of Papua New Guinea and analyses the constraints, risks and lessons learned.

Consultation and participation in the creation of a national sustainable development strategy

Discerning the theoretical underpinnings of consultation and participation in the sustainable development discourse is imperative for the creation of a national strategy (Brodhag and Taliere, 2005; Melnick *et al.*, 2005; United Nations, 2002). The focus on facilitating consultation and participation amongst the 'voiceless' has now shifted to include decision-makers and implementers themselves. Consultation means that decision-makers inform stakeholders, while participation is the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making. Consultation and participation should be a two-way interactive system of communication in which all stakeholders, including decision-makers, frequently interact, resulting in capacity building and empowerment, with a corresponding decline in vulnerability and risks (Cornwall, 2003; Harding, 1998; Morrissey, 1995).

The benefits of consultation and participation have been widely discussed and accepted. The tenth principle of the 1992 *Rio Declaration* calls unambiguously for public consultation in the sustainable development process. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development called for partnerships and participation of all stakeholders (UN, 2002). The Mauritius Strategy (2005) and the Pacific Plan (2006) both value the underlying importance of consultation and participation of stakeholders in small states.

Furthermore, consultation and participation is critical to the achievement of the three principal multilateral environment agreements (MEAs) – the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Convention on Combating Desertification.

Despite prioritising consultation as an important input for sustainable development, the notion that institutional decision-makers are often regarded as the 'brains' behind sustainable development has received limited coverage in the literature. In the case of Papua New Guinea, policy-makers at the Department of National Planning and Monitoring operate with limited consultation with other key stakeholders.

In Papua New Guinea, sustainable development has been constrained by the lack of integration of policy priorities and budgetary allocations. The need for planners to understand the importance, strategic requirements and methodologies for integrating sustainability into national priorities cannot be overestimated.

A sustainable development framework, followed by programme implementation involving public consultation and participation, reflects 'development from within'. In the sustainability debate the contention that 'If you sew wings on caterpillars, you have not developed a butterfly' (Schoell, 1995) is convincing. If cash handouts or answers and solutions are given to people who have not developed the capacity to generate and sustain wealth and build their own solutions, this does not bring about the achievement of sustainable economic development. Instead, the seeds are sown of a dependent relationship.

For centuries, the people of Papua New Guinea have been industrious, innovative, productive and self-reliant. Their ability to adapt and make use of resources from their home environments reflects this capacity for sustainability and bears out the contention that 'true development grows out of people's own input – thinking, struggles, experiences and hard work'. In Papua New Guinea, public consultation is a decision-making tool to facilitate, educate, nurture, encourage and create a framework for sustainable development. Through participation, stakeholders are more likely to plant the seeds for sustainable development because 'true development is something that grows from within' (Schoell, 1995). Complementary to public consultation is the assessment of capacity and vulnerability of the country. These tools are essential to improving internal capacity and risk minimisation in developing and implementing sustainable development programmes. In the long term, both seek to enhance the overall sustainable development process in small developing states.

Experiences of public consultation and participation in Papua New Guinea

The period 1992–94 witnessed a high level of participation by stakeholders in support of the government's formulation of a framework for sustainable development. The University of Papua New Guinea played an active part in facilitating public participation in the discussion of sustainable development as a potential development strategy. In 1993 it hosted the 20th Waigani seminar, 'From Rio to Rai', which focused on development

and the environment in Papua New Guinea.¹ The formal discussions covered seven main themes:

- Revitalising growth with sustainability
- Sustainable living and health
- Human settlements
- Efficient resource use
- Managing chemicals and waste
- Popular participation and responsibility
- Essential means.

All the participants had something to say at this forum which made their participation meaningful.

However, the level of participation represented only an isolated case, where public involvement was relatively high. The experience has since been repeated in a limited way regarding strategy formulation on national issues. There are relatively few legal and institutional arrangements in Papua New Guinea for multi-stakeholder group consultation. Public participation is largely discretionary. Multinational corporations and the government (as a shareholder) facilitate, fund and sponsor public consultation in natural resource projects. It is difficult for this form of 'sponsored' participation to yield lasting solutions. Further, under the Mining Act 1992, public consultation is mandatory only during the negotiation stages of mining projects, after which landowners sign away their resource rights and remain passive observers for the rest of the project's life.

Similarly, the Environment Act 2000 provides for public hearings on all issues surrounding resource projects prior to the signing of agreements and issuing of licences. In both cases, there is low level consultation and participation. This type of participation serves as a rubber stamp for project approval, unlike in Western democracies where public consultation is a powerful tool for community advocacy. Consultation of landowners in project development is an isolated and one-off activity. Developers often use Acts of Parliament designed to facilitate project development to thwart landowners' demands for more consultation on the project's environmental and socio-economic impact and the distribution of benefits. The multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional nature of sustainable development inevitably requires multi-stakeholder group consultation and participation. This has been problematic in Papua New Guinea.

Towards the creation of an NSDS

The 20th Waigani seminar followed the Rio Earth Summit, held in 1992. The seminar led to:

- Recommendations for a national sustainable development strategy;

- Drafting of Papua New Guinea's NSDS in 1994;
- Endorsement of the NSDS;
- Creation of the National Task Force on Sustainable Development; and
- The establishment of the National Commission for Sustainable Development.

The seminar fulfilled one of the core principles of sustainable development in providing stakeholder consultation and participation. All sectors of society were invited to participate, including representatives of districts, provinces, the private sector, NGOs, churches and industry, and academics, policy-makers and politicians. This provided a strong sense of ownership, and a platform from which to convince the government to redefine development in a sustainable format was established. In 1994, the National Task Force on Sustainable Development and the Commission for Sustainable Development were created and housed within the Prime Minister's Department.

However, the institutional capacity to advise government, another key principle of sustainable development, has been relatively limited since the endorsement of the NSDS in 1994. Between 1995 and 2002 constant changes to the political and institutional leadership impacted upon the government's capacity to operationalise the NSDS. There were three different governments in this period and the country witnessed many institutional changes as the respective governments sought to place their own men in key positions.

Despite these constraints, the government of the day adapted the first medium-term development strategy (MTDS) 1997–2002, describing it as the 'bridge into the 21st century'. The MTDS reflected key elements of previous plans, including infrastructure development, particularly transport infrastructure, as a precondition for the acceleration of economic growth.

The MTDS recognised economic growth led by the private sector as the engine for broad-based social and economic development. Although environmental sustainability and sustainable development featured in a limited way in the MTDS, no programme was designed to promote sustainable development apart from the stalled NSDS of 1994. Despite these shortcomings, there have been some isolated but positive developments that have favoured sustainable development, including the MTDS 1997–2002, the Papua New Guinea *Human Development Report 1999* and the 2001 Poverty Reduction Strategy.

In 2002 the incoming government announced the Programme for Recovery and Development (PRD). The government wanted to maintain continuity with previous programmes such as those initiated under the MTDS 1997–2002 and some of its policies were reflected in the PRD, including export-driven economic growth, rural intervention, poverty reduction and good governance. However, by 2002 there had been no concrete attempt by the government to revitalise the NSDS process despite the UN Millennium Declaration of 2000 and the resultant Millennium Development Goals.

The current MTDS 2005–2010 was adopted by the government in November 2004.

It reflects elements of the previous MTDS and also repeats notable contradictions. It seeks private sector development to support export-driven economic growth, and green revolution objectives targeting agricultural produce, rehabilitation of transport infrastructure, health care, education and poverty reduction.

The MTDS 2005–2010 was formulated despite limited consultation between its advocates in the Department of National Planning and Monitoring and the 19 provinces which are home to 80 per cent of the population. The four regional workshops held prior to the drafting of the current MTDS involved province-based public servants. There was only limited grassroots consultation, which significantly reduced avenues for meaningful participation of people at the grassroots and prevented them from taking part in the design and implementation process.

This limited consultation impinges upon the capacity to form effective partnerships between key architects of the MTDS and the intended beneficiaries. The scenario applies equally to an NSDS. The Central Agencies Coordination Committee (CACC)² oversaw the drafting and implementation of the current MTDS, but there was no recognition that the advice given to the CACC by the Department of National Planning and Monitoring ran counter to the facilitation of partnerships among stakeholders.

In addition, ‘environmental sustainability’, which is a major component of sustainable development, did not feature in the MTDS 2005–2010 at all. By early 2007 the MTDS was already facing implementation problems despite the allocation of 650 million kina under the second supplementary budget handed down in August 2006. The third supplementary budget, passed in March 2007, allocated K600 million to the Prime Minister’s home province, with only K50 million going to the remaining 18 provinces. This exemplifies the inherent risks in government priorities and underlies the capacity constraints discussed in linking development with expenditure priorities.

Creating a national sustainable development strategy

The spirit of sustainability is acknowledged in Papua New Guinea’s Constitution through the five national goals and in particular the fourth goal. This states:

We declare our Fourth Goal to be for Papua New Guinea’s natural resources and environment to be conserved and used for the collective benefit of us all and replenished for the benefit of future generations.

Enshrined in the definition of the fourth goal is the vision of sustainability. The rest of the five goals are reflected in *Agenda 21*, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Mauritius Strategy and the Pacific Plan. Indeed, through the fourth goal, sustainable development was declared as a national objective under the Papua New Guinea Constitution 12 years before the publication of the *Brundtland Report* in 1987, which defined sustainable development for the global audience. So sustainable development in Papua New Guinea is not an entirely new concept. What is perhaps new is the language in which sustainable development is being communicated to the people and the way in

which the government is seeking to redefine development in sustainability terms.

While the 20th Waigani Seminar set the pace for introducing and drafting the Papua New Guinea NSDS in 1994, the NSDS lacked the political and institutional support necessary to drive it ahead. The experience of Papua New Guinea shows that the operational aspect of any national sustainable development framework requires political will and institutional capacity. Most importantly, the presence of a core group of like-minded personnel is required in key planning agencies such as the Department of National Planning and Monitoring. A similar group of like-minded politicians in government is needed to champion the NSDS cause. Further, the absence of a sustainable development branch in the Department of National Planning makes the NSDS agenda 'homeless'. Unless these gaps in the institutional system are filled, Papua New Guinea's attempts to create and implement an NSDS will continue to be problematic.

Although the MTDS 2005–2010 attempts to incorporate the five goals into its operational strategy, one of the significant differences between it and the five national goals, *Agenda 21*, the JPoI, the Mauritius Strategy and the Pacific Plan is the failure of the Papua New Guinea government (through its Department of National Planning and Monitoring) to consider 'environmental sustainability' as one of the pillars of sustainable development. Adapting the sustainable development framework will add value to the efforts of the national government to promote the MTDS or an equivalent strategy. It is therefore imperative for the government to either review the current MTDS in an effort to strengthen its capacity for promoting sustainable development or to undertake a comprehensive exercise to develop a national framework for sustainable development.

Constraints and risks in creating and implementing an NSDS

In small developing states, the outcome of an NSDS depends upon the social, political, economic and cultural environment in which it is created and implemented. Several critical issues in Papua New Guinea continue to make this process vulnerable to internal bureaucratic wrangling and political influence. There are five major constraints and risks that impede Papua New Guinea's efforts to create and implement a successful NSDS or its equivalent.

The first lies in Papua New Guinea's 'strategic planning' process and lack of conviction about the notion of sustainability and strategy development. Despite the decentralised nature of the planning process, strategic planning is dominated by the Department of National Planning and Monitoring. The Department has incorporated the principles of sustainability in a limited way, with the concept itself featuring relatively less prominently among its strategic planners. This is clearly demonstrated by the content of the MTDS 2005–2010, in which 'environmental sustainability' does not feature as a core strategic objective of the MTDS. Consequently, Papua New Guinea has witnessed limited success in achieving both domestic and internationally agreed objectives pertaining to *Agenda 21*, the MDGs and the JPoI.

Governance is the second critical challenge in creating and implementing an NSDS.

Transparency in decision-making, accountability in financial management, professionalism in the workplace, taking responsibility for decisions, respect for the rule of law and respect for professional positions are key elements of good governance. However, fulfilling these requirements in Papua New Guinea remains a major issue despite the widespread coverage given to the issue of good governance (Nita, 2006; Piest and Velasquez, 2003). The creation of an NSDS and its successful implementation will continue to face difficulties if governance issues are not first addressed.

Political stability remains an important precondition for creating, implementing and monitoring sustainable development initiatives. This is the third major risk Papua New Guinea faces. Stability in government is necessary to achieve medium- and long-term sustainable development goals, but constant cabinet reshuffles have introduced new ministers with new priorities; for example, the Department of National Planning and Monitoring has had seven different ministers since 2002.

Linked to all the major constraints and risks experienced in Papua New Guinea is the lack of capacity of national institutions in creating, implementing, monitoring and reporting sustainable development initiatives. The capacity limitations within line agencies (horizontal) and sub-national governments (vertical) are obvious. Effective inter-agency linkages remain central to capacity building, but the lack of inter-agency linkages to co-ordinate policy development and implementation is an example of the country's overall institutional weakness.

The Government has taken various initiatives to eradicate corruption – by strengthening the role of the Ombudsman Commission, the Auditor General's Office and the Public Accounts Committee. These are testimony to its resolve to improve the country's capacity to deal effectively with corruption.

An enabling environment

A sound political and institutional decision-making environment is imperative to enhance the capacity to create and implement sustainable development policies in Papua New Guinea. Parliament, and hence the National Executive Council (NEC), remains the highest decision-making body in the country. The Department of National Planning and Monitoring is the nerve centre for government planning and budgetary processes, but it has internal capacity constraints. All sectoral and provincial plans enter the national planning, monitoring and selection process at the Department. Furthermore, all foreign aid (both grants and loans) enters the country through the Department and aid is disbursed either through the annual budgetary process, the public investment programme cycle or directly into prioritised recurrent costs. However, the Department relies on sister agencies to input sectoral plans and budgets into the decision-making process. The information provided by sectoral agencies is invaluable in devising strategies to address sustainable development goals, including an NSDS.

The MTDS 2005–2010 reflects this process. The Department of National Planning drafted the MTDS for the medium term in consultation with key government agencies,

as well as with the wider community and donor partners. However, most government agencies were not exposed to arguments explaining the significance of incorporating sustainable development principles into their sectoral priorities. Consequently, the state agencies and provincial governments have been unable to effectively drive the sustainable development message within state agencies and at sub-national and local level.

In most cases, the working relationship between the Department of National Planning and Monitoring and the provincial governments is not conducive to the creation and implementation of an NSDS. Despite the passage of the Organic Law on Provincial and Local-level Government in 1995 to facilitate 'bottom-up' planning, in practice it is difficult to implement projects at provincial level.

The MTDS (and NSDS) have obviously suffered, given the existing tensions between the Department of National Planning and Monitoring and the provinces. It is imperative to consult and educate both leaders and policy-makers at the provincial and national levels about their roles and responsibilities in relation to the creation and implementation of an NSDS. Successful creation and implementation requires integration, co-operation and co-ordination among key line agencies (horizontally) and different levels of government (vertically). It may imply delegating some key functions to other agencies, including the universities, co-ordinated by the Department in order to monitor and evaluate progress on implementation.

Furthermore, the capacity for an efficient working relationship between the key agencies has not always been sound. The NEC and the Department of National Planning and Monitoring have established ad hoc structures for co-ordinating national strategy processes. The CACC lacks understanding of the reality of sustainable developmental needs at provincial and local level. The roles and responsibilities of the CACC, the Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council (CIMC) or their equivalents need to be properly defined.

There is also often a conflict of interest between line agencies. Their roles and responsibilities are compartmentalised so that their ability to complement and support the MTDS and/or NSDS between and within sectors is constrained. The MTDS and NSDS deal with many cross-cutting priority issues which often require inter-agency commitment. This has been problematic. For example, the Department of Environment and Conservation is responsible for the environmental impact monitoring of resource projects, which requires co-ordination and collaboration between the Department and agencies implementing resource development projects, for example mining. The Department of Mining views its role as a developer and that of the Department of Environment and Conservation as an environmental manager. The perceived, yet contrasting, views of these key agencies make inter-agency linkages difficult.

Inter-agency linkages

The JPoI recognises the significance of promoting better integration of cross-cutting issues within a sustainable development framework. This is another crucial principle of

sustainable development. Cross-cutting issues that need sustainable solutions in Papua New Guinea include poverty, gender equality, environment protection, HIV-AIDS and health, unemployment and education. The need to establish linkages among key government agencies is paramount. It helps to understand the interrelatedness of key issues that require an integrated approach in reducing the risks pertaining to these issues.

Both a synergistic and co-ordinated approach is essential to facilitate inter-agency co-operation for a more cost-effective, negotiated decision-making, planning and implementation of policies. The MTDS 2005–2010 recognises the importance of developing better co-ordination between the three tiers of government, but it is limited in its practical application. The MTDS fails to prescribe specific mechanisms to effectively integrate policies and co-ordinate the country's institutional mechanisms, including legislation, work, culture, civil society and NGOs, in implementing sustainable development initiatives. Improved co-ordination of sustainable development activities at these levels and among line agencies minimises inadvertent conflicts between policies and strategies under different regimes.

In this context, in Papua New Guinea the CACC and the CICC have a fundamental role in co-ordinating and integrating cross-cutting policies both at the level of central government agencies, and between these agencies and provincial governments. Their functions are complementary: both tend to focus on the capital city, Port Moresby, rather than the provinces. Consequently, there is a weak legislative framework defining their roles and responsibilities, and this means that they are ad hoc agencies tasked only with overseeing the implementation of the MTDS or its equivalents in the medium term. Their role needs to be redefined and strengthened to achieve inter-agency co-ordination which will enable the creation and successful implementation of sustainable development strategies. Effective co-ordination and linkages will reduce emergent risks and vulnerabilities in public agencies.

Outcomes and means of implementation

Positive outcomes of sustainable development interventions result from effective implementation. Implementation, in turn, depends on institutional, financial and human resource capacities.

Sustainable development indicators provide useful tools to measure, evaluate and report on the implementation of key sectoral programmes. However, the MTDS 2002–2010 does not have its own set of indicators reflecting Papua New Guinea's social, economic, environmental and cultural landscape. Country-specific indicators, together with the MDG indicators, would include institutional and subsistence indicators reflecting Papua New Guinea's 80 per cent rural population. The underdeveloped nature of the country-specific indicators meant that the MTDS 2005–2010 adapted the MDG indicators without modification. Furthermore, there is relatively little monitoring by the Department of National Planning and Monitoring using indicators on a cross-sectoral basis and involving provincial governments. The indicators contained in the MTDS

need to be expanded to help define economic, social, institutional, cultural, political and environmental issues. This will assist decision-makers in Waigani and elsewhere to decide on the next level of sustainable development intervention.

It is not unfair to argue that the government's system of monitoring and evaluating performance indicators is underdeveloped. In addition, the reporting mechanisms of the CACC, CIMC and Department of National Planning and Monitoring, which provide information to decision-makers on emerging trends, need to be significantly improved. Both these weaknesses are significant impediments and highlight capacity constraints in supporting decision-making for sustainable development.

Lessons from the Papua New Guinea experience

Four important lessons emerge from this discussion of Papua New Guinea's capacity for creating and implementing a national sustainable development strategy. The first is the Government's limited capacity for achieving sustainable development through the MTDS. The Government's commitment to sustainable development has been made obvious by its international obligations and national priorities such as the MTDS. However, the capacity constraints inherent in Papua New Guinea's polity and institutions restrict the effective integration of sustainable development into policy priorities.

Second, there is a need to strengthen the current MTDS through a rigorous review process. This process should involve a consultation process targeting all stakeholders, especially peripheral government agencies and rural communities. It should establish a long-term framework for allowing local input into the planning process. The review process should highlight planning deficiencies at all levels, including the Department of National Planning and Monitoring, and capacity constraints in various agencies, and it should recommend appropriate capacity-building initiatives. The integration of 'environmental sustainability' into the list of government priorities is not an open option: it is absolutely necessary for economic growth, social progress and environmental protection.

Third, there is no section within the Department of National Planning and Monitoring which covers sustainable development issues and the NSDS. The Department would be the natural home of the NSDS, but its homelessness is a major constraint to creating a viable strategy and ensuring its effective co-ordination and implementation.

Fourth, there is no alternative option to creating an NSDS for Papua New Guinea. The process that began in earnest and tragically ended in 1994 needs to be revitalised. The establishment of a long-term sustainable development framework involves revitalising the NSDS with a series of medium-term plans to drive the strategy. Mid-term review processes are necessary to identify capacity constraints and minimise identified risks which may affect the effective co-ordination and implementation of an NSDS. Policy-makers at the Department of National Planning should take responsibility for sustainable development; institutionalising sustainable development will only accelerate the pace for creating, implementing and co-ordinating an NSDS.

Finally, a comprehensive methodology for assessing strategic planning in the govern-

ment system is highly desirable to drive the review process forward. A review methodology is required to analyse the planning personnel and process within the Department of National Planning, sectoral agencies and provincial governments. An appropriate methodology, specifically designed to appraise the strategic planning process at the Department and elsewhere, should enhance the planning capacity at all levels. This may, in the long term, reduce political and bureaucratic risks.

Conclusion

Creating a sustainable development strategy for Papua New Guinea remains a 'no regrets option' for the long term and is a must. The creation of an NSDS does not prevent the government from reviewing and implementing the MTDS. Officials at the Department of National Planning should understand the complementary roles that the NSDS and the MTDS can play in promoting sustainable development. The MTDS remain the appropriate driver of an NSDS, but the latter has yet to be revitalised and implemented.

This discussion has revealed serious capacity constraints within Papua New Guinea's institutional and governance systems. The inherent capacity issues give rise to risks in creating, co-ordinating and implementing sustainable development programmes. An NSDS will experience similar risks to those currently faced by the MTDS if these issues are ignored. It is the task of the Government to enhance capacity within its planning, monitoring and implementation system as a precondition of the creation and implementation of a national framework for sustainable development.

Notes

- 1 The Waigani Seminar is a biannual seminar series held at the University of Papua New Guinea and sponsored by government, development partners, including donors, the private sector and NGOs. The title referred to Rio in Brazil and Rai, a village on the Rai Coast in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea.
- 2 The CACC is made up of all departmental heads, with the Chief Secretary as its head.

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