

South Pacific Regional Environment Programme

Training Unit A1

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

(for trainees)

USE OF THIS UNIT

This unit is to explain to trainees or potential trainees what the training programme is about, and to motivate them to want to go through the programme. Whoever is organizing or recruiting for the training programme should read the text over, and then develop his or her own way of explaining the programme to those who are interested, perhaps using the outline provided. Local examples could be added to make the presentation more interesting. The approach can also be adapted to particular local needs or audiences.

Recruitment can often be more effective by using some of the materials in the sensitization units, especially the film "Story of an island: managing your island environment" or one of the other audio-visual programmes accompanying those units.

When this unit is used to start a training activity, the introductory talk could be followed by a discussion with the participants on the programme and their reasons for taking part in it. A list of questions is provided to help start a discussion of the training programme. For the questions marked with an asterix (\*), each person in turn should give their own personal response. The other questions can be put to the whole group for any who would like to volunteer an answer, until the question is answered to the leader's satisfaction.

(Unit written by A. L. Dahl)  
[Revision 11/5/84]

TEXT

## INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

This training programme is perhaps different from most of those that you may be familiar with. It is not intended to get you a good job, or to help you to move to the city. Its goal is to help you to ensure your future and that of your children and their children on your land. While it is scientific in its approach, it will not teach you something new so much as to restore your confidence in something your ancestors have done for generations. While some of your teachers may be European experts, and they will have useful things to share with you, you ultimately should become your own best expert on your land and sea and other resources. After all, you live there, and the outside expert does not.

This programme is concerned with the environment. The environment is everything around you, the land where you live and farm, the sea where you fish, the air you breathe, the plants and animals, and the invisible germs that make you sick. The science of ecology is the study of the relationship between you (or any other living thing) and your environment. It sees you as part of that environment in much the same way that many island peoples did not see themselves as separate individuals cut off from the world around them. This programme will therefore teach you a way of looking at the world around you, of understanding it with its possibilities and limitations. Above all, it will help you to learn from your environment, so that you can use it and improve it for your benefit and for those around you.

You might ask why you need to study the environment. Everyone, unless they are very young, realizes that their environment is changing. The forest may be disappearing, or it may be harder to grow good crops or to catch fish than it used to be. There may be more people now, or fewer if they have gone somewhere else. There are new kinds of knowledge, new technologies and new chemicals with benefits and dangers. Development has brought new kinds of changes that local people cannot understand or manage from their previous experience. The result is that important resources may be damaged or destroyed.

Studies by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme which sponsored the development of this training programme have shown that the Pacific Islands environment has many problems which are getting worse with each passing year, but sometimes so slowly that people do not always realize it, just as you cannot see the hour hand on a clock move. These problems affect the water we drink, and the food we eat, and sometimes even the air we breathe. These problems of the environment can make us poorer, and keep us from developing, and if they get too bad, even make it impossible to live on our islands.

It would take many years to find enough scientists and experts to solve these problems (even if they could do it, which they cannot always). You cannot always count on governments; their resources are limited and they are not very good at looking at the long term. The only real solution lies with you, the people who own the land, and farm and fish and use things from the forest. You are the ones who, by your actions every day, can make your local

environment better, or worse. But you are also in the best position to control your actions for your own good. You do not always need to depend on outside help. That help can be useful, but how much better to do things for yourselves.

In the past, when there was no help from outside, every culture and every village had local experts, often old men or women who knew every plant in the forest, and every fish on the reef, and when and where to plant and harvest. Sometimes such a person was the master of the land, or the master fisherman; or he might have been the village sorcerer, magician or priest. Often every family had their own special knowledge, handed down from generation to generation. In traditional cultures, knowledge of the environment was closely related to religion and magic, but it was discovered in much the same way that a scientist works today, and it was passed on just as the scientist learns the discoveries and theories of the past as the basis of his science.

The knowledge of the environment accumulated in traditional cultures allowed most societies to live in harmony with their island resources. Where a resource was limited, they learned to control their use or do without it; if they did neither, they perished or emigrated. It is useful to remember that only traditional island societies have demonstrated their ability to survive on the islands for hundreds of years. There is no certainty that western patterns of development can do much better in the long term, and considerable evidence that they may be much worse for the environment. Sustainable development for the future may have to depend much more on the knowledge and proven management practices developed and used by traditional experts in the past.

Today, unfortunately, few such traditional experts remain. The impact of more than a hundred years of missionaries, colonial administrators, school teachers and others who did not understand the value of this knowledge has destroyed much of this heritage. One aim of this training programme is to help you to salvage and to appreciate what remains of this heritage, and to select from it what may be of use today in solving environmental problems. Ultimately, if you devote your life to it, you might again become the local expert able to help all your family and the village to live the best possible life with the resources at their disposal. This is why it is important that the chiefs and the council of elders, and in fact the whole village, support your training and the role it can prepare you for in village life.

Motivation is an essential prerequisite for success in this training programme. You must want to learn everything possible about your environment. This will require patience and many hours of hard work and careful observation. It means never being satisfied with what you already know, and always being ready to admit that you are wrong, or that you do not know enough. If you do not have a real desire to understand your environment, there is no point in completing the training programme.

You do not have to be highly educated. A natural intelligence and good powers of observation are much more important than years of schooling. Most local languages have names for the things in the environment, so western scientific terms are not so important unless you want to talk outside your local language group. If you can learn scientific words, so much the better,

but that is not the essential thing. Understanding your environment and helping others to understand it is much more important. Many an illiterate fisherman or farmer has much to teach a distinguished scientist about his local area.

The only truly successful development is that which reflects the needs and goals of the people themselves, and that involves them in their own development. This training programme will not by itself make development happen, but once you are trained by the programme, you should be able to help make development more successful and sustainable by careful attention to the possibilities and limits of environmental resources.

OUTLINE

Introduction to the training programme

1. Goal of the training programme
2. What is the environment?
3. Why study the environment?
4. What are environmental problems?  
(cite local or regional examples)
5. Importance of doing things for yourselves
6. Traditional knowledge and village experts  
(people have always done things for themselves)
7. Why is traditional knowledge being lost?
8. The need for new local experts on the environment
9. Importance of motivation - a desire to understand the environment
10. Environmental knowledge helps good development

QUESTIONS

\*Why are you here in this training programme?

What is the environment?

Why should people know about the environment?

What do you think are the most important environmental problems?

Can you do anything about environmental problems?

\*Does your family have special environmental knowledge or responsibilities in your village?

\*What do you want to get out of this training programme?

\*What do you hope to do after the end of the training programme?

South Pacific Regional Environment Programme

Training Unit A2

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAINING PROGRAMME  
(for village leaders)

USE OF THIS UNIT

This version of the introductory unit can be used to explain the training programme to village leaders and others who need to be consulted on the selection of participants or whose support is necessary for the success of the programme. It is best if the person presenting the training programme reads over the text for the ideas in it, and then gives the explanation in his own words, using local examples where possible.

The SPC film "Story of an Island: Managing Your Island Environment" or one of the audio-visual programmes in the sensitization section can be used to make the idea of the environment clearer and to show the need for the training programme.

After the presentation, there can be a general discussion of environmental problems if time permits, and the leaders can then be asked to consult and recommend candidates for the training programme, or to provide whatever support is being requested.

The text can also be given to village leaders or other interested in the programme for them to read and discuss later.

Details on the specifics of the training programme, such as the dates, duration and location, can be added if necessary.

(Unit written by A. L. Dahl)  
[Revised 11/6/84]

## TEXT

## TRAINING PROGRAMME ON RURAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

There will be a training programme for rural environmental management whose goal is to help achieve better development and resource use in areas like yours. This training programme is perhaps different from most of those that you may be familiar with. It is not intended to get trainees a good job, or to help them to move to the city. Its aim is to help you to ensure your future and that of your children and their children on your land. While it is scientific in its approach, it will not teach something new so much as to restore confidence in something your ancestors have done for generations. While some of the teachers may be European experts who will have useful things to share, it is the participants, and ultimately through them the people who live here, who ultimately should become your own best experts on your land and sea and other resources. After all, you live there, and the outside expert does not.

This programme is concerned with the environment. The environment is everything around you, the land where you live and farm, the sea where you fish, the air you breathe, the plants and animals, and the invisible germs that make you sick. The science of ecology is the study of the relationship between you (or any other living thing) and your environment. It sees you as part of that environment in much the same way that many island peoples did not see themselves as separate individuals cut off from the world around them. The training programme will therefore teach a way of looking at the world around you, of understanding it with its possibilities and limitations. Above all, it will help the trainees to learn from the environment, so that you all can use it and improve it for your benefit and for those who depend on you.

You might ask why people need to study the environment. Everyone, unless they are very young, realizes that their environment is changing. The forest may be disappearing, or it may be harder to grow good crops or to catch fish than it used to be. There may be more people now, or fewer if they have gone somewhere else. There are new kinds of knowledge, new technologies and new chemicals with benefits and dangers. Development has brought new kinds of changes that local people cannot understand or manage from their previous experience. The result is that important resources may be damaged or destroyed.

Studies by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, which sponsored the development of this training programme, have shown that the Pacific Islands environment has many problems which are getting worse with each passing year, but sometimes so slowly that people do not always realize it, just as you cannot see the hour hand on a clock move. These problems affect the water we drink, and the food we eat, and sometimes even the air we breathe. These problems of the environment can make us poorer, and keep us from developing, and if they get too bad, even make it impossible to live on our islands.

It would take many years to find enough scientists and experts to solve these problems (even if they could do it, which they cannot always). You



cannot always count on governments; their resources are limited and they are not very good at looking at the long term. The only real solution lies with you, the people who own the land, and farm and fish and use things from the forest. You are the ones who, by your actions every day, can make your local environment better, or worse. But you are also in the best position to control your actions for your own good. You do not always need to depend on outside help. That help can be useful, but how much better to do things for yourselves.

In the past, when there was no help from outside, every culture and every village had local experts, often old men or women who knew every plant in the forest, and every fish on the reef, and when and where to plant and harvest. Sometimes such a person was the master of the land, or the master fisherman; or he might have been the village sorcerer, magician or priest. Often every family had their own special knowledge, handed down from generation to generation. In traditional cultures, knowledge of the environment was closely related to religion and magic, but it was discovered in much the same way that a scientist works today, and it was passed on just as the scientist learns the discoveries and theories of the past as the basis of his science.

The knowledge of the environment accumulated in traditional cultures allowed most societies to live in harmony with their island resources. Where a resource was limited, they learned to control their use or do without it; if they did neither, they perished or emigrated. It is useful to remember that only traditional island societies have demonstrated their ability to survive on the islands for hundreds of years. There is no certainty that western patterns of development can do much better in the long term, and considerable evidence that they may be much worse for the environment. Sustainable development for the future may have to depend much more on the knowledge and proven management practices developed and used by traditional experts in the past.

Today, unfortunately, few such traditional experts remain. The impact of more than a hundred years of missionaries, colonial administrators, school teachers and others who did not understand the value of this knowledge has destroyed much of this heritage. One aim of this training programme is to help the trainees to salvage and to appreciate what remains of this heritage, and to select from it what may be of use today in solving environmental problems. Ultimately, if the trainees have your support and devote their life to it, they might again become the local experts able to help the village or area to live the best possible life with the resources at its disposal. This is why it is important that you (the chiefs and the council of elders) and in fact the whole village, support this training programme and the role it can prepare the trainees for in village life.

Motivation is an essential prerequisite for success in any training programme. The people selected for training must want to learn everything possible about the environment. This will require patience and many hours of hard work and careful observation. If they do not have a real desire to understand the environment, there is no point in their participating in the training programme.

The people selected do not have to be highly educated. A natural intelligence and good powers of observation are much more important than years of schooling. Most local languages have names for the things in the environment, so western scientific terms are not so important unless they want to talk outside your local language group. If they can learn scientific words, so much the better, but that is not the essential thing. Understanding the local environment and helping others to understand it is much more important. Many an illiterate fisherman or farmer has much to teach a distinguished scientist about his local area.

The only truly successful development is that which reflects the needs and goals of the people themselves, and that involves them in their own development. This training programme will not by itself make development happen, but those trained by the programme should be able to help make development more successful and sustainable by careful attention to the potentials and limits of environmental resources.