



Mangrove in Fiji making way for industrial and urban development. © Jerker Tamelander/UNEP

SPREP: Primed for action

Arthur Dahl

The Pacific region was already primed for regional action through SFC (founded 1947) and the SFC/IUCN Regional Symposium on Conservation of Nature – Reefs and Lagoons (1969) which led to recruitment of a Regional Ecological Adviser in 1974, the same time that Stjepan Keckes was beginning in the Mediterranean. SPREP has always been more than a Regional Seas Programme, since it includes the whole island environment, terrestrial and marine, which makes sense for coastal environmental management.

The particular challenges faced included rivalry between UN agencies, weak implementation capacity in many countries, frequent turnover of country staff trained by the programme, and lack of local infrastructure to maintain sophisticated laboratories for pollution monitoring.

Nature conservation was the first priority in the region at the time, and SPREP built a solid scientific basis to understand the region's ecosystems, biodiversity and conservation requirements, and made it accessible to governments. One other contributor to success was respect for and incorporation of traditional knowledge of the environment, and a focus on local community responsibility and empowerment. SPREP was the region's own organization, there to serve the region, and had the trust and confidence of

The aim of CPPS is to strengthen our work on behalf of marine biodiversity and ecosystem sustainability by means of consensus and joint effort. I am encouraged by the new global effort launched by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to save oceans from multiple threats. We share the same Regional Seas

the region's leaders. SPREP therefore became an interface between the Region and UN.

SPREP began the process of island collaboration on global issues that led to AOSIS, the islands section of Agenda 21, and the Barbados, Mauritius and Samoa UN conferences on SIDS.

For the future, given the complexity of climate change and the necessary transition to global sustainability, small island developing states and territories will never have the internal capacity necessary to understand and respond to all the issues, so the regional level of collaboration and support provided by SPREP will continue to be essential. More thought should be given to how SPREP can build a coherent body of human capacity between the national and regional levels, with government staff secondments to SPREP for regional training and experience, staff spending some years in SPREP and then returning to national (or other regional) responsibilities, and SPREP able to draw on national experts for regional assignments while supporting a replacement at home. This would make careers in the region more interesting and reduce the brain drain that affects all island countries.

“As a young professional administrator and marine scientist in the Philippines, tasked with building up a marine science research centre at the University of the Philippines in the 1980s, I found myself involved with the inception of the Regional Seas Programme for Southeast Asia as an implementer of projects and advisor to the government agency charged with the country's participation.

The “East Asian Seas Programme”, as it was called, initially involved only the five original Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Because of its close association with ASEAN, the regional effort followed policies of this association. Our initial concerns with the marine environment focused on pollution and resource degradation, particularly those dependent on coastal ecosystems, notably mangroves and coral reefs. Some concern was mentioned with respect to oil-related issues, including shipping. Because of the small number of countries involved and the very limited contributions to a trust fund, the EAS remained small. As a result of the reluctance of the ASEAN countries to even consider a regional convention on marine environmental protection because of their *modus operandi*, our progress was modest.

– Ed Gomez

“ The regional approach is most appropriate for certain scales of environmental management, and this should be built into post-2015 planning. Regional Seas programmes could be helped to translate the Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators into measures relevant to their own areas and scale of responsibility. Climate change adaptation is another area where Regional Seas structures and mechanisms can play an important role, as in the Pacific. The regional scale may also be an appropriate level to manage the increasing number of people displaced and forced to migrate by sea level rise, for which international legal mechanisms do not presently exist.

- Arthur Dahl

“ Strategic partnerships should include not only fisheries and marine aquaculture industries, but also marine tourism (cruise ships), deep sea mining, nature and biodiversity conservation (WWF, CI, TNC, IFAW, Greenpeace, etc), and SIDS. UNEP could serve as an umbrella interface between the Regional Seas programmes collectively and global initiatives like the World Ocean Council and other global oceans initiatives.

UNEP should also liaise with the Group on Earth Observations, IOC-UNESCO, GOOS, GESAMP and other parts of the global oceans monitoring and assessment system to provide relevant data to the different Regional Seas programmes and to ensure that their data requirements are taken into account.

– Arthur Dahl