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# Creating a national sustainable development strategy in Papua New Guinea

## 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 if 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 is within government systems, where planning agencies are able to enhance their overall planning, implementation and monitoring roles, by creating and implementing a national sustainable development strategy (NSDS) through consultation and participation. This paper examines the consultation and participation experience of Papua New Guinea (PNG) in creating a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), and analyses the constraints, risks and lessons learnt.

## Consultation and participation for creating a NSDS

Discerning the theoretical underpinnings of consultation and participation (CAP) in the sustainable development discourse is imperative for creating a national strategy for sustainable development (Brodhag and Taliere, 2005; Melnick et al., 2005; United Nations, 2002). The focus on facilitating CAP amongst the 'voiceless' has now shifted to include decision-makers and implementers themselves. Consultation applies to decision-makers informing stakeholders while participation is the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making. CAP should be a two-way interactive system of communication where 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 CAP are widely discussed and accepted. Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration unambiguously calls for public CAP in the sustainable development process. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) 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 stakeholder CAP in small states. Further, CAP is essential for achieving the three principal Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEA) – the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Convention on Combating Desertification.

Despite prioritising CAP 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 CAP literature. In the case of PNG, policy-makers at the Department of National Planning and Monitoring (DNPM) operate exclusively with limited consultation with other key stakeholders.

In PNG, sustainable development has been constrained by the lack of integration in policy priorities and budgetary allocations. The need for planners to understand the importance, strategy requirements and methodologies for creating and integrating sustainability into national priorities cannot be underestimated.

A sustainable development framework, followed by programme implementation involving public CAP, reflects 'development from within'. In the sustainability debate, the contention that, 'If you sew wings on caterpillars, you have not developed a butterfly' (Schoell, 1994) is indeed convincing. If you give cash handouts or bring answers and solutions to people who have not developed capacity to generate and sustain wealth and build their own solutions, you will not have sustainable economic development. Instead, you lay the foundations of dependency relationships between small state governments and their citizens.

For centuries, people in PNG have been seen as industrious, innovative, productive and self-reliant. Their ability to observe, adapt and utilise and renew resources from within their home environments reflects sustainability. Indeed, it reflects the contention that 'true development grows out of people's own input – thinking, struggles, experiences, and hard work.' For PNG, public CAP 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, 1994). Complementary to public CAP is the assessment of capacity and vulnerability of the country. These tools are essential to improving internal capacity and risk minimisation for developing and implementing sustainable development programmes. In the long term, both seek to enhance the overall sustainable development process in small developing states.

## CAP experience in PNG

The period 1992–94 witnessed a high level of participation by stakeholders to support the government in formulating a framework for sustainable development. The University of PNG (UPNG), by providing technical expertise and a discussion forum, played an active role in facilitating public CAP to discuss sustainable development as a potential strategy for development in PNG. The formal discussions involving all stakeholders covered seven main themes: (a) revitalising growth with sustainability (b) sustainable living and health (c) human settlements (d) efficient resource use (e) managing chemicals and waste (f) people participation and responsibility, and (g) essential means. All participants had something to discuss at this forum which made their participation meaningful.

However, the level of participation experienced in this process at the the 20th Waigani Seminar represents only an isolated case where public consultation was relatively high. This

experience has since been repeated in a limited way regarding strategy formulation on national issues. In PNG there are few legal and institutional arrangements for multi-stakeholder group CAP. Public CAP is largely discretionary. Multinational corporations and the government (as a shareholder) facilitate, fund and sponsor public CAP 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 and participation is mandatory only during the negotiation stages in mining projects, after which landowners sign away their resource rights and remain passive observers for the rest of the project life.

Similarly, the Environment Act 2000 provides for public hearings on all issues surrounding resource projects prior to signing agreements and issuing licences. In both cases, there is low level consultation and participation. This nature of participation in PNG serves as a rubber stamp for project approval, unlike in Western democracies where public CAP is a powerful tool for community advocacy. CAP 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 landowner demands for more consultation regarding generated environmental and socio-economic impacts and benefit distribution. The multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional nature of sustainable development inevitably requires multi-stakeholder group CAP. This has been problematic in PNG.

### **Towards the creation of a NSDS**

The 20th Waigani Seminar<sup>1</sup> at the UPNG followed the Post Rio Seminar in 1993 titled 'Environment and Development: From Rio to Rai'<sup>2</sup> that led to the:

- Recommendations for a NSDS in 1993;
- Drafting of PNG's NSDS in 1994;
- Endorsement of the NSDS in 1994;
- Creation of the National Task Force on Sustainable Development in 1994; and
- The establishment of a National Commission for Sustainable Development in 1994.

The 20th Waigani Seminar fulfilled one of the core principles of sustainable development in providing stakeholder CAP. All sectors of society were invited to participate in the 20th Waigani Seminar including representatives from districts, provinces, the private sector, non-government organisations (NGOs), churches, industry, academics, policy-makers and politicians. This provided a great sense of ownership and the stage to convince the government to redefine development in a sustainable format. Subsequently, the Commission for Sustainable Development and the National Task Force on Sustainable Development were created and housed within the Prime Minister's Department by 1994.

However, the development of the institutional capacity to advise government, another key principle of sustainable development, was relatively limited after 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 a great deal of institutional change as the respective governments sought to place their own people 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 and, in particular, transport infrastructure as a precondition to accelerate economic growth.

The MTDS recognised private sector-led economic growth 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 were some isolated but positive developments in favour of sustainable development including: the MTDS 1997–2002; the PNG Human Development Report 1999; and the National Poverty Reduction Strategy 2001.

In 2002, the incoming government announced the Programme for Recovery and Development (PRD). The government wanted to maintain continuity from previous programmes such as those initiated under the MTDS 1997–2002 and that were reflected in the PRD including: export-driven economic growth; rural intervention and poverty reduction; and good governance. However, by 2002 there was no specific attempt by the government to revitalise the NSDS process despite the Millennium Declarations and the resultant Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the United Nations in New York two years earlier.

The current MTDS 2005–10 was adopted by the government in November 2004. It reflects elements of the previous MTDS and also repeats notable discrepancies. It seeks economic growth through private sector development to support its export-driven economic growth, and the ‘green revolution’ objective targeting agricultural production, rehabilitation of transport infrastructure, health care, education and poverty reduction.

The MTDS 2005–10 was formulated despite limited consultation between its advocates in the Department of National Planning and Monitoring (DNPM) and the 19 provinces which are home to 80 per cent of the total population. The four regional workshops held prior to drafting the current MTDS involved province-based public servants. This was further hampered by limited grassroots CAP. This significantly reduced any opportunities or avenues for meaningful participation of local people to become part of the design and implementation process.

The limited consultation continuously impinges upon the capacity to form effective partnership between key architects of the MTDS and the intended beneficiaries. This scenario equally applies to an NSDS. The Central Agencies Coordination Committee (CACC)<sup>3</sup> oversaw the drafting and implementation of the current MTDS but without first realising that the advice to the CACC from the DNPM was contrary to facilitating partnerships between all stakeholders.

Further, ‘environmental sustainability’ which is a major component of sustainable development did not feature in the MTDS 2005–10. By early 2007, the MTDS was already facing implementation problems despite the allocation of K650 million under the second Supplementary Budget handed down in August 2006. The Third Supplementary Budget passed in March 2007 allocated K600m to the prime minister’s home province with only K50m going to the remaining 18 provinces. This exemplifies the inherent risks in government pri-

orities 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 PNG's Constitution through the Five National Goals and in particular the Fourth Goal. The Fourth Goal 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 are replenished for the benefit of future generations.'

Enshrined in the definition of the Fourth Goal is the vision of sustainability. The other Five Goals are reflected in Agenda 21, The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), Mauritius Strategy and the Pacific Plan. Indeed, through the Fourth Goal sustainable development was declared as a national objective under the PNG Constitution – 12 years before the publication of the Brundtland Report (1987) which defined sustainable development for the global audience. This implies that sustainable development in PNG is not entirely a new concept. What is perhaps new is the language with which sustainable development is being communicated to the people of PNG and the way in which the government seeks to re-define development in sustainability terms.

While the 20th Waigani Seminar set the pace for introducing and drafting the PNG NSDS in 1994, the NSDS lacked the political and institutional support necessary to drive it. The experience in PNG shows that the operational aspect of any national sustainable development framework requires political will and institutional capacity to implement the NSDS. Foremost, the presence of a core group of committed personnel is required in key planning agencies such as the DNPM. Similarly it is necessary to have a group of politicians in government to champion the cause for an NSDS. Further, the absence of a sustainable development branch in the DNPM makes the NSDS agenda 'homeless'. Unless these gaps in the institutional system are filled, PNG's quest for creating and implementing a NSDS will continue to be problematic.

Although the MTDS 2005–10 attempts to incorporate the Five Goals into its operational strategy, one of the significant differences between the MTDS and the Five National Goals, Agenda 21, JPOI, the Mauritius Strategy, and Pacific Plan 2006 is the failure of the PNG government (through the DNPM) to consider 'environmental sustainability' as one of the pillars of sustainable development. Adopting the sustainable development framework can add value to the efforts of the national government to promote the MTDS or an equivalent. It is therefore imperative for the government either to review the current MTDS in an effort to strengthen its capacity for promoting sustainable development or to develop a national framework for sustainable development.

### Constraints and risks in creating and implementing a NSDS

In small developing states, the outcome of an NSDS is contingent upon the social, political, economic, and cultural environment in which it is created and implemented. Several critical issues in PNG continue to make the planning and implementation process vulner-

able to internal bureaucratic wrangling and political influence. Five major constraints and risks challenging PNG's efforts to create and implement a successful NSDS or its equivalent are briefly described.

The first lies with PNG'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 DNPM. The DNPM has incorporated the principles of sustainability in a limited way with the concept itself featuring relatively less prominently amongst strategic planners at DNPM. This is clearly demonstrated by the content of the MTDS 2005–10 in which 'environmental sustainability' failed to feature as a core strategic objective of the MTDS. Consequently, PNG has witnessed limited success in achieving both domestic and internationally agreed objectives of Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals, and the JPOI.

Good governance is the second critical factor 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 advice are key elements of good governance. However, fulfilling the requirements for good governance in PNG remains a major issue despite the widespread use of the term (Nita, 2006; Piest and Velasquez, 2003). The creation of an NSDS, including its successful implementation, will continue to face difficulties without first addressing the critical governance issue.

Political stability remains an important precondition for creating, implementing and monitoring sustainable development initiatives. This is the third major risk PNG faces. Stability in government is necessary to achieve medium and long-term sustainable development goals but is often upset when frequent cabinet reshuffles introduce new ministers with new priorities. For example, the DNPM has had seven different ministers between 2002 and 2007.

The fourth major constraint or risk experienced in PNG is the lack of capacity of national institutions for creating, implementing, monitoring and reporting sustainable development initiatives. There are limitations in capacity within line agencies (horizontal) and sub-national governments (vertical) to support sustainable development. Effective inter-agency linkages remain central to capacity building but the prevalent lack of inter-agency linkages to co-ordinate policy development and implementation remains a testimony to the overall institutional weakness in PNG.

Corruption is the fifth constraint and risk factor inhibiting progress with sustainable development. To eradicate corruption, there are various initiatives of the government designed to strengthen the role of the Ombudsman Commission, the Auditor General's Office, and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) which indicate the resolve of governments to improve PNG's capacity to effectively deal with corruption.

## **Enabling environment**

A sound political and institutional decision-making environment is imperative to enhance capacity to create and implement sustainable development policies in PNG. Parliament and

hence the National Executive Council (NEC) remain the highest decision-making bodies in the country. The DNPM remains the nerve centre for the government's planning and budgetary processes but not without internal capacity constraints. All sectoral and provincial plans enter the national planning, monitoring and selection process at the DNPM. Furthermore, all foreign aid (both grants and loans) enters the country via the DNPM before being disbursed through the annual budgetary process, the Public Investment Programme (PIP) cycle or directly into prioritised recurrent costs. However, the DNPM relies on other agencies in the bureaucratic system to input sectoral plans and budgets into the decision-making process. The information provided by sectoral agencies is valuable in devising policies to pursue sustainable development goals and to designing an NSDS.

The MTDS 2005–10 was developed through the process described above. The DNPM 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 the significance and value of incorporating the sustainable development principles into their respective sectoral priorities. Consequently, the state agencies and provincial governments have been unable effectively to promote the sustainable development message within state agencies and at sub-national and local levels.

In most cases, the working relationship between the DNPM and the provincial governments is less conducive for creating and implementing an NSDS. Despite the passage of the Organic Law on Provincial and Local-level Government (OLPLLG) in 1995 to facilitate 'bottom-up' planning, it is, in practice, difficult to implement projects at the provincial level.

The MTDS (and NSDS) have obviously suffered given the existing tension between the DNPM and respective provinces. It is important to consult and guide both leaders and policy-makers at the provincial and national levels about their roles and responsibilities in designing and implementing an NSDS. Successful design and implementation requires integration, co-operation and co-ordination between key line agencies (horizontally) and between different levels of government (vertically). It may imply delegating some key functions to other agencies but the co-ordination rests with the DNPM, including universities, to monitor and evaluate the progress of implementation.

Further, the capacity for an efficient working relationship between the key agencies (horizontal) has not always been sound. The NEC and DNPM have established ad hoc structures for co-ordinating national strategy processes. The CACC is remote from the realities of needs for sustainable development at the provincial and local levels. The CACC, Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council (CIMC), or their equivalent, should be properly defined in terms of its role and responsibilities for sustainable development.

In addition, there is often a conflict of interest between line agencies. Their roles and responsibilities are compartmentalised in ways that constrain the process of complementing and supporting MTDS and/or NSDS between and within sectors. Both the MTDS and NSDS deal with many cross-cutting priority issues which often require inter-agency commitment. In PNG, this has caused problems. For example, the DEC is responsible for environmental impact monitoring in resource projects which require co-ordination and collaboration between the DEC and agencies implementing resource development projects, e.g mining.

The Mining Department views its role as a developer while it views the role of the DEC as an environmental manager. The perceived, yet contrasting views of these key agencies make inter-agency linkages difficult.

## Inter-agency linkages

JPOI recognises the significance of promoting and establishing better integration between cross-cutting issues under a sustainable development framework. This is another principle of sustainable development. Cross-cutting issues seeking sustainable solutions in PNG include poverty, gender equality, environment protection, HIV-AIDS and health, unemployment, and education. Establishing and promoting inter-agency linkages between key government agencies dealing with the cross-cutting issues helps to reduce the risks of policy failure.

Both a synergistic and co-ordinated approach is essential in PNG to facilitate inter-agency co-operation for a 'more cost-effective, negotiated decision-making, planning and implementation' of policies. The MTDS 2005–10 recognises the significance of developing better co-ordination between the three tiers of government but it is limited in its practical application. The MTDS does not prescribe specific mechanisms effectively to integrate policies and to co-ordinate the country's institutional mechanisms including laws, work culture, civil society and NGOs in implementing sustainable development initiatives. Improved co-ordination of sustainable development activities at these levels and between line agencies can reduce inadvertent gaps and conflicts between policies and strategies and between different elements of governance.

In this context, the Central Agencies Coordination Committee (CACC) and the Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council (CIMC) in PNG's case have a key role in co-ordinating and integrating cross-cutting policies both at the level of central government agencies and between these agencies and provincial governments. The functions of the CACC and CIMC are complementary; but both tend to be more focused on issues in the capital city, Port Moresby, rather than in the provinces, for there is little statutory provision to define their roles and responsibilities. This makes them operate as ad hoc agencies in their tasks in overseeing the implementation of the MTDS and related matters. The roles and responsibilities of the CACC and the CIMC need to be redefined and strengthened to achieve inter-agency co-ordination for creating and successful implementing of sustainable development strategies. Effective inter-agency co-ordination and linkages can reduce the risks of policy failure through the inadequacies of the formal roles of public agencies. But this function of co-ordination needs to be statutorily defined.

## Outcomes and means of implementation

The positive outcomes from sustainable development interventions depend on effective implementation. Implementation in turn depends on effective 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 2002–10 does not have its own set of indicators reflecting PNG's social, economic, environmental and

cultural specificities. PNG-specific indicators, together with the MDG indicators, should include institutional and subsistence indicators reflecting PNG's 80 per cent rural-based population. The underdeveloped nature of PNG-specific indicators meant that the MTDS 2005–10 adopted the MDG indicators at national level without modification. Furthermore, there is relatively little monitoring by the DNPM using indicators on a cross-sectoral basis and with provincial governments. The indicators contained in the MTDS need to be expanded in order to help cover the specific economic, social, institutional, cultural, political and environmental issues. If this were done, it would, indeed, 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 monitoring and evaluation system is underdeveloped to monitor and evaluate performance indicators. Moreover, the reporting mechanism of the CACC, CIMC and DNPM, to provide information to decision-makers on emerging trends, needs to be significantly improved. Both these weaknesses emerge as significant impediments and highlight capacity constraints to supporting decision-making for sustainable development.

### Lessons from the PNG experience

The important lessons emerging from the discussion on assessing the capacity and risks for creating and implementing an NSDS are four-fold. First is the limited capacity of governments for achieving sustainable development through the MTDS. The commitment of governments to sustainable development is evident from international obligations and in national priorities set out in the MTDS. But capacity for implementation is constrained within the PNG process of governance and institutions, which lack effective integration of sustainable development within the mainstream of long-term policy formulation and implementation at national and at local levels. The benefit of future generations defines the horizon for an NSDS which goes way beyond the scope of a five-year MTDS.

Second is the need to strengthen the current MTDS through a rigorous review process. The review process should involve consultation involving all stakeholders, especially peripheral government agencies and rural communities. The process 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 DNPM, capacity constraints in various agencies and recommend appropriate capacity building initiatives. Integration of 'environmental sustainability' into the list of government priorities is not an option but is essential for economic growth, social progress and environmental protection.

Third is the absence of a sustainable development branch in the DNPM for the design and evaluation of an NSDS. The DNPM is the natural home of the NSDS but its homelessness is a major constraint to creating an NSDS and its effective co-ordination and implementation.

Fourth, the creation of an NSDS is essential for progress with development in PNG. The long-term NSDS process that began earnestly and ended in 1994 needs to be revitalised with a series of medium-term plans (MTDS) directed towards achieving an NSDS. 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 DNPM should take responsibility for sustainable development by accelerating the pace for designing, implementing and co-ordinating an NSDS.

Finally, a comprehensive methodology for assessing strategic planning in the government system is highly desirable to drive the review process. A review methodology is required to analyse the planning personnel and planning process in the DNPM, sectoral agencies and in provincial governments. An appropriate methodology specifically designed to appraise the strategic planning process at the DNPM and elsewhere should enhance the planning capacity at all levels which may, in the long term, reduce political and bureaucratic risks.

## Conclusion

Creating a sustainable development strategy for PNG remains a 'No Regrets Option' for the long term and is a must. The creation of an NSDS does not stop the government developing and reviewing and implementing the MTDS. Planning officials at the DNPM should realise 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 is yet to be designed, continually updated and implemented.

So far this discussion reveals serious capacity constraints within PNG'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 currently faced by the MTDS should the capacity issues raised be ignored. It is the role of the government to enhance capacity within its planning, monitoring and implementation system as a precondition for creating and implementing a national framework for sustainable development.

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## Chapter 2

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## Notes

- 1 The Waigani Seminar is a biannual seminar series held at the UPNG and sponsored by the government, development partners including donors, the private sector and NGOs.
- 2 From Rio in Brazil to Rai, a village along the Rai Coast in Madang Province in PNG.
- 3 The CACC is made up of all Departmental Heads with the Chief Secretary as Head of the CACC.