



Environment Assessment

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Vanuatu: Country Partnership Strategy (2010-2014)

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VANUATU COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY 2010-2014 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

1. Vanuatu's more than 100 islands with a combined land area of 12,190 sq. km is only 1.8% of the total maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 680,000 sq. km. It spans from low coral atolls with high biodiversity to majestic forested volcanoes, making Vanuatu is one of the most geographically diverse countries in the Pacific islands region. However, there are indications of increased pressures on the environment that lead to environmental changes. The key drivers of environmental changes are a rapidly growing economy, a young population and rapid population growth, urban drift, land speculation, agricultural intensification, deforestation, inadequate fisheries and marine management, industry and trade, tourism, imported energy and transportation needs, and extractive industries. Key environmental issues that confront the country include: (i) climate change and sea-level rise; (ii) soil erosion and land degradation; (iii) coastal erosion; (iv) loss of forests; (v) loss of biological diversity; (vi) water pollution; (vii) waste disposal and recycling; (viii) reef destruction and over-exploitation of marine resources; and (ix) natural disasters (earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis etc.).

2. Vanuatu would appear to be well placed to respond to changes in environmental quality, particularly with constitutional provisions and a suite of laws to protect the environment, however, there is inadequate political commitment to the environment, under staff Environment Unit, and inconsistent implementation of the carefully crafted laws. To improve this situation, priority actions recommended by national consultations undertaken during the Country Environmental Analysis is to commence implementation of the road map including: (i) conduct national forum to map out a revitalized approach to environmental governance in Vanuatu, (ii) proceeds with creation of the Department of Environment and Conservation as specified in the Environmental Management and Conservation Act 2002. (iii) examine alternative approaches to make environmental management in Vanuatu essentially self-financing by exploring several potential sources of funding, (iv) implement selected priorities indicated in the "environment and disaster management" section of the PAA.

3. Vanuatu's tropical climate is mainly affected by the southeast trade winds and the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO). In addition to the prolonged dry and wet periods associated with ENSO, Vanuatu is also subject to other extreme climate events including storm surges, coastal inundation, flooding, landslides, and hailstorms. The trend of climatic condition in Vanuatu includes increase in annual mean temperatures, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and decline in annual average rainfall. The expected impacts of a climate regime that is drier and warmer, with more frequent extreme climatic events, and also warmer seas. The main possible impacts identified include: (i) decreased agricultural production and reduced food security; (ii) increased incidence of diseases such as malaria, dengue, and water borne diseases; (iii) water shortages; (iv) inundation in coastal zones and estuaries and impacts on infrastructure and housing; (v) bleaching of coral reefs; (vi) probable impacts on coastal ecosystems and fisheries. Therefore, the threat of climate change for Vanuatu and other Pacific Island countries is no longer an issue for the future. Extreme climate-related events are being experienced with increasing frequency, and the effects of climate change and sea-level rise on Vanuatu are expected to become increasingly serious in the coming decades. The National Action Programme for Adaptation (NAPA) was completed and approved by Cabinet in 2007. A prioritized list of projects includes (i) agriculture and food security; (ii) water management; (iii) sustainable tourism; (iv) community-based marine resource management; and (v) sustainable forestry management.

Supplementary Appendix

4. The environment-related goods and services provided by terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems include rich biological diversity, which in turn sustain complex livelihood systems with traditional customary practices relating to the management and use of these resources. Nonetheless, there is indication of degradation of the country's natural resources, specially forests, coral reef and fish stocks because of inadequate management of natural resource systems. Most of the threats to the biological resources in this area are local in nature. But they would benefit from well coordinated policy, institutional and technical responses at the national and regional levels. Some of the threats are regional in scope and will necessitate coordinated solutions, e.g. (i) the destructive practices used in the live reef food fish trade; (ii) illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing across the region; (iii) climate change impacts; and (iv) depletion of highly migratory marine animals (e.g., commercially valuable tuna stocks, endangered sea turtles, marine mammals) which cross national boundaries and require multi-national collaboration for their effective management. Accordingly, Vanuatu has been included as part of the ADB regional technical assistance (RETA) for Strengthening Coastal and Marine Resources Management in the Coral Triangle of the Pacific. This RETA, which is under the GEF program of Pacific Alliance for Sustainability, will be implemented in two phases, i.e. the design phase (2009) that will be followed by four year full size project to be implemented in 2010-2013. The expected impacts will be enhanced and sustained coastal and marine systems.