

Sectoral Integration of Biodiversity in Tonga

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1. Introduction

Tonga reported¹ that despite the difficulty in achieving its biodiversity objectives Tonga remains dedicated to finding ways of achieving these targets in future.

Tonga is committed to the objectives of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which include the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of utilization of genetic resources. As a party to the CBD, Tonga is committed to the promotion, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in all sectors of society.

Biodiversity is a national issue that requires all sectors of society to work together towards achieving its objectives and targets. Understanding the status and threats facing our biodiversity is a crucial first step and this was discussed in Chapter I. The issues and status of the implementation of the objectives were presented in Chapter II. In this chapter we will look into the implementation structure at sectoral and cross sectoral collaborations. The work of the sectors of government is reviewed in view of improving the implementation of the NBSAP objectives by encouraging cross sectoral partnership amongst all sectors.

2. Legal and Policy Framework

Tonga has no legislation or policies that are specific to biodiversity conservation. As a result, the overall management and protection of its biodiversity is not vested under one institution but under the jurisdiction of various ministries and departments. Related legislation can be found within the four sectors of biodiversity namely: Forestry Ecosystem, Marine Ecosystem, Agro-biodiversity and Species Conservation (Terrestrial Fauna).

A summary of legislation and policies that may apply to biodiversity conservation in years 2006 to 2009 are available. It is interesting to note that the only new legislation and policies after 2006 came from Division of Fisheries and Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MECC).

3. Institutional Arrangements

Prior to 2006, the four main sectors (forests, food, fisheries and agriculture) were under three Ministries: Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Ministry of Forestry. This would have been the ideal structure to implement the NBSAP objectives. However, after the launch of the NBSAP in 2006, a centralization process was put into place by government. Most likely for financial reasons, the three Ministries were combined into one Ministry: the Ministry of Agriculture Food, Forest and Fishery (MAFFF).

This new body (MAFFF) became the main implementer together with DOE, NGOs and other stakeholders; although other sectors were requested to contribute in areas that may cross their zones of influence.

¹ Tonga (2010). Fourth Report : Review of Tonga NBSAP, 157 pp.

Another structural change took place at end of 2009 when DOE became a Ministry of Environment and Climate Changes.

The Department of Environment (DOE) of the Ministry of Lands, Survey, Natural Resources and Environments (MLSNRE) – now MECC – was allocated the coordinating role with regards to biodiversity or any environmental issues of all sectors.

4. Sectoral Responsibilities

The Tonga Government operates in a sectoral manner in carrying out its duties. Legislation and policies have been designed so each sector focuses on its core function. Most of government issues and operation are conducted sectorally.

The principle of sectoral responsibility is taken under the conservation of biodiversity to mean that each sector has a responsibility to reduce its harmful impacts on the natural environment. Most of the responsibilities of biodiversity have been embraced well by most sectors of government but progress in implementing some of the objectives have been slow in some sectors due to lack of direction, confusion over roles, volunteer retirement, organizational restructuring and lack of financial resources.

The work of each sector of government relies on the National Economic Plan set out by government each year. During the year 2006 to 2009 there has not been any government policies in its National Action Plan to advocate the objectives of biodiversity.

Most of the work carried out on the biodiversity objectives, especially on species, was carried out by different sectors of government such as the Department of Forest, Department of Agriculture and Division of Fisheries. However, at time of this review the main implementers have shifted to MAFFF, which is a combination of the above departments. The result of the Implementation is given below, separated to species and non species objectives.

Mainstreaming is difficult in government because the approach towards policies and legislation is sectoral. At the same time mandates rest everywhere else in other government sector. This is one of the main issues that government sectors are facing in implementing the biodiversity objectives, which are cross sectoral in their nature. Mainstreaming requires a holistic approach and policies and legislation are required to be in place for this to happen.

Out of the 21 objectives targeted to be implemented in these sectors only 3 or 14% were considered to be fully implemented. About 12 or 59% are on-going and 6 projects or about 27% show no sign of being implemented at all.

The performance of the implementers of the NBSAP objectives on species conservation and sustainable utilization is considered to be below par. The large amount of objectives in the YELLOW is believed to be caused by the following factors:

1. Lack of direction from the Nation Action Plan (SDP 8- Strategic Development Plan)

2. Legislation and Policies are designed for each sector with mandate vested under different sectors
3. Disruption from MAFFF continuous restructuring
4. Lack of Government financial support
5. Lack of Coordination

5. Lack of Direction from SDP-8

The SDP-8 covered year 2005 to 2009. There is no direct policy given on Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable utilization in this plan. Hence it follows that since government's sectors take their cue from the national plan, none of the implementing sectors had any policies in place specific to the objectives that they were facing. As a result the NBSAP report became strategies on the shelf (SOTS).

6. Legislation and Policies are Sectoral

There is no cross sectoral legislation in place. As a result most of the performance, resources and energy of the sectors are directed toward their mandates and core tasks. Objectives that cross the border of their influence usually have little priority and do not get implemented. Most of the biodiversity objectives affect everyone and are therefore cross sectoral. Their implementation needs to be addressed by two or three sectors, otherwise objectives get left behind.

7. Continuous Restructuring of MAFFF

The review considered the continuous restructuring of MAFFF to have had a large influence on the performances of its three sectors (Forest, Fisheries, Agro), in implementing the objectives of the NBSAP. The initial decentralization of MAFFF required new legislation and policies to be put in place to facilitate the operation of the three Ministries. This decentralization could have provided the right machinery for implementing the biodiversity objectives through improved resources and improved focus. However, the re-amalgamation that occurred in 2008, when these Ministries were re-absorbed back to MAFFF, left some of these divisions in limbo with confusion, blurred focus and lack of resources. As a result this reshuffling resulted in high staff turnover due to more qualified staff leaving for regional positions or overseas. The volunteer redundancy that occurred in 2008 further reduced MAFFF capabilities and manpower.

8. Lack of Government Financial Support

There have not been any funds allocated in the Government of Tonga Annual Budget to assist the implementation of the Biodiversity objectives, since the inception of the NBSAP in June 2006. This is a follow through from absence of direction from the National Plan on biodiversity issues. The lack of financial support also affected areas of scientific research, conservation programs, and managing and monitoring parks and reserves. To make matters worse government agencies are not eligible to apply for implementing grants, like GEF Small Grants, which are freely available to the private sector.

9. Lack of Coordination and Mainstreaming

Because most of the biodiversity objectives are cross sectoral, their implementation requirements are beyond sectoral influences but require close collaboration amongst sectors. In a strong sectoral environment like Tonga, coordination becomes very important. This was recognised by Cabinet when it set up the National Environment Coordinating Committee (NECC) to oversee, among other things, development of biodiversity resources as well as making policy direction on other issues related to biodiversity. This would have been the body to coordinate implementation of the biodiversity objectives. However, this body has never met, and the call for coordination therefore must fall back on Department of Environment, which in late 2009 became a Ministry. As a Department, it is possible that it could not perform its full coordination role because it was under the Ministry of Lands, Survey and Natural Resources. However, as a new Ministry there is hope that by the time of the next review that this sectoral issue would be solved as it would have the overarching mandates to fill the gaps between sectors allowing for a smoother and well coordinated effort to prevail.

10. Cross Sectoral Responsibilities and Collaboration & Streamlining

Cross sectoral performance appears to work well in the private sector, more so than in the government sector. The private sector has no limits or defined boundaries to restrict its adaptability. It is one sector operating in a changing environment, adjusting itself to each change along the way. The only factor that could change this sector's adaptability is finance, in a similar way to government organizations.

We have separated the species from the non species objectives simply to demonstrate differences in sectoral and cross sectoral performances. The species sectors cover Forestry, Marine, Agro and Species Conservation. The main implementers were government sectors and the performance of these implementers has been discussed above. In the non species' objectives the main implementers, aside from MECC acting as coordinator, are private sector bodies led by 93

the Civil Society, Tonga Trust and other NGOs. In the sectoral arena, energy is focused and limited only to the area of influence of that sector. In the private sector, a cross sectoral approach is working well with dispersed energy being easily weld together amongst the community to become a bigger force. This synergy is found to act behind community programs making this area an effective body to be encouraged with more activities in future.

The bulk of the implementation work in these sectors was carried out by the Civil Society, NGOs and the community. It is considered that cross sectoral issues are not found in the private sector and mainstreaming is working well due to projects being implemented at a grass root level by members of community. At this level there is a transfer of knowledge and ownership which would ensure that such programs will endure and become pillars for other programs in future.

Of the total of 16 objectives required to be implemented at these sectors, 7 (44%) were successfully implemented, 4 (25%) are in progress and 5 (31%) have not been implemented. When we compare the objectives achieved between government and private sectors, we find that the performance of the

private sector outran that of government by about 30%. The achievements, in percentages, are comparable at 44% to the private sector and only 14% for government sector.

This has clearly demonstrated the need to streamline biodiversity through the sectors. It is still very important for the biodiversity requirements to be towed by government in term of policies and legislation, but the performance of the private sector is encouraging, a strength that is worth investigating further.

For a strong cross sectoral effort to occur in government sectors it is suggested that:

1. Annual national and sectoral work plans to address Biodiversity and Climate Changes issued as a matter of priority;
2. To facilitate implementation, MECC to devise holistic legislation and policies to be passed by parliament on sectoral performances on biodiversity.

11. Mainstreaming of Biodiversity in National Programs

There is a great need to mainstream biodiversity conservation into national plans and programs of the government of Tonga. The sectors will then take cue from this and include biodiversity in their own work programs. The procedure in Tonga is for each sector to put in their priority list to the planning team who would in turn prioritise and include them in the national plan. If this is the case, then MECC has the onus to present biodiversity as priority area to government. It is possible that DOE did not have the political power to push biodiversity when it was a department, however its new ministerial status may assist in elevating this important agenda to the National Plan.

Tonga's national plan is constrained by availability of finance and this usually leads to top down prioritization of the yearly or five yearly plans. The responsibility therefore rest on MECC and government of Tonga to find a compromise on this issue of biodiversity.

If biodiversity consideration is not in the national plan, then finance will not be made available and NBSAP objectives will remain unattended to. MECC needs to push biodiversity as a cross cutting issue and to be set as a priority area of the country in the sectors of environment, forestry, fishery and marine, agriculture, tourism, private sector development and so on. This is the only way biodiversity considerations can be achieved.

In summary, the result of the implementation is encouraging and well balanced. With about 27% of its objectives in Green and considering that 43% of its objectives in Yellow, Tonga is looking at a possible achievement of about 70% in near future if the following necessary requirements are put in place:

- Government to incorporate biodiversity considerations into its national and all sectors plans;
- Main implementers are empowered with financial support;
- Appropriate legislation is introduced to encourage cross sectoral collaborations.

