

Chapter 20

Mainstreaming Development Policies for Climate Change in Fiji: A Policy Gap Analysis and the Role of ICTs

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ABSTRACT

Fiji is a Party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and to the Kyoto Protocol. This chapter examines the development policies implemented since ratifying these agreements to mitigate greenhouse gas and carbon emissions. This includes an analysis of Fiji's effort in mitigating climate change issues by "mainstreaming" - an operational approach for making development more sustainable. A country's use of renewable energy sources is a good indicator of its efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas and carbon emissions. Fiji's renewable energy projects and agricultural sector are examined. Identification is made of the gaps in development policies that take control of climate change issues with the process of mainstreaming. Suggestions are provided to close the gaps. ICT (information communications technology) has a critical role to mitigate the impacts of climate change by advancing renewable energy efforts and reducing emissions. Social media is now widely used to inform and educate about sustainable development efforts and to address broader development challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was decided by world leaders and decision makers at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The ultimate objective of the convention is the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference. Fiji is a party to this Convention as well as to the Kyoto

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Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement linked to the UNFCCC, which commits its Parties by setting internationally binding emission reduction targets (UNFCCC, 2015). What has Fiji done and achieved so far in terms of fulfilling its obligations of the Climate Change Convention?

This paper examines the development policies that Fiji has implemented to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions since ratifying the convention. What changes have Fiji brought to its laws and legislations? What new rules, regulations and acts have Fiji passed to show genuine efforts in its ratification of the convention? According to the convention, sustainable development efforts have been suggested for small island nations like Fiji. This is to ensure that such countries grow economically, and are able to provide social welfare to its citizens, while taking care of the environment. Has Fiji been able to develop as suggested?

The intent of this paper is to analyze Fiji's effort in mitigating climate change issues with a process known as "mainstreaming". Mainstreaming is an operational approach suggested by Metz (2010) for making development more sustainable. According to Metz, the best practical way to achieve this is through integrating all relevant elements of sustainability into development decisions. This process does not require governments to do anything extra or to spend any more. It simply suggests incorporating policies that take care of the environment into existing ministries and departments.

One of the ways in which we can really limit the emission of greenhouse gases into the environment is by burning less fossil fuel. Therefore, a country's use of renewable energy sources is a good indicator of its efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas and carbon emissions. To establish Fiji's status, its renewable energy projects are explored to identify how much fossil fuel Fiji is burning and how much energy it is generating from renewable sources. The agricultural sector is another major producer of carbon and greenhouse gases. What is Fiji doing within its sugar and agriculture industry to take care of the environment?

After ascertaining what Fiji has done and achieved so far, discussion focuses on what remains to be done and what has not been done properly. The gaps are identified in Fiji's development policies to take control of the climate change issues within the process of mainstreaming. Suggestions are provided on what can be done to close the gaps that remain, so that Fiji can fulfill its climate change mitigation obligations. There is not an easy way out as development and sustainability do not positively correlate to each other (Kubiszewski et al., 2013). Some best practices applied elsewhere are recommended; one size however, does not fit all.

It has been 20 years since the first Earth Summit and the UNFCCC in Rio de Janeiro. The June 2012 Earth Summit reports that we have not made much difference since then and are still on track for all the climate change woes predicted. ICT (information communications technology) can play a critical role in avoiding future climate change disasters by identifying solutions to advance our renewable energy efforts and reduce emissions. ICTs can also provide early warning systems to mitigate the impacts of climate change. What can ICT do for countries like Fiji and the rest of the world to ensure that our future generations can experience the same or an even better environment than we do? At present Fiji has 333 islands. Will our children and grandchildren be able to have the same number of islands?

BACKGROUND

Since the establishment of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, there has been significant progress towards understanding the impacts of climate change in the Pacific region, and developing programs to both mitigate and adapt to it. The establishment of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) has provided a forum allowing Fiji to collaborate with other small island states and negotiate agreements at the UNFCCC Conference of Parties (Fiji – NCCP, 2012).

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