

## Planning for sustainable resource management at Uafato

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### Introduction

In early 1991 *Alii ma faipule* (chiefs and orators) of Uafato approached O le Siosiomaga Society (OLSS), a private environmental organisation, for assistance to manage their rainforest. This was in the aftermath of the tropical cyclone Ofa, which devastated much of Uafato village and its surroundings. The area is part of the Uafato-Tiavea coastal rainforest, identified<sup>1</sup> as the top national priority lowland area for conservation. A year later the Uafato Conservation Area (UCA) project was established with funding from the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and OLSS as the implementing agency.

The Uafato village lies within the Fagaloa Bay on the north eastern coast of Samoa's Upolu Island (see Figure 1). Road access is either from Falefa along the coast or inland across from the Lemafa Pass Road. Uafato is the furthest to the east of the bay, about 35 kilometres from the capital Apia. The UCA covers a land area of about 14 square kilometres. The terrain is extremely rugged characterised by a high steep interior range which interconnects with coastal ridges, sloping to the sea to form a series of capes and bays. There are numerous small streams emanating from the central cliffs.

This paper outlines the development of the UCA resource management plan (RMP). It highlights the underlying concepts, explains the planning process involved and describes the identification of strategies for achieving sustainable development.

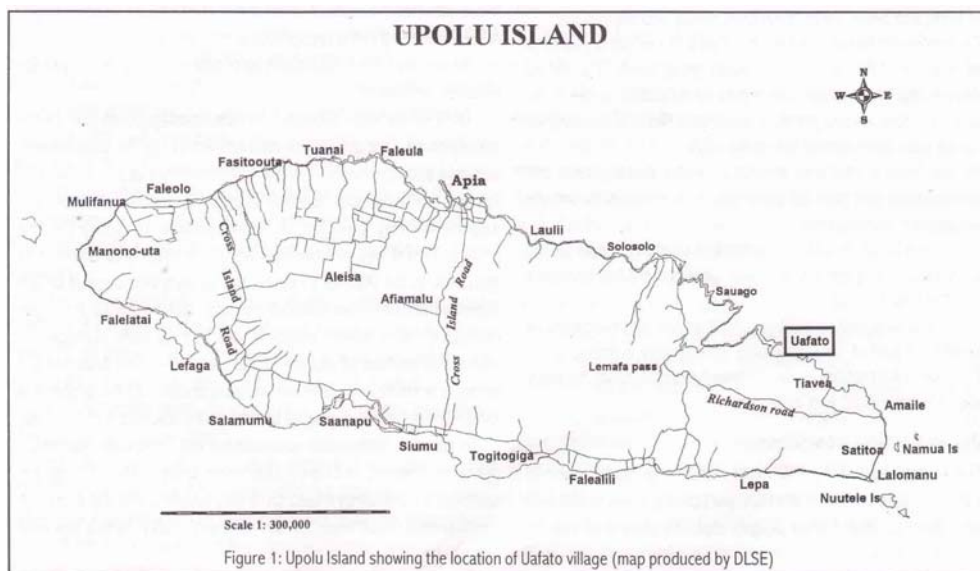


Figure 1 Location of Uafato village

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### Plan principles

The RMP principles are derived from the national environment and development management strategies (NEMS)<sup>2</sup> principles, which in turn are adapted from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development Rio Declaration<sup>3</sup>. These ideals reflect the expectations and aspirations of the Uafato community and confer national and international credence on the RMP. As shown below, the ten principles highlight the concept of sustainable development, recognising that environmental and developmental demands are interrelated and inseparable:

1. The people of Uafato are the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature;
2. The village of Uafato has the right to exploit its own resources in accordance with its own decisions set by the village *fono* (council of Alii ma Faipule) and in recognition of the national environmental and developmental policies;
3. The right to resource utilisation must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations;
4. In order to achieve sustainable development, environment protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it;
5. The people of Uafato shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement of sustainable development, in order to provide equitable standards of living and better meet community needs and aspirations;
6. Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all villagers at the various community group levels. The *Alii ma Faipule* shall encourage community participation in decision-making processes and promote public awareness of the need for sustainable development within the UCA;
7. Women have a vital role in environmental management and development and their full participation is essential to achieve sustainable development
8. The creativity, ideals and other attributes of young people should be mobilised to achieve sustainable development and to ensure a better future for all; .
9. Traditional arts and cultural practices should be recognised as an integral part of the sustainable development process;
10. Environmental protection, development and community harmony are interdependent and indivisible.

### Goals and objectives

The primary goal of the RMP is the sustainable development of the natural resources within the UCA, particularly some of the tree species, like the *ifilele* (*intsia bijuga*), that are already at risk of over-exploitation<sup>4</sup>. Sustainable development expresses the idea that mankind must live within the capacity of the environment to support it. It is defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’<sup>5</sup>. Alternatively it means utilising the community’s resources in such a way as to maintain life’s ecological processes and to enhance the present and future quality of life<sup>6</sup>.

Another key aspect of sustainable development relates to social equity<sup>7</sup>, or some standard of social fairness and justice. The aim is to ‘develop economically and socially in such a way that it minimises those activities the costs of which are borne by future generations’<sup>8</sup>. As well there is growing recognition of the need for community action to address resource sustainability as private solutions cannot provide effective outcomes<sup>9</sup>.

The RMP therefore promotes an integrated approach to resource management, recognising the interconnectivity of the environment, economy and community. This is a multidisciplinary approach<sup>10</sup> which focuses on sustainable resource utilisation, economic development and community building. It is impossible to separate the environmental needs from the developmental and community demands. In the UCA, for instance, the carvers who depend on the *ifilele* for their livelihood would deplete the mature stocks at current harvesting rates unless resource use was carefully managed or alternative sources of income for carvers found. The future of the women's woven handicrafts was also uncertain until the problem of foraging pigs, which damaged the raw materials, was first resolved.

In essence, sustainable development has three main elements - the environment, economy and community<sup>11</sup>. This implies an environmental strategy based on strong sustainability and economic development constrained by social responsibility. Hence the RMP goal of sustainable development is expressed in terms of these three elements to give more specific plan objectives as follows:

1. To protect the biological diversity of the UCA through the sustainable management of its natural resources;
2. To create income generating activities in support of the UCA resource management process; and
3. To improve community welfare to enhance the UCA management efforts.

Order	Participation approach	Level of public involvement
8	Citizen control	Degrees of citizen power
7	Delegated power	
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	Degrees of tokenism
4	Consultation	
3	Informing	
2	Therapy	Non-participation
1	Manipulation	

Figure 2: Hierarchy of public participation approaches. Source: Adapted from Arnstein (1969)<sup>14</sup>

### Community participation

There was strong emphasis on community participation in the development of the RMP. This was considered to be a key factor in the future success of the plan - that the stakeholders were involved in every step of the plan development process and the actions set out in the plan had been developed and agreed upon by them. In other words the RMP was owned by them and not imposed upon them. With the people of Uafato having full jurisdiction over the UCA resources both as individuals and as a community, it was only logical that they should have full control over a plan to manage these resources.

Community consultation and participation is extremely difficult to achieve if it is ever possible<sup>12</sup>. In all consultative processes some views will invariably dominate over others, and 'the rhetoric of community consultation, participation and partnership ... is often grounded in a public relations agenda that may do little more than mask the lack of consultation'<sup>13</sup>.

The relative nature of consultation shows that what one person may call participation can have quite a different meaning to someone else. Figure 2 shows a hierarchy of public

participation approaches ranging from non-participation and tokenism to more genuine levels of public involvement. The bottom orders 1 and 2 are non-participatory approaches, which are mere public relations tools used by those in authority to tell or brief the public on what they wish them to know. Orders 3 to 5 progress to different degrees of tokenism where the members of the public may be given a voice in discussions but lack the power to have their ideas taken seriously or acted upon. The top orders 6 to 8 represent increasing levels of public power in and control of the decision-making process. In the preparation of the RMP the level of public involvement provided a genuine opportunity for the Uafato community to participate in the decision-making and to influence the final plan details.

Using participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques, an inclusive model of partnership was adopted during the RMP preparation where the OLSS and SPREP representatives encouraged the village groups to explore options that were appropriate for their circumstances. Previous research in the social justice field has shown that the individuals' perception of justice and fairness was influenced by the decision-making process more than the outcome itself<sup>15</sup>. Hence some of the key issues that were emphasised during the development of the RMP included the transparency of the planning process, trust of the other parties and full community involvement in decision-making.

### **Plan formulation**

The RMP formulation saw the formalisation of community ideas on sustainable development. It provided the opportunity to propose actions and develop projects that could help improve living standards while protecting the environment. The main focus of the RMP preparation therefore was to allow the Uafato people to freely discuss their views and openly participate in decision making. The aim was to facilitate maximum village involvement in the planning process promoting trust in the system and creating ownership of the final plan.

Figure 3 shows the main steps in the RMP development. Step one dealt with the preparation of the terms of reference by SPREP and the appointment of facilitators, including a planning consultant, to coordinate the plan preparation. Community participation in step two allowed the Uafato village groups to develop plan details. Relevant external stakeholders were also consulted during this step. Plan documentation was done in step three followed by the review of the draft plan by stakeholders, particularly the Uafato village groups, in step four before the plan was finalised in step five.

PRA sessions were conducted with the *Alii ma Faipule*, women and carvers, the latter group consisting mainly of untitled men. The initial meeting with the *Alii ma Faipule* began with a traditional welcoming ceremony, where the facilitators, as visitors, were presented with *kava* sticks and given an official welcoming speech by the village's leading orator. It was important that the guests responded in the appropriate manner, which created an immediate rapport amongst the parties as 'equals'. This was an important aspect of the public participation process - winning the confidence of the village elders. Once the visitors gained the hosts' respect, the subsequent discussions proceeded openly and frankly, sometimes with innocent rivalry but often with great humour. The same acceptance flowed on to the PRA meetings with other groups. It was therefore critical that the facilitators were familiar with the Samoan language, customs and usage.

During the community consultation stage, the village participants' role was to propose what outcomes they wanted to be included in the plan, associated actions, likely constraints in dealing with them and who was to be responsible for implementation and monitoring. The

facilitators' role was to encourage the participants to express their ideas, expand on the issues raised and comment on relevant actions and alternative options. They briefed participants on the existing institutional setting and where external stakeholders could be involved in RMP projects. Often the facilitators would prompt speakers to articulate their comments or express their viewpoints.

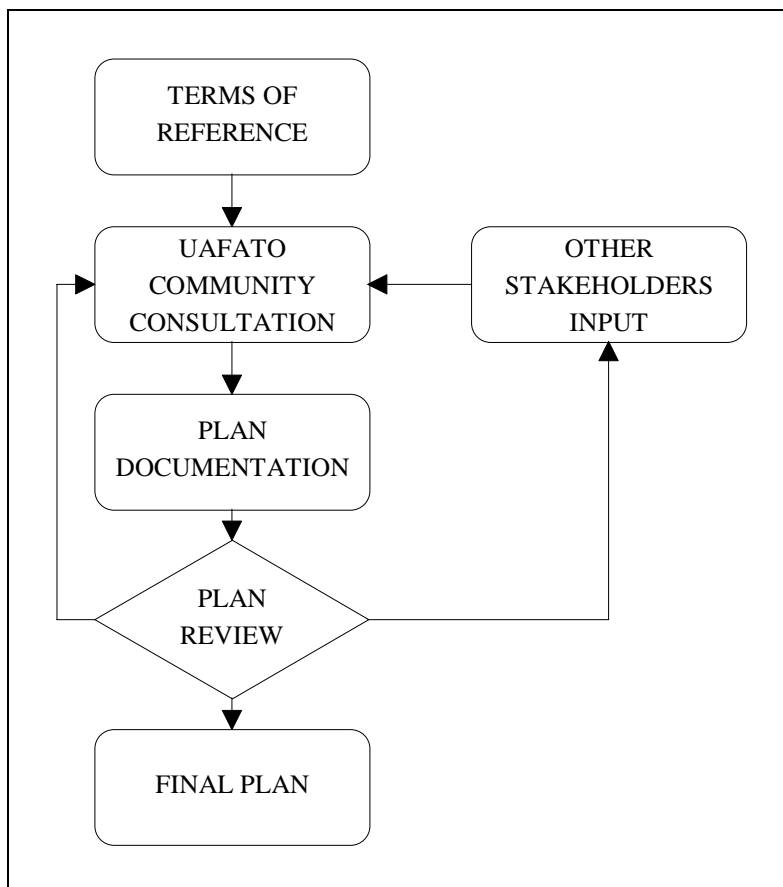


Figure 3: Steps in the RMP formulation

While the facilitators suggested a general order of business to guide the PRA procedures the structure of discussions was quite informal with speakers given all the time to present their own views. However except for the *Alii ma Faipule* meeting which provided ready and spontaneous exchanges, the sessions with women and carvers were more restrained, participants were less forthcoming with personal inputs. Younger members of the groups left most of the talking to their more senior peers although there was keen attention and strong interest in the proceedings. Clear body language indicated agreement or otherwise with the discussions.

Procedures for community consultation were fairly casual, adapted to suit the particular village group involved. The findings of the technical studies were recapitulated. A flip chart was used to write down the issues raised for all to see. It was often necessary to refer back to previous comments to check on the details or context in which they were made. At the end of each PRA session the participants went over the discussion record to arrange their proposed actions in order of priority. These became the ranked operational outcomes that needed to be addressed if the RMP objectives were to be achieved (see Figure 4).

RMP documentation set out the plan details in five components including:

1. Ranked outcomes,
2. Activities to achieve outcomes,
3. Factors affecting the achievement of outcomes,
4. Responsibility for implementation, and
5. Responsibility for monitoring.

Objective	Operational outcomes	Ranking
Protect the biological diversity of the UCA	• Sustainably manage the forest flora	1
	• Sustainably manage ifilele	2
	• Protect birds	3
	• Protect inshore fisheries	4
Create income generation activities	• Promote wood carving industry	5
	• Expand women's handicrafts	7
	• Develop village honey	12
	• Develop ecotourism	13
	• Develop commercial native plant nursery	14
	• Develop chicken farming	15
	• Develop offshore fishing	16
• Develop cattle farming	17	
Improve community welfare	• Control foraging pigs	6
	• Rebuild health facilities	8
	• Improve water supply quality	9
	• Develop vegetable gardens	10
	• Upgrade housing standards	11

Figure 4: Operational outcomes

The ranked outcomes followed the priorities as identified during the community consultation. These were the operational forms of the RMP objectives that needed to be addressed in order to achieve the overall plan goal of sustainable development. Components 2 and 3 described the activities for the achievement of outcomes and the factors affecting the achievement of outcomes respectively. These were identified during the group meetings and would guide the focus and scope of individual project design. They would also determine the criteria and performance indicators for the achievement of outcomes (SPREP had these developed separately). Components 4 and 5 identified the groups responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the respective outcomes.

An institutional framework for the RMP implementation and monitoring was also developed during the consultation stage (see Figure 5). This arrangement highlighted the important partnership between the Uafato village groups and national, regional and global stakeholders. It also recognised the point that since the UCA would provide not only local environmental benefits but also national and regional benefits as well, then the management tasks were everyone's responsibility

The nature of community accountability for the plan implementation and monitoring mirrored the lines of responsibility within the village with the *Alii ma Faipule* setting policies and having overall control. Other village groups would assume responsibility for projects related to their activities. For instance carvers were responsible for *ifilele* sustainable

management and the development of local carving while the women's committee takes charge of health services and woven handicrafts. With the village *aiga* (extended family) sharing ownership of the UCA, enforcement and monitoring of land-related activities would fall on them.

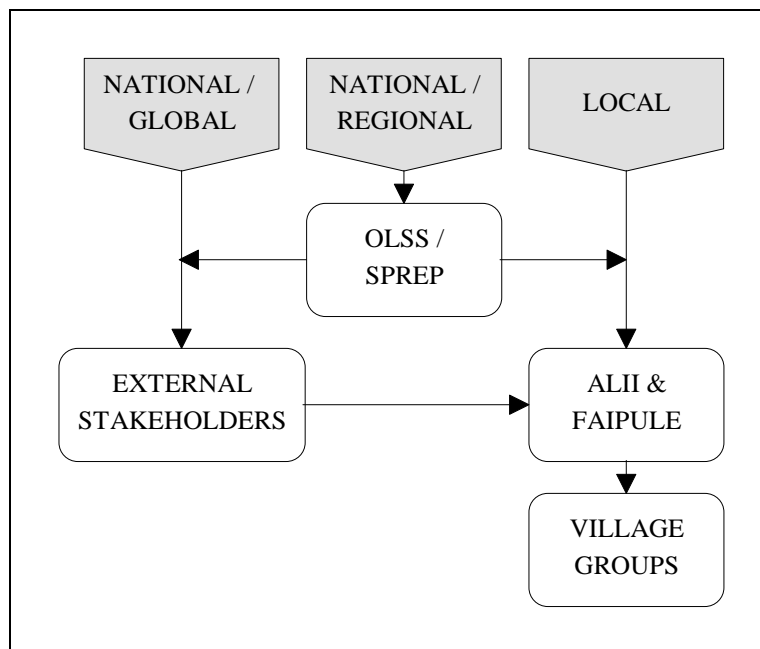


Figure 5: Institutional framework

In line with the participatory focus of the RMP development, the facilitators returned to Uafato to review the draft plan with the village groups. This served two main purposes - first it allowed the people of Uafato to go over the draft plan and checked its details, made additions and approved any changes; and second it reinforced the community trust in the transparency of the RMP formulation procedures. As discussed above these aspects were considered to be vital prerequisites for community ownership of the plan. Separate review meetings were held with the village groups. Apart from some minor changes, the village groups were satisfied with the way the draft plan reflected their points of view and stated priorities. The draft plan was also discussed with some of the external stakeholders before the final RMP was completed<sup>16</sup>.

### Conclusion

This paper has described the background and the development of the RMP setting out the framework for the sustainable development of the resources in the UCA. While it was easy enough to define sustainable development, the difficult issue was to determine how it could be achieved<sup>17</sup>. Any claim to have found the definitive solution to sustainable development is almost certainly false<sup>18</sup>.

The RMP formation has involved the full participation of the Uafato community. From the initial PRA meetings to the review of the draft plan every effort was made to ensure that the villagers had contributed to the plan development. But public participation is also an intensely political process. It is about power and its devolution and can 'privilege the priorities of certain interests over others'<sup>19</sup>. Effective participation is even more difficult to achieve in Samoa where strong respect for authority, while the cornerstone of Samoan

society, can also lead to less democratic practice and the exclusion of the lowly ranked from consultation and decision making.

Finally it is considered that the UCA rainforest has national and global significance which explains the wide interest in this project. Stakeholders at the national (e.g. government agencies, OLSS) and international (e.g. SPREP, aid donors) levels have provided support. However, the conservation of the rainforest will ultimately depend on the people of Uafato and their commitment to the sustainable management of the resources under their control.



Uafato village in the distance nestled between the sea and the rainforest mountains



Young carvers from the village of Uafato showing off their wares

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