

Problem

Pacific Island Countries (PICs) face distinctive environmental, economic and social problems emanating from increasing development pressures. Decision makers in government shape the future of their people. Are their decisions in policy planning taking into consideration environmental, social and economic concerns that affect business and society?

The SDGs are an all-inclusive set of 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators aiming to steer the world closer to sustainable development. However, a closer look shows complex interplays with synergies and tradeoffs. The problems of integrating and achieving these SDGs in current policy planning processes therefore need to be evaluated.

Research Aim

To understand current decision making and policy planning processes in Pacific Island countries in relation to achieving SDGs in order to determine the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

While EIA is now a widely used tool in PICs to manage environmental problems emanating from development, SEA has not been formally institutionalized by most PICs. SPREP is in the process of developing SEA Guidelines for PICs. This research therefore may provide insight on the factors that may influence the uptake of SEA in PICs and thereby contribute to the SEA Guidelines development process.

Methods



Literature Review

(SEA, SDGs, sustainable development, small island developing states)



TONGAN CASE STUDY

Institutional analysis

Document analysis (legislation, strategic plans)



Key Informant Interviews

(22 key informant interviews with CEOs, directors, senior officers and community leaders in TONGA)

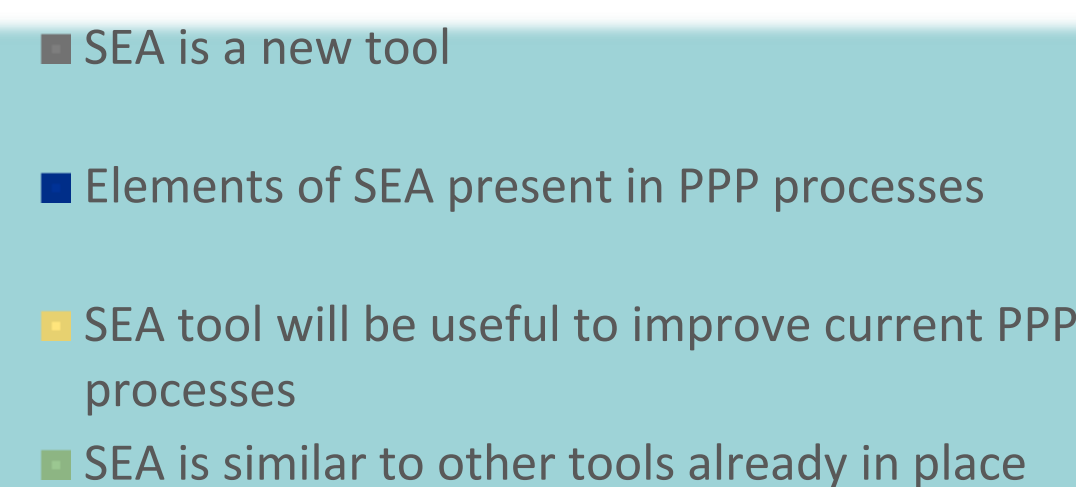
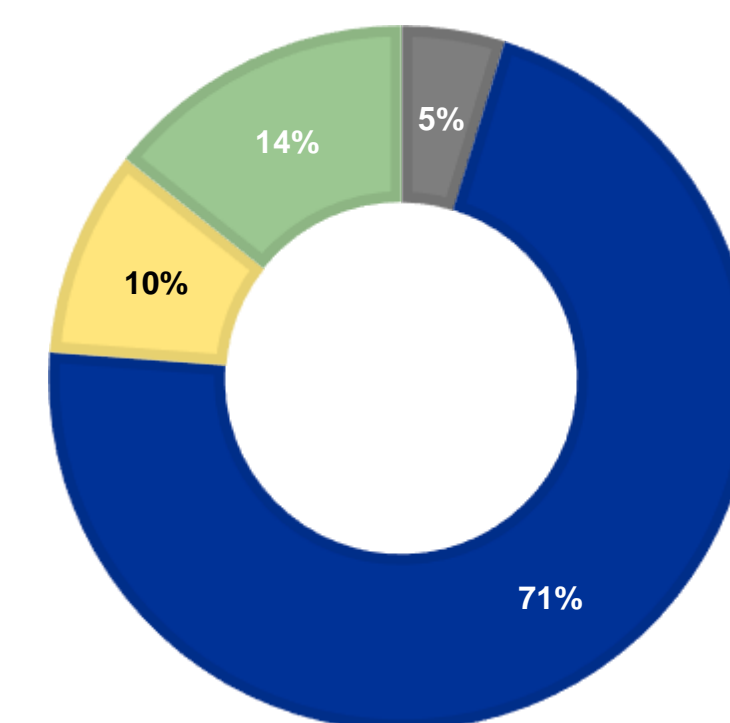
Strategic Environmental Assessment :

Rising to the SDG Challenge

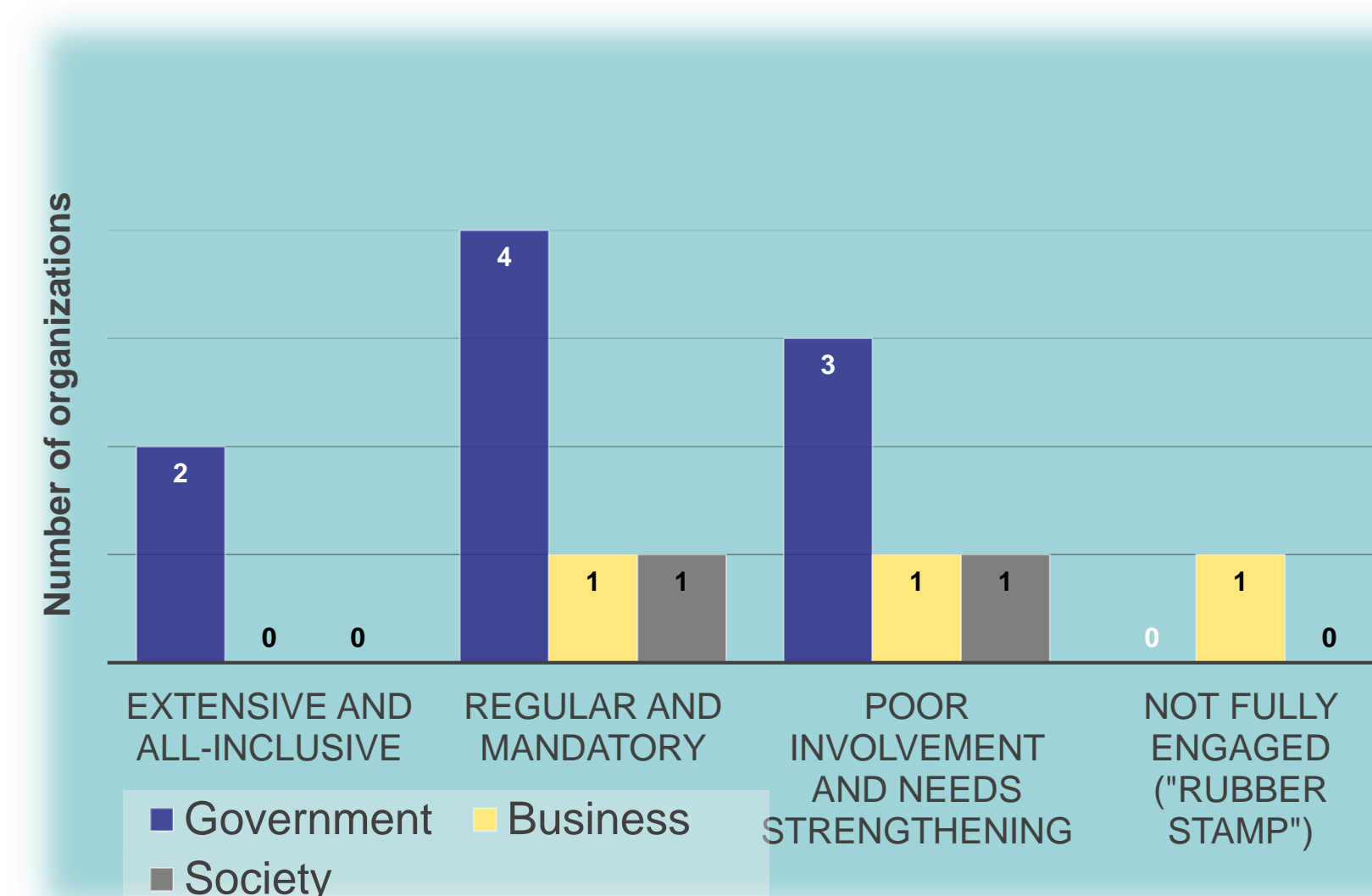
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Results

PARTICIPANTS' AWARENESS OF SEA



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS



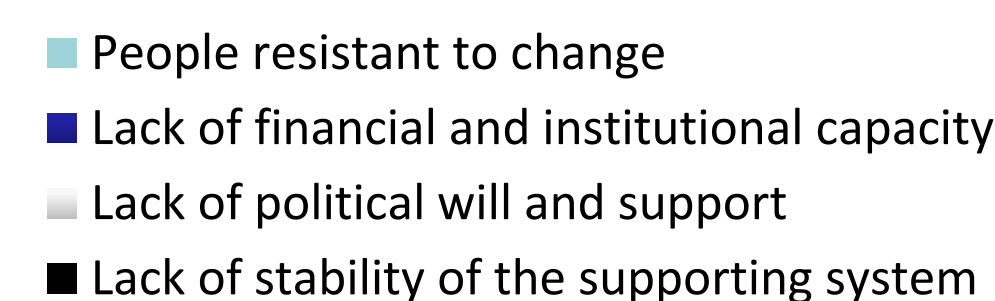
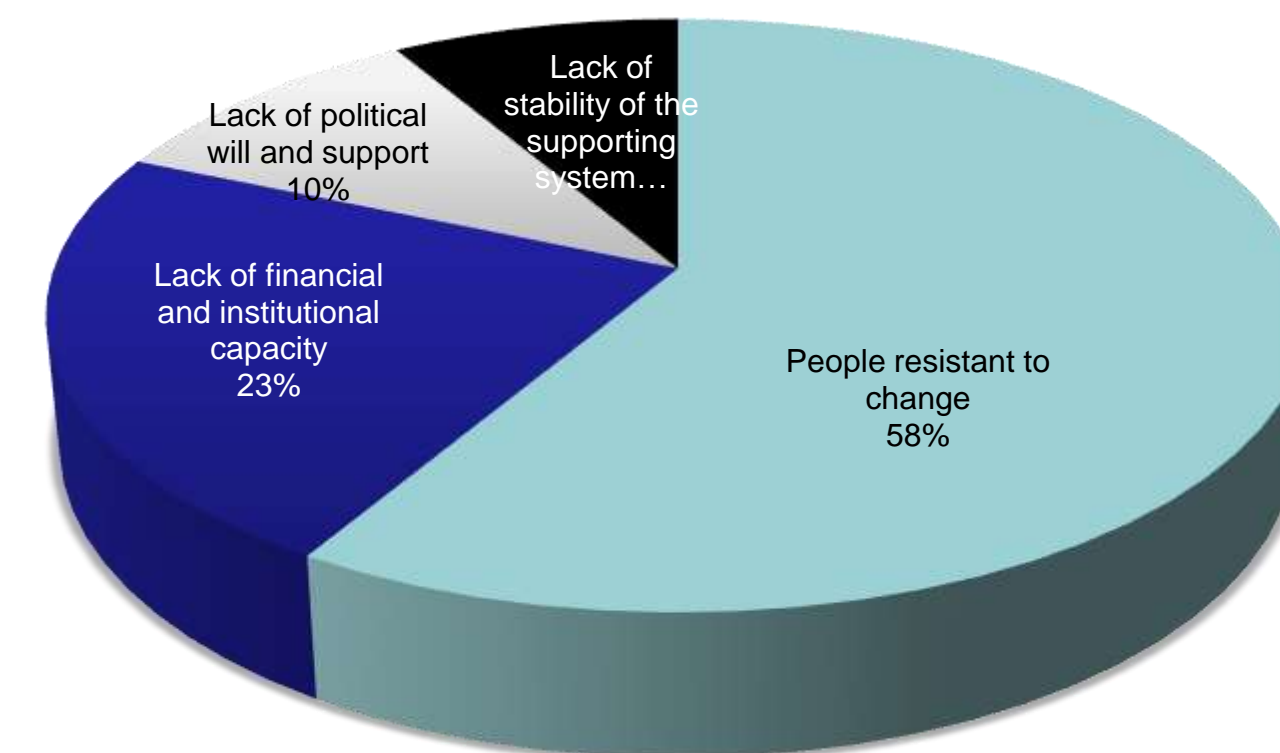
Discussion

1. Short-sighted planning, limited human resources and institutional capacities are limiting factors for sustainable development in PICs.
2. Culture and power relations play a big role in how people make decisions and conduct policy planning.
3. Understanding the root of communication barriers is key to finding common ground to strengthen collaboration among stakeholders.
4. PICs need to adapt the SEA tool to suit them not the other way around.

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POLICY PLANNING PROBLEMS



Conclusion

SEA can play a connective role in consolidating policies, plans and programmes and assist in analysing the impacts of PPPs in Pacific Island Countries. The interconnections and complexities of the SDGs with synergies and tradeoffs among goals provides the impetus and opportunity for SEA to live up to its potential for enhancing stakeholder engagement and serve as a catalyst for helping PICs to 'leave no one behind' when meeting their SDG targets.

Recommendations

1. Given that SEA is a relatively new tool that has not been institutionalized in PICs, SPREP and other international agencies such as World Bank have an opportunity to introduce the SEA tool in a context that suits the unique cultural, political and geographical attributes to support existing sustainable development strategies.
2. PICs should conduct an "EIA on the SEA" to assess the implications of the SEA tool based on their current policy planning processes and how to adapt it to suit them. Without considering the social and cultural interplays, power relations and political status in their own countries, SEA will not be effective.



SEA can help identify impacts of climate change policies, plans addressing beach erosion etc