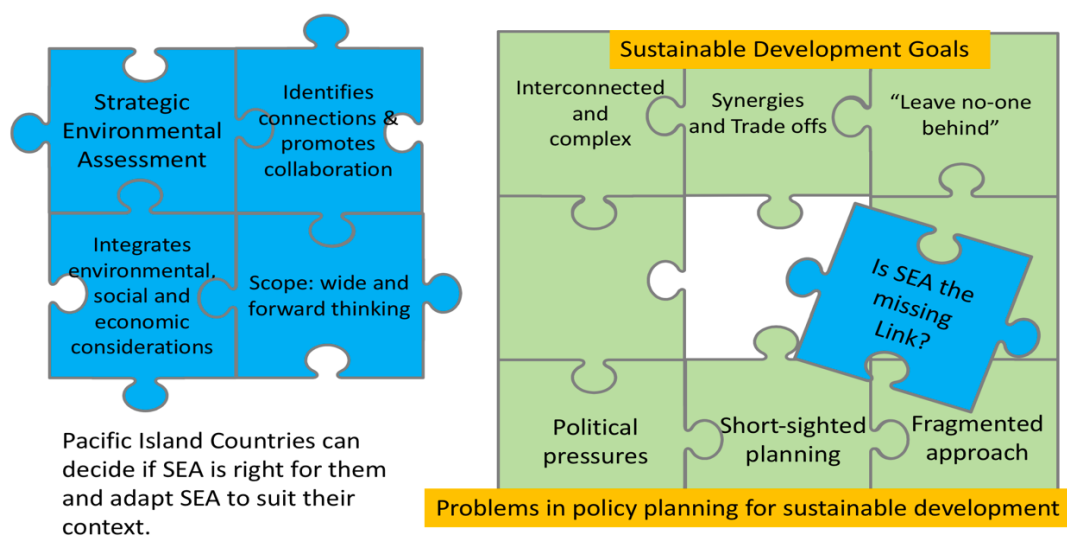


## Is SEA the missing link for sustainable development?



### **The Problem:**

Decision makers in Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are constantly making decisions that affect the environment and wellbeing of their communities, businesses etc. However, the consequences of their decisions on the environment, the people and economy are often overlooked. The SDGs provide a global framework for inclusiveness and partnerships to steer PICs closer to sustainable pathways. However, they are interconnected with synergies and trade-offs that require coordination among all stakeholders to assess the current sustainability credentials in their policies, plans and programmes in order to determine the necessary changes needed to meet them (Moyer and Bohl, 2019).

### **Research Aim:**

To understand current decision making and policy planning processes in Pacific Island countries in relation to achieving SDGs (13, 14 & 15) in order to determine the potential role for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

### **Methods:**

Case Study: Tonga

1. Literature review:
2. Institutional Analysis: document analysis of legislation, policies and plans related to ecosystem management under SDGs 13, 14, 15.
3. Key Informant Interviews: CEOs, directors, senior officers and community leaders involved in policy making, planning and decision-making processes.

## Results and Discussion

1. From the Key informant interviews, 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 but these factors are often not taken into account.
3. Understanding the root cause of communication barriers is key to finding common ground to strengthen collaboration among stakeholders for improving national efforts towards achieving SDGs.
4. PICs need to adapt the SEA tool to suit them not the other way around.

## 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. However, without considering the social and cultural interplays, power relations and political status in their own countries, SEA will not be effective (Bina, 2007).

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