

What does a 'blue' or 'green' economy really mean?

One might recall a communiqué stemming from Pacific Islands Leaders meeting several years back in which consensus was reached on the need to achieve a 'blue economy'. Around the tables of Pacific Islands businesses we wondered just what did this mean?

With a theme of "Leadership, Innovation & Partnership for Green/ Blue Pacific Economies" at this inaugural meeting of the Pacific Islands Development Forum, it is likely that many of the attendees would have a clear understanding of the issues, drivers and climate change paradigms. It could almost be expected that all of you, especially our political leaders, aid partners and bureaucrats believe that if managed properly, the challenge of responding to climate change can generate decent jobs and incomes for our Pacific communities.

The adoption and permeation of sustainable practices throughout the entire chain has not been sufficient in the global arena nor in our own. Cited as a global problem it is our backyards that will flood, it is our people are catching 25 times less fish per unit of fishing power today as they were 100 years ago.

A number of development agencies are engaged in developing markets to channel finance raised for climate change mitigation and adaptation in industrialised countries towards initiatives that reduce carbon emissions in the developing world. These same agencies and others not involved in financing, but service delivery, are all speaking in this new language of sustainable development. But how well do our local businesses and communities understand this, is it just a new set of hoops to jump through to obtain finance, or do we understand and hold a desire to make a fundamental paradigm shift from traditional development and lifestyle to one that is 'modern' yet sustainable.

Green, blue, organic, decent, equitable, transparent, CSO's, reduced footprint, carbon trade, carbon tax, sequestering carbon... sustainable development are not new words, but in the context of Pacific Islands business and government agencies responsible for growing and protecting our economies, we like many nations have a long way to go for it to move beyond niche marketing or making remote and isolated people feel obligated to continue living traditional lifestyles.

With regards to Pacific Islands businesses leading or showcasing the way forward in sustainable development it is not hard to cite several positive examples: New Brittan Palm oil holds RSPO certification; and a number of value-added timber businesses such as Cloudy Bay Sustainable Development have achieved FSC certification; PNG Forestry Products is close to achieving its TLTV certification; we now have almost too many to mention eco-tourism lodges and programs such as those under the Surfing Association of PNG and SPTO; and of course a moderate number of manufacturers of food and lifestyle products with various SD type claims certifications used as premium selling points.

Major players in timber operations have been driven by regulation and international consumer market pressures on sustainability and traceability. In the context of the Pacific our champions in SD are targeting niche markets and in many cases it's not easy, as has been the case with Earth and Spirit Products PNG –an operation encompassing 200 square kilometers, 45 villages and about 18,000 people, after almost a decade of ground work they now have more than 2,450 contracted farmers registered in the certified organic program. E&S holds dual NSAA and Rainforest Alliance certification.

Whilst the session will highlight in more detail the works of some of our champions, we will flesh out the role, private sector associations, governments and NGO's must play if we are to have true champions and sustainable economies and environments in the Pacific.

Achieving blue and green growth cannot be defined solely in econometric terms, we need to think about what it means for how we plan our cities, how we provide utilities and basic services; how we get to and from work, what we eat and wear, noting that price will only have a certain effect on many of those things, and of course we need to find ways to better measure the impact of these changes.