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RESILIENCE THE KEY

VISION-BASED PLANNING
FOR SAMOA'S COASTAL
ENVIRONMENT -
UNIVERSAL LESSONS FOR
STRATEGIC PLANNING

The lack of a specific statutory or regulatory framework for resource management is no excuse for poor planning. In fact there is ample evidence to suggest good planning comes about as a result of sound community driven vision-based strategies.

From 2001 to 2002 Beca Planning worked under a Government of Samoa contract funded by the World Bank to develop a Coastal Infrastructure Management Strategy (CIMS) and Coastal Infrastructure Management Plans (CIM Plans) for the Samoa island group. As the adopted definition of "infrastructure" in Samoa was very wide and includes most domestic activities and structures as well as community, social and utility infrastructure, this project has provided us with useful insights as to the recipes for planning success in a nation with no formal regulatory framework. In our opinion these recipes for success have universal application. Our paper provides an overview of the Samoa project and aims to highlight some of the key approaches to and benefits derived from a vision-based approach to strategic planning.

Samoa comprises the main islands of Upolu, Savaii, Manono and Apolima and lies between latitudes of 13° South, 172° West. It has a coastline length of over 400 kilometres and is generally surrounded by fringing coral reefs in some places up to 1,000 metres or more offshore.

Samoa's coastal environment plays a pivotal role in the nation's social and economic wellbeing. It is estimated that 70% of inhabitants are located within the coastal margin, which provides an important source of protein in the form of seafood for the islands subsistence economy. The intensity of development within the coastal area has resulted in large capital expenditure both by central government (in the form of roads, telecommunications and water supply), as well as investment by villagers (such as crops, houses and reclaimed land). Much of this investment is located within hazard prone areas, susceptible to coastal flooding, landslips or erosion hazards - particularly during cyclones which visit the islands an average of every ten years.

Natural resources, such as the islands coral reefs and sandy beaches, thereby play an essential role in not only protecting the physical

resources that are located within this coastal zone, but also the very well-being of the islanders themselves.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The concept of "planning" is, however, in its infancy in Samoa and is restricted to fledgling central government initiatives without the support of any statutory basis for intervention. The impact of such central government planning is further restricted by the fact that it exerts only a limited responsibility for planning affairs of the villages and their political districts. Where planning does occur - particularly in the case of infrastructure management, it is generally not viewed by villagers as a "public" resource but an encroachment onto the village land. The result is a general apathy at the village level towards government infrastructure, and a higher emphasis on the resources and relationships supporting the subsistence economy of the district. In this context it is not difficult to see why many previous attempts at consultation, (which rely on the role of central government), have failed to further the objectives of their associated projects, and have been criticised locally for their inconsistency with a subsistence lifestyle.

CIM STRATEGY

Given this history and a record of less than successful attempts at other planning projects in Samoa there was considerable debate over the best way forward with respect to formulating a meaningful CIM Strategy. Of more concern was the need to achieve community buy-in to the project and its aims bearing in mind that villagers, not government would, largely drive implementation of the strategy at a local level.

The approach we have adopted in Samoa is to focus from the outset on defining a simple, coherent vision or goal which sets the scene for all subsequent policy and actions whether these occur at a central government, district or village level. If nothing else can be achieved advocacy and awareness raising will flow from the adoption and promotion of such a simple vision. Further, the lack of a single Samoan translation for "planning" makes little difference for such an approach because people still readily relate to the concept of a vision, to personal and

community goals and to a common determination to "do better". Our task has largely been to facilitate the debate on visions and goals and to develop the supporting "planning" framework to achieve those goals and monitor the results.

For Samoa's Coastal Infrastructure Management Strategy we adopted a one key word approach to our Vision using 'Resilience'; a word that embodies all that we want to achieve to improve coastal management.

While the concept or vision needs to be simple, the importance of carefully considering the words used must be recognised. Long hours were spent with stakeholders debating numerous options before the term 'resilience' was selected. We wanted to ensure that in the context of coastal management our vision did not imply only physical intervention or regulatory control. It is about a wide range of practical national and local strategies and actions and it is about self-responsibility and ownership of the solutions. In the Samoan context, particular consideration

Without community ownership, there is no chance of success. This lesson has been particularly relevant in the Samoan context where a regulatory planning environment is in its infancy and necessity demands that the focus for resource and environmental management is on advocacy, self regulation and community enforcement.

2. Once adopted, market the vision widely and seek ideas on issues impacting upon achievement of the vision and options to work towards it.

It is important in the identification of issues to emphasise the often complex interdependencies of issues and the potential for seemingly simple resource and community decisions to potentially impact on the communities vision. We found the use of resource themes assisted the community in understanding the interdependency of resources (action-reaction or chain-reaction theory) and the importance of integration in management for the achievement of their strategic vision.

framework to discuss and debate the objectives and policies and provided a logical structure for the implementation of the strategy.

5. Consult widely and debate the objectives and policies with passion.

It is important that the community understands the implications of the Strategy and objectives and policies as they develop. We have found that the use of graphics and logical sequencing assists in defining the outcomes of objectives and policies, demonstrating the outcomes of different strategic approaches and the integrated linkages between these outcomes. Again, illustration of the consequences of 'chain reactions' provided a mechanism to demonstrate potential outcomes and impacts of the different management options and actions.

6. Develop methods, action plans and implementation measures for the adopted policy framework.

Including a framework for implementation of the Strategy provides the community and wider audience a better understanding on the direction of the Strategy and the priorities for action and demonstrates how the strategy will be physically implemented. This has been particularly important in the Samoan context, where focus has traditionally only been on physical outcomes.

7. Monitor the strategy and revise, revise, revise until the Vision becomes a reality!

In the Strategy, it is essential that structures are put in place to monitor and assess the effectiveness of the Strategy. We have learnt that nothing is certain and it is important that the Strategy has a mechanism for 'self-appraisal' to remain responsive and relevant for the community.

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needed to be also given to the translation of such words.

The CIM Strategy approach serves to illustrate that while being very different culturally, statutorily, economically and even physically, the visionary planning process for the coastal environment and communities in Samoa is fundamentally the same as that which we recommend be applied in countries with more sophisticated resource management systems such as New Zealand. In essence the strategic planning process can be summarised by a number of key steps:

1. Work with the Community to define and develop their Vision.

At the outset it is important that the community is involved in strategic planning.

3. Develop goals or strategy statements for various management themes representing aspects of the vision.

This provides the community a means to translate the vision in strategic management of resources and the environment. The concept of 'resilience' has been translated into four key management themes: information, monitoring and evaluation; education and awareness; land and resource management; and defences and works, these implementation themes apply to national and local management philosophies.

4. Develop objectives and policies on specific topics for each management theme.

This provides the direction for the implementation of the strategy. In Samoa, we found that this approach provided a consistent

CIM PLANS

Having worked hard to formulate a CIM Strategy that found favour not only at a local level but also with government, infrastructure providers and the World Bank (the CIM Strategy received formal cabinet sign off in January 2001), our attention turned to the preparation of CIM Plans for each of Samoa's 43 political districts which seek to implement the national strategy at a local level.

The CIM plans are the cornerstone of the village based management approach and the need to manage infrastructure in a coordinated and strategic manner to improve cyclone and hazard resilience. Each of the plans are prepared to address the unique social, political,

economic and environmental circumstances of the villages and district which they cover. Fourteen Plans have now been completed.

With a deliberate aim of "Institutional Strengthening", the CIM plan process has been undertaken through a close working relationship with Central Government (it is in fact driven by the Samoan Department of Lands Survey and Environment) and each of the villages to reconfirm the significance of infrastructure to social wellbeing and overall cyclone resilience. This was achieved by regular meetings with each of the infrastructure providers as well as the villages to convey issues, solutions and possible management responses. Such an approach recognises and attempts to resolve the inherent unease between districts and central government.

Given the lack of any government funding for enforcement of the CIM plans and the lack of regulatory methods so often relied on in New Zealand, the involvement and 'buy in' of every village as well as the key service providers (water, electricity, roading etc) was essential to the success of the strategy and each of the CIM plans. This was achieved partly by undertaking a broad brush economic analysis of various engineering options, (such as seawalls, or beach nourishment), or planning approaches (such as managed relocation) and by informing villages of the implications of various land use practices.

Not surprisingly, consultation was critical to the success of the project. The consultation process for CIM plan preparation was devised to meet a number of important goals, firstly to gather information on the coastal issues facing each village and solutions adopted, secondly to educate every village directly on the various solutions on how best to respond to both natural and human induced coastal processes and some of the problems associated with current responses, thirdly to facilitate an effective working relationship between each village and the various service providers, and finally to enable the formation of a working committee to feed back to the CIM plan writers as the plan is prepared.

Care has been taken to ensure that the partnership approach (between villages and central government) was translated into every stage of plan preparation. Indeed the education campaign, which introduces the CIM plan process, focussed on identifying the impacts of activities on the coastal environment, and ways

in which to manage these. It did not attempt to dictate every appropriate solution or encourage the foundation of a regulatory approach. This is not to say that there has been agreement on every plan prepared however, and an open debate is actively encouraged throughout the plans formulation.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

In our view the success of the project can be attributed to the following key components.

1. An agreed objective or objectives against which outcomes can be assessed. In the case of the Coastal Infrastructure Management Plans the concept of improving resilience was relied on. This concept has direct ramifications for a subsistence society such as Samoa that is regularly affected by cyclones and other extreme events.

2. A coordinated approach that empowers various stakeholders to commit to and partner the approach. This required a participatory negotiation based approach with villages and various infrastructure providers.

3. The provision of sound, timely expert advice to identify risk and appropriate mechanisms to manage this risk to an acceptable level.


4. Recognition of the institutional environment - legislative and customary. Although there is no legal backing for the preparation or enforcement of the CIM Plans, responsibilities are allocated amongst the villages in order to achieve various outcomes. Furthermore, infrastructure providers are tied to the results of the plans by the World Bank (and other aid agencies) which require consistency and compliance with the CIM plans as conditions of contract.

5. Simplicity. Adoption of readily translated CIM plans that provide simple guidelines and which do not attempt to achieve intellectual kudos.

At the time of writing, CIM plans had been prepared for 15 Districts, comprising individual agreements between government, infrastructure providers and the 98 villages concerned. Although the project is still some way of completion and CIM plans for 28 political districts are yet to be prepared, confirmation of the project's success to date can be seen in some of the major infrastructure investment that is now proposed for Samoa. These include investigations into an alternative inland road from Faleolo Airport to Apia, to

replace the vulnerable coastal route, and a financial commitment from the World Bank to part fund the relocation of government and village infrastructure away from hazard prone areas in four identified villages. Equally promising are village initiatives such as that by Vaimauga East to prosecute unlawful sand miners, reduce reliance on sand for village beautification, and a commitment from all of the villages involved to replace and rebuild new infrastructure and housing away from hazard prone areas. The CIM plans have also formed the basis of the National Adaptation Programme of Action, which outline priority response actions in responding to predicted sea level rise.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, strategic planning is about developing visions for the community and facilitating the means by which this vision can become a reality. It is about taking the widest perspective of planning and interpreting goals into local or specific actions. We have found that a process of 'simplicity and transparency' in consultation with the community has resulted in a greater level of community ownership and responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy. Without such ownership and responsibility no strategy can be fully effective. Ultimately we believe these factors are key to successful Strategic Planning regardless of the location or context. 

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