

12 November 2010 **Students in 'Eua, Tonga learn about climate change** Students from six primary schools and two high schools on the island of 'Eua in Tonga participated in awareness-raising activities on a range of environmental topics: climate change, sustainable forest and land management, land-use planning and watershed management. The awareness programme ran from 1-5 November 2010, and was supported by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)/ German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) Programme on Adaptation to Climate Change in the Pacific Island Region. Resource persons for the different topics came from the Tonga Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, the Forestry Division, the Tonga Trust and GTZ. Two local high school teachers were also part of the team. By the end of the week, more than 700 students had participated in the awareness programme.

Climate change, global warming and the impact of these two phenomena on the Tongan way of life created much interest amongst the students and expanded their knowledge of these topics, which are not part of the regular school curriculum. Students also learned about the role of forests in mitigating climate change, and this created a whole new vision of forests for them; no longer were they seen only as a source of building material and firewood. The students also acquired a sense of responsibility towards forests and the management of them.

A presentation on forest clearance currently being carried out on 'Eua was an eye-opener for students and teachers alike. The GTZ Tonga Project officer Ms 'Ofa Kaisamy said, "Students and teachers wanted to go into the forest to investigate the clearance of their indigenous forests. It became apparent to students that if forest clearance and unsustainable land use were to continue unabated, the impacts, especially in the face of climate change, would affect their future well-being and the health of the island. Following this presentation the students requested that they be involved in the forest replanting programme currently being planned by SPC and GTZ."

The school awareness programme is an effort to address the need to educate children and young adults on these current and emerging development issues. Their integration into educational curricula will be an important development in preparing the younger generation to be better informed. Programmes such as this organised activity on 'Eua take the information directly to the schools. The participation of children in activities to raise awareness about issues such as climate change is an investment for future conservation work.

The week-long awareness programme ended on a high note with the launching of a poetry, essay and drama competition for the schools and youths of 'Eua. Similar awareness programmes are planned for other school clusters in Tonga.

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