



Pacific
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RESCCUE

THE PILOT SITES APPROACH TO ICZM, ITS PITFALLS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM



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Front cover photo:

Caribbean pine (*Pinus caribaea*), Mangareva, French Polynesia (R. Billé, 2014)

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	2
2. Action without change?	2
3. Where do we go from there?	2
Annex 1	4

1. INTRODUCTION

The pilot sites approach is at the core of the RESCCUE project and its architecture. Given the mixed track-record of programmes based on pilot projects in generating change at the targeted level, it is worth investigating whether RESCCUE is designed around a robust theory of change in that regard, or how this can be improved. This paper is made of two different pieces:

- The first one is an article published in 2010 by the author, long before the RESCCUE journey started. It defines the pilot concept and the questions it raises; reminds why the pilot approach is so widely used; explores the most widespread obstacles facing the pilot approach; and briefly concludes. This article is attached as an annex.
- The second one is a more recent development on where do we go from there, aiming at starting a discussion on the extent to which RESCCUE is already on the right track, and what needs – and can – be changed.

2. ACTION WITHOUT CHANGE? ON THE USE AND USEFULNESS OF PILOT EXPERIMENTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

See annex 1.

3. WHERE DO WE GO FROM THERE?

The previous section concludes on the pitfalls of the pilot theory of change and on the highly unlikely success of the “fingers crossed strategy” as a response. It hence leads to the need to develop a clear and realistic strategy for the pilot approach to be successful. This section sketches what this strategy could look like, or at least which questions and challenges should be addressed so that such a robust strategy is developed and implemented. It is articulated around four key topics:

- What are the objectives of the pilot approach in RESCCUE? What do we want to achieve through the pilot projects?
- What are the opportunities to reach such objectives, from which RESCCUE will benefit?
- What are the obstacles to reach such objectives, from which RESCCUE will suffer?
- What specific resources should RESCCUE harness to reach its objectives?

3.1. Why implement pilot projects within RESCCUE?

It could be asserted that RESCCUE is built around the typical pilot sites approach for two reasons – probably both valid to some extent:

- Because it is the most classical approach for regional projects, the typical way of doing development cooperation projects – in other words, the force of habit and the comfort it provides to project funding, implementing and partner agencies;
- Because RESCCUE is a highly innovative project (see meeting presentation, section 2.1), exploring coastal policy and management areas that are only emerging in the Pacific; hence the need to “pilot-test” specific approaches and instruments (such as payments for ecosystem services).

They involve a number of distinct objectives that need to be discussed and clarified:

1. Are we essentially **testing** tools (public participation, PES, economic valuations...) on which we consider there is not enough evidence from the field to develop full- scale projects and policies? Is *learning* then the key objective? If yes, what is to be learnt and who are the key learners?

2. Are we expecting **replication** to happen, i.e. multiplication of similar devices (approaches, tools, actions...) as those tested in the pilot sites, but on other sites? If yes, in the same countries and territories or elsewhere in the Pacific?
3. Are we trying to leverage pilots to **initiate country- or region-wide changes** in coastal management? To change specific public policies? Which ones?
4. Are we more generally targeting the **acculturation** of Pacific decision-makers to ICZM, economic tools etc., seeing RESCCUE as one contribution among many others over the years, with a very diffuse and hardly measurable own effect? Many wide-scale transformations have resulted from an accumulation of pilot experiments before being eventually carved in laws and translated in practices.

These objectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but RESCCUE probably needs to clarify which one(s) is/are the priority.

3.2. Opportunities

Depending on the actual key objective(s), opportunities may include:

- RESCCUE has a regional activities budget of 450,000 Euros for dissemination, learning, capitalisation...
- Quite unusually, pilot sites have not been chosen because they were particularly favourable to reach easy success, but for a much more complex web of reasons. While this is a challenge to having successful pilots, this may provide more opportunities to learn lessons from real-world experience;
- Partner governments and administrations are involved very formally through signed agreements at a high political level, participation / chairmanship of steering committees, design / approval of calls for tenders etc. Therefore conditions are met for RESCCUE to go beyond the pilot sites approach and support national and local policy objectives;
- The financial sustainability of devices developed during the project is embedded in the project itself through the component on sustainable financial mechanisms;
- The project is implemented by a regional organization, whose mandate is in synergy with the need to go beyond the pilots.

3.3. Obstacles and risks

Depending also on the actual key objective(s), obstacles may include:

- Sites may be too specific to really learn general lessons that can be easily used elsewhere;
- There is a risk that learners will be mainly the RESCCUE team and operators, not the administrations and local stakeholders;
- No budget is available within RESCCUE to directly fund replication of pilot experiments on other sites;
- 18 of the 22 PICTs are not RESCCUE beneficiaries and will be more difficult to reach, involve or convince;
- Ownership of RESCCUE by partner governments and administrations is so far uneven but generally not as strong as it could be, for various reasons.

3.4. What to do? Means and resources

Once the key objective(s) is/are defined, means and resources to achieve it, taking into account opportunities and obstacles, will be defined and precisely connected to the RESCCUE architecture and planned activities. This will cover for example:

- Plan the replication effort: how is it going to happen? Through whose action? With whose support? Which funding?
- Carefully analyse and document **successes** (to identify what works) **and failures** (which probably offer previews of what will happen if replication is funded in less favourable sites);
- Try and convince donor agencies and Pacific governments and administrations to fund and support replication after RESCCUE is completed, instead of going for more pilots and tests;
- Strengthen national and local ownership (but how?);
- Place more emphasis on policies and laws than on concrete field actions (for example by allocating some of the RESCCUE pilot sites budget to national scale activities to foster changes in fiscal policies and laws);
- ...

ANNEX 1

Billé, R. 2010. Action without change? On the use and usefulness of pilot experiments in environmental management. S.A.P.I.E.N.S 3(1)