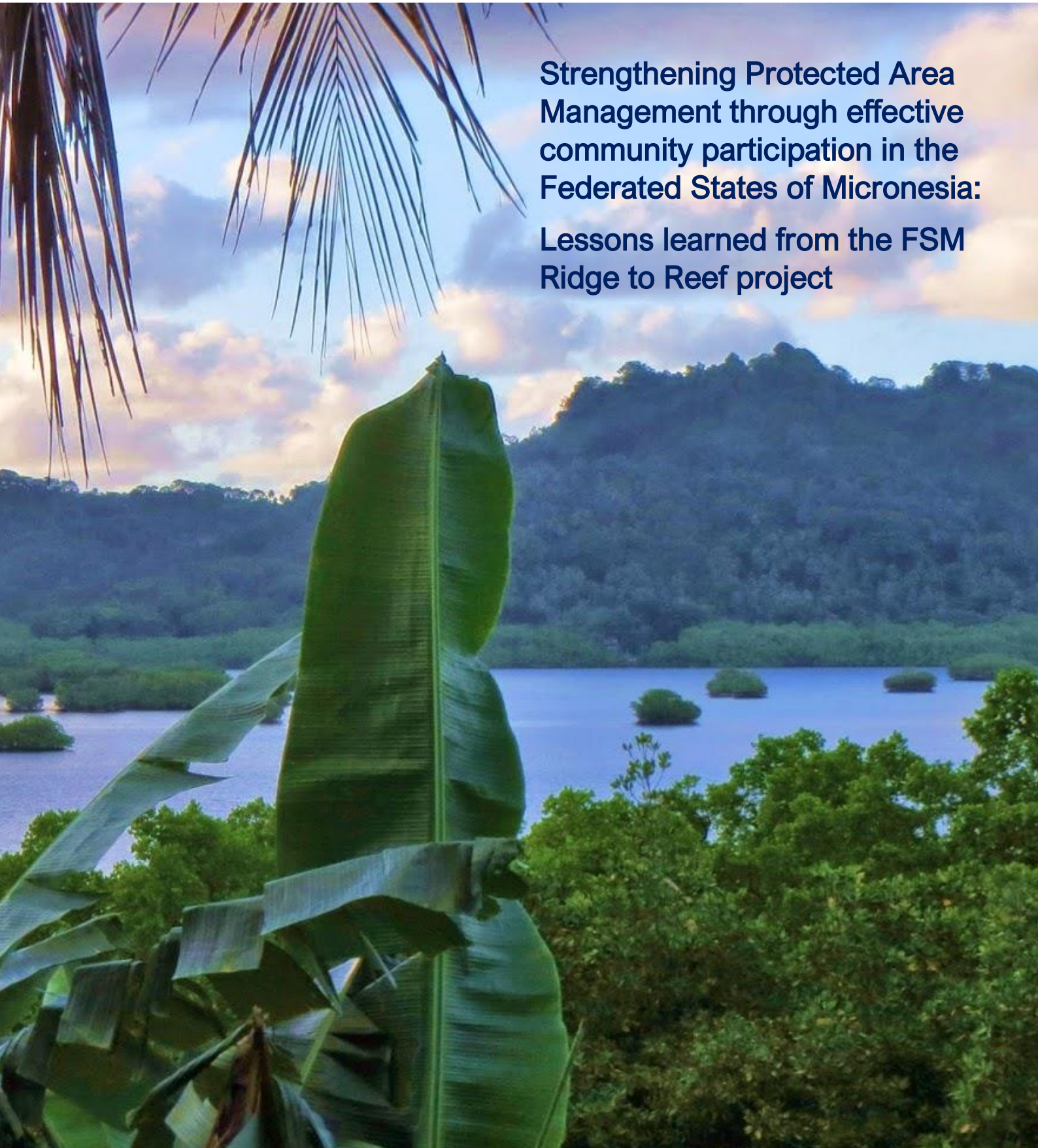

Strengthening Protected Area Management through effective community participation in the Federated States of Micronesia:

Lessons learned from the FSM Ridge to Reef project

Authors:

Dr. Chiara Franco, FSM R2R Chief Technical Adviser,

Ms. Rosalinda Yatilman, FSM R2R Project Manager,

Ms. Rachael Nash, FSM R2R Technical Coordinator.

Ms. Mae Bruton-Adams, APLŸS Managing Director

Reviewed by: Dr. Fononga Vainga Mangisi-Mafileo.

Writing and editing support: Seema Deo (Footprints in the Sand Consulting)

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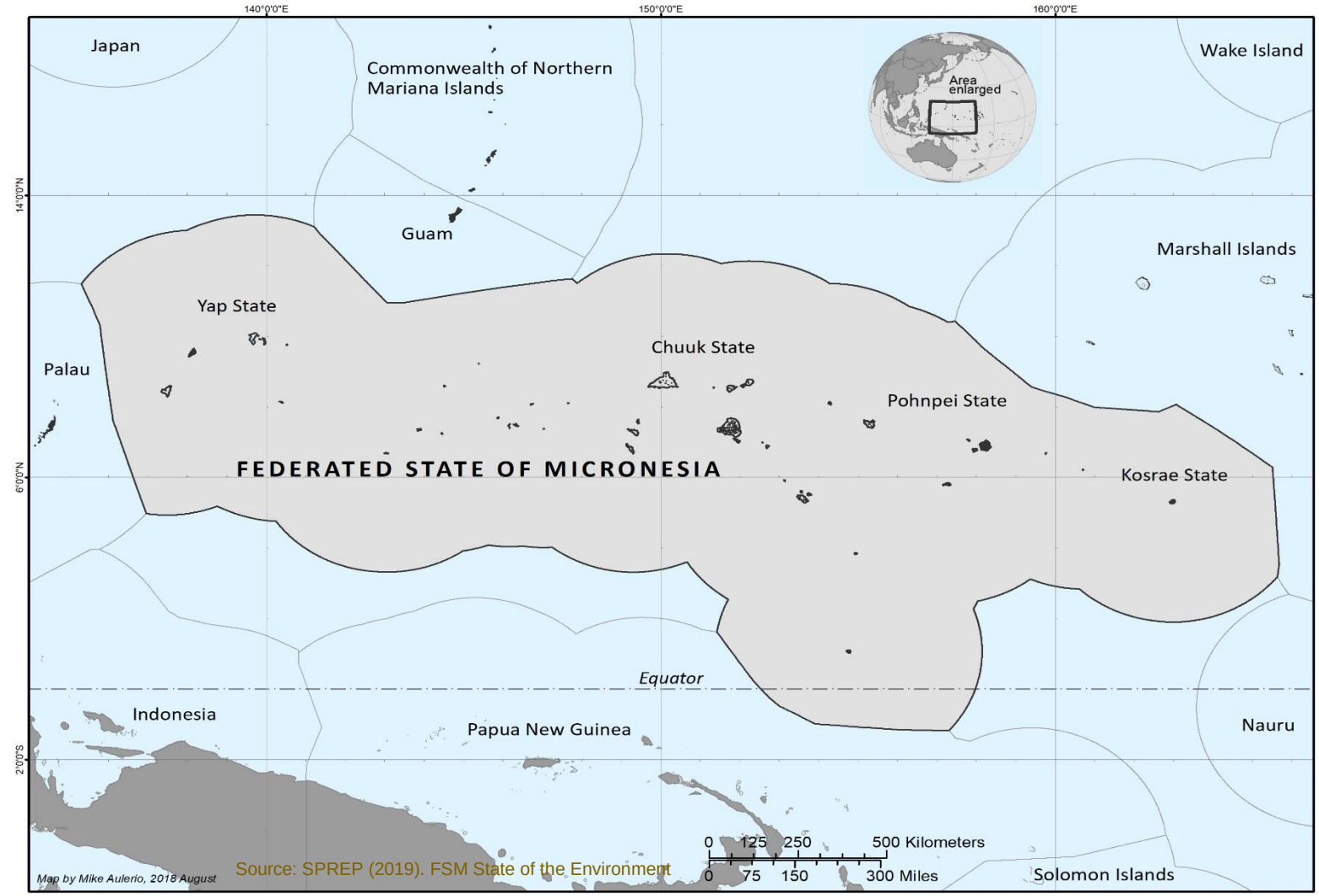

Federated States of Micronesia Ridge to Reef in Context

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) Ridge to Reef Project (R2R) project titled "*Implementing an integrated Ridge to Reef approach to enhance ecosystem services, to conserve globally important biodiversity and to sustain local livelihoods in the Federated States of Micronesia.*" The project was scheduled to commence on November 19, 2015 and conclude on November 19, 2020. However, it was extended in June 2020, for an additional 18 months, until May 2022, to accommodate delays in the recruitment of project staff, the execution of the inception workshop not occurring until October 2016, the COVID-19 pandemic, and to help meet the desired targets.

The objective of the FSM Ridge to Reef Project (R2R) is to strengthen local, State and National capacities and actions to implement integrated ecosystem-based management through a "ridge to reef" approach on the High Islands of the four States of FSM. It is designed to engineer a paradigm shift in the approach to and

management of natural resources from an ad-hoc species/site/problem-centric approach to a holistic ecosystem-based management "ridge to reef" approach guided by planning and management processes that are informed by actual data. To achieve the objective, the project focused on two main components, which are the R2R's expected outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Integrated Ecosystems Management and Rehabilitation on the High Islands of FSM to enhance Ridge to Reef Connectivity.
- Outcome 2: Management Effectiveness enhanced within new and existing Protected Areas on the High Islands of FSM as part of the R2R approach (both marine and terrestrial).

Under outcome 2, the project aims to improve the management effectiveness and sustainability of marine and terrestrial Protected Areas (PAs) through a nationwide network of PAs, to establish and enhance sustainable land and marine management practices to reduce existing environmental stressors and increase the resilience of communities and natural ecosystems to the impacts of climate change. In doing so, the R2R project is promoting the use of ecosystem-based approaches to maintain the flow of vital ecosystem services and sustain the livelihoods of local communities.

Ecosystems, such as upland forests, mangroves and coral reefs, are vital for the livelihood and well-being of the communities of the FSM. High island ecosystems are threatened by anthropogenic impacts, which are further taxed by climate change, which can alter their ability to provide food, water and coastal protection to communities living in Pohnpei, Yap, Chuuk and Kosrae. In addition, climate change and human activity can reduce biological and genetic diversity, further hampering nature's capacity to provide critical services, reducing community resilience. Conservation efforts and sustainable management of natural assets can help communities adapt to climate change impacts, while providing an array of co-benefits such as sustainable economic development, poverty alleviation, carbon sequestration and protection of livelihoods. In FSM, numerous households are dependent on coral reefs for subsistence fisheries and on intact forests for soil fertility and agroforestry yield. Sustainable management and protection of these key ecosystems is the foundation for maintaining the flow of services that they provide to communities, and ensures their future socioeconomic safety.

The R2R project, in its efforts to conserve important biodiversity to sustain local livelihoods, has been working alongside communities, to implement and enforce PA sustainable management plans and regulations for FSM's marine and terrestrial PA network. FSM's government structure constitutionally provides the four states autonomy over the governance of their environment and land tenure. Therefore, each state has a unique land tenure system and environment protection laws and regulations. Land and, in some states, marine systems, are also privately owned and

managed. The project thus, needed to be mindful of the diversity of these ownership issues and the laws, customs and traditions of each state in planning and managing PAs. Through collaboration with communities and government agencies, the project identified best management practices for privately owned land and marine systems. Rather than enforcing strict government regulations for managing PAs established on community private land, focus was given to traditional management systems, including norms that have been traditionally used by communities to sustainably manage their marine and terrestrial resources.

Since its inception, the R2R project has provided assistance to communities in developing community-based management plans, aligned to state regulations, as instruments for implementation and enforcement, and created awareness around demarcated community PA boundaries. It also promoted awareness and education on the benefits of PAs and provided local capacity building for implementation and enforcement of community-based management plans. Through this bottom-up approach, communities across the four FSM states were aided in establishing and reviving PAs and fully operationalising management plans of designated PAs.

Problem Context

FSM's marine and terrestrial ecosystems are vital for food and water security, material for construction, coastal protection, control of soil erosion, water filtration, biological and genetic diversity, and the continued practice of customs and traditions. These resources and services, however, are being undermined by unsustainable use and practices; spread of invasive alien species; the impacts of climate change; and the limitations of government to effectively implement and enforce its programmes and policies. As a result, institutional enabling conditions that provide the framework for ecosystem and natural resource management are weakened, and habitat fragmentation and loss of biodiversity are undermined reducing the ecosystems' ability to provide provisioning of critical services (i.e., food and water) and natural regulatory services (i.e., coastal protection).

In 2006 the Micronesia Challenge (MC) was established, whereby FSM's leadership committed to effectively conserve at least 30% of their nearshore marine resources and 20% of their terrestrial resources by 2020. During the 24th Micronesia Island Forum in 2019, FSM, along with the other countries and territories in MC and its partners, worked to expand the MC's ambitious goals to effectively manage at least 50% of marine resources and 30% of terrestrial resources by 2030; and provide a platform to regionally connect this locally-led action to the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the CBD Aichi targets. Since FSM's commitment to the MC, in 2006, communities, national, state and municipal government, as well as local

and international NGOs, have worked together to establish PAs across FSM. In this context, FSM's Protected Areas Network (PAN) National Guiding Policy Framework (PANPF), adopted in September 2018, aims to strengthen and expand the existing network of terrestrial and marine protected areas in the country, by facilitating the "national government's delivery of assistance to its states in the protection of significant areas of biodiversity, key habitats, and other valuable resources" (NBSAP 2018). The PAN policy framework "outlines a transparent, fair, and efficient system governing the designation and operation of a nationwide protected areas network, inclusive of state-level protected area networks in Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae" (NBSAP 2018).

Among the island communities, changes in landscape and seascape are raising concerns. FSM's population is highly dependent on terrestrial and marine ecosystems for subsistence, with 47% of the country's households conducting fishing activities and more than half being dependent on fisheries for their subsistence, with 6% of total household income coming from fisheries and accounting for 28% of the value of subsistence consumption (HIES 2013/14; SPC Fact sheet). Similarly, FSM communities are highly dependent on agroforestry for their livelihood, with 67% of households conducting agroforestry activities, particularly for subsistence, and the total value of agricultural products making up US$ 28 million from crops (HIES 2013/14; SPC Fact sheet).

Terrestrial and marine habitats, and the goods and services they provide, are threatened by destructive human activities, such as deforestation, clearing of mangrove areas, coastal dredging, pollution of rivers and water lenses, coastal and inland development, overharvesting of marine species, as well as by climate change through rising air and sea temperatures, changes in rainfall, sea level rise and increased storms.

Throughout the twentieth century, changes in the economic landscape, with an important shift from a subsistence to a monetised economy, have contributed to degradation of terrestrial ecosystems and increased extraction of marine resources. While fishing pressure occurs in a similar fashion throughout the country, land degradation differs in form across the states. For instance, in some states, land degradation is largely associated to forest loss due to monocropping activities (e.g., sakau – *Piper methysticum*); in others states, invasive alien species may play a more major role. Despite prominent human and climate change induced threats, FSM's communities have been proactive in seeking sustainable ways to manage their natural resources.

Historically, communities have been the guardians of their natural systems. FSM's traditional culture is still strongly intertwined with nature and its persistence. Men and women have key roles in natural resource management that vary from island

to island, with men generally involved in fishing, and women in gardening. The majority of natural resources are also privately owned and managed, but traditional leaders give guidance and often make final decisions. This has favoured engagement and participation of communities in the management of protected areas. Through the years, a number of local communities have worked with their local governments and in collaboration with local and international NGOs, to set aside critical areas of biodiversity for conservation, and have been at the forefront in planning, establishing, and managing protected areas across the country. For states such as Chuuk and Yap, where the government doesn't have jurisdiction over most of the land and near-shore area, all management plans and decisions are community driven and endorsed by local leaders.

The R2R project utilised a bottom-up approach that builds upon the role that communities have historically played as nature's custodians, increasing ownership of and accountability for protection and conservation of natural resources. The support from the local government has been essential to create momentum and build the foundations for an inclusive management system that promotes participation of traditional leadership, youth and women, thereby strengthening the relationship between communities and local government towards the common goal of protecting nature and its services.

Through awareness, education, and learning exchanges, more people are becoming aware of the benefits associated with protection and management of nature and biodiversity in protected areas. For example, Pohnpei State has been hosting annual cross-site visits where resource owners, conservation officers and supporting agencies come together to share progress, best practices, lessons learned and connect with new resources, which has helped to build their capacity to better manage their protected areas. During the exchange, they also prepare priority actions for the upcoming yea


Oneisomw Marine Protected Area, Chuuk, FSM © R2R Project Implementing Unit

Approach

The lessons learned presented in this document, focus on key lessons from the implementation of PA at community and local government level, describing the barriers and best practices for PA management in FSM.

This report is informed by interviews with community representatives and project management units that assisted in the planning and implementation of protected area management plans at community level. Secondary sources were also used, including R2R project documents, reports and other relevant material (e.g., newsletters) produced during the life-time of the project.

In FSM, protected area management is a joint effort between local communities, NGOs, state agencies, the FSM national government and international donors and technical assistance organisations (Kostka et al. 2014). This requires input and buy-in from the communities that own and steward the land and marine areas in question, with consistent technical support from local and international NGOs and government agencies (Kostka et al. 2014).

Since 2003, in FSM, conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems was driven by the ecoregional plan '*A Blueprint for Conserving the Biodiversity of the Federated States of Micronesia*' (TNC 2003), which identifies Areas of Biodiversity Significance (ABS) in the country, encompassing key terrestrial and marine systems across the four states. Although the blueprint process identified numerous sites as ABS, most of the

sites were on private land with limited access. Some of the ABS sites are not under any type of management, while others are either privately or community owned and have been managed under the traditional tenure system (NBSAP 2018). Over the years, government, NGOs and community partners across FSM have worked together to establish state, municipal and community legislated and/or traditionally declared protected areas covering a wide range of habitats and ABS sites.

A key approach taken by FSM is the establishment of the National Protected Areas Network (PAN), which recognizes communities and states management systems and modalities[1]. Membership to PAN has benefits such as access to long-term technical and financial aid. A National PAN Policy Framework (PANPF) has been developed, which establishes procedures for management entities of PA sites to apply to be part of the PAN. While the implementation framework for the PANPF is still being formulated, the R2R project, has assisted the states in updating or developing their PAN legislation and/or regulations to promote the inclusion of existing and new PA sites to the PAN.

The R2R project has collaborated with communities and State PAN Coordinators to develop or update site management plans in all four states, while at the same time building local capacity to effectively manage their PAs. For example, in Chuuk the project supported the rehabilitation of Nefo watershed in Weno. This effort was led by Chuuk Women Council and comprised replanting and plant nursery trainings as well as awareness campaigns with two local schools, which included tree planting demonstrations. The Nefo watershed rehabilitation effort ensured equal access to trainings, awareness and implementation by women, girls and people with disabilities, promoting women empowerment and capacity building. Another example is the development of a management plan for Gachpar marine protected area in Yap State, which underwent years of consultations and collaborative review with support from R2R and key stakeholders and partners. It was officially endorsed by the community in 2021.

Lack of capacity at the community level can have a significant impact on effective protected areas management, therefore, focus was placed in building local capacity through training programmes and learning exchanges. For instance, the learning exchange between the Sapo, Oror, and Ununo (SOU) Conservation Society and the

[1] At State level, the conditions for a PA site to be recognized is for the site to be officially recognised through (i) the legal system for those states where terrestrial or marine areas are set on public areas, such as Pohnpei and Kosrae; (ii) require the endorsement from the community and/or in same cases through an ordinance from the local municipal government for states where land and marine areas are owned by communities (i.e., clans, land owners). In states where terrestrial or marine areas are public, the PA process should go through a legislative review and approval to be gazetted and officially recognised. To promote the inclusion of existing and new PA sites to the PAN, the R2R project has assisted the states in updating or developing their PAN legislation and/or regulations.

Oneisomw Resource Management Committee (ORMC), allowed these community-based organizations to share information on their resource management experiences and to learn from each other as natural resource management partners with the goal of increasing capabilities and inspire internally driven decisions and actions for the achievement of immediate and long-term outcomes. The event took place with the assistance from the Chuuk Departments of Marine Resources and of Agriculture, the Chuuk Protected Areas Network, and the Chuuk Conservation Society, strengthening collaboration among the participating communities, NGOs and resource managers in Chuuk State and as well as the FSM National Government.

Terrestrial Protected Area in Tamil, Yap, FM © R2R Project Implementing Unit

SOU- Oneisomw learning exchange, Chuuk, FSM © R2R Project Implementing Unit

Highlights

Community participation in Protected Areas management promotes effective stewardship of terrestrial and marine resources

The process of establishing and implementing protected areas has benefited from the participation of communities, who have a wealth of knowledge and an intimate understanding of the needs at their sites. The use of a bottom-up approach had the advantage of including all the members of community. For example, the Kosrae wetland rehabilitation, promoted partnership between women and men and increased awareness on wetland and biodiversity conservation across genders and ages by involving 304 community members, 114 of which were women and 190 were men. Prior to the start of the rehabilitation process, the FSM R2R project partnered with KIRMA to create an ad-hoc group consisting men and women, which facilitated the identification of sites for rehabilitation, including PA sites. This has enhanced collaboration among community members, with women and youth actively participating in community resource management committees and increasing their commitment to conservation, especially in those states where resources, such as land and coral reefs, are privately owned. Throughout the life of the R2R project, it was observed that protected areas have reinforced collaboration among the different sectors of society and increased stewardship by communities of their resources.

Protected Areas build upon traditional management systems

Traditional enforcement practices are part of management and key for community engagement and accountability. The R2R project assisted in the review and update of several community plans and state legislations (e.g., Chuuk Protected Areas Network Act of 2017, SOU Stewardship plan), which were built acknowledging

traditional management practices as effective tools in the management toolbox. Among the benefits of utilising traditional management systems were:

- High familiarity with these practices by communities since they have been utilised generation after generation;
- The enhancement of traditional knowledge and their transfer to new generations;
- An increased willingness to comply with traditional systems rather than modern forms of management; and
- Traditional governance systems (i.e., Traditional councils in Yap) represent an opportunity for enforcing local management plans and to enhance awareness and education among members of the community.

Biological monitoring and knowledge sharing strengthen community and government capacity in managing resources

The Protected Areas Network (PAN) uses existing in-country networks and long-term biological monitoring data that are collected under the Micronesia Challenge. Through local NGOs and reporting back from monitoring teams, the communities have the opportunity to access information on and better understand the status of their resources in order to make informed decisions on how to manage ecosystems. For example, knowledge sharing on emerging threats that could compromise PA management efforts (such as the impact of an accidentally introduced invasive species) is key to promoting adaptive management by informing decision making at local level as well as policy decisions at state level, which influence the distribution of resources.

The existence of in-country networks, such as the Locally Managed Area Network and Locally-Managed Marine Areas (LMMA), represents a good platform for engaging communities and government, highlighting best management practices and promoting the benefits of adaptive management of natural resources for replication in other communities. Learning exchanges were also important efforts to ensure that best practices were shared among several communities within and outside these networks.

Protected Areas build and strengthen community relationship with local government and other partners

Under the R2R Project, the PA component (outcome 2) provided communities with the opportunity to foster the network of partners from which they could receive support for capacity building and access expertise and professional inputs. This enlarged network includes local NGOs, government agencies and international NGOs. R2R fostered new networks among community resource committees during learning exchanges and between NGOs and government agencies at national and

international conferences. This helped strengthening relationships between state agencies and community resource management groups. Throughout the R2R project, collaboration between state agencies and communities was beneficial for effective planning that aligned with state regulations, while addressing community management needs.

Mooring for demarcation of Marine Protected Areas, FSM © R2R Project Implementing Unit

Participatory 3D model for Kitti Watershed, Pohnpei, FSM © R2R Project Implementing Unit

Lessons Learned

ISSUE 1: Establishing and implementing a protected area can be a lengthy and complex process

Although a participatory process represents the best approach for establishing protected areas and ensuring management effectiveness, it is time consuming and is highly dependent on community members' time, their priorities, the geographic make-up of sites, weather conditions, cultural mores, and other external factors. Some protected areas and their communities, are remote and difficult to reach. Weather can also have an impact on accessing sites and communities. Most importantly, community social events (e.g., funerals, celebrations), which are deeply embedded in the community social life, are prioritised over other activities. Among the most relevant challenges that increased the length of the process were:

- Land tenure: participation and commitment of landowners to implement protected area plans can fluctuate with time. The importance of keeping some level of flexibility in the management planning process has been highlighted, considering that some landowners may change their perspective on the benefits associated with protected areas and thus withdraw their support.

Continued communication, engagement, implementation support and identification of alternative livelihoods is crucial. These considerations are particularly relevant for those states where most of the land, and in some cases the coral reefs, are privately owned and managed.

- Turnover of staff or political changes: changes in the political settings of a state are part of the democracy; however, when new administrations come on board, they generally require time to adjust. Staff turnover has been identified as another challenge in terms of time needed to establish protected areas. Government staff may increase their capacity through training and experience, which results in acquiring additional responsibilities, but not additional compensation. NGO and community organizations are often unable to obtain sufficient resources to maintain adequate personnel due to donor funding restrictions (i.e., funding project activities but not recurrent costs). As a result, staff move on to new positions. Staff need to have an incentive to remain employed, such as attractive salaries and room for performance-based raises. New staff require time to become accustomed with the protected areas status and their processing level.
- There are insufficient technical staff or officers to review and assist in the finalisation of the management plans. Since government agencies operate at multiple levels, they may have limited capacity to assist communities throughout the PA establishment process and to officially recognise their protected areas. However, during the R2R project, collaboration between communities and NGOs at some sites was effective in addressing this capacity gap, and PAN Coordinators were put in place in each state with the intention that the positions become permanent if funding is found. Having a dedicated individual within each state to support PAs is crucial
- Aside from the planning and development of management plans, current legislation can require considerable time for publicising the establishment of protected areas. The FSM R2R project has supported updating PA legislation, developing regulations, and the development of a PAN Operations Manual in efforts to streamline this process, along with continued awareness campaigns all of which are ongoing at the time of writing this document.

Key lessons learned and recommendations

1. Managing expectations of communities and donor partners has helped to strengthen communities' trust in the process.
2. Identification of community members who are tasked to build partnerships between local government and government agencies has improved communication and collaboration among state partners and communities.

3. Establish clear guidelines for streamlining the PA process from the identification of the sites for protection through to gazetting, including timelines. The PA process should be built based on the states' priorities and constructed by local laws and regulations that support the FSM PAN Policy Framework. The PAN policy highlights the need for the states to appoint a person to assist communities to develop, review, edit and finalise management plans based on the policy criteria. The draft PAN Operations Manual will further clarify the process once it is complete.

ISSUE 2: Community-managed protected areas require external funding support for implementation and enforcement

Sustainable financing is a requirement for the sustainability and effectiveness of protected areas. Currently, implementation of community management plans for protected areas is reliant on external (donor) funds. A challenge is meeting the expectations of donors as well as those of communities. Although management plans include protection of key ecosystems for livelihoods, their focus is not limited to this, but expand to include other community needs in terms of water security, food security, education, health and any other sector relevant to community well-being. There are thus, cases when some activities prioritised in the management plan do not align with donors' requirements for funding, although they reflect community needs. For example, the aforementioned issue of retaining staff is exacerbated when donor policy doesn't allow for funding of personnel, even though that is what the community needs most. A single donor is also not enough to fund all needs of a protected area, so in most cases, cost sharing occurs. For instance, annual coral reef monitoring occurs across the FSM to measure national targets and inform community management, with support from US Federal funds (NOAA). Field work is a collaborative effort between NGOs, state agencies, and communities providing in-kind support. In 2020, R2R granted additional funds to the coordinating NGO to collect and analyze additional information on fish biomass.

Community capacity for planning and applying for funds needs to be built together with their capacity to absorb project funds. Administrative and financial capacities are required skills for managing funds disbursed for implementing management plan activities. Capacitating communities with institutional management skills will help build their ability to access different funding sources, and appropriately manage their finances.

Key lessons learned and recommendations

1. Although the existence of management plans may represent an opportunity to secure funds from national and regional entities, there is a need to develop

fund-raising capacity at the community level and to better understand and target appropriate donors.

2. Simplify fund disbursement process, including training to build communities capacity to access funds, is essential to ensuring long-term management goals are met. This can also include building or strengthening partnerships with major stakeholders and their technical staff, which can assist communities in seeking and securing funds that support their plans.

3. Alternative sources of funds, such as fundraising, may represent an opportunity for communities to fund items or activities that are not considered for funding by donor entities.

ISSUE 3: Communication is key to increase community engagement and expand the network of Protected Areas

In FSM, the expansion of protected areas has benefitted from local champions who have promoted sustainable use of resources and protection of nature for the persistence of the Micronesian culture. Local champions, especially community leaders, have committed to engage with communities, government agencies, international organisations and donors to promote grassroot conservation and report on the benefits of protecting nature to the entire society.

Storytelling is part of the Micronesian culture and represents a powerful tool to reach across generations and different sectors of society. Storytelling has been used to report on the accomplishments of communities in protection and conservation of their natural resources.

Throughout the R2R project, communication has been key to build and expand partnerships, address protected area priority needs with leaders, communities and the larger public, as well as increase transparency on the PAN process. The R2R project has developed and endorsed a communication plan that assisted the project implementation unit in communicating major achievements in protecting nature while expanding the country's network of protected areas.

Key lessons learned and recommendations

1. Learning exchanges between communities represented a powerful and effective communication strategy. By participating in learning exchanges, community members can share best management strategies, knowledge and experiences on implementation and enforcement of protected area plans and regulations.

2. Champions identified within the community and government leadership bring multiple benefits, including the promotion of protected areas as tools for community well-being, the promotion of community achievements, which

increases ownership and accountability, and the opportunity to share the benefits of protected areas with other communities. Voicing environmental issues through government leaders and community champions can strengthen replication of effective management practices.

3. Communication and awareness raising on protected areas, such as information on site boundaries (i.e., coordinates of the site), regulations, type of enforcement and benefits of sustainable management of nature, were beneficial to increase compliance with protected area rules. It is recommended that communication and awareness raising is clearly delineated in a protected area site management plan. This is essential to ensure communities fully understand their commitments and obligations and to mobilise their engagement and support for the PA.

ISSUE 4: Harmonisation between traditional management systems and other forms of planning and management for protected areas is key for raising community ownership and accountability

In FSM, traditional management systems, such as the *mechen*, a traditional fishing closure in use in Chuuk, are embedded in the culture of the society and have been in use for centuries. Although communities are familiar with these traditional systems, modern forms of management, such as science-informed zoning, fishing closures and establishment of laws and regulations for protection of a single species, among others, are more commonly promoted and used. In general, there is a poor understanding of the science behind traditional management systems with respect to other widely used and studied forms of management. Nevertheless, traditional practices maintain their value, especially in terms of community compliance to these long-term institutionalised systems.

Despite the importance of traditional management practices, the shift from subsistence to a monetised economy has promoted exploitation of natural resources, and reduced the effectiveness of community's traditional knowledge and management practices. It is important to capture both traditional management practices and effective 'modern' strategies, such as science based spatial planning. Formal schooling has replaced some of the traditional mechanisms for sharing knowledge. Culture classes have attempted to replace some of this knowledge sharing, but does not currently include resource management.

Key lessons learned and recommendations

1. Ensure elders contribute knowledge to the protected area management plans during planning and decision-making phases, and identify members of the

community that have relevant traditional knowledge and knowledge of the traditional management systems.

2. Ensure that all members of the community are equally involved in planning and implementing protected areas management plans. Due to the distinct division of roles between men and women in the Micronesia society, to ensure the greatest management benefits, it is crucial that traditional management practices and knowledge are equally captured from both men and women through participation of both genders during PAs' planning and learning exchanges.

3. Expand school culture curriculum to include appropriate resource management, environment, conservation, and climate change subjects through a traditional knowledge and management practice lens.

Community meeting at Pohnpei, FSM © R2R Project Implementing

Replication

FSM has a long history of protected areas established through community endorsement and/or recognised by state laws and municipal ordinances. Over the years, communities have been the driving force enabling protection of critical areas for conservation and encouraging development of state laws. This effort translated into States legislations that enabled the establishment of PA sites before the adoption of the FSM's Protected Areas Network National Guiding Policy Framework (PANPF). The approval and adoption of FSM's PANPF represents a national institutionalised framework that will help strengthen the expansion of the existing network of protected areas in the country.

The R2R project has actively contributed to strengthening the FSM PAN institutional framework by providing financial assistance for the development of the National PAN Operations Manual and States sub-chapters, as well as assisting in the review of existing PAN legislation at state level to ensure alignment to the national policy. Since 2018, the government has worked to institutionalise the PAN by putting in place a framework that provides information to national, state and local institutions on the process for entering FSM's network of protected areas. The institutionalisation of the PAN will secure the establishment of a nationwide network of protected areas, as well as the long-term sustainability of new and existing sites.

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