

Project Leader: Kartik Sameer Madiraju  
Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation Grant Awardee 2014  
Project Final Report

## Introduction

As per the grant proposal, in light of the precarious situation in which island nations find themselves with respect to climate change and biodiversity loss, not to mention loss of culturally significant ecosystems, this project aims to empower both non-governmental and governmental actors with the skills to: engage communities in discussions to adapt to and mitigate climate change impacts; protect and manage key resources such as fisheries; and negotiate agreements internally for consensus building, bilaterally and multilaterally for external agreements.

In this report I summarize objectives, go over the high-level, broad accomplishments of the work, and finally offer concluding remarks.

## Objectives

1. To provide training in negotiation, conflict resolution and effective communication to Palau Conservation Society (PCS) staff and key target groups as jointly identified by Project Leader and PCS. Training takes the form of 2-3 day workshops that involve theory, case study preparation, mock negotiations, debriefs of exercises, and takeaway tools and reading materials (books, flashcards, notepads, worksheets)
2. To develop a community engagement strategy in order to empower communities to start and continue productive dialogue on key sensitive issues (climate change, fisheries, water quality, etc.)
3. To network through PCS partners and affiliates with the goal of providing more negotiation training to the Palauan Government and its environmental agencies (Office of Environmental Response Coordination, etc.)

## General Achievements

### *Under Objective 1*

For the workshop given to Protected Area Network Coordinators, I supplied participant feedback forms, which ask for commentary on workshop and trainer effectiveness, as well as quantitative scores (rating from 1 to 5, 5 being 'Excellent') on specific elements such as the workshop's relevance to their careers and the trainer's ability to handle questions. Analysis revealed that the workshop overall received an 86% approval rating, and as a trainer I was rated at 94%, based on 14 respondents (~90% of respondents filled the evaluation).

More importantly were the comments received for the workshop and the overall response that participants' only constructive criticism was that the workshop was too short. All participants expressed desire for follow-up training if possible, and an overall commitment to implementing the skills and mindsets taught.

### *Under Objective 2*

Much was learned about how various parties perceive fisheries management and marine resources in Palau. It must be noted here that the process of developing this strategy, and the survey data upon which the multiparty dispute analysis will be predicated, is still being collected.

At the time of this project's termination, it became clear that sources of income and enforceability of environmental regulations are a primary concern across all sectors (fishermen, political leaders, ministry officials, environmental NGO groups, traditional leaders and hotel managers). From a principled negotiation perspective, my high-level recommendation based on this analysis was that communities be engaged to brainstorm their own, contextually relevant options for income generation—some options thought of included aquaculture, developing arts and crafts skills, honing agricultural acumen to reduce living costs, etc. Since fishing is both source of income and nutrition in Palau, supplementing income through agricultural development can address nutrition issues as well.

Areas susceptible to conflict, albeit based on incomplete data, were identified as:

- Stronger regulations could be seen as impinging on hotel business development, based on responses from hotel managers. Hotels thrive on tourism, and stringent environmental regulations may lead to reduced tourism
- Of special note here is the deep-seated tension between traditional leaders and contemporary leadership in Palau. In an internal memo to Palau Conservation Society, I relayed the details of the risks this tension poses to environmental law and encouraging sustainable fisheries management. My overall recommendation was that a 'conservation society' must prioritize the importance of traditional marine regulations and customary law, and its role in encouraging compliance. Because the institution of contemporary governance is most closely associated with The Presidency, the tension between these two forms of governance is most often played out between the Presidents and High Chiefs of Palau. The most important distinction that qualifies this tension is that while contemporary leadership is ephemeral (term limit statutes), traditional leadership is hereditary. Thus High Chiefs remain in their position through several different iterations of Palauan Presidency. The Council of Chiefs, as a result, views the Presidency as a continuum of governance—past conflicts are *still* used as examples of current relationships, even if the President at the time is no longer in office. For this reason, I believe one unique conservation goal in Palau must be the

conservation of customs, and the strengthening of relationships between the *offices* of elected officials, and the Council of Chiefs. Such an effort is different from favoring the election of leaders sympathetic to the Council of Chiefs—instead, I recommended that efforts be geared towards greater collaboration between traditional and contemporary approaches to fisheries management, such that regardless of the occupant of the seat, the institution itself is reformed to foster better understanding, and less conflict. This is an effort that would necessarily be the task of a non-partisan third party that commands respect in Palau, and this is why PCS is especially equipped to spearhead such an effort.

### *Under Objective 3*

Before leaving Palau, I had the opportunity to offer a 1-day intensive Negotiation Skills workshop to the Republic of Palau Financial Institutions Commission, whose mandate is to conduct financial intelligence investigations, maintain national finance accountability and audit the national treasury.

Negotiating agreements and handling difficult tactics are daily aspects of this organization's tasks and activities. The training was very well received, and with all respondents filing a feedback form, the workshop was given a perfect rating, and I was also awarded a perfect overall rating.

### Concluding Remarks

I shall be brief in conclusion by saying first and foremost, that Palau is not unique in its environmental predicament—rather, I have come to appreciate Palau as an archetype for how communities of small, cohesive populations that face drastic climate change impacts in the near future, might focus their efforts on economic balance that is environmentally conscientious. Cities such as New Orleans, New York, Santiago and many others, all of whom risk devastation as sea levels rise, can learn quite a lot from Palau's commitment to environmental laws.

As a nation not counted amongst the stereotypically powerful nations (such as the G8 or G20), Palau has created a niche for itself as a stalwart and champion of our generation's greatest challenge. Palau was the first nation to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the matter of holding foreign states responsible for domestic climate change impacts, due to the diffuse nature of pollutants. Kiribati, another island nation similar to Palau, was the first nation to submit a draft of the Kyoto Protocol.

Offering negotiation and conflict resolution training in a tiny Pacific island nation equips the leaders and environmental professionals here to not only pursue better outcomes for themselves domestically, but to continue to serve as shining examples of effective policymaking in the international community. The training offered to the Alliance of Small Island States, the common interest bloc in the United Nations, is

evidence that one of our chief responsibilities is to empower those on the short-end of political power balances with the skills to be effective negotiators, to level the playing field.

For the future, conflict resolution training must be provided to more organizations, especially political leaders in the National Government. As a short-term goal, I feel that funding earmarked for this purpose can help foster a national interest in the idea of resolving disputes productively, with the ultimate objective of developing a Palauan cohort of mediation and ADR professionals that can take ownership of these techniques, and adapt them to the Palauan context. Furthermore, I was notified that no comprehensive education on Palauan history and customs is given to students—to the extent that clan affiliation and respect for customs plays a strong role in Palauan society, the coming generation can be empowered to respect marine resources and traditional regulations on fishing. My time in Palau has reinforced my belief that a respect or reverence for a natural resource is one of the most potent ways to regulate against its abuse.

Palau's complex colonial and cultural narratives make it a melting pot of views, beliefs and by corollary, a hotspot for misunderstanding and conflict. However, with training and research in conflict resolution, we aid in the efforts to pursue collaborative gains, and we get that much closer to conserving those priceless elements of our society: our ecology and our history. I am humbled and proud to have served in that interest.