

U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE WORKSHOP: TRANSLATING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE INTO MANAGEMENT, AUGUST 20TH 2007

Moderator American Samoa Government Senator HC Pulefaasisina P. Tuiasosopo

On Monday, we came together and learned about traditional knowledge and management practices in the Pacific and looked at how to translate this knowledge into our modern systems of coral reef and ecosystem management. I am here today to provide a summary of this meeting and present the recommendations that resulted.

We heard from traditional village leaders, government managers, and educators on the importance of working within the traditional governance structures to best conserve and manage the marine resources. We learned about the Samoan traditions, traditional practices in the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau, and throughout the Pacific. Through this, we saw similarities in some key areas related to conservation and fishing practices, the importance of working within the traditional village structure and customs, the importance of targeting key social and cultural groups within a community, and utilizing scientific and research mechanisms by working with local educators and gaining the trust of the local people. We also saw that there is a need to document and pass on our traditional knowledge and management practices to the younger generations.

The local community is seen as the owners and managers of the land and sea and their involvement is essential to building successful stewardship programs. Our values and principles are found within the traditional decision making process. In Samoa, the environment is both physical and spiritual. Here, and in most Pacific island cultures, when the village speaks, the village is unified. Decisions are made by consensus not only at the village council level, but also within all of the groups. The village leaders are made up of the family leaders who speak for the family. So when the village council makes a decision, the whole village is speaking. Earning trust is an important component to building a program. It is a key step, and understanding the culture and traditional governance structure can further the development of trust. For example, the village leaders will be more likely to trust outsiders who are assisting with environmental conservation and management programs if they respect the traditional system and understand the process. Utilizing the traditional structure can be an excellent tool to implement environmental protection and management. The Village council incorporates all branches of government, the executive, legislative, and judicial. Once the council agrees, implementation occurs, responsibilities are designated, punishment is defined, and enforcement mechanisms can be put into place.

The local community has to be involved from the beginning for the programs to be successful. We speak of Fa'avae as a theme for utilizing both traditional and western environmental stewardship programs. When looking at bringing in a plan or a conservation idea, it is best to have a tentative plan, something that goes to the village for ideas that it can be changed to incorporate traditions and local needs as well as buy in

from the village council. This is also related to the concept of adaptive management, something we heard about in the new American Samoa Marine Protected Area Network Strategy. This plan is a foundation that will incorporate village decisions, traditions, and wisdom that will build all aspects of the MPA Network. The MPA Network includes the Office of Samoan Affairs as a member agency because it was realized early on that without local involvement and acceptance, it would not be successful or implemented.

Utilizing traditional knowledge can be seen in our use of seasons for resource management. To illustrate this, I will provide an example. There is a time when the moon is high and full when the alili can be harvested without damaging the coral reefs. This is a tradition that we could incorporate into a village MPA program as other times for harvest of the alili results in damage to the reef. There are also seasons for fishing certain types of marine resources. Seasons would allow for the take of species such as palolo and I'a sina in a sustainable manner so that it isn't overexploited. If we brought back this concept of seasonal management we can work towards protecting resources in a way that our people can embrace. This could apply to pelagic species as well.

From this basic understanding of the structure of Samoan and Pacific island communities, many specific recommendations will continue to emerge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We need to train and educate our local environmental leaders and education staff to reach out to the public utilizing various methods including village presentations, legislatures, media, church groups, women's groups and other village groups. Programs should train local educators to be able to present scientific information in a way that the general public can understand and accept. We should strive to build the local outreach and education methodology that makes a lasting impression on people.

Ancestry is very important as we look to the past for our history and knowledge. We look to the legends, songs, and traditions and this is how we present our history. For education, outreach, and the preservation of traditional knowledge, we saw a strong recommendation to preserve and pass on the wisdom and traditional practices for future generations. As western preferences and products become more and more common, there is a need to ensure that the traditional systems of management and knowledge of the marine resources is passed on so that future generations can sustainably utilize and preserve valuable resources. Preservation and documentation of our traditional knowledge, management, and fishing practices should be integrated into our formal and informal educational systems.

Village leaders should lead traditional forums and workshops in their respective villages so that they can teach the younger generation on the importance of our natural resources. There is a saying, "E tu'utu'u taliga, va'ai ma fa'alogo ma fa'aitaitai le ao'ao'ina ole

tamaititi Samoa”. Samoan youth are taught through oral tradition and by observing and participating in traditional practices. Traditionally, it was the elders, the grandparents, that told the stories and legends while weaving, fishing, cooking and even dancing. As such, we need to rely not only on the academic, western-based education system, but find ways to incorporate the wisdom and knowledge from the elders into the education of our youth. One way this could happen is through developing a program, sponsored by resource management agencies, that would institutionalize this practice. In American Samoa, the Office of Samoan Affairs could lead this effort. We need the ability to develop and encourage a culture-specific education system that allows hands on experience with the elders.

Throughout the Pacific, we see the importance of oral tradition and the transfer of environmental stewardship and management through legends. We recommend that this is documented and made available as part of the curriculum in the school system. We also need to provide the island specific ecological knowledge to our education system. This should include the development of curriculum that showcases local environmental problems.

Specific Recommendations are as follows:

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support should be provided to allow involvement of traditional leaders in conservation efforts. This could be done through assistance to village leaders in developing rules and safe practices that will serve to protect the environment while preserving traditional practices.
- We need to develop strong relationships with village communities. Co-management with governmental agencies and villages should be pursued.
- Fisheries by-laws should be considered that apply equally to all citizens, that have been prepared in accordance with relevant provisions of the Fisheries Legislation, and that have been accorded legal recognition in the Court of law.
- Expend directed effort to combine technical expertise and local knowledge in providing monitoring capacity increasing the capacity to monitor our resources. This would be best accomplished by training local people to conduct the monitoring.
- Funding should be made available to identify and document traditional management techniques before they are lost.
- Sustainable traditional fishing techniques that respect the environment should be identified, documented, and supported.

- We need to strengthen community ownership, responsibility and accountability of all resource protection efforts.
- We should embrace the local community structure and traditions in developing enforcement programs. Traditional rules, fines and punishments should be consistent with local laws and customs.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH RECOMMENDATIONS

- There needs to be an effort to develop location-specific information and to simplify and translate some of the existing scientific information to make it useful.
- There needs to be support of student and youth activities that include monitoring and science camps.
- Create educational opportunities for communities on marine environmental issues.
- Funds and support should be made available for developing textbooks and other educational products that contain traditional knowledge and reflect local conditions.
- Provide support to carefully document and conserve cultural protocols, heritage sites and their traditional stories.
- Ensure that traditional knowledge and management practices are made available to the local population and throughout the region.
- Enforcement and education programs need to team up on their outreach efforts.

CAPACITY BUILDING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Technical advice and support must be provided in order to enhance understanding of the concerns through visual examples of impacts and outcomes in other areas in the Pacific.
- Enhance the teaching and practice of the Samoan culture within all activities of the MPAs.
- Provide financial and technical support to conduct traditional knowledge surveys to identify the gaps, conduct community workshops, and develop strategies to share this knowledge.
- Encourage volunteerism as a valuable asset in capacity building in local communities.