



REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

FIRST NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE DIALOGUE, 9 – 10 SEPTEMBER 2014

REPORT



Findings of the 1st National Climate Change Dialogue in the RMI

Summary

On 9 and 10 September 2014 the Office of Environmental Planning and Policy Coordination on behalf of the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands hosted the 1st National Climate Change Dialogue. Support for the event was provided by the European Union funded Global Climate Change Alliance: Pacific Small Island States project implemented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

The objectives of the Dialogue were to:

1. Discuss the long term future of the Marshall Islands in the context of climate change; and
2. Share and receive feedback on climate change policies, plans and actions in the Marshall Islands.

These objectives were met through two events open to the general public: a town hall event (also broadcast on national radio) and a workshop addressing the second objective respectively. (The program is attached as Annex 1). Around 320 people attended the events – this was a good turnout for the first time these events were held in the RMI. The President of the Marshall Islands was present at both events and highlighted how he wanted to hear what the people have to say and what recommendations they have for future action.

What was clear from the two events and the results from the survey was that the citizens of the Marshall Islands are serious about acting on climate change because they believe it will be harmful to their nation (93% of the respondents of the survey think so), indeed they believe that by the end of this century most of the country could be uninhabitable. They show responsibility for climate change despite the carbon emissions of RMI being negligible, and a strong sense of responsibility and great ideas for how to act on climate change nationally.

Findings town hall event

At the town hall event two main questions were asked:

1. What do you think life will be like in RMI in 2090?; and
2. What can we as Marshallese do to address climate change?

These questions were asked after a presentation by the National Weather Service's meteorologist, Reggie White, on climate change science and predictions for the future. In answering them the attendees were separated into groups of: elder males, elder females, younger males, and younger females. The most prevalent responses from the ~100 people who took part in the discussions are outlined below.

Question one

The majority of the people have a bleak outlook for RMI's future with the majority believing that the atolls will be uninhabitable by the end of this century. Below are some quotes that highlight some of the opinions within the groups:

"If we don't do anything now, everything will be in total chaos" – elder males

"There will be no food, no water, no land and no people" – elder females

"People will have to migrate" – young males

"There will be no Marshall Islands" – young females

The younger participants and the elder women in particular believe there is a strong chance climate change will destroy their homeland forcing them to migrate elsewhere. All groups mentioned how migration will negatively affect the Marshallese culture and heritage and many that they are scared their culture will vanish altogether if they leave.

If the islands are still here by the end of this century the most prevalent opinion was that life will be much harder.

“There will be more challenges in life in 2090” – elder males

“There will be less local food so we will be depending more on imported food” – elder males

“As the population grows life will be more difficult” – younger males

A few also said that “life in 2090 will be depended on our priorities now” (elder males), which reinforces the suggestion in responses to the second question about Marshallese sentiments about their own responsibility to act on the climate crisis. Even though people have a bleak outlook on the future they still think action should be taken, especially nationally to improve living and prepare for further climate change impact.

Question two

The second question asked what Marshallese can do to address climate change (on a personal, community, atoll, national and international level) although the focus was clearly national.

The answers show that the people attending feel responsibility to personally respond to climate change and have a good understanding of what is needed to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases some of which are also beneficial to adaptation. However, there seems to be some lack of focus on direct adaptation measures.

“Reduce usage of utility” – elder females

“Climate change education especially to our children is a top priority” -elder males

“Stop burning fossil fuels” – younger females

“Decrease cutting trees” – younger females

“Educate our children” - elder females

“The Marshallese people can do a lot to fight climate change, electric cars will have to be subsidized by the government. Plastic bags should be sold for .25, Styrofoam should be banned, burning plastics should be banned” - younger males

“Decrease usage of vehicles and walk more” – younger females

“Replant along our coastal areas with proper trees” – elder females

This suggests that people have hope and believe that their actions can affect their future and that of RMI itself, despite its negligible contribution to global emissions. The responsibility to act nationally can also be witnessed through quotes such as:

“Marshall Islands can be a role model for the whole world as a place that stands against climate change.” - Younger males

“I can share these information with the people in my community so we can work together to fight climate change” – younger males

“I also want to encourage them to bring back the Marshallese ways of living that we inherited from our ancestors.” – younger males

Everyone focussed on working together to address climate change of which one reason could be as one of the elder female groups stated “bigger countries are moving to slow”.

“There will be changes we will experience in the future, but if the government and the people work together we will be able to extend from 2090 to more years beyond but at least let us work together to come up with solutions” – elder males

“Stand together and do the right thing” – younger females

“People have to work take the initiatives to work together and with the government” – elder females

“Try working together to clean up to prevent climate change” – younger females

“People need to show that they care” – younger females

“As an individual we all need to take all sort of actions to help our government to survive the effects of climate change, work with the Chiefs and Landowners” – elder males

One group also noted that “the polices need to be implemented” (elder females). This was discussed further in the workshop the following day.

Workshop

The workshop focussed on more short term policies, plans and actions and started with an overview presentation by Director of OEPPC Bruce Kijiner. Five topics were then discussed in smaller groups facilitated by resource people working in the fields. The topics were: water, energy, food security, coastal management and environmental education and awareness. The findings of the different groups were as follows:

Water

Around 30 people contributed to the two small group discussions on water that were led by Moriana Phillips (SPREP) and Jina David (CMI Land Grant).

The main recommendation coming out of the discussions on water were a need to focus on larger water catchments of between 30-60,000 gallons rather than small catchments that are not adequate in drought situations as seen in the drought of 2013. Another recommendation was that there is a need for a policy to be put in place with the lending institutions to require them to include water catchments.

Coastal Management

Around 30 people contributed to the two small group discussions on coastal management led by Florence Edwards (MIMRA) and Lannih Milne (EPA).

They focussed on two main areas namely trash and erosion.

In the Q&A section there was a big focus on sea walls and mapping of erosion.

Energy

Around 30 participated in the discussions on Energy led by Angeline Heine (R&D) and Dolores deBrum (Admire Project). The main findings of the two groups that visited them were:

- There is a need to strengthen public awareness activities and the responsible office.
- The biodiesel project should be revamped
- Centralize the copra collection points in the outer islands to decrease burning of fuel
- Conduct trainings for the teachers to teach the students on how to relate energy to climate change
- Make assessments on how the Ministries are paying their electric bills and have each Ministry be responsible for paying its own bills

Environmental Education and Awareness

Around 30 people participated in the discussions led by Hanna Lafita (Ministry of Education), Jessica Zebedee (EPA) and Alex (IOM). The emphasis of these discussions was that there is a need for action rather than talk. People learn more by doing than listening, therefore a bigger focus needs to be on projects that include community members and learning by doing. This is one reason the climate change education part of the National School Curriculum won't just teach what is happening outside but also teach skills so the students will have to go out to interview older people about traditional Marshallese skills and knowledge.

There also needs to be a focus on sustaining already existing projects rather than new projects being launched continually.

Food security

The discussions on food security were attended by around 30 people in two groups led by Karness Kusto (R&D) and Jabukja (R&D).

The main recommendations of the attendants were

We should stop talking but walk the talk.

One of the biggest challenges of the Ministry of Resources and Development is facing is how to get people to stop depending on the imported food. They are trying to promote replanting of local food bearing trees as much as possible. This also help with coastal protection by stopping erosion.

Overall recommendations

Clear that there is a need to focus on more climate change awareness and education in all fields to inform people about the science and what options they have in a way where they truly learn – which is most often by acting. Alson Kelen from WAM held the closing speech in which he reflected on the discussions of the day and said:

“The food security discussed mainly on who is responsible. It is our own responsibility. We have to stand up and participate. Education and Awareness clearly said that lack of communication is one of the problems. Very little information is going out to the people. There are workshops being conducted in here but the information stops at the door. We tell people to go to the internet to look for this information and then turn around saying the outer island people needs to know about these things. As long as the people receive little information they will do whatever they want without caring.”

Improving communication, coordination and awareness raising should be the next step for RMI with respect to climate change to ensure that the actions are effective and that RMI are truly adapting.

Survey Results

The survey was created to get some initial insights into the opinions of the people attending the dialogue – there were 84 responses. We made it as simple as possible to get a high rate of response. The survey is not statistically significant.

The survey was originally written in English and then translated into Marshallese – in the translation process three of the most important questions¹ were removed and the meaning of questions changed². The change was not discovered until after the event due to time pressure but it is recommended that in the next dialogue more effort is spent on ensuring that the translation is correct and does not change the meaning of questions. Although this changed the usefulness of the survey, there were still many interesting findings.

The surveys were also distributed at both events (town hall and workshop) which meant that the participants were responding to the questions in different contexts which would have coloured their answers. The vast majority of the surveys were answered at the town hall event (around 65) and the rest at the workshop. For the next dialogue this should be thought about more with respect to what questions to ask and whether there should be separate surveys.

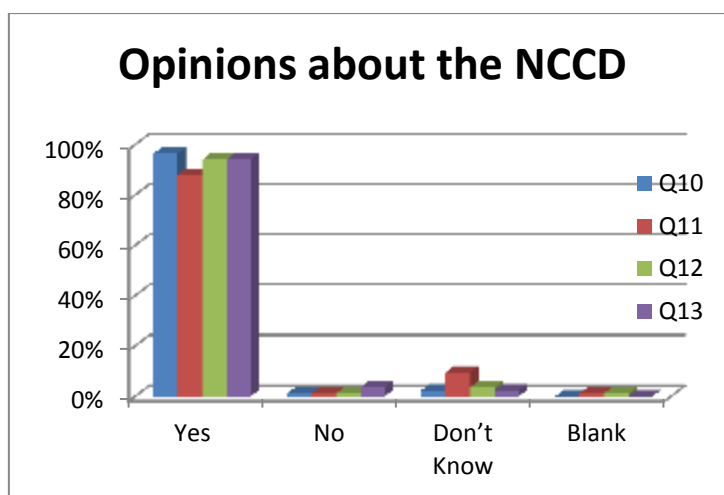
Main findings

The survey showed that the people attending overwhelmingly think that doing such a dialogue is the right thing to do (question 12), that they want to continue to be a part of such a dialogue (question 10), that they know others

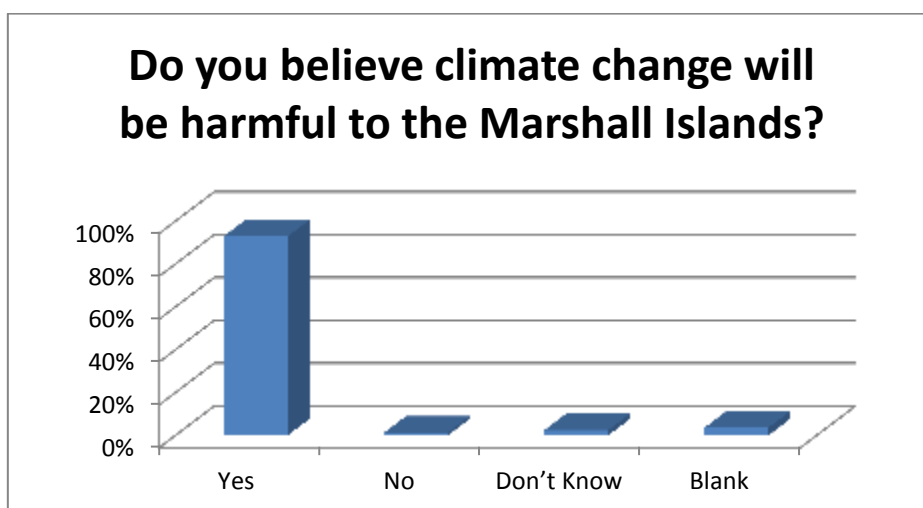
¹ Are you worried about climate change? Have you thought about leaving the Marshall Islands due to climate change? Do you believe developed/big countries are to blame?

² Most notably question 9 changed from: Do you believe enough is being done in the Marshall Islands to address climate change impacts?; to the above which has a focus on the individual rather than the collective.

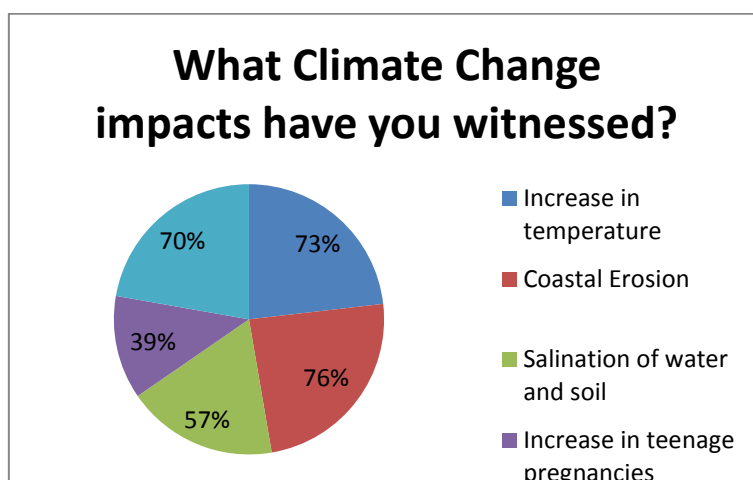
that would want to join (question 11) and that it should be conducted in other atolls in the Marshall Islands (question 13).



The survey also showed that the vast majority of people believe climate change is partly man made (question 3), they believe climate change will be harmful to RMI (question 7) and that they have seen impacts of climate change in their own communities (question 4).



We also asked them what kind of impacts they had witnessed and the results were:



The question regarding increase in teenage pregnancies was put in as a test question to see whether people understand what a genuine climate change impact is and what isn't. In fact question 1 asked whether people believe

they adequately understand what climate change is after they saw the presentation and 87% said yes – however 42% answered yes to that question and the question regarding increase in teenage pregnancy due to climate change. In RMI there have been talk about climate change being a contributing factor to the increase in teenage pregnancies but this is pure speculation and highly unlikely. The results show that almost 40% of the respondents believe it to be a climate change impact and this needs to be rectified.

Nr	Question	Yes	No	Don't Know	Blank	Total
1	After the presentation would you say you adequately understand what climate change is?	87 %	5 %	2 %	6 %	100 %
2	Do you feel you need more information about climate change?	67 %	26 %	2 %	5 %	100 %
3	Do you believe climate change is partly man-made?	92 %	4 %	1 %	4 %	100 %
4	Have you seen impacts of climate change in your community?	89 %	5 %	5 %	1 %	100 %
5	Do you believe you have done anything to contribute to the impacts of climate change?	65 %	31 %	2 %	1 %	100 %
6	What kind of impacts have you seen?					
A	Higher temperatures?	73%			27%	100%
B	Coastal erosion?	76%			24%	100%
C	Salt in soil and groundwater?	57%			43%	100%
D	Increase in teenage pregnancies?	39%			61%	100%
E	Coral bleaching? (dying corals)	70%			30%	100%
7	Do you believe climate change will be harmful to the Marshall Islands?	93 %	1 %	2 %	4 %	100 %
8	Do you believe the developed world is doing enough to stop climate change and help small islands such as the Marshall Islands?	35 %	46 %	19 %	0 %	100 %
9	Do you believe you have done enough in the RMI to avoid the impact of climate change?	39 %	43 %	17 %	1 %	100 %
10	Do you want to continue to be a part of a dialogue on national action on climate change?	96 %	1 %	2 %	0 %	100 %
11	Do you know others that would want to join this conversation?	88 %	1 %	10 %	1 %	100 %
12	Do you think what we are doing today is the right thing?	94 %	1 %	4 %	1 %	100 %
13	Should we do the same thing in the communities throughout the RMI?	94 %	4 %	2 %	0 %	100 %

Annex 1: Program National Climate Change Dialogue

TOWN HALL MEETING 9th September - MIHS Gymnasium

MC: Abacca Anjain-Maddison

4:30 – 5:00	Afternoon tea
5:00 – 5:05	Prayer by Rev. Mark Luke
5:05 – 5:10	Welcoming remarks from Rita Councilman Charles Kelen
5:10 – 5:20	A call from the children
5:20 – 5:30	Opening remarks by President Christopher J. Loeak
5:30 – 5:45	Background and outline of event Minister in Assistance Wilbur Heine
5:45 – 6:10	Climate Change presentation by Reggie White
6:10 – 7:00	Small group discussions
7:00 – 7:50	Reports from groups, storytelling and comments from the floor
7:50 – 8:00	Summary of event and road ahead Speaker of the Nitijela Donald Capelle

WORKSHOP 10th September - ICC

MC: Abacca Anjain-Maddison

9:00 – 9:05	Prayer by Rev. Mark Luke
9:05 – 9:15	Opening remarks by Ambassador Armbruster
9:15 – 9:20	Remarks by Alson Kelen
9:20 – 9:50	Presentation of climate change plans and actions by Bruce Kijiner
9:50 – 11:20	Topic specific small group discussions
11:20 – 11:50	Feedback from groups
11:50 – 12:00	Summary and closing Alson Kelen
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch



Town Hall Meeting 9th September 2014



Workshop 10th September, 2014



Conclusion

- ▶ There are many policies and plans guiding work on climate change
- ▶ And many projects
- ▶ But lack of coordination, planning and organisation within government and with other organisations make it less efficient than it could be
- ▶ Once RMI has it's own house in order we will be much more likely to access the climate finance we need to adapt to climate change!