

The Nature Conservancy: FSM community-based watershed management

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Nowhere is the challenge to balance conservation and economic development more critical than in Asia and the Pacific. The natural resource demands of the world's most populous and fastest growing region are destroying some of the Earth's most unique and productive ecosystems. To work effectively in this diverse and far-flung region, The Nature Conservancy is developing innovative solutions that cut across country borders, integrate conservation with social and economic goals, and foster international cooperation. Combined with a site-based, in-country presence in five of the world's most biologically diverse island nations - Indonesia, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Palau, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea - the Conservancy is forging strong partnerships around key regional issues with the goal of ensuring lasting conservation success.

Watershed management in Pohnpei

In Pohnpei, The Nature Conservancy got involved in watershed management in 1992, after villagers protested government plans to set up a forest reserve. Due to Pohnpei's relative age and isolation, the island's vegetation and wildlife are some of the most diverse in Micronesia. The third largest island of the FSM, Pohnpei has the largest intact native rainforests and mangroves in all Micronesia. The island's watershed forests serve as habitat for at least 269 different species of plants, of which 110 (41%) are endemic to Pohnpei, meaning they are found nowhere else on earth. The watershed also provides a home for the island's wildlife, and Pohnpeians depend on many birds and animals for subsistence or income. Over 32 different species of birds make their home on the island, of which five species (16%) and eight subspecies are found only in Pohnpei.

Pohnpei's upland forest also serves several important ecological functions. Perhaps most importantly, the forest vegetation with its extensive root system and litter layer serves to capture rainfall, retarding surface runoff and improving infiltration of water into the soil, where it is filtered and slowly released into the streams and rivers that eventually make their way to the coastal mangroves and the lagoon.

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Through the retardation of surface runoff, erosion and sedimentation are reduced protecting these ecologically and economically important downstream environments from degradation. Flood severity and intensity are also reduced. The slow release of ground water helps ensure streamflow even during relatively dry periods. The resulting high quality surface water is critical to both the lifestyle and the health of Pohnpei's residents.

As early as 1983, it became evident that the island interior was being rapidly deforested. The Pohnpei State Division of Forestry requested assistance from the Pacific Islands Forester Office (USDA Forest Service Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry - Honolulu) to develop legislation to establish a watershed area for the interior upland forests located on public lands and to provide for the protection of coastal mangrove forests.

The two agencies closely cooperated in legislative efforts that resulted in the passage of "The Pohnpei Watershed Forest Reserve and Mangrove Protection Act of 1987" (S.L. 1L-128-87). The Act designated some 5100 ha (13,000 acres) of the central upland forest area and 5525 ha (15,000 acres) of coastal mangrove forests of Pohnpei as a protected area in order to safeguard the following:

- the water supply to Kolonia and all Pohnpei communities;
- important cultural and archaeological sites;
- the high level of endemic flora and fauna species; and
- the economic potential for ecotourism and recreation.

However, local communities were not adequately involved in drafting the law. The proposed rules and regulations did not recognize traditional Pohnpeian resource use in the upland forest areas, and as a result, they were almost universally rejected. Boundary survey teams were turned back by angry community members around the island. These setbacks led to the formation of the Watershed Steering Committee (WSC) in 1990, an interagency task force made up of representatives from several Pohnpei State Government agencies, community leaders, The Nature Conservancy, the Community College of Micronesia Science Department, the College of Micronesia Land Grant Programs, Micronesian Islands Conservation, Inc., and the USDA Soil Conservation Service.

The WSC initiated a watershed education and negotiation program and extended it around Pohnpei. As a result, two issues became clear:

- Local communities must be partners with the Government in order to successfully manage natural resources;
- Proper resource management practices must extend throughout the entire island ecosystem to be effective, from the upland forests to the reef. This includes the human-managed agroforests and settled areas (nansapw) and the lagoon (nansed).

The education program turned community opposition into public support over the course of less than two years. Together with chiefs representing communities around the island, the WSC finalized a new set of rules and regulations based on community input, which were presented to the Governor in early 1994.

For the last two years, the Watershed Steering Committee, has been revisiting each island and carrying out a community natural resource planning program. The result of this program is the development of Community Action Plans, establishment of training of a local corps of volunteer Community Conservation Officers, and agreement on community-recognized boundaries for watershed, mangrove, and marine reserve areas. The process, which now enjoys widespread support in Pohnpei, has been completed in three out of five municipalities and will be expanded to the entire island by 1998.

For more information about The Nature Conservancy and their programs, contact: The Nature Conservancy Asia/Pacific Regional Office, 1116 Smith St., Honolulu, HI 96817, Tel: (808) 537-4508. Fax: (808) 545-2019.

Water for Survival

JOHN LA ROCHE
DIRECTOR (RETIRED WATER ENGINEER)

Water for Survival is a voluntary New Zealand registered charity. We concentrate on assisting people in developing countries to achieve better health through clean water supply and basic sanitation. The emphasis is on community participation. We do not send volunteers into the field, believing in the need for local communities to help themselves, assisted by a little financial (and sometimes technical) help from outside.

Established by a group of New Zealand professional engineers in 1988, we set out to follow the lead of the UK Charity WaterAid which had been established by the leaders of the British water industry in response to the UN International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

To date we have provided financial assistance to 135,000 people in 13 developing countries. Our main activity in the Pacific has been in the Solomon Islands where we have a Representative to monitor and evaluate projects. The New Zealand Government has a subsidy scheme for overseas aid agencies which contributes on a dollar for dollar basis to donations raised. However in order to obtain the subsidy there are many criteria and reporting requirements which must be fulfilled. Most of these requirements are based on good development practice which involves communities making their own decisions. An essential component is community ownership, achieved through participation, fi-

nancial, material and physical contributions and undertaking the responsibility for maintenance of the completed scheme.

We have also been receiving water supply and sanitation project applications on behalf of the Pacific Development and Conservation Trust. This is another NZ based organisation which provides small grants for village type development. Applications to the Trust must be from citizens of South Pacific countries. South Pacific Forum countries including Tokelau, and the Pacific territories of UK, France and USA are eligible

After some difficulties with one of our projects in the Solomon Islands we now require an independent representative in any country where we operate. Slow mail services and difficulties in appreciating local conditions have reinforced this need. There are possible representatives offering in Papua New Guinea, Fiji and the Marshall Islands.

Being completely voluntary, we are able to keep our overhead costs very low - usually between 1 and 2% of our income. Our organisation has Coordinators in seven regions throughout New Zealand all of whom are active in raising funds and promoting Water for Survival. Although most of the money we raise goes to Africa and the Indian subcontinent, we are keen to assist needy communities in the Pacific.

If you would like to be involved or have projects you would like to submit for consideration, please write to Water for Survival, P O Box 6208, Wellesley St, Auckland, New Zealand or phone/fax 64-9-528-9759 or email john@wfs.ak.planet.gen.nz □