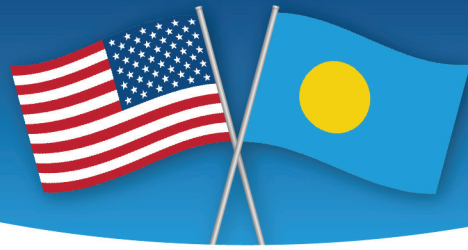


Palau and the United States of America



Looking to our Past Helps our Future

Palau resident Bernodett “Bernie” Besbes feels fortunate that she started working for the Palau Conservation Society (PCS) in 2015. That same year, PCS received a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to fund a project called *Reviving Traditional Croplands to Improve Community Climate Resilience*.

“This project looked to the past to help us respond to current and future climate change,” she said. “We need food security, environmental security, and economic security—the cornerstones of climate resilience.”

Palauan women historically cultivated taro, a tuber sometimes used in cultural practices or medicinally. Bernie explained that taro comprises the sole income for about 60 percent of females in Babeldaob, but many women have little time for farming these days.

“Women used to clear waterways into taro patches several times a year,” she said. “If it’s not done, rain deposits soil and it leaves a lower quantity and quality of water.”

A 2014 study by the Palau International Coral Reef Center found that a fully functioning patch has the same capacity as the mangrove to filter sediment, which protects coral reefs. Thus, one component of the project is to revive taro patches at three Babeldaob sites. Another is to provide institutional capacity for state governments to manage the watershed.

“Our watershed is an important resource,” Bernie said, “and our collective efforts will help protect it. We were blessed that an environmental engineer developed a plan for public works personnel that can apply to all Babeldaob states.”

The third component of the project is to build climate change awareness focused on what individuals and communities can do.

“We have done many outreach events to share low cost, low tech ways to control erosion and storm water, even on slopes and roads,” she added. “Our Palauan ancestors knew how to protect their environment. We simply applied science and tweaked traditional farming methods.”

Bernie wants people to understand that climate change is here and they must be resilient. Her own enthusiasm is evident.

“Palau expects 10–15 years of extreme weather, particularly rain. But let’s grow grass and a little garden to absorb rainfall rather than allowing it to wash soil into rivers and eventually the ocean. These practices work with little time and cost. I love this project!”

To learn more about the relationship between Palau the U.S.A., please visit <https://pw.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/progress-through-partnership/>.

Read more about PCS at www.palauconservation.org.

Read more about USAID at www.usaid.gov.