



# INTERNATIONAL WATERS EXPERIENCE NOTES

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## Lessons from the Micronesia Challenge 2030: *Reimaanlok, A National Framework for Locally-led Conservation* May 2024



Photo courtesy of Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority

### ***Strengthening and Enabling the Micronesia Challenge 2030 - GEF Project ID: 10740***

**Abstract** | The Micronesia Challenge is a multi-jurisdictional commitment towards effective management of marine and terrestrial resources throughout Micronesia. Addressing regional conservation ambitions while achieving national and global targets and adhering to local values, is a formidable challenge. In the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the solution has been *Reimaanlok*, a national framework co-developed by government and traditional community leaders, with the explicit purpose of conservation area planning that is “fully owned, led and endorsed by local communities.” In use for decades, the *Reimaanlok* framework is now being updated to align national efforts towards achievement of more comprehensive regional goals through the Micronesia Challenge 2030.

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## GEF IW PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Micronesia Challenge 2030 (MC 2030) is a commitment by Palau, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) to effectively manage 50% marine and 30% terrestrial resources by 2030. Building upon the Micronesia Challenge 2020, the goal also includes a larger voice for fisheries management, reducing invasive species, restoring habitats, increasing livelihood opportunities, and reducing risks to communities from climate impacts in Micronesia.

The project *Strengthening and Enabling the Micronesia Challenge 2030* builds on MC 2030 conservation, community benefit, and process targets, aiming to enhance national and regional marine resource management through three components:

**Component 1:** Supporting RMI, FSM, and Palau as they develop national policies, plans, and tools to support national integrated management of marine resources

**Component 2:** Strengthening capacities, communication, and planning to ensure regional coordination of the MC 2030

**Component 3:** Focusing on monitoring, evaluation, knowledge management, and communication of knowledge products generated through the project

This experience note outlines the learnings from the RMI as the flagship *Reimaanlok* framework is updated and enhanced to meet new targets as defined by MC 2030 while also aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals.

*Reimaanlok* is a process through which consultation and decision making surrounding marine management occurs, with a strong emphasis on meaningful involvement of traditional leaders, local resource users, and community members. *Reimaanlok* mandates that priorities and policy in marine management incorporate traditional knowledge and serves as a compelling example for what meaningful and inclusive management processes can look like across the region

*Using Reimaanlok will enable the RMI to continue to honor local knowledge, setting an example for how to achieve multi-jurisdictional, and even global, conservation goals without losing sight of the importance of culture, tradition, and local knowledge in natural resource management.*

## THE EXPERIENCE

### The Issue

*Reimaanlok*—Marshallese for “looking to the future, together”—has been an avenue for local communities to be at the forefront of achieving conservation goals throughout the RMI. This conservation planning framework, formally outlined in *Reimaanlok, Looking to the Future: National Conservation Area Plan for the Marshall Islands 2007–2012* is a step-by-step process for designing and implementing community-based marine conservation areas. In this way, *Reimaanlok* honors the deep connections that the Marshallese have to the ocean, creating avenues for communities to design and implement conservation areas that fulfill their needs and values while honoring their cultural heritage.

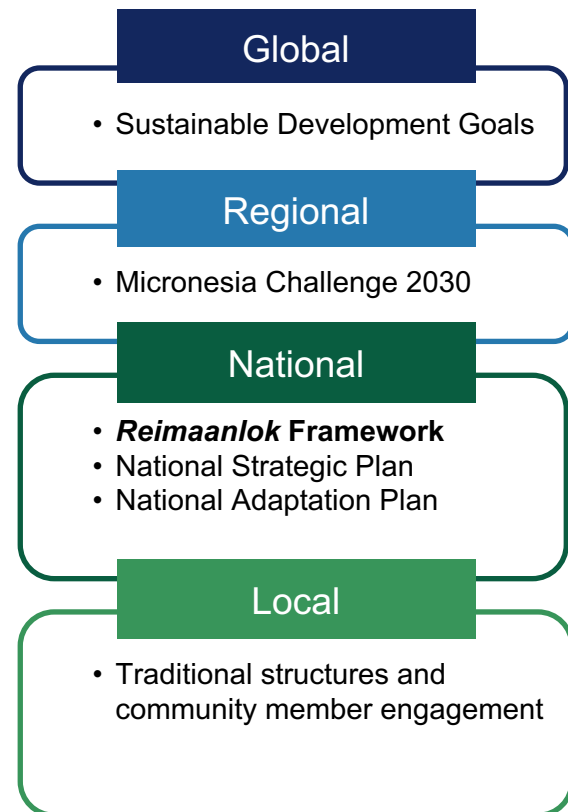
However, a compelling challenge arose when, in 2019, new conservation targets were agreed to by jurisdictional leaders as part of the Micronesia Challenge 2030. With the RMI signing on to the challenge, including its targets to effectively manage 50% of marine and 30% of

terrestrial resources by 2030, questions arose as to how to meet ambitious multi-jurisdictional conservation and community benefit targets while upholding a commitment to local natural resource management.

### Addressing the Issue

The resounding decision has been that, with updates and enhancements, *Reimaanlok* is the right framework to achieve the targets set out in MC 2030. The strength of *Reimaanlok* stems from its ability to facilitate context-appropriate, locally-led, and endorsed conservation areas, with effective marine conservation depending on the stewardship of those who live beside and depend on the ocean.

Crucially, *Reimaanlok* blends scientific information and findings with localized traditional knowledge and experiences to create unique and contextualized conservation strategies, bridging national government and traditional leadership in marine resource management.



*The Reimaanlok framework is amongst the essential national planning resources that facilitate the alignment from local, traditional engagement to regional and global targets.*

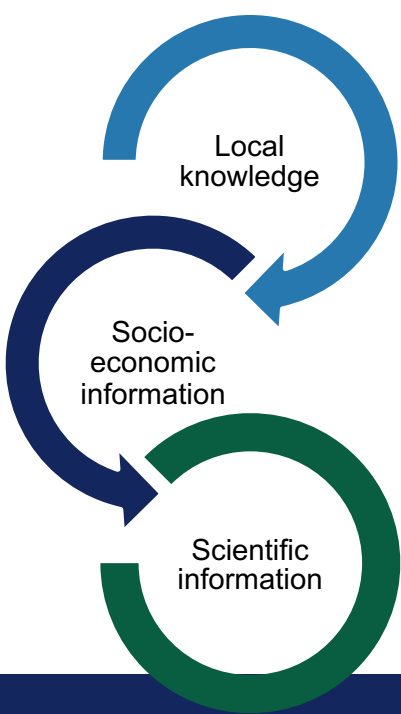


## RESULTS AND LEARNING

To date, more than 30 sites in the RMI have used the *Reimaanlok* framework since its inception. These engagements are a huge step forward for community-based conservation at the forefront of the RMI’s conservation strategy.

As of 2023, the RMI has conserved 19% of its terrestrial resources and 31% of its marine environment. While significant work remains regarding MC 2030 targets, an updated *Reimaanlok* will be poised to deliver on the expanded conservation and human benefits.

Immediate next steps for the project include conducting consultations throughout the RMI to define necessary updates, which will feed into RMI’s National MC 2030 Strategic Plan.



*“...conservation is not only about setting aside wilderness areas, but it is about creating dialogue, strengthening communities and valuing our people’s knowledge and understanding of our reefs and forests.”*

- Fred Muller  
Former RMI Secretary of Resources and Development

## REPLICATION

While *Reimaanlok* is unique to the Marshall Islands, its development and substance offer transferable lessons to other small-island, large-ocean states. Successfully applying the *Reimaanlok* framework has depended on five enabling principles, identified by the planning and implementation team:

- Focus on community leadership and social sanctions - traditional and respected leaders, and community support, are key for compliance
- Projects are initiated by the community - prioritize atolls and communities where motivation is high and communities request action
- Ensure adequate time and commitment of resources by Marshallese Agencies - long-term community engagement is important for trust and buy-in, and reaching true consensus
- Use appropriate tools for community-based planning - customize tools to the context of the Marshall Islands, ensuring they are culturally and contextually-specific
- Integrate multiple realms and objectives - marine, terrestrial, and human - conservation should be holistic

With the enabling conditions in place, there are **eight key steps** to the conservation planning process outlined by *Reimaanlok*. It should be noted that this process is iterative and ongoing, and adaptive management—in particular—should be emphasized, shown to the right:



Figure courtesy of Marshall Islands Conservation Society

*“The fact that our people have lived in harmony with our islands for thousands of years suggests we have something important to teach others in the world about conservation.”*

- Fred Muller

*“Often times, people don’t think about their actions and how it will impact their resources and future generations.”*

*It [- Reimaanlok -] is a very powerful word.”*

*Emma Kabua-Tibon*  
*Former Protected Area Network Coordinator*



Photo courtesy of Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority

## SIGNIFICANCE

This project’s significance stems from providing a viable pathway for meeting multi-jurisdictional conservation targets through meaningful and intentional engagement with local communities. Strengthening the *Reimaanlok* framework and updating it to meet MC 2030 targets will enable the RMI to elevate and refine the process. The successful application of *Reimaanlok* provides proof that ambitious management targets are best met with local, community-based solutions.

## CONCLUSION

While this framework stems from experiences amongst an atoll nation, the principles, steps, and enabling conditions can be influential in aligning local to global objectives while ensuring inclusion of perspectives from those most closely connected to the resources.

## KEYWORDS

Micronesia; Marshall Islands, community-based conservation, local ecological knowledge, TEK

## PHOTOS

Page 1, 2, and 4 – Courtesy of MIMRA staff

Page 3 – Graphic from Marshall Islands Conservation Society



Photo courtesy of Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority

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