

# **CNMI CAP Review Report Fiesta Resort, CNMI January 11, 2017**

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## Background:

As part of the two The Nature Conservancy (TNC)/ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Corral Reef Cooperative Agreements (CRCP), TNC helped to create site- based Conservation Action Plans (CAP) and management plans using TNC's CAP process. The CAP process was used at several sites around the Commonwealth of Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI) by natural resource management entities to identify priority management actions and develop management plans, after initial facilitation of the tool by TNC in 2007. In the case of the Laolao Bay CAP, a review process was conducted to assess the status of the activities in the plan. The revised Laolao Bay CAP, completed in 2012, represented a successful example of a full cycle of adaptive management. The Garapan CAP and Talakaya CAP were both updated through a similar process in 2015. The assumption is that the CAPs and management plans will guide priority actions to inform adaptive management and help to secure the necessary funding for implementation.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the CAP and management planning processes in enabling adaptive management for CNMI, TNC assisted partners in CNMI in completing J-CAT priority 4.2, to develop an assessment of the effectiveness of the CAP and management planning processes as well as lessons learned during implementation that have been undertaken in the past several years. TNC worked with CNMI partners to complete an review of the status of the existing CAPs (Laolao Bay, Garapan and Talakhaya watershed) and effectiveness of the planning processes undertaken in guiding adaptive management within CNMI. To do this those who have participated in the development of the CAPs or management plans for CNMI were asked to complete a written assessment of the process (See Appendix 1). TNC also facilitated a focus group with key stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of the CAP and management planning processes as well as lessons learned during implementation. The following is a report on the information gathered through this process.

## CAP Assessment

### Review of individual CAPs

The first component of the assessment looked at each of the CAPs individually. Participants of the focus group were asked to consider the following questions; What was supposed to happen; What actually happened; and why were there differences.

### **Garapan**

The Garapan watershed was identified as a high priority watershed, which is why it was chosen for a CAP. The Garapan CAP was developed as a guiding framework for all work in the Garapan Watershed. The CAP process was supposed to assist in identifying what was being done by different agencies and to come up with strategies for dealing with a diverse population and challenging communication and trust issues. Specific agencies, organizations or people were to be assigned to different activities.

While several of the activities identified in the CAP have been completed, most participants said there were general problems with implementation of the CAP. One major challenge is that Garapan is a highly populated multilingual urban area with few permanent

residents. Some of the remaining activities or strategies identified in the Garapan CAP are for large infrastructure projects. While there are some ongoing infrastructure improvements, the biggest challenge with infrastructure is the financial investment necessary to make changes at scale. Another issue raised was coordinating between the different agencies. Often the people sent to these kinds of meetings are not often the right delegates and so the information doesn't get back to the right people and the upper level and agency management are not informed. As a result, the CAP activities are not prioritized by those agencies and therefore do not receive funding. The CAP could have been used to leverage funding, but it wasn't and this is due to issues mentioned above having to do with authority and priority.

Activities that were in progress prior to the CAP like research, monitoring and activities water quality were implemented, but the new activities weren't because a lot of them are large scale. For example, creation of watershed and improvements to infrastructure. Another issues brought up was that it is hard to identify best way to approach these activities and implement because of complex problems that involve multiple agencies and large pots of money. The Governor has a Garapan Revitalization Task Force that was newly formed to address all issues in Garapan including infrastructure issues. The task force meets monthly to talk about the problems and how they can be fixed and will hopefully address these coordination issues.

### **Laolao Bay**

Laolao Bay was identified as a priority watershed in 1998. Laolao Bay is a less populated rural area and a popular dive site. Divers were noticing changes to the reef overtime as a result of high turbidity and sedimentation. The CNMI Coral Reef Initiative comprised of three natural resources agencies (Coastal Resources Management (CRM), Divisions of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Fish and Wildlife (DFW), and various community stakeholders) put together a plan, called a Local Action Strategy (LAS) to address issues impacting Laolao Bay. TNC offered to help facilitate the CAP process and the LAS were incorporated into the CAP process.

The residential community is easier to work with than Garapan because there are fewer landowners that own larger amounts of land. There is one residential owner that is particularly important because he owns a road that is now probably the largest source of sedimentation, but we can't do improvement projects on that road because it is not public land. The owner is difficult two work with because he does not live on Saipan. An MOU was developed and idea of conservation easement was presented to the landowner, but landowner was not on board. Another approach involving moving the road to public land has not been implemented due to lack of funding.

Significant progress was made in implementation other strategies identified in the CAP. As a result, the focus has now switched to Garapan because all the easy activities and big activities that got funded are done, but all the hard activities/strategies are remaining. The main, paved road is being maintained. It is the the large privately owned unpaved road that continues to be a problem, because 'maintenance' means that every year it is replenished with more gravel/coral that contributes to more sedimentation.

Socioeconomic Monitoring using the SEM-Pasifika protocol and guidelines helped inform the Laolao campaign and later the Rare campaign. Laolao Bay was chosen as Rare

site because it was priority site. The CAP helped to inform the Rare campaign through identifying issues to address. The CAP was utilized to compete for and successfully receive funds from The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The fact that the CAP was community vetted was a plus in the application process.

Volunteers from Micronesia Island Nature Alliance and Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality (BECQ) staff are maintaining storm water sediment chambers but in the CAP it is assigned to DPW. DPW does not put money aside in their budget for maintenance. BECQ is considered owner of CAP and therefore feel like they have responsibility to implement activities that are not necessarily work they do and is responsibility of other agencies. Due to communication issues other agencies might not be aware that they should take part in the CAP activities.

### **Talakhaya**

Talakhaya was identified as a priority watershed site because of sedimentation issues affecting coral reefs. The CAP process was led by NOAA coral reef fellow with NOAA funding and was later updated by BECQ. Similar to the Laolao Bay process, they started with local action strategies, but didn't produce a CAP till later. Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) and Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) forestry were already working in Rota on how to address the Badlands issues and this work was incorporated into the CAP.

Since the review in 2015, significant progress was made, primarily with the revegetation project. The existence of the Talkahaya CAP has been fundamental to the ongoing funding for the revegetation project from NOAA CRCP activities. Unfortunately, the revegetation project and associated outreach/education and monitoring does not make up the bulk of the CAP and most of the remaining strategies/activities identified in the CAP have not been implemented. One strategy that was identified by the CAP was to integrate community work and turn over some of that work to the community this lead to putting stipends for volunteers in grants, which led to buy in by volunteers. Implementation has been very focused in outreach and education and revegetation and not on other strategies because of lack of buy in from other agencies that need to take on those roles possibly because the identified CAP activities are not priorities for those agencies. There is also issues with implementing in Rota since most staff from government agencies are based on Saipan.

### **Review of CAP Process**

Views on how useful the CAP processes was depended on the agency or organization. Some participants felt that their agencies already have other types of plans they are required to use and that funding is tied to these plans, so there was not a lot of leeway for implementing CAP activities unless they overlapped with existing plans. To offset this, they tried to incorporate work plans that were already existing into the CAP. Participants agreed that work that was already in progress was easy to incorporate into the CAP during the CAP process. However, they did feel one gap in the process was that prioritized strategies or activities were not tied directly to existing mandates. As a result, there are a lot of agencies saying, yes we have this CAP, but we have to go out and do other things because this is what the funding/plans dictate.

One factor the greatly influenced the CAP process was who participated in it. Many felt that since BECQ partnered to lead the CAP it was more focused on what they are trying

to achieve. In order to have a CAP that was more useful for all the agencies it would have needed to be a more joint process. The group did emphasize that in all planning efforts they tried to bring everyone to the table. Certain people come to the CAP meetings and then they left their agency, so agencies lost that institutional knowledge and needed to be reminded that the CAP exists.

In contrast when the CAP process was initiated and they brought everyone together to have big conversations and things were done by group consensus, some felt that actions and strategies identified got watered down or prioritized based on the whole group and not tied to agencies or organizations specific strategies. When a smaller group meet to finalize the plan the details were not included because everyone is not represented. We want everyone to participate, but in that large group we did not get the level and details that each agency needed.

Participants found the CAP review process useful. The CAP review was used to incorporate climate change adaptation into existing plans. Participants found that the CAPS were more realistic than some of the other plans used to dealing with than for example species recovery plans.

#### Implementation of CAP

Most participants found the CAP useful as reference when developing their work, but that the strategies did not lead to certain work being developed. When writing grants however, they did say they used the strategies from the CAP and then submitted the CAP to support their work. Some donors, NOAA for example, only wants to fund things in established plans. Submitting a copy of the CAP helps strengthen their proposals. The private sector said that they found CAPs very usefully in designing projects to get funded by the government.

One thing that was missing from implementation of the CAP is accountability. There is no mechanism for checking in with folks and there is no reward for accountable. People need to held accountable to reporting on what was completed and why not. Reviews in the past focused more on the actual CAP plan and less on how are we doing and how we can do it better. As a result, there is not much that drives an agency or organization to continue to use the CAP. Another issue was people being distracted by other projects, since there is no one specifically in charge of implementation of the CAP.

#### Monitoring of CAP Strategies

When CAPs were initially developed they were aligned with preexisting monitoring, specifically water quality and marine benthic monitoring. They were able to use the Garapan CAP to guide the establishment of new monitoring sites closer to the project area. For the CAP process this was the easiest part because they did what they were already doing and didn't do much adaptation. Existing monitoring data was actually used to identify critical areas that needed a CAP. Current monitoring that was already being done is tied to strategies identified in the CAP, but there are several strategies in the all of the CAPs that don't have any monitoring work associated with them. There is also monitoring work, for

example nearshore reef monitoring is ongoing adjacent to the Talakhaya, Laolao Bay and Garapan. This is not tied to a specific strategy, but is able provide useful data about the CAPs sites and show trends over the years.

The monitoring data has yet to be used to address the effectiveness of the CAP strategies. For the Laolao bay sit a post social marketing survey, as part of the Rare campaign, was completed to see if educational work was effective. The results of this survey were used to improve thye Rare work plan, but was not used to assess or improve CAP strategies. So far there has not been much change in water quality overtime at any of the sites, but this may be due to the short timeline. Laolao has improved water quality for the limited sampling they do, though they haven't done the full post-project sampling and analysis. When the latest CAP reviews were conducted there was not enough data available to assess the strategies. Now there is a lot more data available and there is a genuine interest in using the data to assess the effectiveness of the CAP strategies. Also because of merger of CRM and DEQ, there is some discrepancies in the data and timeline, so while data is being used to make recommendations it's not necessarily being tied back to the CAP.

#### Group Ranking Activity

Each group was asked to rate the CAP as a useful tool in project implementation and management.

Group 1 score: 6

Plans are useful, but there is no teeth no one enforcing anyone or pushing anyone. Put someone in charge with a gun or money.

Group 2 score: 5

It is useful for getting funding for projects, but we just don't generally trust that what is in the CAP reflects actual priorities and some of it isn't still relevant. It's a process problem in that it's all based on who happens to have been in the room, may not be based on agency prioritize and it makes it watered-down. More in-depth process and more than two days and need point person at each agency that focuses on incorporating the CAP into their other work. More iterative process.

Group 3 score of 3-4

The issues we had today are still the same issues we had before. All it boils down to is having the leadership buy in and everyone is accountable.

## Recommendations

- Almost everyone in the room emphasized the need for additional inter-agency communication, especially on collaborative projects.
- There were concerns over whether the planning process should be more centralized or decentralized. The claim was that centralization should allow for a more comprehensive incorporation of various agencies' concerns, but that this often left to the end product being watered down. One way to overcome this was to have a

centralized approach, but then to have agencies create individual work plans based on the CAP or agency specific work plans for each strategy.

- Need to form CAP teams and then have annual meetings to keep momentum going. Whoever convenes or leads CAP review meetings should be on a rotating basis. If CAP sponsorship rotates from agency to agency there would need to be someone in charge of making sure that happens, could it be an outsider like TNC? There also needs to be clear who should people report to regarding progress on CAP activities.
- A bill to create a central planning office for the CNMI is currently being developed. One option is to house the CAP plans with this office or to at least incorporate CAPs into the future master plan.
- The CAP is not a mandate, but it should carry some weight, at least in that partners should have to report every year on the status of CAP projects, money spent, money secured, and barriers to implementation. That should be compiled into an annual report so that we can see exactly what progress we are really making, and what problems we need to address collaboratively. There are so many challenges, but it's hard to have a productive conversation without laying all the challenges out on the table.
- During the CAP process it needs to be more explicit in capturing the activities that are already happening or that we have funding for and then how to link them to other activities and what are side or additional activities or projects that could happen if you found the funding.
- The initial recommendation was that CNMI should aim to implement four CAPs: one on Tinian, one on Rota, and two on Saipan (Laolao and one other). These numbers were guided by priority sites. There was a request to NOAA to do a CAP on Tinian, but haven't heard anything about it lately. Interest in doing locally managed marine area plan for Tanapag and a CAP for the Achugao watershed