Workshop Report

A novel approach towards equitable and effective marine stewardship through co-design: a community values based approach

One People One Reef

Hofagie Laamle!

Workshop date: October 14, 2024
International Marine Conservation Congress
Cape Town, South Africa

On October 14, 2024, One People One Reef (OPOR) held a workshop at the International Marine Conservation Congress in Cape Town, South Africa. Twenty six participants came from around the globe to discuss their approaches and philosophies on conservation, and representatives from OPOR presented some key principles learned during our ~15 years doing values based conservation with Pacific island communities. This document outlines the impetus for the workshop, its guidelines and goals, and the content discussed by the participants and workshop organizers. We have also made our slide deck available for reference. We are grateful to each of you for your valuable and earnest contributions to the workshop, and we look forward to continued discussions in the future.

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Report Outline

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1. Workshop framing: about OPOR and why we held this workshop

The future of sustainable reef restoration and management is one built on inclusive solutions: where multiple approaches are used, multiple perspectives are included, and 'authentic' collaboration is central to the effort. It is a future where both science and community perspective come together to ensure success, which needs to be defined by the people who are most directly affected by the issues and the successes. People, and importantly local and indigenous people, must be at the center of solutions, and their voices need to be elevated to ensure they are heard. In places where scientists and practitioners who are not 'of place' are working, it is incumbent on them to listen, and incorporate what they hear at the forefront of any planning, including placing people 'of place' in leadership roles.

We promote a values-based approach to conservation planning. This is a process whereby community values are identified, and provide a foundation for determining potential success of a conservation effort. Are the suggested plans in line with what the community values? One example might be: if the community values unity and shared resources, a no-take area may not align with those values, and so may cause stress, anxiety, and even conflict, thereby undermining success.

One People One Reef is a collaboration between Micronesian coastal communities & scientists who develop inclusive, adaptive, & sustainable conservation solutions to protect the health & resilience of critical coral reef habitats & the people who rely on them for food security.

We strive to **put people at the center of conservation solutions**

Our approach to adaptive marine conservation supports community leadership & traditional ecological knowledge & management systems, combined with modern science. We envision resilient reefs & healthy communities for current and future generations.

Our Mission

- To achieve effective and enduring protection of critical marine habitats and the people who rely on them.
- To develop innovative & diverse partnerships that advance adaptive management and conservation in the Micronesian outer islands.
- To develop local capacity through a unique collaborative approach that weaves traditional knowledge & management practices together with modern science and technology.

Our approach involves centering community needs, goals and values in conservation/management planning, and putting local practitioners/leaders in leadership roles building the plans. This can be viewed as co-creation or collaboration around planning, and we place importance on a clear definition of those terms and the role of individuals in the planning and implementation. Many conservation and management efforts are driven by frameworks conceived through a western lens which risk being less effective due to a lack of cultural context and local leadership from inception. We have collectively seen progress and positive outcomes through including more diverse voices in these efforts, and incorporating methods to reach out more intentionally to local community members in the early planning and implementation efforts.

However, there remains a significant gap between conservation efforts and an understanding of the impacts to local communities. This is an ongoing environmental justice issue, and we believe that **working collaboratively** to understand socio-cultural and environmental systems can ultimately achieve mutual conservation goals. We recognize that imposing management solutions can lead to erosion on multiple levels. **A values-based approach to conservation planning** allows for conservation and management to be developed in a **culturally relevant framework, avoiding unintended consequences of western driven approaches.** Doing this work to understand the cultural context and listen carefully to people requires work to shift the paradigm from 'inviting a diversity of perspectives to the table in planning' to 'setting the table together and discussing and planning in a non-dominant space'. The way much conservation is implemented today is through the former: a dominant group sets the agenda and invites people to come discuss it. We believe there needs to be more effort to first learn from people of place what the needs and concerns are, and then support and collaborate on solutions rather than drive them from an external framework.

To that end, some import questions/concepts to consider collectively as a conservation community include:

- The definition of **conservation** is not unilateral. Some languages don't have a word for conservation. It may be considered from a perspective of stewardship, social dynamics, and resource use and distribution. For some peoples management and conservation may not be distinguished separately (eg. management IS conservation), and it may be incorporated into their taboo system, social constructs, stories, and lessons.

- Approaches to sustainable ecosystems should be **culturally contextualized** for maximum success for all, and importantly, considered in the context of supporting people, and not causing harm. Local people need to define what this means.

- What is **science informed** management (e.g. in developing and assessing MPAs)? Including: Whose science 'counts'? Who will use the science? What will it be used to inform?

- How is **success evaluated?**: Who determines the metrics? When is there enough data? Is the determination of success based on natural science metrics? Community input? Both? To what degree do different approaches and information streams determine success? The metrics we use to measure conservation and management success should include a social component, and be derived from multiple knowledge systems.
- **Training** for management and evaluation: In what context is this training done? Is it training to implement a western program with western or outside determined metrics? To what extent do people of place determine the training needs and methods?

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2. Workshop guidelines, goals, objectives, and desired outcomes

Workshop Guidelines

We used the following guidelines to ensure this workshop was a *safe space* to voice, discuss and share.

We will…

•Listen to others
•Speak/share ideas
•Be respectful
•Make sure all voices are heard
•Recognize that silence is a choice and can mean you are ok with the outcome
•Recognize that is ok to disagree (respectfully)
•Keep an open mind

We also opened the floor for participants to contribute other guidelines.

Goals and objectives

- Highlight the importance of identifying and prioritizing human values in conservation planning to ensure long term implementation success and minimize adverse effects on local communities
- To better understand the implications and impacts to human communities of some conservation models
- Identify gaps between how marine conservation is promoted and how it is implemented
- Share approaches and tools to develop conservation solutions that support social, cultural and environmental integrity

Outcomes

- Synthesis of the workshop proceedings, both from the organizers and participants

- Determine the potential applicability and efficacy of the OPOR workshop model with a diverse group of people from different parts of the world
- Begin building a network for a larger platform for these discussions in the future, such as a larger workshop, symposium, or conference

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3. Summary of Workshop Sessions

We opened the workshop by providing the Merriam Webster (western) definitions for 'culture', 'conservation', and 'values'.

- **culture**: the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations
- **conservation**: a careful preservation and protection of something
- **practices**: a repeated or customary action
- **values**: the deeply held beliefs and principles that a particular group or society considers important or desirable

We recognize that these words have different meanings to different people, and we wanted to provide one definition to get people to consider what these words mean to them, and in their conservation work.

Sessions 1 & 2: Identifying best practices in conservation, and how to implement these practices

Our first session was devoted to identifying some of the 'best practices' the group believed were helping conservation work advance. The goal was to get participants thinking about what are the best practices, and are those all being practiced in the 'best' way. Some considerations for conservation work:

- **How do we define the collaboration and the power dynamics?**
- What are the **value systems** that interact around the work? Is there an intentional attempt to understand this?
- **Who** is bringing **who** into **what?** Who are the dominant players, who is doing the inviting, and who is defining the project/program/goals? Are there attempts to put more local practitioners in positions of leadership?

Session question:

In your experience, what are some best practices (those that lead to the greatest success) for applied conservation work?

Participant responses

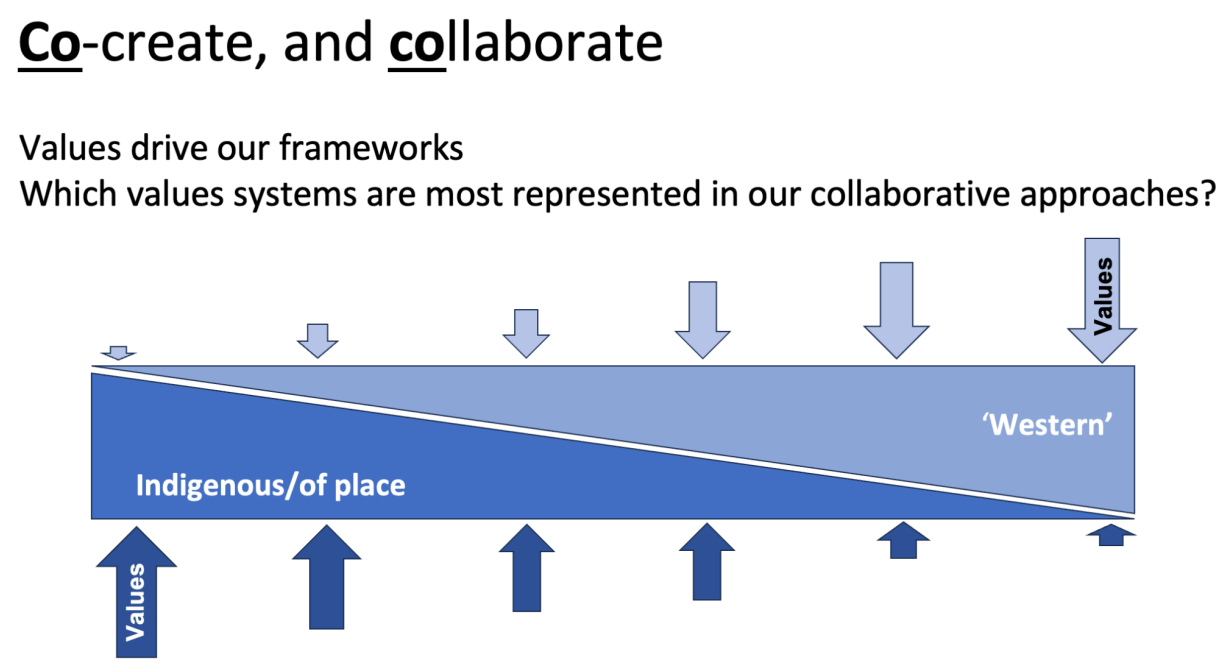
- Free informed consent understood: information is accessible & confidential
    - All intentions are understood: what change needs to happen, what are the impacts of the work
    - Adding to it: informed prior to consent
    - Make sure the communities actually know what the point of the conservation initiative is
    - Understand what conservation is already taking place
- Community voices: make films where all members of the community get to say how they feel about a particular practice such as hunting turtles
- Before engaging the community, do some stakeholder mapping to make sure all of the stakeholders are actually included
- Establish what other alternative livelihoods exist in the community: other ways of fishing, etc.
- Exchange of practice between different communities in the area
- Open access research & materials with translations in local languages
- Providing communities with incentives for conservation
    - Acknowledge when MPAs, for example, take livelihoods away
    - Equitable distribution of benefits in a community
- Long term sustainable finance
- Working with youth & students
- Being aware of how much of people's time you're taking with the work
- Raising the profile of the communities: making them proud of their achievement
- Monitoring & enforcement

Synthesis

- Conservation initiatives are generally approached from 2 perspectives:
    - Conservation practitioners
    - Community members
- Participants stressed ensuring communities are informed & involved: info is accessible & available
- Regular knowledge exchange is key to mutual understanding and synergy
- Sustainability: finances, ongoing engagement with youth, monitoring

Session 3: Understanding values in marine conservation

This session was designed to highlight the importance of values in driving the work we all do. The value systems of conservation practitioners may not be the same as the values of the people affected by the conservation work, especially if it is conceived by non-local groups. There may be a great deal of overlap in some cases, or very little overlap in others. Recognizing both overlaps and gaps in values is essential for maximizing the success of the conservation work while minimizing any adverse effects on local communities.



The Figure above illustrates a spectrum showing the extent to which two (sometimes) distinct value systems - indigenous and western - shape and are represented in conservation efforts. Many conservation initiatives are predominantly influenced by western values, funding, and agendas (right end of the spectrum), often overlooking or underrepresenting the values and systems of local communities (left end of the spectrum). We aim to tip the scale toward prioritizing indigenous/of place values through a better awareness of how conservation is being practiced on the ground, and prioritizing voices 'of place'. .

Participants were asked to identify some core values they hold as individuals (not restricted to their conservation work). As conservation scientists, practitioners, or enthusiasts, we often share many values when it comes to our work in conservation. As people however, we also share values derived from our cultural context and community, and those can inform our views towards the environment and its use. In our community workshops through One People One Reef, we like to identify and prioritize the core human values shared by community members to

guide the development of conservation initiatives. The following are personal values that workshop participants shared on sticky notes

1. **Most Repeated/Central to Ethics: key themes about how individuals and communities should behave.**

    - Respect (X10)
    - Honesty (X7)
    - Accountability (X4)
    - Empathy (X3)
    - Integrity (X3)

2. **Human Relationships & Social Principles:**
    - Kindness (X2)
    - Compassion (X2)
    - Humility (X2)
    - Generosity
    - Tolerance
    - Forgiveness

3. **Environment & Nature:**
    - Protect the sea as they are a lot of biodiversity
    - No sea, no life
    - Cohabitation with nature
    - Eco-friendly lifestyle
    - Nature

4. **Values Related to Growth & Openness:**
    - Authenticity (X2)
    - Patience (X2)
    - Creativity
    - Diligence
    - Knowledge-loving
    - Open mindedness

5. **Universal Concepts & Purpose:**
    - A voice
    - Access to knowledge
    - Act with integrity
    - Leave the world in a better place than I found it

The idea of discussing personal, core values was well-received, and participants embraced the idea of approaching community discussions in this way. Core human values tend to be consistent from person to person within communities with shared histories and cultural context, and this common ground can highlight fundamental commonalities (and differences) as we approach complex and difficult issues.

Session 4: (Participants were not able to engage due to time constraints) What is conservation success?

<u>Points to consider</u>

- *How is conservation success defined?*
    - *Who is defining it?*
- *How is conservation success measured?*
    - *Who is it being measured by?*

Session 5: Identifying the gaps between the best practices in conservation and how conservation is actually being done

<u>Questions to consider</u>

1. *Are the values of the people being most affected represented in this work?*

2. *How are those values being assessed/incorporated?*
3. *Examination of local community needs versus conservation strategies. Where are the greatest gaps?*
4. *Strategies for bridging identified gaps (didn't get to due to time)*

Participant responses

Gaps

- The desire to incorporate values often falls short
    - There is often a reason to prioritize some initiative over values
- The agenda and commitment of conservationists is sometimes unclear or poorly aligned with community needs
    - Communities may have other more important life priorities
- The importance of honesty - conservationists can't always follow through with promises
- Consultation fatigue is an issue. In addition, there is often improper compensation and/or recognition of indigenous communities for their knowledge contributions
    - Communities feel exploited for data, photos, etc.
    - Money isn't always the answer: conservation practitioners need to be able to compensate communities without undermining values
    - We need to train communities to collect and interpret their own data, giving them agency in co-management
    - Communities can be reluctant to engage without seeing benefits
    - Risk aversion: communities can be hesitant to adopt conservation initiatives when financial or cultural risks are high
- Power dynamics - ensuring marginalized groups will benefit from the conservation program
- Involving women: outside conservation practitioners need to work to understand how gender roles are seen and understood in different communities
    - This helps foster safe places to share ideas
- Acknowledging that it takes time to build trust with communities and planning project timelines accordingly
- Prior engagement & consent
    - Understanding community aspirations and desires
    - Identify barriers to obtaining prior engagement and consent and develop solutions to this
    - Taking the time and energy to build relationships with communities
    - Acknowledging and respecting the sensitivity of information within communities
- Facilitating discussion when community knowledge and western scientific conclusions disagree
- Encouraging the transfer of culture and knowledge to new generations to avoid the erosion of cultural practices
- Taking the time to overcome barriers in language & understanding
- Enforcement: outsiders can poach and benefit from sacrifice of community
- Indigenizing policy and legislation: respecting the authority of indigenous leaders and

abiding by community governance structure
- Government corruption is an inevitable challenge that must be accounted for to whatever degree possible when planning a conservation initiative

This session was pressed for time, and we had limited time to discuss solutions to the gaps between the best practices in doing conservation work and the challenges in actually carrying out these best practices. However, it was enlightening to hear from this diverse international group, as the nature and scope of conservation challenges vary substantially depending on context. **A common theme across all of the challenges identified was in making sure that the communities themselves are properly considered - that they are in a position to both guide the work and benefit holistically from it.**

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4. Conclusions & next steps

We were energized and inspired by this workshop. Each of you brought a unique perspective and suite of experiences that made for enlightening and impactful discussion. We are grateful for your earnest participation, and we look forward to further discussion and potential collaboration in the future.

Going forward, we would love to hear from you about ideas and opportunities to continue the conversation - whether it's another workshop at an upcoming conference (with more time), a larger scale workshop/meeting/symposium dedicated to values based management, or some other idea. Please be in touch!

Appendix A: List and contacts of participants

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Appendix B: slide deck