

Caribbean & Micronesia

Twinning Exchange 2025–26

Twinning Exchange Report

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Coordination Leads

Dayne Buddo: dayne.buddo@crfm.int

Eric Hartge: ehartge@stanford.edu

Participants

Allena Joseph

Azra Blythe-Mallett

Catherine Lee Hing

Daemi Ngirmidol

Melvira Kazuma

Thomas Nelson

Tyrell Reyes

Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities Through Marine Spatial Planning
in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus (BE-CLME+) Project (GEF ID [10211](#))



Strengthening and Enabling the Micronesia Challenge 2030 (GEF ID [10740](#))

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1.Introduction

The Pacific Islands and the Caribbean Islands portray similarities when it comes to fisheries management and interlinked with marine protected areas. The community-based fisheries, and predominantly artisanal fisheries, present a unique opportunity to compare and contrast governance, role of science, advocacy, stakeholder engagement and public education. Best practices from both areas would serve to improve collectively the management of living marine resources and share these lessons to the wider community in each region.

The Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities Through Marine Spatial Planning in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus (BE-CLME+) Project aims to promote blue economy development in the CLME+ through marine spatial planning and marine protected areas (MPAs), ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF), and sustainable seafood value chains. Similarly, the Strengthening and Enabling the Micronesia Challenge 2030 Project leverages efforts towards effective management with national partners from the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau as well as jurisdictional partners from Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands to enable achievement of the Micronesia Challenge 2030 Targets.

Both regions embody similar characteristics of distinct local resource management protocols partnered with collaborative regional transboundary governance systems. Specifically, the island communities that share the burden of managing a wealth of national resources with relatively low populations and staff capacities. This Twinning Exchange was an investment into enhancing the capacity of ministry or agency staff that are directly involved at the local and regional levels. The participants from each project were selected as key actors in 1) national protected area or coastal fisheries management, 2) regional knowledge exchange and capacity development, and 3) GEF project management and coordination. In addition, they each have direct experience in the core thematic areas of protected area management, marine spatial planning, coastal fisheries, and pelagic fisheries.

As communities in both the Caribbean and Micronesia navigate topics such as methods to balance livelihoods, resources, and economics, this knowledge exchange provided an influential conduit for improving shared resource management in the target regions and beyond. The lessons identified, shared, and evaluated during the exchange will provide additional value to the full project teams and the broader IW:LEARN community.

The Twinning Exchange structure included a balance of virtual meetings as well as a pair of site visits in each geographic region of interest. The project teams conducted initial preparatory meetings in September in advance of a full-participant virtual inception meeting hosted on October 7 / 8, 2025 (date depending on location). The site visits included the Republic of Palau from November 17–21, 2025 and Saint Lucia from January 26–30, 2026. Between the site visits, each project team conducted a virtual meeting with both Project Managers in attendance to review reflections from the first site visit and to prepare for the second site visit.

The initial proposed approach included back-to-back site visits in Jamaica and Palau both occurring in November 2025. Due to the historic impacts from Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica, the project team conferred and decided to continue with the planned trip to Palau and then shift the location of the Caribbean site visit to a different time period and project nation: Saint Lucia.

The Twinning Exchange participants included:

- From the BE-CLME+ Project:
 - Regional Project Coordinator: Dr. Dayne Buddo
 - Jamaican Fisheries Representative: Dr. Azra Blythe-Mallett
 - Belizean Protected Area Representative: Mr. Tyrell Reyes (Palau site visit only)
 - Saint Lucian Fisheries Representative: Mr. Thomas Nelson (Saint Lucia site visit only)
 - BE:CLME+ Marine Spatial Planning Specialist from Saint Lucia, based in Belize: Ms. Allena Joseph (Saint Lucia site visit only)
- From the MC 2030 Project:
 - Project Manager: Mr. Eric Hartge
 - Palauan Protected Areas Coordinator: Ms. Melvira Kazuma
 - Palauan Fisheries Representative: Ms. Daemi Ngirmidol
 - Early Career Ocean Professional (Stanford PhD Candidate): Ms. Catherine Lee Hing

2. Short Description of Participating Projects/Partners

2.1. Project 1: BE-CLME+

[10211](#): Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities Through Marine Spatial Planning in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus (BE-CLME+) Project

The “BE-CLME+”: Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities Through Marine Spatial Planning in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus Project seeks to promote blue economy development in the CLME+ through marine spatial planning and strengthening of marine protected areas (MPAs), ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF), and sustainable seafood value chains. The CRFM, an inter-governmental CARICOM agency, is the executing agency for the 4-year BE-CLME+ project, funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which endorsed the Project in November 2022 and provided a US\$6.2 million grant for the project.

The participating countries are **Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, and Saint Lucia**, while the partner organizations are the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF), CRFM, the University of the West Indies Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (UWI-CERMES), University of Florida Sea Grant, which has committed co-financing of approximately US\$41.7 million. The CRFM is the executing agency, while FAO and CAF are the GEF co-implementing agencies. These partners will support the governments of the participating countries in implementing the project interventions, from which benefits will be spread across the region. The project’s budget includes US\$25 million in co-financing from CAF, for lines of credit through national financial institutions to support the development of fisheries value chains.

2.2. Project 2: MC 2030

[10740](#): Strengthening and Enabling the Micronesia Challenge 2030

Strengthening transboundary integrated marine resource management for healthy marine ecosystems and sustainable coastal fisheries in Micronesia through the 2030 Micronesia Challenge

The project Strengthening and Enabling the Micronesia Challenge 2030 builds on the Micronesia Challenge 2030 (MC2030) conservation, community benefit, and process targets, recognized by MC2030 partner jurisdictions including the **Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)**, **Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)**, **Republic of Palau**, the U.S. Territory of Guam and the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The overall MC2030 conservation target is to effectively manage at least 50% of marine resources and 30% of terrestrial resources across Micronesia by 2030. The project aims to enhance national and regional marine resource management towards the Micronesia Challenge 2030 targets through three Components. The first component focuses on supporting FSM, RMI and Palau as they develop national policies, plans and tools to support national integrated management of marine resources under Micronesia Challenge 2030 targets. The second project component—implemented through the Micronesia Conservation Trust and the Micronesia Challenge Regional Office—aims to strengthen the capacities, communication, and planning to ensure regional coordination of the MC2030. The third project component focuses on monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management and communication of knowledge products generated through the project, including through IW:LEARN. The project is implemented by World Wildlife Fund, Inc. - US Chapter; and it is executed by the Stanford Center for Ocean Solutions.

3.Objectives of the IW Twinning Exchange

The Twinning Exchange included the pursuit of four primary objectives that embody overlapping areas of interest at the local, national, and regional levels.

- Conduct a comparative analysis of marine & coastal resource management at local, national, and regional levels
- Enhance knowledge of liaisons & networks working on shared topics of local to regional resource management efforts
- Compare designation, funding, operations, and monitoring methods for protected area management
- Distill and share lessons amongst the two project teams as well as with broader IW:LEARN community

4.Key Activities

The Twinning Exchange consisted of an inception meeting and two core site visits in Palau and Saint Lucia. At both sites, the participants spent a week experiencing the natural systems, engaging directly with local actors, and conversing with a range of managers, practitioners, and resource users. An overview of each itinerary is below.

Inception Meeting - October 7 (& 8), 2025

Participants convened virtually from Kingston, Belize City, Atlanta, Palo Alto, Pohnpei, and Koror for a welcome dialogue amongst all involved. The agenda included an introduction to both projects, a review of the site visit agendas, and a discussion on paths to capture lessons learned throughout the process.

Palau Site Visit - November 17–21

Day 1: Participants experienced the UNESCO World Heritage Site: the Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, a multi-use area for recreational, subsistence and restricted commercial use. The first outing included a visit to popular dive and snorkeling sites near Ngemelis Island—along the German Channel that connects the lagoon to the open ocean. Following the boat trip, the participants reconvened for a dinner meeting to gain an initial briefing on the plans for the week and to discuss areas of overlapping interest for exploration during the exchange.

Day 2: Participants conducted a bi-coastal tour of Babeldaob Island. The first stop was Kamesang Dock and the neighboring Ngatpang Aquaculture Center. The site is the planned location for the new port expansion under Palau's blue prosperity plan, to increase access for industrial fishing vessels to land and offload their catch to increase pelagic supply to the nation while also using the aquaculture center as a source of baitfish for the fishery. In the afternoon, the group reconvened for a lunch meeting and outing on the east coast of Melekeok State to meet with local clam aquaculturists from Ngaramercherocher men's group. In addition, the group joined an ongoing convening with a similar "knowledge exchange" event from the [Kiwa Initiative's MiCOAST](#) Project, 'Roots to Reefs and Beyond.' That exchange was co-organized by OneReef, co-led by RARE and involved > 40 participants from throughout Micronesian and Western Pacific islands, including Melekeok State Officials, Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) and TNC Palau. Participants were also allowed to outplant giant clams within the sanctuary in

a designated clam garden. Following the coastal visit, the participants conducted a self-guided tour of the National Capitol grounds in Ngerulmud.

Day 3: In the morning, the participants conducted three courtesy visits to relevant actors in the marine resource space. The first visit was to the Palau Conservation Society (PCS), a long-term community-based environmental consultancy organization that implements its activities through partnerships. The second visit was to the Belau Offshore Fisheries Incorporated (BOFI), a recently developed pelagic fishing cooperative. BOFI operates under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment. They are involved in capacity building for fishermen, implementing fish handling techniques to preserve quality, promoting pole-and-line fishing methods, and developing operational guidelines. They also work with stakeholders to secure fishing areas for live bait. The third visit was a sit-down meeting with the Director of Fisheries, Ms. Persis Omelau, to discuss an overview of current fisheries policy in Palau. In collaboration with the staff from the Palau Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment (MAFE), the participants visited local tourist and cultural sites near Ngeruktabel Island, an uninhabited Island located in Rock Islands Southern Lagoon. This trip included immersive experiences in the Rock Islands inner lagoon for firsthand experiences of the reef abundance and diversity.

Day 4: Participants were able to have a brief chat with a State Chief in Ollei who once was an active fisherman, but now only fishes occasionally. His current duties as Chief and looking out for the younger generation now takes priority. Participants traveled to the northern tip of Babeldaob to embark on a 90-minute boat ride to the northern atoll community of Kayangel, one of four small Islands and the only one inhabited. With a population of less than 50 people, the state of Kayangel takes a very direct approach to protected area management. Due to its remoteness, Kayangel is known for its untouched white sand beaches and tranquil atmosphere free from modern crowds, hence the area is referred to as a hidden gem with pristine coral reefs and vibrant marine life. The group toured the island and met with the local ranger as well as other community members. After the visit to Kayangel Atoll, the participants headed south with brief stops to snorkel on the reef drop off as well as to fish the abundance of the pristine waters.

Day 5: Participants convened for a multi-hour morning meeting to discuss and reflect on the first site exchange week, identify topics to collectively unpack, and receive an initial logistical plan for the site visit in Saint Lucia. Following the meeting, all participants conducted a few additional courtesy visits to local establishments including the Belau National Museum and the Palau National Aquaculture Center.

Saint Lucia Site Visit - January 26–30

Day 1: Participants launched the exchange through a first visit to the Soufriere Marine Management Area (SMMA). The SMMA staff guided the participants on a snorkel or scuba dive of the local reef and restoration efforts within the Anse Chastanet Marine Reserve, said to have some of the best and healthiest reefs in St. Lucia. Following the dive and an engaging lunch dialogue, the rangers led the group on a snorkel visit to the House Reef Coral Restoration sites. Following the aquatic activities, all members participated in a watershed and beach cleanup activity on a public beach in Malgretoute, a scenic coastal area on the southern coast of Soufriere Bay. Ocean debris, plastic bottles and other waste material caused by human activities were collected and bagged for pick-up and disposal by SMMA partners.

Day 2: Participants traveled from Rodney Bay to southern Saint Lucia for a visit to the village of Laborie. While there, the exchange participants were treated to overview discussions of distinct, yet interrelated aspects of the management of coastal village livelihoods. The visit included dialogues with the Laborie Fishermen's Co-operative Limited; one of nine active co-operatives throughout St. Lucia, the Laborie Development Foundation; a non-for-profit community-based independent organization guiding sustainable development and improving quality

of life in the community; a local trap/pot fisher and a local conch diver from Laborie Bay fishing village who gave their perspectives on the fishing industry, then and now.

Day 3: Participants started the third day by traveling to the south of the island again for a visit to Vieux Fort and the Maria Island Nature Reserve, which was done after preliminary talks and individual biosecurity checks from Rangers. Travel to the Island is by boat and normally done by fishing vessels and other tour operators, providing an ecotourism opportunity with the St. Lucia National Trust, which manages the reserve. On Maria Island, the participants learned about the unique local wildlife habitats in the Western Caribbean. Following the island visit, the group of hosts from the Reserve and all participants had a lunch discussion with the local marine police officers from the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force, Marine Unit to learn about their role in enforcement of fisheries regulations. In the afternoon, the participants visited a sea moss farm at the local cooperative in Savannes Bay operated by the Eau Piquant Seamoss Farmers Association (ESFA) and were treated to a wading experience. The Farmers are supported by the Department of Fisheries and the St. Lucian National Trust in order to enhance production, sustainability and market access through equipment grants and capacity building in cultivation methods.

Day 4: Participants spent the morning discussing the importance and value of multi-national collaboratives for resource management in a dialogue with members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) community. In this dialogue, many elements of scaling impacts at the local, subnational, regional, and global levels were discussed - primarily as a comparison between the OECS and the jurisdictional partners of the Micronesia Challenge. Further discussions included policies and programs instituted to promote a Blue Economy to enhance livelihoods and ocean health through sustainable resource use and drive economic growth. In the afternoon, all participants concluded the day with a kayak or boat ride on Praslin Bay with a family-owned ecotourism business “Kayak on the Bay” supported by the Community Tourism Authority which empowers local entrepreneurs to build, manage and promote successful ventures to elevate the St. Lucian local experience.

Day 5: The fifth and final day centered on the closing presentation and meeting with the members of the Saint Lucian government. The event was hosted by the Saint Lucian Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Climate Change at the Orchid Garden Centre in Gros Islet. The participants presented the overview from the exchange and their initial findings from both site visits as a means to facilitate dialogue amongst all attendees. Upon conclusion of the compelling dialogue, the participants readied for departure to their home destinations.

5. Results and Learning Outcomes

The governance of marine resources varies significantly across island nations, shaped by distinct political structures, cultural traditions, and geographic contexts. This Twinning Exchange examined the contrasting approaches to marine resource management in Palau (Micronesia) and Saint Lucia (Caribbean), highlighting how historical governance systems, spatial considerations, and community engagement models influence conservation outcomes and livelihood sustainability.

Relevance of Scale in Marine Governance

Political and Governance Structures

The foundational differences in political organization between these two island nations profoundly influence their approaches to marine resource management.

Saint Lucia operates within a Westminster-style parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy, where the British Crown serves as head of state. This system reflects its colonial legacy and emphasizes centralized,

state-led governance structures. Decision-making authority flows primarily through elected representatives and appointed officials, with formal bureaucratic processes governing resource management policies. As is true for many former colonies under the British Empire, the Saint Lucian government operates under a unitary system, which can create distance between policymakers and resource users, particularly in coastal communities where traditional knowledge and local practices remain vital to daily subsistence and cultural identity.

Palau, in contrast, has developed a unique hybrid governance system that integrates democratic republican institutions with deeply rooted traditional authority structures. As a matrilineal and matriarchal society, Palauan culture vests significant social and resource authority in women and maternal lineages. The Council of Chiefs (*Rubekul Belau*) maintains formal recognition within the political system through an advisory role to the President and other elected officials, wielding considerable influence over customary resource management and land tenure decisions. The Traditional Chiefs — known as the *Klobak* — also embody an authoritative local resource management role relating to moratoriums or conservation measures at the state or village levels. This dual governance structure—combining modern democratic processes with traditional authority—enables more flexible, community-responsive approaches to marine conservation that honor ancestral practices while adapting to contemporary challenges.

These contrasting political frameworks create fundamentally different relationships between communities and marine resources, with Saint Lucia's centralized model emphasizing regulatory compliance and Palau's hybrid system facilitating customary stewardship alongside statutory management.

Spatial and Geographic Considerations

Beyond political differences, the physical geography of these island nations creates distinct opportunities and constraints for marine resource management.

Saint Lucia, while blessed with productive coastal waters, manages marine resources primarily along its island perimeter. The island's steep volcanic topography descends quickly to deep oceanic waters, limiting the spatial extent of shallow, accessible fishing grounds. Coastal resources—including coral reefs, seagrass beds, and nearshore fisheries—exist in relatively narrow bands around the island. This linear, perimeter-based resource distribution creates particular management challenges, as fishing pressure concentrates in limited areas and conflicts between competing uses (e.g., tourism, fishing, coastal development) intensify along accessible coastlines. It is also located in the Lesser Antilles with an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 15,411 km². Saint Lucia shares its delimited maritime borders with Martinique, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Barbados, and Venezuela, giving rise to multiple adjacent maritime jurisdictions.

Conversely, Palau's EEZ spans over approximately 500,000 km². Its nearest neighboring state, the Federated States of Micronesia lies approximately 450 km away, and the two nations have a treaty which formally delimits their maritime boundary. Palau's archipelagic structure, by contrast, encompasses an extensive lagoon system that dramatically expands the nation's manageable marine estate. The barrier reef system creates vast protected areas of shallow water, offering multiple zones for differentiated management strategies. This spatial complexity enables Palau to implement sophisticated area-based management approaches, including marine protected areas, traditional fishing zones, and tourism-designated sites, all within relatively sheltered waters. The lagoon environment also supports distinct ecological communities compared to open ocean systems, creating opportunities for reef-focused conservation strategies that complement pelagic fisheries management beyond the reef.

These geographic differences fundamentally shape what is possible in marine spatial planning and zoning—Palau can create extensive no-take zones while maintaining substantial fishing areas, whereas Saint Lucia must balance

competing demands within more spatially constrained coastal zones. This highlights the importance of marine spatial planning for small Islands with large ocean spaces as these multi-use areas provide critical livelihoods for many coastal communities. Consequently, and as seen in other Caribbean countries, pelagic fishing is being promoted as a means of utilizing the larger EEZ and providing alternative offshore fishing opportunities. Reducing dependence on coastal fisheries helps to alleviate pressure on coastal ecosystems allowing habitat recovery which supports increased biodiversity.

Contrasting Management Approaches

The divergent political and spatial contexts have produced markedly different marine governance models in practice.

Saint Lucia's approach relies predominantly on state-led management frameworks, where government agencies—primarily the Department of Fisheries—are responsible for establishing regulations, enforcing compliance, and coordinating conservation initiatives. However, given the limited resources often faced by government departments in the Caribbean, effective management increasingly depends on forming partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other institutions and agencies to provide additional capacity for a broader stakeholder engagement. While consultative processes exist to incorporate stakeholder input, these mechanisms often face legitimacy challenges when communities perceive them as extractive rather than collaborative. Fishers and coastal residents may be asked to provide knowledge, comply with restrictions, or modify practices, yet the distribution of resulting benefits—whether economic returns from marine parks, tourism revenues, or improved fish stocks—frequently remains unclear or inequitably allocated. This asymmetry can undermine compliance, erode trust in government institutions, and reduce the effectiveness of conservation measures, even when scientifically well-designed.

The consultation-to-implementation gap therefore reflects broader post-colonial governance challenges associated with ensuring meaningful participation, transparency, and equitable benefit-sharing. Where formal democratic processes have not fully displaced communities' desires for meaningful self-determination over local resources, co-management arrangements can help to bridge the gap by fostering local ownership, enhancing trust in institutions and ensuring conservation and development benefits are more equitably distributed.

Palau benefits substantially from strong customary tenure systems and clear social authority structures that predate modern statehood. Traditional leaders and community organizations exercise recognized authority over specific marine areas, with rights and responsibilities passed through matrilineal lines over generations. This customary framework provides several management advantages: enforcement mechanisms rooted in social relationships rather than external regulation; local ecological knowledge integrated directly into management decisions; and clear benefit streams to communities who bear the costs of conservation measures.

The *bul* system—traditional closures of fishing areas declared by chiefs—exemplifies this approach, allowing rapid, flexible responses to resource concerns without requiring lengthy bureaucratic processes. When combined with modern scientific monitoring and legal recognition, these customary systems create resilient, adaptive management structures with strong community ownership and legitimacy.

Regional Context and Collaboration

Despite their significant differences, both nations participate actively in regional collaborative frameworks that address shared marine challenges.

Political Regionalism

Both nations engage in ambitious regional conservation initiatives: Palau participates in the Micronesia Challenge, a commitment by Micronesian jurisdictions to achieve ambitious targets including effective management of at least 50% of nearshore marine resources and 30% of terrestrial resources by 2030. Similarly, Saint Lucia is advancing its biodiversity commitments through the UN Convention on Biological Diversity - Kunming Targets and the Caribbean Challenge Initiative, with parallel conservation targets across Caribbean nations. These regional frameworks facilitate knowledge exchange, coordinate monitoring efforts, mobilize conservation funding, and create political momentum beyond what individual small nations could achieve independently.

Additionally, participation in broader regional organizations—the Micronesian Islands Forum (MIF) or Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) for Palau and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) or Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) for Saint Lucia—provides platforms for coordinating positions on climate change, fisheries access, and marine conservation within international negotiations, amplifying the collective voice of small island states.

Fisheries Management: Similarities and Differences

Resource Focus and Fishing Practices

The target species and fishing methods in each location reflect distinct marine ecosystems and cultural traditions.

Palauan fisheries focus substantially on reef fish and pelagic species, reflecting the nation's dual marine environment of lagoon and open ocean. Reef fisheries target species like groupers, snappers, parrotfish, and surgeonfish, which play vital ecological roles in coral reef health while providing essential protein and cultural sustenance. Pelagic fisheries pursue tuna, wahoo, and mahi-mahi in offshore waters, supporting both subsistence needs and commercial export opportunities. The ecological knowledge required for successful reef fishing—understanding fish behavior, seasonal patterns, and habitat associations—has been accumulated over millennia and continues to inform contemporary management.

Whereas Palauans harvest giant clams and sea cucumbers, Saint Lucian fisheries, while also multispecies, place particular emphasis on shellfish and invertebrate harvesting, including conch, lobster, and sea urchins, alongside finfish. These fisheries often involve gleaning and diving in shallow waters, practices dominated by both men and women, though often underrecognized in official fisheries statistics. The reliance on shellfish creates specific management challenges, as these species are particularly vulnerable to overharvesting due to their limited mobility and aggregating behaviors during reproduction.

Despite targeting different species assemblages, both nations share certain livelihood patterns: gleaning and small-scale harvesting remain economically and culturally important, supporting household food security and local market economies. Women also play an essential role in these activities and are often the primary participants in gleaning, post-harvest processing, marketing and managing household resources. Both communities maintain deep cultural connections to specific harvesting practices, fishing grounds, and seasonal patterns that extend beyond purely economic considerations.

Common Management Challenges

Both Palau and Saint Lucia confront remarkably similar management challenges, despite their geographic separation:

Data limitations constrain evidence-based management in both contexts. Small-scale, dispersed fisheries are notoriously difficult to monitor comprehensively, creating uncertainties about stock status, catch composition, and fishing effort. Both nations work to strengthen catch monitoring systems, biological assessments, and socioeconomic data collection, often with limited budgets and technical capacity.

Stakeholder engagement presents ongoing challenges—how to meaningfully incorporate fisher knowledge, ensure equitable representation of diverse user groups (including women, youth, and less politically connected communities), and build genuine buy-in for management measures. Both nations recognize that top-down regulations without community support rarely succeed, yet creating truly collaborative processes remains an evolving practice.

Climate change impacts—including coral bleaching, ocean warming, sea level rise, coastal erosion, changing fish distributions, and intensifying storms—add urgency and complexity to management decisions, requiring adaptive frameworks that can respond to rapid environmental changes while maintaining biodiversity and supporting community livelihoods and enhancing coastal ecosystems.

Regional Fisheries Agreements

Palau's participation in the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA)—an organization of Pacific nations controlling access to the world's largest tuna fishery—demonstrates how small island nations can leverage collective action to negotiate better terms with distant water fishing nations. The PNA's vessel day scheme creates scarcity and competitive bidding for fishing access, substantially increasing revenues while improving monitoring and conservation measures.

Saint Lucia, though not part of a comparable binding fisheries agreement, participates in regional and international fisheries governance, through bodies addressing shared stocks such as CRFM and International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) which facilitates cooperation on particularly highly migratory species like tuna and billfish that move through Caribbean waters.

Key Lessons and Innovations

Participation of Women in Fisheries

Both regions demonstrate that women's roles in fisheries extend far beyond the beach and market—they are active harvesters, processors, and knowledge holders whose contributions have historically been undervalued in management planning. Recognizing and supporting women's participation strengthens both equity and effectiveness, as women often possess distinct ecological knowledge and maintain different stakeholder networks than their male counterparts. Gender-responsive fisheries management creates opportunities to address specific barriers women face (access to equipment, market channels, decision-making forums) while tapping their expertise and leadership potential.

Zero Tolerance for Waste

Palau's cultural emphasis on zero tolerance for fish product waste reflects deep respect for marine life and resource reciprocity. This principle—that taking life from the ocean creates an obligation to use it fully and respectfully—stands in sharp contrast to wasteful practices in industrial fisheries. The philosophy aligns closely with circular economy principles, which seek to maximize resource efficiency, minimize waste and create value from materials that might otherwise be discarded. Applying this ethic to contemporary management promotes utilization of bycatch, encourages whole-fish use, and discourages high-grading or discarding. Such cultural values, when integrated into formal management frameworks, can improve sustainability while honoring traditional stewardship principles and reinforcing the responsible use of marine resources.

Marine Spatial Planning and Multiple Objectives

Palau's Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) initiative explicitly aims to increase alternative livelihood opportunities while preserving cultural heritage, recognizing that conservation and community wellbeing are complementary rather than competing objectives. By zoning areas for different uses—strict protection, traditional fishing, tourism, research—MSP can reduce user conflicts while creating economic opportunities in marine tourism, restoration, and monitoring. Critically, Palau's approach centers on cultural heritage preservation, ensuring that sacred sites, traditional fishing grounds, and customary practices maintain protection even as economic development proceeds.

Community-Based Management Models from Saint Lucia

Despite its more centralized governance structure, Saint Lucia has produced important community-based management innovations that offer lessons for marine conservation globally.

The Soufriere Marine Management Association (SMMA) Inc. demonstrates that effective coastal and marine resource management is strongest when built on collaboration rather than top-down control. Established in the 1990s to address conflicts between fishers, tourism operators, and conservationists in Soufriere, the SMMA created a multi-stakeholder governance structure that zones marine areas, negotiates use agreements, and shares benefits across user groups. By involving all stakeholders in decision-making—not merely consulting them—the SMMA built legitimacy, improved compliance, and generated measurable improvements in coral cover, fish biomass, and stakeholder satisfaction. This co-management model demonstrates that even within state-led governance frameworks, meaningful decentralization and power-sharing can succeed when properly supported.

The Laborie Development Foundation illustrates the importance of strong local organizations that can represent community interests, manage projects, and engage government agencies as genuine partners rather than passive beneficiaries. Such organizations serve as critical intermediaries, translating between community needs and government processes, mobilizing local action, and building community capacity to sustain initiatives beyond initial project funding. They demonstrate that governance effectiveness depends not only on formal institutional design but on the presence of capable, trusted community organizations that can exercise agency within those systems.

Conclusion

The contrasting governance approaches in Palau and Saint Lucia reflect different historical trajectories, cultural systems, and geographic contexts, yet both offer valuable insights for marine resource management in small island developing states. Palau's integration of customary tenure with modern conservation frameworks demonstrates how traditional governance can enhance rather than hinder effective resource management, while Saint Lucia's

community-based initiatives show that meaningful collaboration can emerge even within centralized systems when institutional space and support are provided.

Common threads emerge across these differences: the critical importance of meaningful community participation (not merely consultation), the value of recognizing and supporting diverse stakeholders including women, the need for governance systems that can adapt to environmental and social changes, and the potential for regional collaboration to amplify the capacity of individual small nations.

As climate change intensifies pressures on marine ecosystems and island communities, the lessons from both Palau and Saint Lucia—customary stewardship, collaborative governance, strong community organizations, and cultural values of respect and reciprocity—offer essential guidance for building resilient, equitable, and effective marine governance in an uncertain future.

6. Replication

While each experience would be unique, the participants from this knowledge exchange identified the following relevant lessons learned.

1. **Motivated participants make a significant contribution.** Finding the right people that are at an appropriate stage in their career such that they can mutually contribute to and benefit from an immersive experience made a significant difference. The participants included fisheries and protected area managers and practitioners in early to middle career stages. This knowledge base and career level provided for informed dialogue while also allowing for growth opportunities during and after the exchanges.
2. **Remain resilient in logistical planning for site visits.** During the planning process, participants navigated significant weather conditions that impacted the structure of the exchange. In October 2025, the exchange organizers and all participants planned to visit Jamaica and then Palau in back-to-back weeks of site visits. After the significant impacts of Hurricane Melissa on Jamaica and the resulting emergency declaration, the group collectively determined they would pause and relocate the Caribbean leg to January in Saint Lucia. En route to Saint Lucia, a snowstorm in the U.S. restricted the travel of one participant such that he could not attend the second site visit. Amongst those difficulties, the participants benefited from a range of perspectives and skill sets to continue with the exchange and conclude the experiential learning opportunity.
3. **Maintaining the network connections benefits from additional support.** All participants noted interest in remaining connected at the interpersonal as well as institutional levels. The investment from the GEF International Waters LEARN team has provided for a beneficial dialogue amongst managers working on related topics amongst geographically distributed communities. Participants also stated an interest in further opportunities to reconvene and showcase the findings — including, but not limited to, the next International Waters Conference.
4. **Examine more ways to include young professionals.** All participants welcomed opportunities to engage with Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) between regions. This would enhance the sustainability of initiatives as well as improve long-term collaboration between the regions. Internships, formal courses and joint research are some ways that the participants discussed as suitable mechanisms to improve involvement of ECOPs.

7. References

For more information about each project, please visit the project webpages:

- [10211](#): Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities Through Marine Spatial Planning in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus (BE-CLME+) Project
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 - Project Manager, Eric Hartge: chartge@stanford.edu
 - [Experience Note 1](#): Lessons from the Micronesia Challenge 2030: Using a science-to-management approach for effective protected areas April 2024
 - [Experience Note 2](#): Lessons from the Micronesia Challenge 2030: Reimaanlok, A National Framework for Locally-led Conservation May 2024
 - [Experience Note 3](#): Centering ‘effective management’ elevates traditional forms of natural resource governance
- Video from final presentation in Saint Lucia ([LINK](#))

Annex: Selected Images

Additional images from the site visits can be found in this “[Select Content for External Audiences](#)” folder.



Image 1: Participants visiting the capitol grounds in Ngerulmud, Palau.



Image 2: Participants visiting a milkfish aquaculture facility in Ngatpang, Palau.



Image 3: Participants Daemi Ngirmidol and Tyrell Reyes reflecting on and discussing resource management experiences after a visit to Kayangel Atoll in northern Palau.



Image 4: Participant Catherine Lee Hing discussing protected area management considerations in geographies including Belize and Palau.



Image 5: Participants visiting with fisheries managers as well as a local fisher in Laborie, Saint Lucia.



Image 6: Participants before a meeting with the managers of the Laborie Fisheries Cooperative in Laborie, Saint Lucia.



Image 7: Participants after a beach cleanup session on Malgrétoute Beach near Soufrière, Saint Lucia.



Image 8: Melvira Kazuma conducting a recorded testimonial along the shores of Praslin, Saint Lucia.



Image 9: Participants and audience members after the closing presentation at the Orchid Garden Centre in Gros Islet, Saint Lucia.