A UNDP Project in partnership with the Government of Japan



PRESERVING PALAU'S

How Climate Change is affecting our unique Cultural Heritage, and What Government and Communities are doing about it.

A comic from The Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience in the Republic of Palau Cultural Sites Impact Team





Our world has reached a tipping point.

Man-made climate change is having real impacts on our lives...

11

...threatening communities and ecosystems...

Here in the Pacific we are all too aware that rising sea levels... ... across the globe.

. changing sea temperatures...

... and increasingly damaging storms can take a terrible toll on our islands.

But what does this mean for our cultural heritage?

This year, the Palauan Government, working with the United Nations Development Programme and funded by our partnership with the Government of Japan, is undertaking a bold new project to understand what we can do to prepare our islands for the impacts of climate change...

Climate change is affecting everything on Palau, including our precious and irreplaceable cultural heritage. The UNDP project has created a Cultural Sites Impact Team to identify how climate change is impacting our cultural heritage, and to recommend ways to preserve and protect traditional villages, landscapes and archaeological sites.



This comic will show you how climate change has impacted ten different sites from our team's survey, and how those impacts are affecting local communities. We will also show how Government and communities can work together to preserve, protect and manage those sites.















When drainage of water is managed well it can lessen the danger from erosion and flooding. Our ancestors knew this - and here at Ngerutechei we can learn from their example.



Diong ra Imeched B:NM-3:6 F4







This kind of work will help manage the problem of surface water. And once again, the stone figures will look out over the water as they should, and guard this village for the future.





#### BTELULACHANG ER A KEMURRULL ME A TAOCH ER A NGITEUAI 07°31' N 134°31' E Area: 14.2 acres (of which 3.5 acres shown here)





### KUKAU EL BAD

linking the site to lungel village

INTO MANY (KRAMA)

archaeological survey, mapping and recording

Kukau/Olketokel

B:NE-9:6 F1

The point of managing surface water and protecting sites from the impact of climate change is to restore these traditional village features to the heart of the local community by preserving them for the future.

X

07°31' N 134°31' E

That's exactly what's happening here. This is a unique sacred site, and is being restored by the people of my community of Ollei.

> We've learned from the experiences of projects at sites like Ngerutechei.

> > X

management of

secondary vegetation

Area: .36 acres

I'm proud to have been part of the team - proud of the months we spent clearing and cleaning this special place.

Community projects like this do more than just "bring people together" - they connect us to who we were in the past, and help determine who we are going to be in the future.

> These are not just empty words: the local community helped restore the site because we want our children and grand-children to be able to see and touch their Palauan heritage and draw strength from it.



B:NM-3:6 B:IR-2:1 B:NE-9:6

Beluu er a Ngerutechei Btelulachang er a Kemurrull me a Taoch er a Ngiteuai Kukau el Bad / Olketokel er a Kukau

#### **SUMMARY**

Even sites which are some ways inland are still at risk from climate change in the form of surface water as a result of heavier, less predictable storms.

These sites are focuses for community pride, and the community are an important partner in any strategy to mitigate for the impact of climate change at these sites.

Restoring sites like these manages surface water drainage and benefits the local ecology. Such restorations contribute to community cohesion and the sustainable tourism economy.

Importantly, they build close partnerships between youth and elders, between the community and state government, and between Palauans and visitors. These partnerships ensure that ancient sites become an important part of contemporary society.

The Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience in the Republic of Palau Cultural Sites Impact Team hopes that National Government and NGOs recognise the significant contributions to community resilience and cohesion that these projects make, as well as their potential to incorporate meaningful mitigations for climate changerelated erosion

We strongly recommend continuing National and State Government support for these community projects, and enhancing them by incorporating programs of ongoing research and monitoring, as well as funding more complex interventions as required.











B:IR-1:17 Chelechol er a Orrak B:OR-?:? Omedokel Cave

#### **SUMMARY**

The cultural heritage located beneath ground at Palau's archaeological sites is at risk from a dangerous combination of climate change impacts. Higher tides, storms and increased surface water runoff are causing significant and irreversible damage to the scientific evidence at these sites - including potential loss of ancient DNA evidence.

Losing this archaeological data means losing forever a crucial part of the story of who we are as Palauans. A long-term program of survey, research and outreach must be supported by government and NGOs in order to recover and preserve the information from these sites.

The Bureau of Cultural and Historic Preservation is already conducting an intensive survey of the archaeological sites in the Rock Islands, but this is only the beginning.

Government and NGOs must help liaise with business and tourism to help protect and promote and good practice around archaeological remains within the Rock Islands - both to Palauans and to visitors.

The Cultural Sites Impact Team recommends a two-strand approach to preserving, conserving and managing the archaeological sites of Palau: support for research, investigation and scientific publication combined with a broad program of public outreach and education.







But if the next big typhoon forces another 1/3 of the population to leave the atoll, how likely is it that there will be future generations on Kayangel?





More severe storms, rain and rising tides have brought down trees along the shoreline, causing significant coastal erosion. Infrastructure, present-day houses and cultural sites are all at risk.







B:NH-1:2 B:NH-1:1 B:TO-1:1 B:DE-1:2 B:D

#### SUMMARY

Low-lying atoll and island sites are at immediate threat of severe and damaging impacts from climate change. Both traditional villages and archaeological sites are at risk from damage caused by storms, surface water and rising water tables.

**Community-lead initiatives** to clear secondary vegetation and restore surface water drainage features - similar to projects at sites such as Beluu er a Ngerutechei - could help protect cultural heritage in the short term. The Cultural Sites Impact team recommends that State and National government support communities in setting up such projects.

However, given the long-term expectations for the impact of climate change, it is also vital that significant resources are devoted to the investigation and recording of cultural heritage at low-lying atoll and island locations. This should include the recording of oral histories, survey and mapping, and archaeological excavation. This research should be accompanied by educational and outreach programs to ensure that knowledge of cultural heritage sites likely to be destroyed within the next 25 years is passed on to younger generations.

The Cultural Sites Impact team specifically recommends that such a program be initiated at Iporu on Tobi as a matter of priority.





be a long-term project - but we must commit ourselves to this kind of investment in our cultural heritage if it is to survive. This kind of intervention, combined with community initiatives, research and outreach would be of immense benefit to the local community, the state of Melekeok and the whole of Palau.

![](_page_24_Picture_0.jpeg)

Projects such as these can have a positive impact beyond cultural heritage: on community resilience, education, skills, training and job opportunities.

But most importantly, we will be ensuring that future generations can continue to take pride in our unique cultural heritage - the greatest legacy we can leave our children and grandchildren.

> Ray Ongino Melekeok State Administrative Officer

![](_page_25_Picture_0.jpeg)

B:NA-4:1 Cheldeklel a Dilrengulbai B:ME-4:1 Odalmelech

#### **SUMMARY**

Cultural heritage sites which are at immediate threat of severe and irreversible damage or even destruction should be considered as candidates for interventions. Sites which are in imminent danger of destruction, or which are already subject to such, should be given priority for a full program of scientific and archaeological work, with accompanying outreach and education designed to involve the local community. At such sites, consideration must be given to the feasibility of relocating and/or restoring historical and traditional structures, and partnership projects created to include and involve local stakeholders in decision-making.

The Cultural Sites Impact Team recommends two such interventions. The first at the site of Iporu on Tobi - as already discussed, and the second at Odalmelech.

This intervention should involve (1) the recovery of the fallen monoliths, (2) the re-siting of the monoliths, (3) the reconstruction of their platforms, and (4) the protecting of the entire site with an appropriate seawall construction. Evidence of the effectiveness of such construction can be seen at the site of Cheldeklel a Dilrengulbai. This project should be designed so as to involved local landowners as well as the local community, and include cultural outreach and education as an integral component of the project.

The Cultural Sites Impact Team recognises the scale of the investment this intervention would require, but sees no alternative: it is clear that within the next 10-25 years the entire site and its monoliths could well be destroyed completely.

![](_page_26_Picture_0.jpeg)

## WE CAN ALL BE GUARDIANS OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE:

- Learn about your cultural heritage, from family members, teachers and from our museums.
- Learn about climate change, from rangers and our marine and conservation biologists.
- Take part in community projects to help preserve, conserve and manage traditional villages and archaeological sites near where you live.
- Spread the word and help educate friends, relatives and visitors about the importance of understanding climate change and how it impacts our cultural heritage. You can give them a copy of this comic!

Our survey has shown how all of us, working together in partnership with government and communities, can help protect our precious cultural heritage from the impacts of climate change.

To read the full report of The Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience in the Republic of Palau Cultural Sites Impact Team, please contact the Bureau of Cultural and Historical Preservation.

![](_page_27_Picture_0.jpeg)

![](_page_27_Picture_1.jpeg)

# WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

![](_page_27_Picture_3.jpeg)

We all know that climate change is having a significant impact on our islands. More severe storms, rising sea levels and higher tides affect every aspect of our lives. They also affect our cultural heritage, damaging and even destroying our unique traditional villages, historic places and archaeological sites.

The Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience in the Republic of Palau Cultural Sites Impact Team has surveyed cultural heritage sites across Palau to determine exactly how climate change is impacting these sites - and to make a series of recommendations to the Government of Palau and the United Nations Development Programme.

This comic tells what we found on our survey, and what government, communities and even individuals can do to help protect the irreplaceable cultural heritage of Palau from the impacts of climate change.

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![](_page_27_Picture_8.jpeg)

![](_page_27_Picture_9.jpeg)

![](_page_27_Picture_10.jpeg)