

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

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| DIALOGUE DATE | Friday, 27 August 2021 09:00 GMT +12:00 |
| DIALOGUE TITLE | RMI National Blue Food Systems Dialogue |
| CONVENED BY | Secretary Iva Reimers-Roberto, Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce |
| DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE | https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/43466/ |
| DIALOGUE TYPE | Member State |
| GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS | Marshall Islands |

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

29

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0-18

7

19-30

18

31-50

2

51-65

2

66-80

80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

Male

Female

Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

3 Agriculture/crops

8 Fish and aquaculture

Livestock

1 Agro-forestry

4 Environment and ecology

1 Trade and commerce

5 Education

Communication

Food processing

3 Food retail, markets

Food industry

Financial Services

1 Health care

Nutrition

3 National or local government

Utilities

Industrial

Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

3 Small/medium enterprise/artisan

Large national business

Multi-national corporation

Small-scale farmer

Medium-scale farmer

Large-scale farmer

4 Local Non-Governmental Organization

1 International Non-Governmental Organization

Indigenous People

4 Science and academia

Workers and trade union

Member of Parliament

Local authority

13 Government and national institution

Regional economic community

2 United Nations

International financial institution

Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

2 Consumer group

Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

Organization of each RMI National Dialogue incorporated and reinforced the Summit Principles in a number of ways. All organizing team members were made aware of the Principles through the sharing of relevant materials, and these were borne in mind throughout the organization and execution of the Dialogues. Specifically, the RMI is a country on the front lines of climate change like few others, and one that very clearly recognizes the need to act swiftly with regards to sustainable development. This awareness of the need for action in specific relation to the nation's food systems was integral to the organization of the National Food Systems Dialogues. The Dialogues were planned with an array of local stakeholders, ensuring that local culture and context was at the core of their planning, design and execution. The range of invitees reflects the recognized complexity of food systems in the RMI. Dialogue invitees were drawn from a cross-section of RMI society, including not only government officials from relevant agencies, but local farmers and fisherfolk, those involved in the buying and selling of foods for commercial and other purposes (e.g., institutional caterers), health professionals and NPO/NGO personnel. All dialogues were conducted in the context of current policies and legislation, and of previous and current relevant projects and initiatives. This was ensured through the delivery of relevant presentations preceding discussions at each Dialogue. Transparency has been central to the organization of the Dialogues, with the intent of the Dialogues and outputs from them clearly communicated to all invitees and attendees. Dialogue discussions were structured in such a way as to provide all attendees with a safe space to share their knowledge, perspectives and ideas.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

Execution of the RMI National Blue Food Systems Dialogue reflects the Principles in various specific ways. Commitment to the Summit was evident in the number of attendees and their engagement in the discussions being held; a wide range of perspectives were shared, and all were recorded. All discussions were held respectfully, with individuals given the space and time to share their points of view; this was the case in the smaller discussion groups and in the plenary group. In terms of the recognition of the complexity of food systems and how these relate to the issues of human health, nutrition and food safety, this was communicated via a detailed opening presentation, and was reflected in the diversity of attendees, which also reflects that the Dialogue embraced multi-stakeholder inclusivity. In terms of complementing the work of others, the Dialogue allowed varied stakeholders to share their activities with a wide audience, with the potential to increase awareness of these and open doors for new collaborations. Finally, the outputs of the Dialogue are those of the group as a whole, with no attribution to any given individual, reinforcing the Principle of building trust.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

The planning and organization of the Dialogues, both in terms of their content and execution, were conducted with an understanding and appreciation of the Summit Principles. Planning the Dialogues centered around the specific needs of the RMI with topics and meeting styles initially developed to be locally relevant and appropriate. Dialogue plans were subsequently cross-checked with the Summit Principles to ensure their incorporation. In this way, national priorities were placed at the center of Dialogue planning to ensure they were meaningful and valuable, while the Summit Principles provided an underlying guide to support the development of Dialogues that responded to them.

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

Yes

No

The organizing team developed three 3-hour RMI National Food System Dialogues. These focussed on a) Green Food Systems, b) Nutrition, Health and c) Safety and Blue Food Systems. All three Dialogues were conducted in the week of 23rd August 2021. The decision to conduct the Dialogues in this way was based upon an in-depth understanding of the current national food systems and their associated priorities, as well as the capacity of individuals to attend the Dialogues. The Dialogues were organized by the RMI national-level convener at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce, supported by a team of consultants, relevant stakeholders from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce, the Ministry of Health and Human Services and the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority to guide the individual Dialogues, and personnel from the Resident Coordinator Office in the Pacific. The development process involved in-depth collaborations and discussions between all team members to ensure all aspects of the Dialogues, from discussion content to logistical aspects, were comprehensively planned and efficiently executed. Three invitee lists were developed to reflect the content of the individual Dialogues. Invitees ranged from national-level government personnel to members of civil society engaged in different aspects of the food systems of the RMI. This enabled discussions to engage a range of people from those responsible for guiding national policy to those impacted by such policies. Prior to the Dialogues, invitees received an official invitation, a copy of the Dialogue agenda, relevant materials and a link to an electronic attendance form. Printed attendance forms were also provided at the Dialogues to ensure full completion and submission by all participants. Each dialogue presented the relevant national context in terms of the current status of food systems and the impacts of these in terms of economy, environment and social and human health, policies and legislation in place that relate to these systems and impacts, and examples of past or current innovations of relevance, including government-led, NGO-led, and individual-led initiatives. Discussions in each Dialogue were focussed around five key topics (specific to each Dialogue), with discussions under each topic guided by a number of key questions. These topics and questions were drafted by members of the organizing team and validated by the wider team, with particular input from national experts and relevant ministerial personnel. All topics were cross-checked against the Summit Action Tracks to ensure all Action Tracks were sufficiently incorporated into each Dialogue. The five discussion topics that formed the Blue Food Systems Dialogue comprised 1) The blue food we produce, 2) The blue food we eat, 3) The challenges of being on the front lines of climate change, 4) Resilience and vulnerability, and 5) The impact(s) of COVID-19. Dialogue discussions were structured in a way to ensure all stakeholders had the opportunity to have their voices heard. Discussions were held in small 'breakout' groups, helping to prevent individuals from dominating the discussion. Feedback was then delivered by each group in the plenary setting, allowing for the sharing of all ideas and perspectives and affording the opportunity for additional comments and discussion as a single group. The Dialogues were structured to allow both in-room participation and online participation. This enabled the Dialogues to be accessible to as broad a group of stakeholders as possible, providing access both to stakeholders across the country (the RMI being an archipelagic nation including some 24 inhabited atolls) and to those for whom online access may not be possible.

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

A rapid scan of the RMI agriculture/nutrition nexus conducted in 2018 indicated that at least 90% of the RMI food supply chain is made up of imported goods. It also reports high levels of diet-related health issues in the RMI; up to 80% of the population are overweight or obese and 27% have diabetes. The rapid scan also recognises the urgent need for a whole of government, inter-agency, cross-sectoral response to reduce the level of both imported food consumption and nutrition-related non-communicable diseases, with fishers identified as key partners for achieving this. The RMI Food Security Policy 2013 has as its goal “To ensure access to nutritious, quality, safe and affordable food for all Marshallese people at all times.” Blue foods, which are rich in bioavailable nutrients, can play an essential role in this. The RMI Food Security Policy specifically identifies fish as being a very important component of the national diet, particularly in the outer islands. The security of village marine resources and the sustainable management of coastal and inshore fisheries and aquaculture are seen as being priorities for achieving food security. The RMI National Strategic Plan 2020–2030 includes Marine Resources as a pillar of economic development, with a goal of “Sustainable and Responsible use of Marine Resources.” This focuses solely on fisheries as a source of revenue through the selling of fishing licenses to commercial fishing companies, rather than small-scale and artisanal fishing. It is recognised that blue food resources hold not only economic benefits but are culturally and socially important supporting food security, employment and good nutrition.

Within this context, the National Blue Food Systems Dialogue explored the following five key topics:

1) The blue food we produce

Questions to guide this discussion focussed on the strategies in place to ensure healthy marine ecosystems that support sustainable stocks, innovative practices, limitations on local blue food production and processing, the availability of local blue foods, and challenges to export.

2) The blue food we eat

Questions to guide this discussion focussed on the consumption of locally produced vs imported blue foods and food waste.

3) The challenges of being on the front lines of climate change

Questions to guide this discussion focussed on food system-related climate adaptation strategies, and coping with climate change and environmental degradation in the short and long term.

4) Resilience and vulnerability

Questions to guide this discussion focussed on social inclusion in the blue food system, economic inclusion in the blue food system, policies and strategies to address inequity related to blue food production and dealing with vulnerabilities within the RMI's food systems.

5) The impact(s) of COVID-19

Questions to guide this discussion focussed on the impact of COVID-19 on the blue food system and how such impacts can be addressed.

ACTION TRACKS

- ✓ Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
- ✓ Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
- ✓ Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
- ✓ Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
- ✓ Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

- Finance
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Human rights
- ✓ Women & Youth Empowerment
- ✓ Policy
- Data & Evidence
- Governance
- Trade-offs
- ✓ Environment and Climate

MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings from the RMI Blue Food Systems Dialogue are presented under the five topic areas.

1) The food we produce

Marine conservation practices have a long cultural history and various traditional and modern approaches are taken to support healthy ecosystems and stock. The Reimaanlok Framework is central to this, providing a pathway for community-led marine protected areas. Clam hatcheries have been established and fish aggregating devices deployed. The latter support safe off-shore fishing for artisanal fisherfolk, thus alleviating the fishing pressure on near-shore fisheries. A Protected Area Network Act has been established. Commercial fishing fleets are controlled by strict catch limits introduced after extensive discussions among the Parties to the Nauru Agreement. Fleets monitored using various techniques, including on-board solutions. It is considered that commercial fishing enterprises now understand their role in conserving fish stocks and the need for such measures to enable access to fishing grounds. Fines for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing can be as high as \$1 million. An aquaculture program running since 2013 is farming moi, with a view to exporting the fish. Despite some challenges with brood stock maintenance, the project is continuing to develop, employing an entirely local staff. This project is expanding into rabbit fish and seaweed farming, with a focus on capacity building and gender inclusion. The seaweed-farming project has been established and engages women who have experienced income loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic damaging the sale of local craftworks. The intent of the project is to farm seaweed for local use and for export to Hawaii. This project also includes the teaching of necessary mathematics skills and the holding of cooking demonstrations. Drying seaweed provides a value-add aspect to the project.

2) The food we eat

The most commonly eaten blue food in the RMI is tuna, both locally caught and canned, imported tuna. The MISCO Market (part of the Marshall Islands Service Corporation) in Majuro sells locally caught fish, the majority of which are snapper and grouper. This includes the sale of live grouper to restaurants. The market has also recently started exporting local reef fish to Hawaii to meet the demands of the Marshallese community there. It was noted that snapper, grouper and moi were also sold through the main supermarket, those this is no longer the case. The supermarket, supported by JICA, had held cooking demonstrations and provided recipe leaflets to support the consumption of local parrot fish. However, this program was discontinued with a change in supporting personnel. There remains a desire from the retail sector to support local fisherfolk by providing a venue for sales. It was noted that blue food waste is extremely limited. It was noted that instead of allowing food to reach the end of its shelf life, it is often used in meals for sale. Any other waste is fed to pigs or used as fish food.

3) The challenges of being on the front lines of climate change

The Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority is conducting surveys to assess the impact of coral bleaching on fish production, however, this is currently at the baseline survey stage with a need for ongoing data collection in the future. Evidence from the scientific community suggests fish migratory patterns will change with oceanic thermal stress. There is also a recognized need to communicate climate change to local communities in an accessible way. The Reimaanlok Framework aims to reintegrate traditional management practices into fisheries management at the community level. This is needed as observations suggest that local fishers are catching less and different fish of smaller sizes. There is a need to corroborate these observations with data. Nationally-driven data collection is an area of focus as historically much data that has been generated by international parties has not been shared with the RMI government. The deployment of fish aggregating devices supports coastal ecosystem protection by providing a safe off-shore alternative for fisherman.

4) Resilience and vulnerability

It was identified that many of the traditional approaches to resource management have disappeared over time and, while rural communities may live more traditionally, the tools have changed and that's eroding traditional culture. The Reimaanlok Framework aims to address this and there are projects in place to re-establish the use of traditional fishing equipment. There is a recognized need for a cultural revival. In addition, building up a bank for RMI-generated data is also essential to support policy and decision making. The RMI Exclusive Economic Zone has been identified and all necessary data deposited with the United Nations under the Convention of the Law of the Sea. The intention being that the nation will always retain its waters despite the most extreme effects of climate change. Legal activities are also be undertaken to ensure this position can be asserted and defended.

5) The impact(s) of COVID-19

The main impact identified in relation to blue food systems relates to the commercial tuna industry, with changing regulations affecting the transportation of the tuna catch. From a food retail perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in some inconsistency in the supply of goods.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/4

The RMI Blue Food Systems Dialogue delivered outcomes in terms of specific ideas and innovations to be implemented to drive change within the RMI food system and also in terms of the recognition of specific needs and challenges that may not have been previously identified. These provide new avenues for consideration and future action. The identified Action Tracks and key words represent the Outcomes as a whole, rather than individual outcomes.

Supporting traditional fishing practices

The Dialogue identified the need for ongoing efforts to support a revival of traditional custom in relation to fishing and to support fisheries sustainability. There is a need for further expansion of the community-led marine protected areas established utilizing the Reimaanlok Framework. Within this Framework, the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority facilitates (rather than directs) the creation of a management plan to address the unique situations being faced by different communities. This helps promote ownership of the plans. The Reimaanlok process is therefore supporting the revival traditional fishing practices while bolstering them with management plans and legislation.

Lastly, the Dialogue discussions considered opportunities for reviving educational programs in the retail setting in collaboration with the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority, to encourage locals to consume more local blue foods through cooking demonstrations and the provision of recipes leaflets.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/4

Expanding opportunities and building resilience

The moi fish farming project that started in 2013 continues to develop. Ongoing development of moi project a seaweed. This project has expanded into seaweed farming, working directly with women to support household resilience in the face of lost income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Women that may otherwise be engaged in craftware production for the tourist market can now generate income farming and preparing seaweed for local and export markets.

There is much potential for the integration of sea vegetables into the food system of the Marshall Islands, with additional potential for finding non-food-based uses for them. Building resilience will also come from the maintaining of Marshallese culture and practices. There is a need for future focus on school curricula to ensure traditional knowledge isn't lost further.

There is also a desire by local retailers to work more closely with government and local fishers to provide a marketplace for local blue foods.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/4

Building capacity

Building capacity is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, to enable the RMI to fully participate in the actions necessary to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and secondly, to be able to nationally generate the data necessary to monitor a changing environment and assess the impacts of specific interventions. Also, there is a need to work with local fisherfolk to ensure the safe handling of foods in accordance with regulatory standards in order to improve the safety of local products.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 4/4

A Marshallese response to climate change

There is a need to establish a nationally-relevant understanding of what climate change means to the Marshallese Islands. This requires the communication of the need to respond to a global problem the origins of which are not local. This is all important in the context of developing necessary environmental management plans that address the environmental degradation that communities are seeing. The future of the RMI is contingent on what happens 'on the ground' and internationally to prevent being "drowned by the sea and starved by the barren land".

Numerous additional areas that are being addressed and need continued action were raised during the Dialogue:

- Increasing community participation in resource management via the Reimaanlok Process
- Establishing and safeguarding the quality of marine products for the export market
- Streamlining processing procedures and monitoring, control & surveillance protocols for companies interested in exporting
- Consolidating information collected into a database system from all exporting companies
- Facilitating expansion of the Industry in all areas from harvesting/cultivation to marketing research
- Establishing the link between markets, both domestic and international
- Strengthening stakeholder participation
- Engaging national and local partners to address issues identified under the National Ocean Policy
- Improve communication/partnership between National Government, Local Government and the private sector
- Building capacity at national and local levels
- Facilitating infrastructure and equipment support
- Strengthening policy frameworks and regulations.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

No specific areas of divergence came to the fore during the Dialogue. The unique geography and environment of the RMI, and the limitations and opportunities that this presents, are well understood by all participants. There were no suggested activities or initiatives that led to a divergence of opinion and participants were cohesive in their views of the priorities related to health, nutrition and food safety in the RMI.

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ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

ATTACHMENTS

- **RMI Blue Food System Dialogue Agenda**
<https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Blue-Food-System-Dialogue-Agenda-30august2021.docx>
- **RMI Food System Summit Dialogues guiding questions**
<https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/RMI-FSSD-dialogue-questions-prepared-by-ISU-final-version-20august2021-1.docx>
- **NOS Outcomes Implementation Plan**
<https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/NOS-Outcomes-Implementation-Plan.pdf>
- **RMI Blue Foods System**
<https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/BLUE-FOODS-SYSTEM-PPT.pdf>