

REPUBLIC OF PALAU



VNR REPORT 2024

**HARNESSING OUR CULTURAL
HERITAGE TO “BUILD BACK BETTER”
FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

FOREWORD

As we reflect on the journey of the Palauan people and the aspirations that drive our nation, the ethos of "a Kot a Rechad er a Belau" (Palauan People First) remains as our guiding principle. It is our Administration's unwavering commitment to prioritize the well-being of the Palauan people, and it underscores our government's overarching priority.

The Palau Development Plan 2023-2026, the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, and the Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity initiative stand as testaments to our dedication to empowering our citizens and charting a course towards a sustainable, resilient, and prosperous future for all.

At the heart of our endeavors lies a profound respect for our cultural heritage and a deep-seated understanding of our responsibility to protect the environment. These values anchor us and focus our efforts on a shared commitment to build a nation that balances progress and a good quality of life for our people while also protecting our natural resources, our homes, and the environment that has sustained our people for centuries. In this, our second voluntary national review, themed "Harnessing our cultural heritage to build back better", we share the progress we have made and acknowledge where we need to do more to achieve the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda.

The first voluntary national review was completed in 2019. Palau's undertaking of the second voluntary national review is a testament to our commitment to transparency and accountability and ensuring we leave no one behind. This second report encapsulates Palau's journey to achieving our Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and highlights our resilience and adaptability in the face of unprecedented challenges. Through the lens of five pillars — culture, people, economy, environment, and partnership — we assess our advancement against 115 specific targets, highlighting national efforts to "build back better" in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.



The pandemic hindered the work we had planned for reaching our national targets. Among other challenges, much of our capacity became focused on health or supporting health-related goals. In addition, the pandemic exacerbated existing challenges. We have slowly gotten back on track and are working to reach our national targets by 2030. This ongoing effort requires collaboration and effective implementation across all sectors. We are determined to get it done.

I want to thank everyone who is working hard to help us achieve our goals and targets. It is not easy, but we know that the ultimate payoff is worth the effort.

Palau is standing in a pivotal moment in our history. Today's global environment demands bold action, visionary leadership, hard work, genuine partnerships, and unwavering solidarity if we are to achieve our potential. As we embark on this journey together, let us draw inspiration from the resilience of our ancestors and the promise of our shared future. Together, we can realize the vision of a sustainable, equitable, and prosperous Palau for all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Surangel S. Whipps, Jr.".

Surangel S. Whipps, Jr.
President of the Republic of Palau

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GUIDE TO ABBREVIATIONS

ADB

Asian Development Bank

AHTU

Anti Human Trafficking Unit

BANGO

Belau Association of NGOs

EEZ

Exclusive economic zone

EQPB

Environmental Quality Protection Board

ESCAP

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

GDP

Gross Domestic Product

HDI

Human Development Index

HIES

Household Income & Expenditure Survey

ILO

International Labour Organization

IOM

International Organization for Migration

IPCC

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

LNOB

Leave No One Behind

MAFE

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, & Environment

MHHS

Ministry of Health and Human Services

MHRCTD

Ministry of Human Resources, Culture, Tourism, and Development

MOE

Ministry of Education

MOF

Ministry of Finance

MPII

Ministry of Primary Industries and Infrastructure

MSME

Micro, small, medium enterprises

NEET

Not in employment, education, or training

NEMS

National Environmental Management Strategy

NGO

Nongovernment organization

PALARIS

Palau Automated Land & Resources Information System

PCC

Palau Community College

PICRC

Palau International Coral Reef Center

PLC

Palau Language Commission

PNC

Palau National (Legal) Code

PVA

Palau Visitors Authority

SDGs

Sustainable Development Goals

SPI

Social Protection Indicator

UNODC

UN Office on Drugs and Crime

VNR

Voluntary National Review

WHO

World Health Organization



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



PAGE 1



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE 2030 AGENDA

Palau completed its first VNR in 2019 and its second in 2024. VNR-24 incorporates all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 115 out of 169 global targets. At the goal level, Palau is fully on track to achieve SDG 6 (water and sanitation) and records significant progress toward SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure). Advances have also been made toward SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 15 (life on land), and SDG 17 (partnership for the goals). These areas, however, will require further effort to accelerate progress.

Assessing progress for SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) presents challenges due to insufficient data or lack of nationally defined targets. This underscores the need for increased attention to producing SDG statistics to better track progress (SDG 17).

VNR-24 highlights our progress and our shortcomings. By addressing identified challenges, strengthening data collection, and maintaining momentum in areas of progress, Palau can move toward a future that is both sustainable and inclusive, reflecting our unique cultural values and national aspirations.

FORMULATING PALAU VNR-24

As set out in Executive Order 483 (June 2023), VNR-24 has followed a highly participatory process involving all ministries, state governments, the private sector, non-government organizations, youth, women, persons with disabilities, traditional leaders and cultural custodians.

At the apex of Palau's monitoring and reporting structure is a steering committee headed by the President, whose 15 members represent the eight ministries, the Rubekul Belau (Council of Chiefs) and Mechesil Belau (Women of Palau), the Governor's Association, the Speaker's Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and Belau Association of NGOs.

The Bureau of Budget and Planning supports the committee as a secretariat with members from the Bureau, the Office of Planning and Statistics, the President's Office, the Governor's Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and other civil society organizations. The secretariat is further supported by Thematic Area Groups (TAGs), whose leads are appointed by the ministers.

“VNRs are not simply a report or a presentation...they are a national process of in-depth review and consultation... Ultimately, VNRs create space for governments and their partners to identify what is needed to keep the promise of the SDGs.”

Amina Mohammed
UN Deputy Secretary General

In charting progress 2015-2024, there is much to celebrate. Likewise, there remain shortfalls, many of which are a legacy of COVID-19. Despite its devastating economic and social impacts, COVID-19 created new opportunities to “build back better,” a key message in VNR-24.



PILLAR 1 – SUSTAINING OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE, SDGS 1-17

Palau’s culture has evolved over the millennia, shaped by and shaping the natural environment while forging a harmonious society. Independent Palau has crafted a modern governance system that safeguards traditional governance and culture. Nurturing a vibrant culture for future generations is a priority goal, a means of SDG implementation, and a strategy for “building back better.” Cultural practices supporting the SDGs are showcased throughout the VNR.

PILLAR 2 – EMPOWERING OUR PEOPLE SDGS 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 16

Palau is “building back better” by expanding social protections for vulnerable populations, enhancing food security, harnessing technology to extend basic services to all, ensuring equitable participation of men and women in development, and investing in a future without violence. Nonetheless, Palau faces challenges in achieving food security and reducing noncommunicable diseases and mental health disorders.

PILLAR 3 – GROWING OUR ECONOMY WHILE LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND SDGS 8, 9, 10, 11

Due to COVID-19, economic growth regressed between 2020 and 2023. To restore growth, Palau “builds back better” while “leaving no one behind” through climate-resilient economic diversification, entrepreneurship, sustainable tourism, and harnessing new development opportunities fueled by information technology.

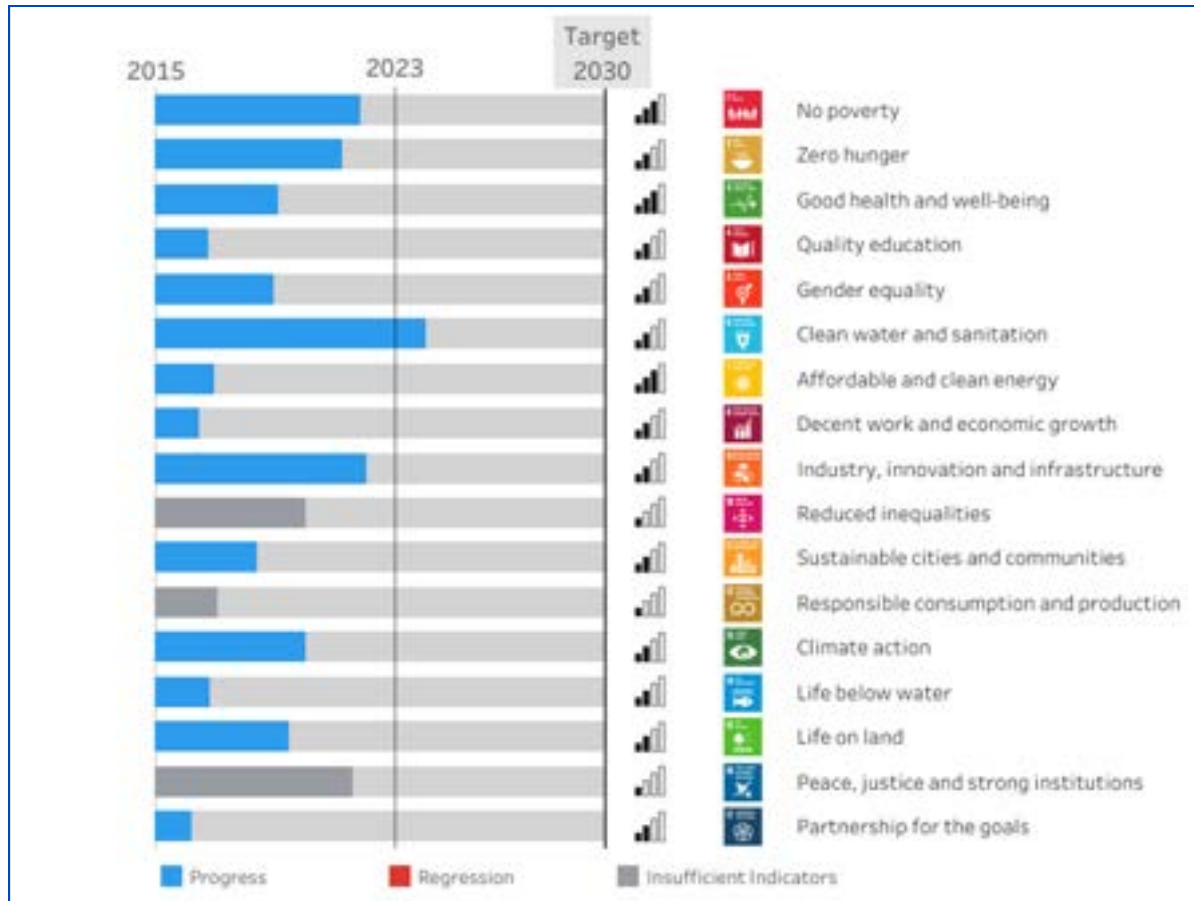
The National Infrastructure Investment Plan 2021-2030 prioritizes climate-resilient infrastructure. The National Youth Policy seeks to leave no young person behind, and a forthcoming Labor Policy will improve the quality of work while aiming to slow out-migration.

PILLAR 4 – PROTECTING OUR HOME FROM RIDGE TO BEYOND THE REEF SDGS 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15

At home, Palau manages 100% of its marine and 20%% of its terrestrial areas while implementing its Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity strategy.

Globally and regionally, Palau hosted the Our Ocean Conference in 2022 and, in 2023, was the first nation to ratify the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions Treaty (BBNJ). Palau advocates for a moratorium on deep-sea mining and a plastics treaty that limits production. Recognizing the existential threat posed by climate change to culture, environment, livelihoods, and health, Palau celebrates the climate-biodiversity-oceans nexus and, in 2024, launched the second edition of its climate change policy and action plan.

VNR-24: Progress at a Glance Across the Goals



Source: ESCAP

KEY MESSAGES

The Palau Government's overarching priority is "a Kot a Rechad er Belau" (Palauan People First). "Our Palauan people will have improved quality of life, are motivated and able to pursue their happiness, and will be the driving force behind their development and the progress of our country."

This lies at the heart of the Palau Development Plan 2023-2026, the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, and the Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity co-chaired by Palau, and is supported by the Small Island Developing States (Revised) Program of Action. This vision spans the whole of the 2030 Agenda and is reflected in the theme for VNR-24, "harnessing our cultural heritage to "Build Back Better" for a sustainable future."

Other key messages are the role of culture in implementing the SDGs, resilience in the face of climate change, and leaving no one behind.

Organized around five pillars - culture, people, economy, environment, and partnerships - the VNR assesses progress while providing many examples of "build back better" post-COVID.

Of the 115 targets incorporated in VNR-24, 34 (29%) are on track to be achieved, 53 (46%) are progressing but require additional effort to achieve, and 10 (9%) have regressed, mostly because of COVID-19. An additional 18 targets (16%) have insufficient data to be assessed or national targets have not been set.

Palau has achieved universal access to clean water, sanitation, and energy and has created life-line utility subsidies to ensure that low-income households are not left behind. Despite progress in sustainability, new consumer products and lifestyles far removed from nature pose challenges as do transboundary threats including, but not limited to climate change.

PILLAR 5 – SUSTAINING LASTING PARTNERSHIPS, SDG 17

To realize the promise of the SDGs, the government works at home in partnership with traditional leaders, subnational governments, the private sector, and civil society. Internationally, Palau celebrates partnerships with like-minded multilateral, bilateral, and private partners and seeks to expand these partnerships for the benefit of all. We seek partnerships with the global community to access technologies, develop innovations, and secure financing for a resilient, sustainable, and equitable future for today and future generations.

PATHWAYS TO 2030 AND BEYOND

Palauans have called our islands home for generations, adapting to change and evolving values and traditions that are foundations for sustainability. As Palauans progress in this Era of Sustainable Development, we look to our past to guide our future and commit to “building back better” while leaving no one behind. We seek partnerships with the global community to access technologies, develop innovations, and secure financing for a resilient, sustainable, and equitable future for today and future generations.



COUNTRY CONTEXT



COUNTRY CONTEXT

Palau, a small island but a large ocean state

LOCATION

The Republic of Palau constitutes the westernmost group of islands in the Micronesian subregion of Oceania. Comprised of more than 340 islands, of which eight are permanently inhabited, Palau has a total land mass of 188 square miles and a maritime exclusive economic zone of 237,830 square miles (PALARIS).

CAPITAL

Ngerulmud (Babeldoab Island).

GOVERNMENT

Palau is a democratic republic with a directly elected President, a bicameral congress, and an independent judiciary. Sixteen subnational governments “states” control living and non-living resources within their jurisdiction and 12 nautical miles seaward with the exception of highly migratory fish. Traditional governance is recognized in the Constitution and operates alongside the constitutional government.

HISTORY

Following colonization by Spain (1885-1898), Germany (1899-1918), Japan (1919-1944), and the United States (1945-1994), Palau adopted a constitution in 1981 and became fully independent on 1 October 1994. Palau continues to have a close relationship with the United States through the Compact of Free Association, an agreement that sets out continuing mutual obligations between the two countries. On 15 March 2024, the Compact was officially extended through 2044.

CULTURE

Palau is a matrilineal society in which traditional titles and authorities are inherited through the female lineage. Kinship is the core of social relations and customs.



Traditional meeting house

The basic social unit is comprised of a mother and her children (*ongalek*), a family unit (*telungalek*), and several families that comprise a clan (*kebliil*). Core Palauan cultural values include respect (*omengull*), responsibility (*ngerachel*), obedience, kindness, and perseverance (*blekongesenges*, *blekokuii me a ducherrenge*), humility (*osisecheklel a klengariou el reng me a omeleko*), and concern for home, clan, and village (*chelbulel a blai me a beluu*). Of these, the paramount value is respect.

PEOPLE

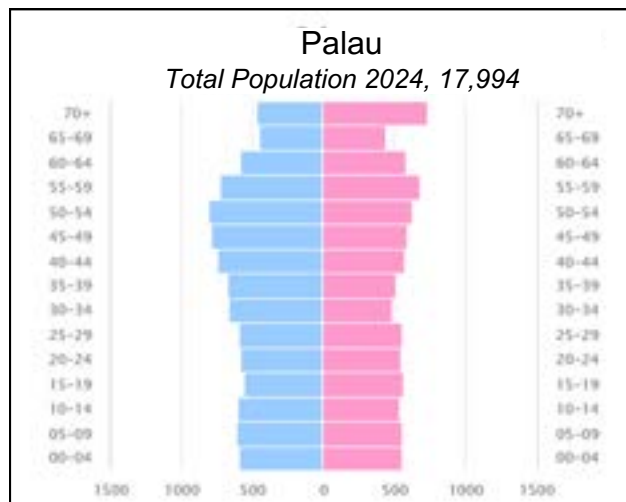
Palau's population is characterized by low fertility, high outmigration by Palauans to the United States, and high in-migration by Asians to fill the labor void created by Palau outmigration.

In 2020, the population of Palau was 17,614, an 11% decline from 2005 (*census*). A large and growing number of Palau-born persons reside in the United States. Among residents, 30% are non-Palauans, primarily contract workers; 11.6% are 65 years of age or older; and 78% reside in the Koror-Airai urban center, making Palau one of the most highly urbanized countries in Oceania (*census, 2020*).

The Pacific Community projects that Palau's population in 2050 will be 16,439, of which 20.9% will be over the age of 65.

ECONOMY

At independence, the World Bank classified Palau as a lower middle-income country. By 2018, a thriving tourism industry catapulted Palau into the high-income group, with GDP (current prices) reaching US\$284.7 million in FY 2018 or USD\$16,263 per capita, but the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant economic losses and reclassification as a middle-income country. Although the outlook for future economic growth to 2030 and beyond is strong, post-COVID economic recovery has been slower than initially envisaged.



Source: Pacific Community



Palau's world-famous Rock Islands, a UNESCO World Heritage site, are a mecca for tourists and a mainstay for Palau's economy. Photo credit (upper) PVA and (lower) Boris Dzingarov, Travel Tipsor.





PILLAR 1

SUSTAINING OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE



PILLAR 1

“Culture refers to the way of life of a particular group of people including their values and belief systems, world views, philosophies, and knowledge systems that are expressed through their language(s)”
(Pacific Regional Cultural Strategy 2022–2032).

Palau’s culture has evolved over the millennia, shaped by and shaping the natural environment, governing the relationships between people, and ensuring a peaceful and harmonious society where no one is left behind. Culture is the foundation of Palau, what distinguishes Palauans from other peoples, and what defines Palauan culture.

“We, the people of Palau proclaim and reaffirm our immemorial right to be supreme in these islands of Palau, our homeland. We renew our dedication to preserve and enhance our traditional heritage, our national identity, and our respect for peace, freedom, and justice for all mankind”.

Preamble to the Palau Constitution

Ensuring that a vibrant culture is passed down as a legacy across generations is a core goal under Palau’s development agenda, a means of implementing the SDGs, and a strategy for “building back better” post-COVID.

OUR GOALS - TEKOI, TELOOCH, ONGELAOD

Palauans strive to preserve traditional knowledge and ways of living while remaining adaptable to welcome new concepts, knowledge, and technologies to enrich cultural traditions. Expressed sometimes as “TTO”, **tekoi** refers to preserving cultural identity through language, **telooch** to preserving traditional foods and the environment and culture that sustain them, and **ongelaod** to preserving traditional arts, entertainment, cultural expressions, and ways of living.

Across successive administrations, it has been the government’s policy to support traditional governance through the Rubekul Belau (Council of Chiefs) and Mechesil Belau (Women of Palau) as a means of stability and peace, protect Palau lands and natural resources from expropriation by foreigners, control immigration, manage foreign investment, and implement programs to encourage the return of Palauans living, working, and studying overseas.



Photo credit: Dirremeang Ngiraingas



Photo credit: Dirremeang Ngiraingas



Photo credit: Dirremeang Ngiraingas

While the government's overarching policies remain unchanged, further actions are needed to stem out-migration and encourage Palauans living overseas to return home, to strengthen the teaching of language and culture in homes, schools, and communities, and to sustain the celebration of cultural expression, especially given the onslaught of foreign social media.

Demography and culture: Demographic trends - low natural growth, high outmigration by Palauans, and high in-migration by foreigners - predict a continuing decline in the number of ethnic Palauan residents in Palau. This is a challenge for sustaining culture, although, as students in a 2023 Youth Forum on culture point out, information technology offers opportunities to bridge gaps in time and space by keeping overseas Palauans close to home even while physically afar (*Island Times*).

Demographic change is a long-standing challenge for Palau, and actions have been taken to encourage people, especially youth, to return after completing their education or military service abroad. The Palau Development Plan 2023-2026 and the draft National Labor Policy place high value on improving the quality of work, including but not limited to wages, as one means of further addressing these challenges.

Palauan language: Palauans concur that language lies at the heart of culture. The 2020 census found that 97% of ethnic Palauan residents in Palau speak Palauan, a figure virtually unchanged from 2015. However, the number of Palauans who reported using a second language increased from 7,099 people in 2015 to 8,970 in 2020, with speakers of English more than doubling from 4,146 in 2015 to 8,893. This may indicate a decline in the importance of the Palauan language.

The Palau National Youth Policy 2023-2027 reports that maintaining a connection to culture and community is a priority for youth, along with a better understanding of how to navigate between cultural roles and values and the demands of modern life and expectations. This tension was identified by youth and other stakeholders as a factor that complicates the transition from childhood to independence among youth in Palau.

Recognizing the importance of language, the government established the Palau Language Commission (PLC) in 2008 with the mandate to “preserve and maintain standardized use of Palauan language...(but) flexible enough to evolve in response to the ever-changing world...especially the realities of cultural exchange, technological advancement, and knowledge expansion” (*PLC mission statement*).

The work of the Palau Language Commission guides the teaching of Palauan in schools. Language, however, is taught in schools as one component of Palauan Studies, which also integrates culture, history, and government. It is, therefore, difficult at present to evaluate student mastery of the Palauan language alone. Given the acknowledged importance of language, through the VNR process MOE and MHRCTD have agreed to collaborate in developing indicators that will measure SDG 4.4 (literacy) in two parts - one part literacy in any language as at present and one part literacy in Palauan.

Balancing tradition and modernity: Although avoidance of cultural obligations is sometimes cited as a driver of out-migration, a strong cultural identity, sense of place, competitive wages, and high standard of living are essential to retain Palauan youth in Palau, encourage

overseas Palauans to return home, and persons living in Koror to relocate to their home states.

Ngarchelong State is the first to complete its State Master Plan 2024. Embedded within the plan is a novel approach - teaching Ngarchelong Studies (in addition to Palauan studies) in elementary school so that when students leave for Koror for high school, they do so with a strong sense of place.

“When they (children) finish 8th grade and come to Koror for high school and then leave for the U.S. or Japan, or wherever, they will never forget where they’re from”.

Faustina K. Rehuher-Marugg
Chairperson, Ngarchelong State
Planning Commission

Cultural and historic sites: The Bureau of Cultural and Historical Preservation within MHRCTD manages the process of identifying culturally and historically significant sites and entering them into a National Registry. Once registered, the Bureau assists state with restoration, interpretation, and management. Site management plans are critical not only for site preservation but also to support cultural tourism, which has the potential to diversify tourism while creating jobs and opportunities for entrepreneurship in rural communities.

There are 4,000 known cultural and historic sites across Palau, but only 193 (5%) have been officially registered (as of January 2024), up from 180 in 2015 (*Bureau of Culture and Heritage, 2024*). Of the 193 sites, 43 (22%) have been restored and interpreted. An unknown number of sites are under threat from climate change and sea level rise. It is

proposed in moving forward that SDG 11.4 be further developed to monitor the progress of registration, management, and protection of cultural sites against climate change.

Centers for cultural expression: While all states have centers for cultural expression (e.g., community centers, senior centers, museums), many facilities are poorly maintained and lack sustained programs that enable centers to serve their intended purposes. The Palau Development Plan calls for US\$5.7 million to be invested in the cultural sector for the 2024-2027 period to (i) support expansion of cultural education, (ii) restore and maintain cultural sites, (iii) build or repair a network of community-based cultural centers, and (iv) improve management and maintenance of cultural and historic sites.

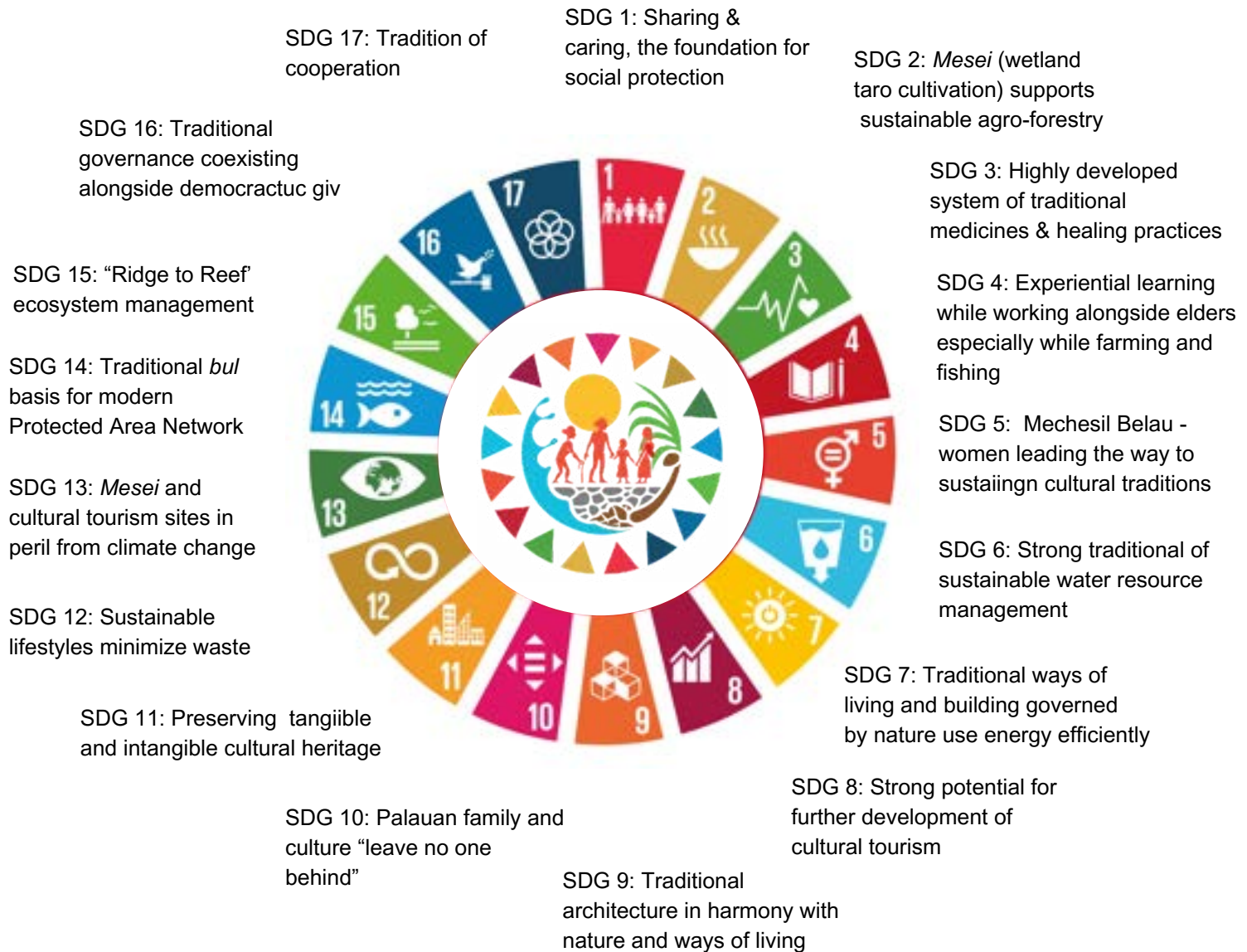
Intangible cultural heritage: Palau has a 16-member Society of Historians comprised of elders with unique knowledge of language and culture whose work is to document oral history and cultural traditions. Over the years, this group has published extensively, and its works are widely recognized as an expert source for much of Palau’s intangible cultural heritage.

To promote cultural expression, it has been proposed that a registry of “living treasures” be developed - individuals with special skills in various forms of cultural expression.

PATHWAYS TO 2030

Palau’s second VNR stimulated many discussions about the importance of culture in the achieving the SDGs. Several modifications to SDG targets and indicators have been proposed for Palau’s third VNR to sharpen the focus on culture. In contrast, VNR-24 focuses on culture as a means of SDG implementation and strategy to “build back better”.

HARNESSING OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE TO IMPLEMENT THE SDGs WHILE “BUILDING BACK BETTER”



SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE: THE ROLE OF “BUL” IN PALAUAN CULTURE

CULTURE IN ACTION

In Palauan culture, our traditional leaders taught us that conservation means more than just a pause; it's about renewing our connection with nature. This wisdom is the bedrock of *bul*, our time-honoured practice of ensuring the conservation of our resources and maintaining social order in the community. Respect and balance are central to this practice and the core of Palauan ethos.

As a traditional practice promoting social order and governance, *bul* serves as a decision-making process guided by chiefs. It governs collective behaviour, ensuring harmony and cohesion within the community. The chiefs, with their profound wisdom and respect for their people and environment, convene to make informed decisions that benefit the community as a whole. Their governance goes beyond human interactions and influences people's connection with their environment. *Bul*, in this context, touches on SDG 16 which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions. It shows how traditional governance systems can effectively enforce social order and manage natural resources sustainably. It also demonstrates how culture and tradition are instrumental in achieving the SDGs.

In the field of conservation, *bul* is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of our natural resources. Chiefs impose a moratorium on certain activities, like fishing in designated areas or harvesting specific plants, to facilitate replenishment of these resources. *Bul* is not merely a restriction; it is a conscious effort taken to respect nature's pace and allow it to regenerate the resources upon which the community relies. This practice reflects the profound understanding that we Palauans have of the environment and demonstrates a keen awareness and ability to recognise signs in nature such as tree maturity or tidal cycles which, in turn, regulate our activities. It also demonstrates the respect we have for our leaders. By taking only what is necessary and allowing nature time to recover, this conscious and adaptive practice ensures people live harmoniously with the environment.

As we navigate the challenges of our current time, the concept of *bul* can provide valuable lessons on how we can coexist harmoniously within our communities and with nature. It also serves as a reminder that achieving sustainable development requires respect, understanding, and conscientious decision-making, maintaining the delicate balance between our needs and the health of our natural world.

Submitted by: Faustina K. Rehuher-Marugg and Julita Tellei, Palau Resource Institute (PRI)



Photo credit:
Kyonori Tellames



PILLAR 2

EMPOWERING OUR PEOPLE



PAGE 15

Photo credit: Max Pincker
IOC Olympism in Action-Palau Project



PILLAR 2

Empowerment is about purposeful action by the government and its partners to ensure that people have the freedoms, skills, and enabling environments they need to assert control over their lives, achieve their full potential, and realize their human rights.



Empowerment of people is supported by constitutionally guaranteed human rights and freedoms, including freedom from discrimination (SDGs 5, 10, and 16), free and compulsory public education (SDG 4), free preventive health care, and subsidized medical care for citizens (SDG 3). In the pursuit of empowerment, the national government allocates a high percentage of the domestic budget to health and education and, increasingly, to social protection. In FY2023, 15.4% of the national budget was allocated for health and 17.6% for education. This has catapulted Palau into the United Nations' category of countries with high human development. In 2022, Palau's Human Development Index was 0.8, among the highest in the Pacific Island region.

“A KOT A RECHAD ER A BELAU” PALAUAN PEOPLE FIRST

The government's overarching priority - “A Kot a Rechad er Belau” (Palauan People First) - embodies empowerment. “Our Palauan people will have improved quality of life, are motivated and able to pursue their happiness, and will be the driving force behind the development and progress of our country” (H.E. President Surangel Whipps, Jr).

Pillar 2 incorporates six SDGs (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 16) and forty targets. In “Building Back Better” while leaving no one behind, the government has expanded social protections for vulnerable populations (SDGs 1), developed new food security initiatives (SDG 2), and improved health and education systems (SDGs 3 and 4) while promoting gender equality, non-discrimination, peace, and harmony (SDGs 5 and 16).





SDG 1: NG MO DIAK A CHELEBUUL (NO POVERTY)

The Palauan word for well-being, *orruul*, incorporates access to basic services, land and ocean resources, traditional status, personal drive, and the strength of interpersonal relationships, in addition to ownership of material goods and monetary wealth. This local definition aligns with the multifaceted concept of well-being embodied in SDG-1.

The customary system of “caring and sharing” through family and clan, long the cornerstone for social protection, remains strong but is under stress. Accordingly, people increasingly look to the government for social protections that go beyond the Constitutionally mandated free education and subsidized health care.

The depth and breadth of COVID-19's economic and social impacts threatened to overwhelm customary caring and sharing. Accordingly, the government took swift action, with help from international partners, to expand social protections for impacted households. “Building Back Better” post-COVID-19, new programs have been introduced with a stronger focus on low-income workers. These include public sector minimum wage increases, tax rebates, lifeline utility subsidies, child-rearing subsidies, and subsidies for *makit* (market) vendors.

OUR PROGRESS

Palau incorporates six SDG 1 targets into its core National SDG Framework, but pending completion of the 2023 HIES, data are available to assess only four of the six targets.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

1.1: Extreme poverty (persons below the food poverty line)	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
1.2: Persons below the national basic needs poverty line	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
1.3: Social protection	Accelerate Progress
1.4: Access to basic services	Maintain Progress
1.5: Resilience to disasters	Accelerate Progress
1.a: Mobilize resources for poverty reduction	Accelerate Progress

“Our culture and traditions ensure that no one is left behind, and we must hold on to these underlying principles. We are deeply concerned that people are struggling to meet the rising costs of living and ... keep up with the family's basic needs and necessities.”

*Council of Chiefs
Kerradel Declaration, 2023*

Poverty

SDGs 1.1 and 1.2

Palau compiled poverty data as part of the 2006 and 2014 HIES. A comparison of the two surveys found Palau on track toward the global target (reduction in poverty by 50%) but off-track toward the national target (zero poverty). COVID-19 caused widespread economic disruption. The 2023-2024 HIES survey will provide a benchmark for post-COVID poverty, but data will not be available until 2025.

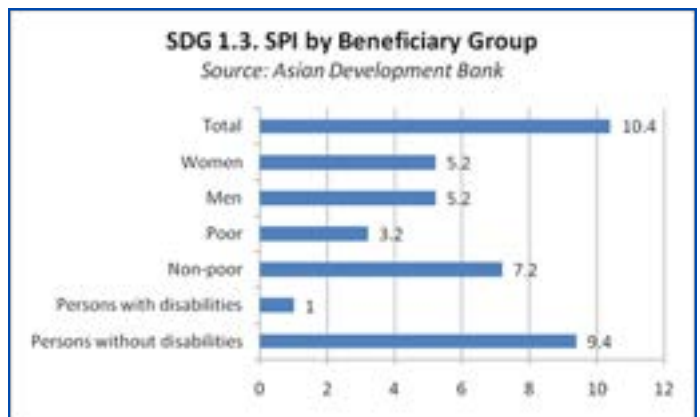
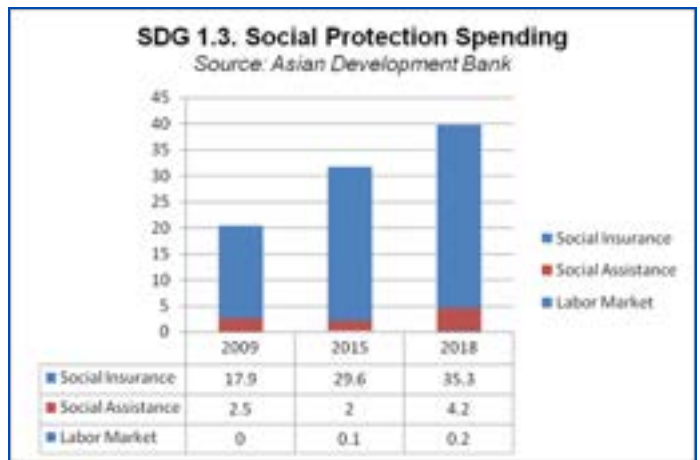
The MHHS's Community Health Assessment, conducted in 2023, included questions about the ability to meet basic needs. One in five respondents reported being unable to meet one or more basic needs during 2022. Rates were highest among low-income ethnic Palauans living in Koror and having low education levels. Despite expanding social protection, these findings suggest that many people continue to experience financial hardships post-COVID.

Social Protection

SDG 1.3

Access to basic social protection throughout the life cycle is a human right and fundamental to ensuring individuals' health and dignity. Social protection systems are at the core of efforts to ensure decent living conditions for the whole population across the lifespan (ILO, 2024).

Over the past decade, Palau's social protection expenditures have progressively increased but benefitted mainly senior citizens (through social security and pensions) and the entire population (through health insurance). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government expanded targeted social protections, albeit these were time-limited. Today, all residents are covered by at least one social protection program and new programs are being introduced that target young families and low-income workers.



Inventory of Palau Social Protection Programs, 2024
(Date program started in parenthesis)

Social Insurance	Social Assistance	Labor Market
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social security (1968) • Civil service pension (1987) • Medical savings account (2010) • National health insurance (2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School lunches (1975) • School breakfast (2022) • Head Start early childhood (1975) • Aging services (1978) • Special education (1989) • Severely disabled fund (2003) • Lifeline utility subsidy (2021) • "Makil" vender subsidy (2024) • Child rearing subsidy (2023) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce innovation and opportunity (2014)



The Asian Development Bank (ADB) measures social protection using a social protection indicator (SPI) that calculates expenditures as a percent of GDP per person. Palau's SPI has steadily increased since 2009 (the first year for which the indicator was calculated). The most recent SPI for 2018 was 10.4 compared to 7.7 in 2009 (ADB, 2022). While everyone benefits from at least one social protection program, at least at the last SPI assessment, benefits were not equally distributed. The poor and persons with disabilities received fewer benefits than the non-poor and persons without disabilities. Current initiatives to expand social protections for low-income workers in part respond to these findings.

Access to Basic Services

SDG 1.4

Access to basic services is high. The Constitution guarantees citizens access to free basic education, free preventive health care, and subsidized medical care. Low-income households benefit from a lifeline utilities subsidy that ensures everyone has access to basic utilities without regard to income or citizenship. Out of 5,056 occupied households, only 41 do not have basic water services, and only 16 do not have basic sanitation (Census, 2020).

Disaster Risk Reduction

SDG 1.5

Palau has experienced four major natural disasters and three health disasters in the past decade, resulting in significant economic losses and in the case of health disasters, loss of life. Natural disasters include Typhoon Bopha (2012), Haiyan (2013), and Surigae (2021), as well as a severe drought in 2016-2017.

Protection, Gender, Social Inclusion

In 2021, the National Emergency Management Office in partnership with the Red Cross, UNDP, Japan, and others convened a workshop on “protection, gender, and social inclusion in disaster risk management.” Key messages were that disasters affect people differently depending on their social position - age, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Participants recommended that Palau's National Disaster Risk Management Framework be updated to reflect PGI concerns.

Dengue fever outbreaks in 2017 and 2018 resulted in severe health and economic impacts. And, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in widespread social and economic disruptions (see SDG 8).

Recognizing increasing vulnerability to disasters resulting from climate change and sea level rise, Palau has in recent years invested heavily in disaster risk reduction.



Students from Melekeok Elementary School practice tsunami evacuation as part of their school's emergency management plan. Photo credit: UPDP.



Recent actions include development of a unified national response (National Emergency Management Framework) that integrates protection, gender and social inclusion, investments (US\$22.2 million) in disaster-resilient infrastructure and capacity building, development of a community toolkit to assist states in developing their own disaster risk reduction plans and strategies, and development of disaster management plans for schools.

The National Emergency Management Framework is supplemented by the Climate Change Policy and Action Plan 2024-2034.

Palau Climate Change Policy 2024: Priorities for Disaster Risk Reduction

- (1) Improve anticipatory actions such as evacuation plans, secure alternative power sources, distribute financial aid and pre-position response equipment.
- (2) Continue to build national capacity to identify and analyze hazard and risk data.
- (3) Streamline intra-government collaboration at all levels, including with traditional leaders.
- (4) Amplify community awareness and knowledge through regular exercises and drills.
- (5) Ensure that zoning and planning incorporate climate change and disaster risk reduction and preparedness.
- (6) Ensure that emergency shelters are fit-for-purpose, accessible, and self-sufficient (renewable energy, rainwater collection and storage, medical supplies, and emergency food).

OUR CHALLENGES

In Palau, as elsewhere in Oceania, the customary system of "caring and sharing" through family and clan is the cornerstone for social protection. Traditionally, maternal uncles oversee the well-being of family members, and families and clans meet regularly to collect money for significant life events. In the past, surplus food was shared, and clan housing was open to all members, creating a strong social safety net within the community

This system of "sharing and caring" remains strong. Families continue to gather regularly to collect money for funerals, housing, medical referrals, and other important events. Sharing of food continues, albeit with less regularity than in the past, while modern house designs and changing ideas about personal "space" undermine former "open door" residential practices.

It is widely acknowledged, however, that the traditional social protection system is under stress due to the dominance of the cash economy, changing values and residential patterns, and demographic changes that leave some vulnerable people without relatives on island to care for them. People increasingly look to the government for social protections that go beyond the Constitutional mandates for free education and subsidized health care.

Demographic changes also threaten "modern" social insurance (e.g., social security and pensions). Outgoing benefits exceed contributions by the active labor force, a problem that will worsen as Palau's population ages. The Ministry of Finance is working with partners to find ways to preserve these two crucial social protection programs while the MHHS and partners develop new services to assist senior citizens and others in need of caretaking.



In partnership with the Palau Community College, the MHHS trains and certifies in-home caregivers. Additionally, the MHHS partners with the non-profit Belau Wellness Center to provide medical and social support, and home accessibility modifications, for individuals homebound due to age or disability.

Disaster risk reduction and preparedness also require considering the needs of vulnerable populations. These needs include early warning and evacuation planning for persons with disabilities, child and family protection before, during, and after disasters, and mental and physical health support for victims.

Palau National Policy on Care for the Aging 2023

With technical assistance from WHO, Palau developed an Aging Policy in 2023, the first in the Pacific Island Region. The vision is for “all individuals to lead healthy, happy lives with dignity in age-friendly environments,” and four objectives exist:

1. Create a new culture around healthy aging
2. Optimize the social environment for healthy aging
3. Create physical environment enablers
4. Transform health systems to address needs across the lifespan.

The policy is closely linked to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 16, 17.

PATHWAYS TO 2030

Palau was hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, but prompt action by the government, supported by partners, enabled Palau to avoid widespread hardship and hunger. Post-COVID, the government has expanded social protections for low-income workers and self-employed *makit* (market) vendors. This underscores the national commitment to “build back better” while leaving no one behind.

As Palau moves toward 2030, the government has signaled a continuing commitment to strengthening social protections, especially for the working poor, persons with disabilities, and children. It has also signaled a strong commitment to strengthening community resilience against climate change, sea level rise, and natural disasters by enhancing disaster risk reduction capacities at every level of governance.



SDGs In Action

BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE WITH R-DAT: RED CROSS IN ACTION



The Red Cross Disaster Action Team (R-DAT) is a program to establish a volunteer-based, well-trained team resident in each State ready to respond to emergencies in their own community. Palau Red Cross Society, working closely with the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) and other partners, trains team members in disaster preparedness, response, good communication skills, and basic life support skills. The purpose of this training is to promote safe, healthy, and resilient Palauan communities.

R-DATs are the link between the National Government, their governors, and the vulnerable populations in their communities. R-DATs are generally trusted and known to community members, so they are able to provide assistance as well as the correct information to everyone. Palau Red Cross Society and partners have just completed R-DAT State Training Level 1 in all sixteen states.

"Thank you very much to PRCS and partners NEMO and MHHS- Emergency Health for conducting a great training. We learned so much in the three days, and we took a lot of notes and we will bring back what we have learned to our community. Thank you for taking care of us and for providing a very useful training".

Cailla Evalisto
R-DAT Team, Angaur



Koror State R-Dat Training
Photo credit: Palau Red Cross





SDG 2: NG MO DIAK A KLENGERENGER (ZERO HUNGER)

SDG 2 focuses on ending hunger, improving nutrition, achieving food security, and promoting sustainable agriculture. It addresses malnutrition in all its forms – low birth weight, underweight (low weight-for-age), stunting (low height-for-age), wasting (low weight-for-height, over-nutrition (overweight and obesity), and nutrition-specific deficiencies.

While reliance on imported foods has long been recognized as a threat to nutritional well-being and health, shipping disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic underscored that reliance on food imports is also a security threat. This triple threat - nutrition, health, security - has led the government to launch a whole-of-society initiative - *Keled a Ngercheled* (Our Food is Our Responsibility) that aims to modernize culturally and environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient blue and green food systems to achieve health and nutrition targets (SDGs 2, 3) while supporting environmental targets (SDGs 12-15).

OUR PROGRESS

Palau incorporates three of the eight SDG 2 targets into its National SDG Framework.

Undernourishment SDG 2.1

In 2022, 8% of infants born in Palau had low birth weight (under 2,500 grams). This is a 4% decline from 2015 and well below the global average of 15%. It reflects the increased focus of the MHHS on the health of the “mom” both before and during pregnancy.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

2.1: Eliminate undernourishment	Maintain Progress
2.2: Eliminate all forms of malnutrition including overweight & obesity	Accelerate Progress
2.4: Ensure sustainable food production systems	Accelerate Progress

“Food is how we strengthen relationships and connect families; how we welcome visitors and send off guests; how we express our culture and keep our traditions alive. Taro and fish are the cornerstones of our society.”

Hon. Steven Victor
Minister of Agriculture,
Fisheries, and Environment



Ensuring that infants and children are breastfed and well-fed is a high priority for the MHHS. Working in partnership with the NGO Kotel A Deureng, the MHHS reports that 53% of infants were exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life (2023 data). Continuing breastfeeding together with healthy complementary foods is strongly encouraged to extend into the second year of life.

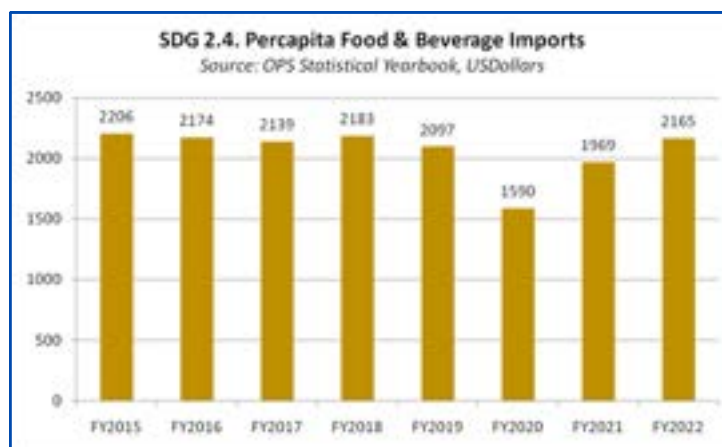
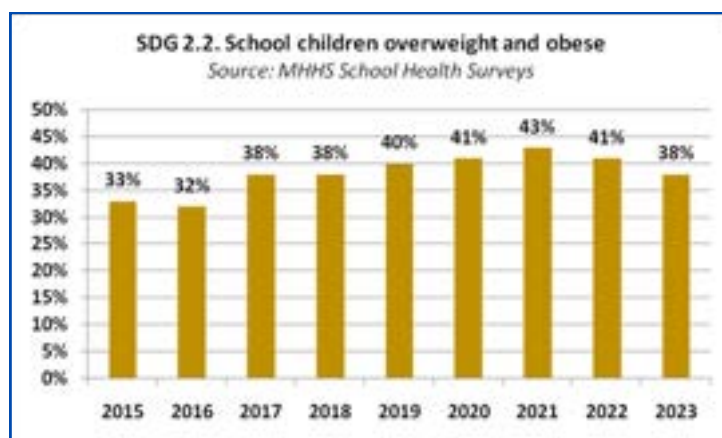
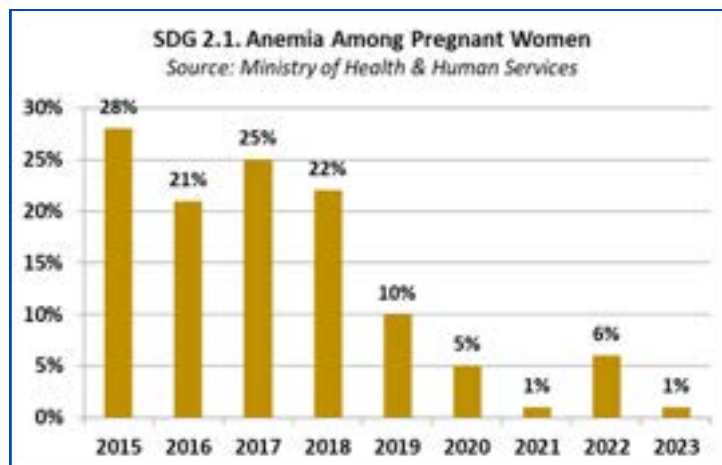
The MHHS reports no cases of childhood stunting or wasting and, at most, one or two cases of preschool children with clinically low weight-for-age diagnosed in an average year. Anemia rates among pregnant women have declined sharply due to changes in clinical prenatal supplementation protocols initiated in 2019. Anemia rates among pregnant women (1% in 2023, down from 28% in 2015) are well below the global average (36%).

End Malnutrition

SDG 2.2

While the term "malnutrition" refers to poor nutrition and encompasses a wide range of nutrition-related issues, including undernutrition, nutrient deficiencies, and overnutrition, this report focuses on overnutrition (overweight and obesity).

Overweight and obesity are primary drivers of Palau's noncommunicable disease epidemic. The 2023 MHHS Community Health Assessment found that obesity and overweight among adults increased from 73% (2016) to 76% (2023). Overweight and obesity rates among school children, however, peaked at 43% in 2021 and, while still alarmingly high, show a modest decline in 2022 (41%) and 2023 (38%). This is a testament to the strong partnership between MHHS and MOE to promote healthier school meals, eliminate "junk" food in schools, and promote physical activity both in and outside of school.





Food Security SDG 2.4

Although Palau has a rich cultural heritage in agriculture and fisheries, local food production has waned under the onslaught of cheaper and more convenient imports. Food and beverage imports average \$36 million annually or about \$2,000 per capita. 92% of food imports are destined for household use and 8% for the tourism industry. The average household diet consists of 84% food imports and only 16% locally harvested food and fish (*HIES, 2014*).

Although food security has long been a stated goal, the reality is that production has not significantly increased. The change now is an invigorated government commitment and a whole-of-society approach. As part of the new initiative, *Keled a Ngercheled* (Our Food is Our Responsibility), MAFE aims to double food production by 2027 and triple output by 2030.

Empowering farmers is part of the initiative. With technical support from the Republic of China (Taiwan), projects in fruit and vegetable production, aquaculture, and poultry and livestock support sustainable food systems. MAFE provides women's groups with initial funding and seedlings through the Taro Seedling Project, funded by ADB. Additionally, farmers have access to affordable equipment rentals. MAFE is also partnering with the Palau Livestock Association to address challenges such as domestic livestock feed production and the high cost of feed imports.

Recognizing that more than increased production is needed, MAFE is developing new food processing and marketing initiatives to provide farmers access to reliable markets. The government agriculture center at Ngchesar houses a taro processing facility. Additionally, MAFE, with support from Australian Aid, launched an online farmer dashboard, *Okeiuid*, an app that connects farmers with buyers.

OUR CHALLENGES

Palau is a food-insecure nation reliant on imported foods. Local production is constrained by infertile and highly erodible soils, lack of coordinated land-use planning, land tenure issues, invasive species, high production costs, low interest in agriculture by young Palauans, and climate change risks (saltwater intrusion into taro patches, increasing ambient temperatures, and unpredictable weather patterns).

Our Vision: Sustainable food production and wise stewardship of our marine and terrestrial resources enhance the well-being and economic livelihoods of all.

Ministry of Agriculture,
Fisheries, and Environment

PATHWAYS TO 2030

Although the target to triple local food production by 2030 is ambitious, with a clear plan, vertical and horizontal partnerships, comprehensive infrastructure, and a focus on empowering and supporting farmers, MAFE is optimistic about its achievement.

MAFE is supported in this work by bilateral partners (the United States Department of Agriculture, Japan International Cooperation Agency, and the Republic of China (Taiwan) Technical Mission among others), multilateral partners (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), state governments, and local organizations (Palau Community College, Palau Livestock Association, Palau Organic Growers Association, Palau Farmers Association, Palau Community Action Agency, Belau Offshore Fisheries, Palau Commercial Fishing Company, and Palau National Aquaculture Association together with other community-based organizations).



SDGs In Action

NGERUTECHEI VILLAGE: PROGRESSING WITH OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE IN NGEREMLENGUI STATE



According to legend, the demi-god Milad first settled in Ngerutechei Village in Ngeremlengui State after the great flood. This is where Milad made her first *mesei* (taro patch) called Ngeruuchel. From here, Milad traveled throughout Palau, teaching the art of the *mesei*. Although no longer inhabited, based on its unique oral history and well-preserved stone structures, Ngerutechei was inscribed on the National Registrar of Historic Sites in 2017. Today, Ngerutechei is a vibrant community that is sustainably co-managed by the Ngeremlengui State Government and the *cheldebechel* (community groups). The community men and women groups work collaboratively to protect the coastal village from sedimentation and sea level rise with support from the Global Environmental Facility Small Grant Fund and a Historic Preservation grant. Every Saturday is “restoration day,” which brings the community together as one.

With abundant natural resources and an improved sense of community, the women of the village started their own group during the pandemic to provide food for the Bungalkesol men’s group while restoring the village. The seven-member women’s group is composed of retirees and young mothers. Bngalakesol women’s group then became one of 20 women groups across Babeldaob that qualified for a seed grant to start upland taro farms under the ADB COVID-19 Response Project. With abundant taro plants in Ngerutechei, the group supplied its own seedlings and with the equipment and labor of Bungalkesol, restored the Merilang upland farm, a 30-year-old-abandoned farm located behind the Ngeremlengui elementary school. Half of the group’s harvest is sold to the MAFE food processing center, while the other half is distributed to widows and single mothers. One of the leaders, also a State Legislator, Ms. Mesiwal Madlutk observes, “aki metitur lou makit; aki di meduch el merous” (we do not know how to market and sell our taro, but we do know how to distribute it, ensuring that no one is hungry). Legislator Mesiwal also observes that the wider community of Ngeremlengui state has taken up farming as a weekend activity, making it difficult to find locals during the weekend. An active member of the Palau Organic Growers Association, the legislator ensures Bngalakesol integrates traditional knowledge in climate-smart agriculture, such as the use of fruit bat manure as organic fertilizer.

*Submitted by: Jodean "Ongly" Remengesau
Edited for space*



Photo credit:
Legislator Mesiwal Madlutk



SDG 3: UNGIL E MESISIICH EL KLENGAR ME A KLECHAD (GOOD HEALTH AND WELLBEING)

Palau has incorporated eleven of the thirteen SDG 3 targets into the National SDG Framework. The targets are grouped into five categories: (i) maternal health, (ii) infant and child health, (iii) communicable diseases, (iv) noncommunicable diseases, mental health, and substance abuse, (v) tobacco control, and (vi) health systems. Of the SDG 3 targets, the overarching national priority is SDG 3-4, noncommunicable diseases and mental health.

With every Palau resident enrolled in the Republic of Palau Healthcare Fund (HCF) and living within 30 minutes of a primary healthcare facility, Palau has largely achieved universal health coverage (SDG 3.8) but continues to work to achieve a modern climate-resilient health infrastructure - notably a new national hospital. In public health, a "focus on the mom" has kept maternal mortality rates low, reduced pregnancy-related anemia, and increased breastfeeding rates resulting in improved child health outcomes. A post-COVID "build back better" initiative trains community health workers to "leave no one behind" by strengthening linkages between communities and the health system.

Despite investment in controlling noncommunicable diseases (NCD) using a whole-of-society approach, NCDs remain Palau's #1 health challenge. Besides the NCD crisis, mental health indicators, especially for youth, show regression. Under the National Youth Policy (2023), youth identified mental health as among their top priorities. Acting on the concerns of youth will require new and revitalized public-private partnerships to support young people and their families.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

3.1: Maternal health	Maintain Progress
3.2: Child mortality	Accelerate Progress
3.3: Communicable diseases	Accelerate Progress
3.4: Prevent NCDs and promote mental health and well-being	Reverse Trends
3.5: Substance abuse	Accelerate Progress
3.6: Road traffic accidents	Maintain Progress
3.7: Sexual & reproductive health	Maintain Progress
3.8: Universal health coverage	Accelerate Progress
3.a: Tobacco control	Accelerate Progress
3.b: Access to vaccines	Accelerate Progress
3.c: Health financing & workforce	Accelerate Progress



OUR PROGRESS

Maternal, Child, Adolescent Health SDGs 3.1, 3.2, 3.7, 3.b

Palau has a comprehensive system of maternal and child health care, including well-woman, family planning, prenatal, postnatal, well-child, school health services, and services for children and adolescents with special health care needs. Participation rates by targeted populations are high.

In-hospital deliveries attended by health professionals have been the norm for decades. Out-of-hospital births are exceptional. For 2015-2022, there were four out-of-hospital births. Births to adolescents (women 10-19 years of age) have declined, with no births to women 10-14 years of age in recent years.

Over the eight years, 2015-2022, a total of 33 children died before reaching age 5, most (66%) in the first month of life due to perinatal conditions.

Immunization rates are high (SDG 3.b). Near universal coverage has been achieved for diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP3) and pneumococcal conjugate (PCV3). Coverage against measles and human papillomavirus (HPV) has increased, although rates remain below target. Vaccine hesitancy is, at least for now, not a significant problem in Palau.

Communicable Diseases

SDG 3.3

SDG target 3.3 provides flexibility for countries to target diseases of most significant concern to them. Palau has integrated tuberculosis (TB) and HIV infection into the SDG Framework. Palau's TB incidence rate is well below that of the Western Pacific Region and is declining. HIV incidence is also low, with only 2 cases reported for 2015-2022.

Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health Conditions

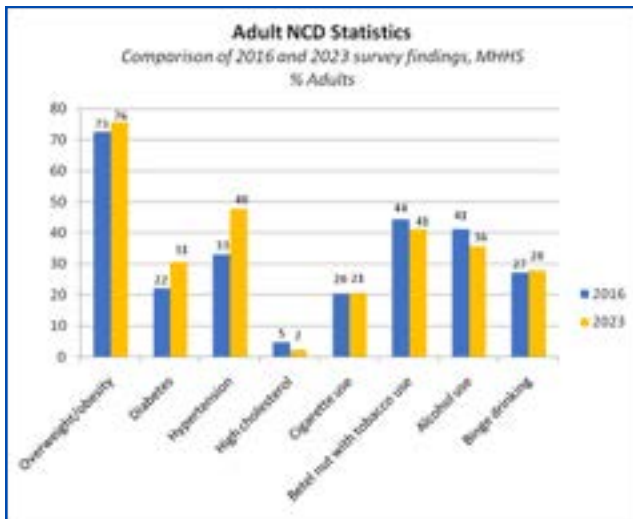
SDGs 3.4, 3.6, 3.a

Cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic lung and kidney diseases, together with mental health conditions, are the leading causes of morbidity in Palau and account for about 80% of deaths. The government has responded with interventions that seek to engage the whole-of-society. A strategic action plan for 2015-2023 has guided interventions coordinated by a multi-sector National NCD Coordinating Mechanism chaired by the Minister of Health and Human Services with membership drawn from across the government and civil society.

MHHS conducted Community Health Assessments in 2012, 2016, and 2023. The 2023 assessment found some improvements in NCD risks but still, rates for overweight/obesity, diabetes, and hypertension have increased. The 2023 survey supports an updated NCD Strategic Plan (drafted April 2024) and a National Sports Strategy (adopted April 2024).

Gender and NCDs 2023

The 2023 Community Health Assessment finds some gender differences in NCD risk factors. Women are more likely to be overweight/obese (women 80.2%, men 71.6%) and to have unhealthy blood lipids. Men were more likely to drink alcohol and engage in binge drinking. Although men smoke more than women, women are more likely to chew betel nut with tobacco thus total tobacco use is about the same (55%). Neither men nor women adhere to the five recommended daily servings of fruits/vegetables. Both are equally conscious of salt intake. Women are somewhat less likely to engage in regular physical activity. Hypertension higher among women than men (women 49.8%, men 45.8%) but there was no gender difference for diabetes (30.5%) or prediabetes (36%).



In a unique intervention, Palau sets aside 10% of tobacco and alcohol tax collections each year to fund NCD small grants to support innovative NCD interventions planned and implemented by government and civil society partners.

A wide range of interventions are funded each year, addressing environmental and behavioral change, physical activity promotion, local food production, healthy eating, tobacco and alcohol reduction, and community-clinical linkages. One beneficiary has been the Ngeruterchei community profiled on page 26.

Tobacco control SDG 3.4 and 3.a: Palau led negotiations that resulted in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and was among the first to ratify the Convention. Aligned with the FCTC, Palau enacted comprehensive tobacco legislation. Although tobacco use among both adults and youth has declined, there was an upsurge in vaping by high school youth between 2015 and 2021, prompting Congress to pass legislation that bans vapes (RPPL 11-27).

Mental health (SDG 3.4b): The 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 44% of high school students (females 53%, males 35%) reported symptoms of depression (e.g., feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks), a significant increase from 2015 (then 29%). The Palau suicide rate per 100,000 population in 2022 was 34 compared to a global average of 9 (WHO, 2019). Because suicide in Palau is almost exclusively a male phenomenon, the suicide rate for males is 63 compared to a global average for males of 12 (WHO, 2019). To help guide prevention efforts, Palauan law (RPPL 11-17) mandates that psychological autopsies be conducted for all suicide cases.

“Youth in Palau are hesitant to talk about mental health issues, and if something is not done about it now, we will end up raising a generation that will continue to struggle mentally, and this cycle will continue for generations to come“.

Chairperson Ms. Dee-Raya Antonio
National Youth &
Cheldebechel Council (NYCC)

Road traffic deaths: On average, four people lose their lives on Palau’s roads each year. The road traffic fatality rate in 2022 was 17 deaths per 100,000, identical to the global average. Palau’s rate is declining. In 2023, seat belt and child restraint legislation came into force in a bid to further reduce rates (RPPL 11-9).



Health Systems

SDGs 3.a, 3.c

The MHHS is responsible for “promoting and protecting public health, providing clinical services, operating and managing public medical facilities, and related matters” (*PNC 2.107*). Recent legislation expands the MHHS mandate to include human services (*RPPL 11-2, 2021*).

The MHHS operates the 80-bed Belau National Hospital (BNH) in Koror and nine strategically located primary care community health centers. Three private clinics are also located in Koror. Health worker-to-population ratios (per 10,000 persons) in 2022 were physicians (15.36), dentists (5.7), and nurses/midwives (63.1). A new cadre of community health workers is being deployed in communities, another “build back better” post-COVID-19 initiative.

With the help of partners, Palau has invested heavily in health, partially in response to COVID-19 but with continuing investments to “build back better”.

Major investments for 2021-2023 include creating a national emergency medical team, digitizing medical records, installing an MRI machine, entering into an MOU with Guam Cancer Center to bring more accessible and affordable care to Palau, and general facility repairs, renovations, and equipment replacement valued at USD\$7 million.

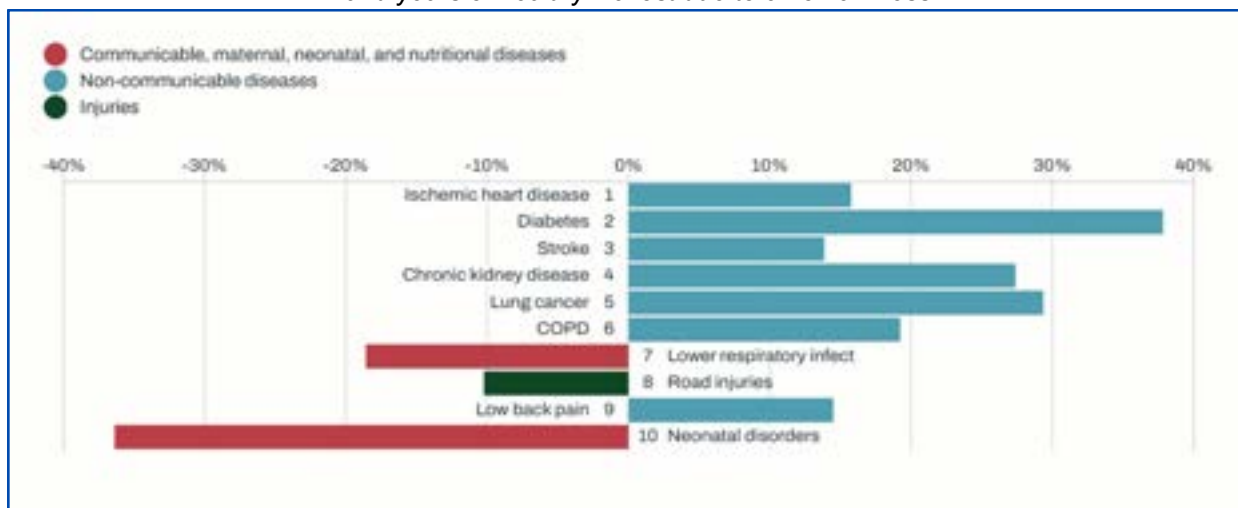
Despite these investments, the current hospital is not well located in an era of climate change and sea level rise. Funding for a new facility is included in the Compact of Free Association, and a Hospital Relocation Task Force has been appointed to identify an alternative site.

PATHWAYS TO 2030

Analysis of Disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) for Palau 2011-2021 confirms the progress made in reducing morbidity and mortality associated with early childhood illnesses, communicable diseases, and road traffic injuries. Still, the number of people living with and dying from NCDs is increasing. Consequently, NCDs are the health top priority for the lead-up to 2030 and beyond.

Palau: Changes in Disability Adjusted Life Years, 2011-2021

Disability-adjusted life years consider both years of life lost due to death and years of healthy life lost due to chronic illness.



Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, USA.

TAKING AIM AGAINST NCDs WITH AN INTEGRATED WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACH

SDGs In Action

Like many nations, Palau is transitioning from traditional to modern lifestyles, a transition that has resulted in a sharp increase in noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) – heart disease and stroke, cancer, diabetes, and chronic lung and kidney diseases. Eight of the ten leading causes of death and disability in Palau are NCDs, which collectively account for about 80% of all deaths.

A coordinated whole-of-government and whole-of-society response was launched by Presidential Executive Order No. 295 (2011), “Declaring a State of Health Emergency on Noncommunicable Diseases” (SDGs 3, 11, 16). A 2013 national survey, “Palau STEPS Survey”, established the baseline for NCDs and their risk factors. Following the survey, the MHHS convened more than 70 stakeholders who used survey data to develop the “Palau National Strategic Plan for NCDs 2015-2023”. To facilitate implementation, the Presidential Executive Order (No. 379, 2015) created a multi-sector public-private National Coordinating Mechanism (NCM) responsible for overseeing the NCD response, mobilizing political commitment, and coordinating plan implementation.

A second national survey, the “Palau Hybrid Survey,” conducted in 2017, identified progress toward plan targets and provided information for refining implementation. A third national survey, conducted in 2023, further identified areas for improvement and supported the development of a third-generation NCD Action Plan.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: A UNIQUE APPROACH

The NCD Plan called for increased local funding for NCD action supported by taxes on alcohol and tobacco. In 2017, the Palau NCD Fund was established by RPPL 9-57 (SDGs 3, 11). The Fund is managed by the Coordinating Mechanism and provides a small grant facility to support NCD interventions designed by national and state government agencies and civil society organizations. The funded activities represent a unique combination of traditional health measures, such as physical activity, healthy eating, tobacco, and alcohol interventions, along with initiatives for environmental safeguarding and cultural preservation that address social determinants of NCDs..





Photo credit:
Judy Otto
Micro All Around, 2023

SDGs In Action

SPORT: ENABLER OF HEALTH, INCLUSION, AND SUSTAINABILITY



Among Palau's contributions to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the inclusion of sport as an “enabler of development” (paragraph 22). Although the Agenda does not specify targets and indicators for sport, it recognizes “the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education, and social inclusion.”

Palau has an active sporting community led by the Palau National Olympic Committee and sixteen-member sporting organizations. Working in partnership with government, traditional leaders, and civil society, PNOC recently adopted a National Sports Strategy 2024-2034 endorsed by the President, Congress, Governors, and traditional leaders (April 2024).

Title

Palau Rising: A thriving sports sector for all Palauans.

Vision

An active, healthy, and inclusive Palau.

Targets

- (1) For every Palauan to undertake physical activity and sport across the lifespan in a safe, fun, and inclusive way.
- (2) To foster the inclusion of all Palauans in family and community life through sport.
- (30) To harness the value of sport to bring people together in unison and comradery.
- (4) For Palauans to excel in the field of play and for all Palauans to share in the success of athletes and feel motivated and empowered to engage in sport.
- (5) To create a sustainable and long-term sports pathway and system to achieve success in sport and life and incentivize sports careers, scholarships, and livelihoods.

Envisaged Outcomes

- (1) Improve physical and mental health
- (2) Strengthen communities
- (3) Achieve international sporting success





SDG 4: UNGIL EL OSISECHAKL ME A OMESUUB (QUALITY EDUCATION)

"In partnership with parents and community, {our mission} is to ensure that our children and youth preserve Palauan culture and become contributing citizens and productive workers in a changing world".

Mission Statement
Palau Ministry of Education

To ensure quality, inclusive, and equitable education for all, Palau is reforming and modernizing education, including a recent switch to year-round schooling, enhanced teacher training facilities and opportunities, improved institutional linkages, especially for vocational education, and new distance learning centers in rural schools. These reforms "build back better", improve quality, close gaps, and "leave no child behind". New public-private partnerships harness year-round schooling with four three-week intersession breaks to provide non-traditional learning in culture, sports, entrepreneurship, and environment - forums for implementing the SDGs while catering to diverse student learning styles.

In FY 23, the Palau Government appropriated US\$10.3 million for K-12 education and US\$5.2 million for post-secondary education, constituting 17% of total government appropriations (MOF, 2023). With near universal participation in schooling, the focus now is improving the quality of teaching and learning while leaving no child behind.

OUR PROGRESS

Palau has integrated 6 out of 10 SDG 4 targets into its National SDG Framework.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

4.1: Effective learning outcomes	Accelerate Progress
4.2: Early childhood development	Reverse Trends
4.3: TVET & tertiary education	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
4.5: Gender parity in education	Accelerate Progress
4.a: Education facilities	Maintain Progress
4.c: Qualified teachers	Maintain Progress

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT & ACHIEVEMENT SDG 4.1 AND 4.2

There are 11 free-standing pre-primary education centers in Palau, all of which are non-government, and 10 of which are tuition-free. In the 2022-2023 school year, free public kindergartens were introduced in selected elementary schools. This initiative was expanded nationwide in the 2023-2024 school year, ensuring that every five-year-old child in Palau has access to free, quality kindergarten education.



Seventeen public elementary schools extend from Kayangel in the far north to Hatohobei in the far south. A single public high school in Koror serves the entire nation. In addition to public schools, there are two private elementary schools and four private high schools. All private schools are operated by religious organizations and receive financial support from the government in the form of grants, which help to partially offset tuition costs for students attending these institutions.

Despite recent investment in public kindergartens, the enrollment rate in pre-primary schooling at age 5 has declined. The reasons for this are unclear; however, preliminary analyses suggest that disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the high rate of out-migration observed from 2022 to 2023 may be contributing factors to this trend.

Children ages 6-17 are legally required to attend school. The gross enrollment rate exceeds 100% and gender parity has been largely achieved (SDG 4.5). There is evidence, however, that a small number of children are still being left behind. UNESCO (2021) estimates that 2% of elementary-age-eligible children and 9% of secondary-age-eligible children are not in school. The average retention rate from Grade 1 to graduation is 88.3% (MOE, 2023). An adult education program provides a second chance for adults who left school before graduating to earn a high school diploma.

Quality of education: Palau High School, ten public elementary schools, and all private schools are accredited by the U.S. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) or, in the case of the Seventh Day Adventist Schools, by a comparable religious accreditation body. Accreditation is in progress for the remaining public schools. 100% of schools in Palau have electricity, running water, safe single-sex toilets, and computers, and all but one geographically remote school in Hatohobei has internet access.

Education reforms. MOE has adopted reforms to improve the quality of teaching and learning. These include:

- Year-round schooling
- Public kindergartens in elementary schools
- Accelerated reading programs in all schools
- Expanded Advanced Placement options for gifted students,
- Online learning centers in rural schools provide an alternative for students who would otherwise need to relocate to Koror to attend high school; this is particularly valuable for students with disabilities living in outlying communities.
- Introduction of a complimentary school breakfast program to supplement the existing school lunch service provided to public school students in Palau since 1975
- Expansion of the vocational-technical program at Palau High School to provide a seamless transition to vocational education at Palau Community College
- Improved linkages with workforce development programs, including the U.S. Job Corps, a vocational training program open to Palau students, the Civic Action Team apprenticeship program, and the Workforce Opportunities Investment Program (WIOA)
- Supporting professional development and continuing education for teachers toward the goal of 100% of teachers holding a bachelor's degree by 2028
- Investments of US\$6.7 million to upgrade school facilities, including the development of a new Alternative Learning Center in Koror to cater to children whose needs are not well served in the traditional classroom
- A new Pre-K-12 school in Babeldaob will break ground in 2024, providing a second option for public secondary schooling that is more accessible to students living in northern communities.



“...we have over 50 students certified in open water diving and eight with advanced open water certification. It is amazing the difference that this has made in their appreciation of this incredible [ocean] resource that we have. Our students are going outside of the science labs and the classrooms to actually be in the lab of the ocean.”

Dr. Dale Jenkins
Minister of Education
April 2024

To increase fiscal space to concentrate on quality, the Ministry of Education is enhancing efficiency by consolidating small schools. In 2011, schools in East Babeldaob were consolidated, and currently, planning is underway to consolidate schools in Western and Northern Babeldaob. This consolidation strategy also addresses climate change and disaster preparedness by relocating schools situated in low-lying areas to higher ground, farther from the coast.

While the new Alternative Learning Center and the introduction of distance learning options will support “No Child Left Behind”, disability advocates also call for extension of special education support services to Palau Community College and development of a sheltered workshop for young people and adults with severe disabilities (*OMEKESANG and Palau Parents Empowered*).

Teacher training is a high priority. The goal is for 100% of teachers to hold bachelor’s degrees by 2028, up from 25% in 2023 (PDP, 2024),

In SY 2022-2023, Palau adopted the IOWA standardized achievement test for national academic progress monitoring.

Because of this recent change, student performance data are available only for 2022 and 2023, making it difficult to assess progress against SDG 4.1 for VNR-24.

TERTIARY EDUCATION

Palau Community College (PCC), the country’s sole public higher education institution, offers 40 certificate and associate degree programs. In the fall semester of 2022, PCC had an enrollment of 525 students, with 412 (90%) being Palau citizens and 321 (61%) being full-time students. PCC partners with the University of Guam and San Diego State University to offer online and hybrid bachelor’s and master’s degree programs.

In addition to degree programs, PCC receives approximately \$500,000 annually from the U.S. Department of Education for the Talent Search and Upward Bound programs. These programs serve low-income and educationally disadvantaged high school students to help them enter and succeed in college.

For post-secondary students, the Palau National Scholarship Board (PNSB) provides scholarships, grants, and loans to Palau citizens who meet eligibility criteria. Priority is given to students pursuing degrees in priority fields, including law, medicine, engineering, education, and special education. PNSB also administers non-government student financial aid for higher education offered by private entities and development partners.

PATHWAYS TO 2030

From 2021 to 2024, MOE has adopted many new initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The priority for 2030 is to sustain and further refine these reforms, giving them time to yield dividends in student achievement.



Photo credit:
Belau National Museum

SDGs In Action

YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLING YIELDS BENEFITS

Palau’s Ministry of Education took a bold stand in 2022 by implementing a year-round school calendar for all public schools. Although the number of instructional days remains the same - 180 days - the difference is that the school vacations are distributed over the year in four 3-week blocks rather than concentrated in the summer. The long summer break is a by-product of Palau’s colonial heritage and not relevant for most modern families. The calendar change was intended to improve academic achievement (SDG 4) and support working families for many of whom the long summer break was a hardship with its increased childcare costs (SDG 1).

Eliminating learning loss over the summer resulted in immediate academic benefits to students. By no longer needing to re-teach skills after the summer vacation, teachers can use classroom time more efficiently. The year-round calendar also helps families who previously struggled with childcare expenses during the summer. Year-round schooling has reduced student absenteeism, increased facility utilization, and reduced student discipline problems. It has been particularly beneficial for children with special learning needs who benefit from the more sustained contact with teachers (SDG 10).

Operational costs have not increased with year-round schooling. For teachers, the intersession breaks provide opportunities for professional development. For students, the inter-sessions provide opportunities to participate in non-formal education. Many non-government organizations are stepping up to make use of this time to immerse students in cultural and environmental learning, sports, and community activities (Pillar 1, SDGs 3, 11, 14, and 15). One noteworthy partnership involves MOE, MHRCTD, the Friends of the Palau National Marine Sanctuary, and the Belau Tourism Association which offer SCUBA certification to high school students. So far over 50 students have completed the basic training and others are progressing to advanced certification.

Although the change to year-round schooling was not universally supported initially and did require adjustments by students, families, and the community, after 2 years, the benefits are increasingly evident. Year-round schooling is proving to be a valuable support to Palau’s education vision, “Our students will be successful in the Palauan society and the world.”

Submitted by: Pillar Ngiraswei. MOE

4



SDG 5: TA BESUL EL OMERUUL EL MO ER A BEK EL CHAD (GENDER EQUALITY)

Culturally, Palau is a matrilineal society in which women hold positions of power and respect in equality with their male counterparts. Although the roles of men and women were and remain distinct in matters of custom and tradition, these are not distinctions that imply a dominant-subordinate relationship but a duality in which the success of each gender depends on support from each other.

Building on Palau's tradition of gender equity, the government promotes equity across all sectors. Women, however, remain underrepresented in the formal labor force and overrepresented among unpaid family workers and caregivers, which reduces their lifetime earnings and their social security in retirement. The gender gap in middle and senior management has narrowed substantially, but women remain underrepresented in elected positions at both state and national levels.

Palau developed a Gender Mainstreaming Policy in 2018 that is aligned with the SDGs and the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration (2012). The Gender Division (Bureau of Domestic Affairs within the Ministry of States) coordinates the policy's implementation.

The policy has resulted in increasing recognition of the importance of gender mainstreaming across the development spectrum as reflected by the explicit inclusion of gender issues in the Palau Development Plan 2023-2026, the National Climate Change

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

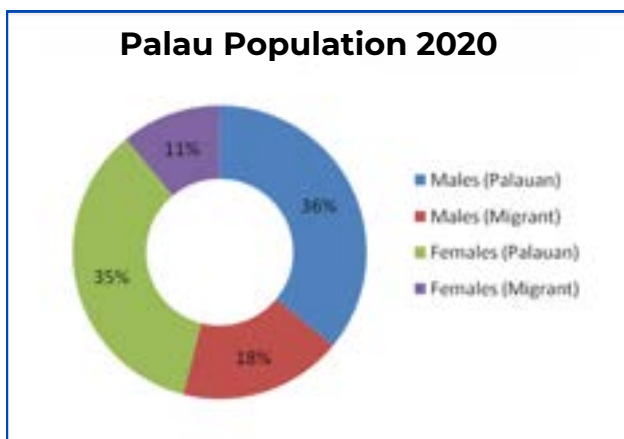
5.1: Discrimination against women & girls	Maintain Progress
5.2: Violence against women and girls	Accelerate Progress
5.4: Unpaid care and domestic work	Accelerate Progress
5.5: Women in leadership	Accelerate Progress
5.6: Reproductive health access & rights	Maintain Progress

Policy, the National Environmental Management Strategy, emergency management policies, and other guidance documents. Work is underway to update the policy as part of preparations for the U.N. Beijing+30 meeting (2025).

OUR PROGRESS

Palau has integrated five of the nine SDG 5 targets into the national SDG framework.

Demography: The Palau population in 2020 was 17,614, of which 8,120 (46%) were women and girls. Among women and girls, 71% were Palauan, and 29% were migrants (non-Palauans). The Palauan population is gender-balanced (males=females), while the migrant population is dominated by males. Women head one-third of Palauan households compared to 28% of migrant (non-Palauan) households.

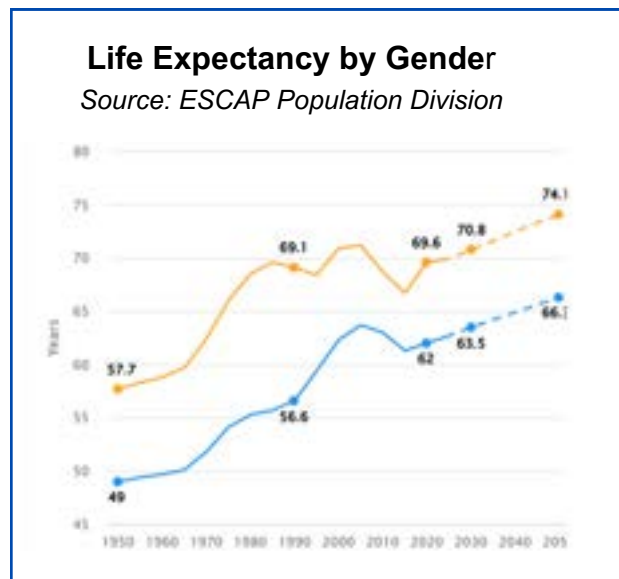


Source: Pacific Community

The law: In 2023, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) commissioned the Ministry of Justice to prepare a review of gender under Palau law. The analysis concluded that Palau's law is generally gender-responsive albeit with two important exceptions on age of marriage and inheritance of property when the decedent leaves no will. Further, the law does not mandate maternity leave for women employed in the private sector (or in the public sector for women who are non-permanent civil servants). There are also no provisions for paternity leave which reinforces the idea that caretaking is women's responsibility.

While the Constitution and MOJ operating procedures require gender segregation of prisoners, due to overcrowding, this is not always adhered to. A new prison will open in 2025 after which it will be possible to enforce gender segregation. There is, however, no requirement that female prisoners be supervised by female corrections officers, a gap that the report highlights for remediation.

Health: On average, Palau women live seven years longer than men. While the higher rates of suicide and accidental injuries among young men contribute significantly to the gender gap, men are also more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors - smoking, alcohol and marijuana use - which drive NCDs and associated premature mortality.



Education: Gender parity exists in primary and secondary schooling (SDG 4.5), and a higher proportion of women (38%) complete tertiary education than men (26%) (Census 2020).

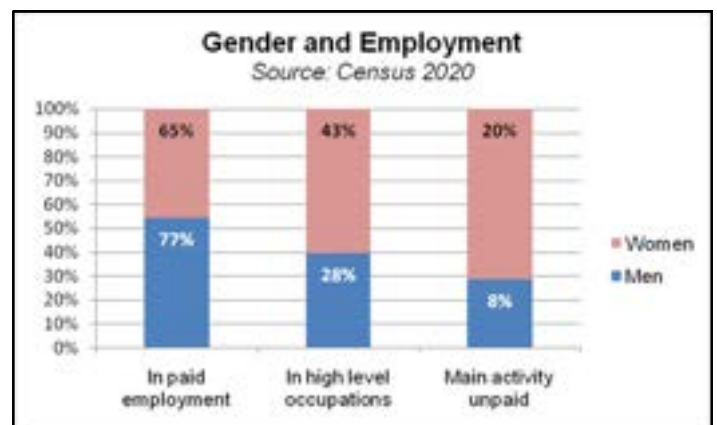
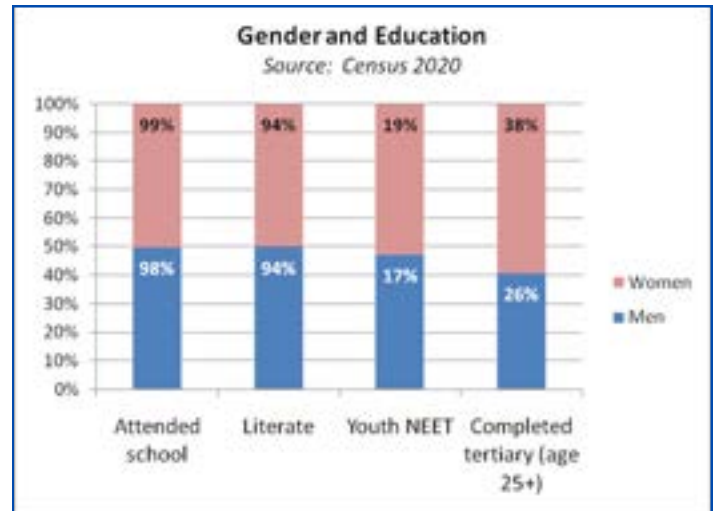
Employment: There remains a significant gender gap in paid employment, with 77% of men but only 65% of women in paid employment (*Census 2020*). This gap puts women at increased risk of poverty throughout their lifespan (SDGs 1, 10). The gap is widely perceived to result from women's caregiving roles.

When employed, women are more likely to be in high-level occupations and have higher earnings. Although unemployment rates for women 25+ are twice those of men (1.4% versus 0.7%), rates for both are negligible (*Census, 2020*).

Leadership in Government: Women are well-represented as judges in the Judiciary and in management positions in the Executive Branch, including as members of governing and advisory boards. However, women remain underrepresented in Congress (Olbiil er a Kelulau), the cabinet, and elected positions at the state level.

Community and traditional leadership: SDG gender indicators prioritize women in elected office and paid employment; but ignore the many leadership roles that women assume within their families, clans, and local communities. Men's and women's groups, youth groups, and councils of traditional leaders play an active role in community development, ensuring that all voices are heard while providing the human capital that moves progress. (See also SDG 11).

At the pan-Palau level, there are two influential organizations of traditional leaders. The Rubekul Belau (Council of Chiefs) comprises the highest-ranking (male) chiefs from each of the sixteen states. The Constitution mandates the Rubekul Belau to advise the President on matters concerning traditional laws and customs (Article 8.6).



The Mechesil Balau (Palau Women’s Council) is headed by the two highest-ranking women - Bilung (Koror) and Ebil Reklai (Melekeok) - who are supported by the ranking women leaders from all the states. The Mechesil Balau is committed to the community and to raising awareness about issues affecting both women and men. The Mechesil Balau Conference, held annually since 1993, takes place over three days and provides a forum for dialogue among various stakeholders. These include men and women traditional leaders, women's traditional organizations, government leadership and agencies, students, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

The conference serves as a platform for policy development and an opportunity for the community, particularly women, to raise awareness about issues reflected in the theme for each year's conference. In addition, the event offers space for cultural awareness through traditional protocol practices, performance and visual arts, and the exhibition of women's traditional attire. Moreover, it is an important platform for discussing and resolving conflicts between traditional and modern practices.

The Mechesil Balau has been central in lobbying for legislative and policy reforms on issues important to women and girls. The group has successfully advocated for twenty-five national laws, three constitutional amendments, and one traditional law on culture, health, education, and the environment. Among the laws that Mechesil Balau has championed is the Family Protection Act (FPA), Palau’s domestic violence legislation.

Gender violence: The Belau Family Health and Safety Study (2014) is to-date the only national survey on gender-based violence. The survey found that 23% of women reported having been victims of gender-based violence by a current or former intimate partner in their lifetime. It is important to note, however, that the survey considered GBV from a gendered perspective in which women are victims and men are perpetrators. No data were collected on men as victims.

To fill data gaps and take a gender-neutral perspective, the Ministry of Justice has proposed new gender-disaggregated indicators for VNR-24 that use court data together with emergency room and behavioral health statistics for GBV-related offenses. Pre-COVID, service utilization was low. Since COVID, numbers have increased, with men and women seeking services at nearly equal rates. Although there is no evaluation data available, it is probable that the increasing numbers represent some combination of COVID-driven increases in GBV combined with increased awareness of available services.



Post-COVID, MHHS launched new counseling and education services in partnership with civil society as part of the ADB-supported “COVID-19 Response for Affected Poor and Vulnerable Groups” project. One component of the project is BANGO's social marketing campaign, “No Silence on Violence”. The initiative aims to raise awareness about gender-based violence, promote accessible victim support services, and foster positive behavior change by challenging harmful social norms.



OUR CHALLENGES

While Palau's gender equality status is comparatively advanced relative to many countries, there remain challenges to fully realizing SDG 5. Although generally gender responsive, some inequalities do exist under the law, while women carry a disproportionate burden of caregiving that impinges on their full realization of their rights. While caregiving needs to be more equitably shared, there also need to be more services that support both women and men in caregiving roles, including maternity and paternity benefits, affordable childcare, and compensation for women and men who forego paid employment to care for their elderly, sick, or disabled loved ones.

Additionally, deliberate efforts to reshape societal perspectives on women's roles in democratic governance are likely to encourage more women to seek public office and increase electoral success rates.

Social norms around gender-based violence also warrant continuing attention. Concurrently, the recent National Information Technology Policy identifies the need for stronger protections for women and children in the digital space.

PATHWAYS TO 2030

The Palau Development Plan, 2023-2027, recognizes women's and men's essential roles across the development spectrum but does not include gender as one of the sixteen action areas. A Gender Equality Country Plan (2023-2027) has been developed by Australian aid in partnership with the Gender Division of the Bureau of Domestic Affairs (Ministry of State). Although the plan primarily guides Australian funding, it broadly reflects three priorities for action - women's leadership, women's rights, and partnerships for gender equity. With continuing support from Australia, the Pacific Community, and other partners, the plan proposes to,

- (1) Provide training, networking, and mentoring for aspiring women leaders to give them the skills, confidence, and support needed to participate in electoral processes
- (2) Further support implementation of the Family Protection Act
- (3) Expand opportunities for women entrepreneurs and women in business
- (4) Develop policies and legislation to increase protection for women and children in the digital space
- (5) Strengthen gender mainstreaming through revision of the national gender mainstreaming policy.

Preparations for Beijing+30 will provide opportunities for further dialogue about these and other priorities for 2030 and beyond.



SDGs In Action

GENDER IN PALAUAN TRADITION

The concept of balance is central to Palau’s culture and is reflected both spatially and cognitively within the dualistic system that comprises the sociopolitical structure of Palau. This idea of balance creates a chiefly system that is not static and although there is a hierarchal structure, ranking can often be altered or changed. Consequently, rank and mobility whether upward or downward can be fluid and occurs from the individual level to pan-Palau level. Because of this sociopolitical equilibrium, there is a sense of confidence, security, and power for the individual Palauan as one maintains identity and belonging to a specific place. This understanding of balance remains important in Palau’s contemporary space.

A male chief has a female chief who is his counterpart and therefore brings balance to the traditional governance system. This shared leadership responsibility lies at the core of gender relationships. Women and men’s roles in society are differently defined however balanced. Balance acknowledges the partnership between women and men and the important contributions each makes in society.

Gender remains an organizing principle in contemporary Palauan society. Traditionally, the male domain includes the marine realm and related responsibilities – fishing within the reef as well as deep sea fishing; providing *odoim* (protein food stuff); construction of canoe including “heavier” work such as building construction, building and maintenance of road projects and docks. Women’s domain remains on land with primary responsibilities as cultivators of the land (agriculture), providing *ongraol* (starch).

Nero best expresses this relationship in the following way – “Relations between men and women {can} best be characterized in terms of complementary interdependence. The production of both men and women was equally valued and necessary to the smooth operation of the complex patterns of affinal exchange channeled primarily through siblings and their respective spouses” (Nero, 1990, p. 67).

A Palauan proverb helps to clarify this relationship – “A redil a desemelel a sechal”. This proverb relates to the canoe metaphor with the canoe needing the outrigger so that it does not tip. A woman is the outrigger for man and therefore provides stability to the relationship. A woman chief is a counterpart of a male chief – a male chief is never without his counterpart and as such both discuss all matters relating to clan and external of clan.

Submitted by Dr. Klouldil Singeo





SDG 16: BUDECH, LLEMALT ME A MESISIICH EL CHELECHAD (PEACE, JUSTICE, & STRONG INSTITUTIONS)

“Ng ko er a Beriber me a Emaredong.” Like Beriber and Emaredong, both from a village in Airai, they lived next to one another, separated only by a rock. One had an abundance of food, while the other starved. When they learned of each other, they began to share and cooperate, so both prospered. This proverb highlights the importance that Palauans place on cooperation and interdependence.

SDG 16 AND PALAU LAW

Palau is a free and democratic society with basic human rights enshrined in the Constitution and the National (legal) Code which also addresses:

- In Title 17, the criminal code, violence (SDG 16.1), corruption (SDG 16.5), and human trafficking (SDG 16.2),
- In Title 21, family violence and violence against children (SDGs 16.2 and 16.3),
- In Title 1, the public’s right to information from government sources - Open Government Act) (SDG 16.10), and
- In Title 34, registration of births and deaths (SDG 16.9).

Specific to SDG 16, one legal gap that the Ministry of Justice has identified is the need for an independent human rights institution aligned with the Paris Principles (SDG 16.a). However, the Office of the Special Prosecutor has a broad mandate that can enable that office to investigate human rights violations pending development of a more formalized system as agreed to during Palau’s Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights in 2021.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

16.1: Reduce violence & related death	Maintain Progress
16.2: Stop human trafficking	Accelerate Progress
16.3: Achieve justice for all	Not Assessed (targets not set)
16.5: Eliminate corruption and bribery	Not Assessed (targets not set)
16.6: Effective institutions	Maintain Progress
16.7: Promote inclusive decision-making	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
16.9: All persons have a legal identity	Maintain Progress
16.10: Ensure the public’s access to information	Maintain Progress
16.d: Establish an independent human rights institution (new Palau-specific target).	Reverse Trends



Legal Institutions

Judiciary: Palau has an independent Judiciary committed to preserving and enhancing the rule of law by providing a just, efficient, and accessible mechanism for resolving conflicts (*Palau Judiciary, 2024*).

Ministry of Justice: The MOJ provides legal services to the Government and its agencies and political subdivisions, promotes and protects the safety and peace of the public, and enforces the law. The Bureau of Public Safety and the Office of the Attorney General are part of MOJ.

Anti-Human Trafficking Unit: The AHTU is a part of the Ministry of Justice and is responsible for preventing human trafficking and enforcing laws on trafficking.

Special prosecutor: An independent Special Prosecutor has broad latitude to investigate and prosecute violations of the Constitution or law and to serve as the prosecutor for the national government when the Ministry of Justice or the Attorney General is unable to act because of a conflict of interest or other ethical considerations (*OSP, 2022*).

Financial Institutions Commission: The FIC supervises banking and is responsible for protecting the interests of consumers, preventing systemic risks in the financial system, and protecting Palau's reputation in the international financial community.

OUR PROGRESS

Family Violence

SDGs 16.1 and 16.2

Under the leadership of the MHHS, now the focal point for family violence, actions taken

since 2019, include updating the referral pathway and re-establishing the Victims of Crime Assistance (VOCA) Program within the Ministry. To carry out its responsibilities to prevent and respond to family violence, MHHS works closely with many partners. Within government, work is coordinated through a multi-sector Family Protection Advisory Group, while new partnerships with civil society include Semesemel a Klengelakel (SKO), specializing in victims' services, and BANGO, specializing in social marketing and community education. (See also SDG 5).

Violence against children: To address violence, neglect, and exploitation of children, the Government, with support from UNICEF, has critically assessed the child protection system and has begun to strengthen both prevention and response. In April 2024, stakeholders drafted an updated plan of action for ending violence against children. Child protection is closely aligned with family protection and the Palau National Youth Policy (2023), designates "Justice, Protection, and Social Inclusion" as one of five priority action areas.

Human Trafficking

SDG 16.2

Palau has taken aggressive measures to address human trafficking. It has been upgraded from the U.S. State Department Tier 2 Watch List to Tier 2, progress actively supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Palau's Anti-People Smuggling and Human Trafficking Act was enacted in 2005 (*PNC 17.21*). In 2019, Palau ratified the United Nations Trafficking in Persons Protocol and the United Nations Convention on Transnational Crime and its optional protocol. Subsequently,



Palau's law was strengthened in 2023 (*RPPL 11-28*). Significant changes include: (i) upon conviction of trafficking, the defendant faces both imprisonment and a fine; (ii) persons who are smuggled, trafficked, or exploited are immune from prosecution; (iii) the consent of the person trafficked does not constitute a defense; (iv) penalties are significantly increased for aggravated trafficking of children, with this offense now incurring a fine of US\$375,000 and imprisonment of 10-50 years.

Palau established the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit within the Ministry of Justice in 2018. In 2022, a multi-agency Anti-Human Trafficking Working Group was formed to strengthen domestic responses, including (i) information sharing, (ii) punishment of illegal practices, (iii) protection and assistance for victims, such as shelter options, interpretation services, medical and psychological care, and other rehabilitation support, and (iv) public education and awareness. Palau has also created an Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan focused on the "4P" approach - prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership. As part of awareness efforts, the month of February is designated as National Anti-Human Trafficking Month (*Presidential Proclamation 23-339*).

Corruption and bribery

SDG 16.5

Palau is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. Accordingly, Palau has endorsed a "zero tolerance" principle concerning fraud and corruption, which it views as a driver of poverty, environmental degradation, and bad governance (*Ministry of Finance, 2017*). The law and public service regulations prohibit government employees from using government time, equipment, facilities, assets, or property for political or other activities that serve no official purpose. Also prohibited are actions that represent an actual or perceived conflict of interest.

Palau participated in a review of its performance under the UN Convention on Corruption in 2022. Positive findings include Palau's open public records law, a user-friendly online platform for anonymous reporting, an incentive program for public officials, an independent press, and an independent Office of the Special Prosecutor with broad latitude to investigate and prosecute corruption. The review also identified areas for improvement, including the need for a national anti-corruption strategy, re-establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman, and improved legal frameworks for procurement and public administration transparency.

Since the review, work has begun under the leadership of the Attorney General to prepare a National Anti-Corruption Strategy, with efforts also underway to engage the private sector. The Palau Media Council has participated in training provided by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to strengthen reporting on corruption. UNODC is also partnering with the Palau Chamber of Commerce to integrate anti-corruption training into the Chamber's programs.

Stronger Leadership Voice for Youth

What was formerly the Palau National Youth Council has been reorganized as the National Youth and Cheldebechel Council. The council comprises a seven-member board elected by youth to represent their states. While partially funded by the national government, it is administratively independent and supported by a full-time secretariat. The purpose behind this restructuring is to amplify the voice of youth while enabling their holistic development to reach their full potential.



As part of anti-corruption measures, the MOJ has established an Office of Professional Conduct to oversee the training and certification of law enforcement officers and address police misconduct. In 2023, MOJ started random drug testing to ensure that law enforcement officers respect the laws they enforce.

As a Pacific Islands Forum member, Palau actively supports the Teieniwa Vision, a regional anti-corruption framework adopted in 2021.

Inclusive Leadership **SDG 16.7**

SDG 16.7 targets women and young people in leadership positions. While women in leadership are addressed under SDG 5, a new national indicator has been introduced for SDG 16.7, focusing specifically on young people as elected members of the national congress. Until now, data on youth (defined as persons under 45 years of age) representation in leadership roles has not been systematically compiled. A 2023 analysis found only 19% of seats in the Congress (OEK) for the 2021-2024 election cycle to be held by persons under the age of 45, a clear indication of under-representation, which is in part cultural. Age is revered in Palau, and young people are discouraged from speaking in the presence of their elders.

To encourage young people to become active in political leadership, the Ministry of State conducts training on the electoral process for youth, both men and women. The purpose is to ensure they have the information needed to participate fully as voters and potential candidates. As a result of these trainings, several young people have been empowered to seek political office.

OUR CHALLENGES

Drug importation is one of Palau's greatest law enforcement challenges. To help combat this, human trafficking, cybercrime, and terrorism, Palau joined INTERPOL in 2023, invested in a new integrated customs information management system (ASYCUDA), has entered into a new agreement with the U.S. Coast Guard to help police Palau's EEZ, and established a Protected Area Network Ranger Academy.

PATHWAYS TO 2030

The Justice and Public Safety chapter of the Palau Development Plan outlines planned activities to strengthen public and fire safety while continuing to address issues central to SDG 16 - namely gender-based violence, violence against children, juvenile justice, and trafficking in persons and illicit substances. Specific measures will improve police staffing, management, technology integration, and overall efficiency and effectiveness of public safety. Significant initiatives include the opening of a new prison facility in 2015, renovating the old prison as "public safety central", and developing a regional maritime training center within the Division of Marine Law Enforcement.



The Rubekul Belau (Council of Chiefs) at the first Traditional Leaders Forum, 2023.



SDGs In Action



RUBEKUL BELAU: TRADITIONAL LEADERS FOR A RESILIENT PALAU

16



The Rubekul Belau (Council of Chiefs) comprises the 16 paramount chiefs from each state mandated under the Constitution to advise the President on matters of custom and tradition. Given the social and economic challenges that Palau faced during COVID-19, the Rubekul Belau saw it as their duty to consider these problems from the perspective of tradition. They convened the first Palau-wide Traditional Leader’s Forum in June 2022. Themed “Resilient Palau”, this two-day forum addressed resilience and the role of chiefs in building resilience.

In 2023, the Rubekul Belau visited seven states to confer further with the *Klobak* (council of chiefs within a state) on the theme of resilience. Following most consultations, a “State Declaration” was prepared that summarized discussions. Common themes from the declarations will be discussed in greater depth at the Second Traditional Leaders Forum to be held in July 2024 under the theme “Honor, Respect, and Preserve Our Basic Traditional Values.” Four overarching agenda items are proposed.

- 1. Appointing chiefs and resolving disputes:** The forum will seek to clarify, solidify, and strengthen the process for appointing chiefs so that disputes, when they occur, are resolved respectfully and fairly without recourse to the lengthy, expensive, and divisive proceedings in the judicial system.
- 2. Ensuring no one is left behind:** Palauan culture and traditions ensure that no one is left behind, but in this era of rising costs, families struggle to meet basic needs. Accordingly, the *Klobak* must strengthen their traditional roles in addressing the needs of their people, and the *cheldebechel* (traditional men’s and women’s organizations) must also reinforce their roles in performing their community and civic duties.
- 3. Youth:** Young people must be educated in the roles of the *Klobak* and the customary way of life of Palauans, including the use of the Palauan language. They must be taught to resolve conflicts, settle disputes, and instill forgiveness, respect, and remedies. For youth who commit transgressions, *Klobak* must establish disciplinary mechanisms so that the records of offenders will not be tarnished and their future opportunities will not be limited.
- 4. Environment:** The Palauan way of life depends on the ocean and land resources that sustain us. Accordingly, communities must reduce their dependence on fossil fuels and strengthen the use of the *bul*. The preservation of the Palau National Marine Sanctuary requires harmonizing Palauan traditional ecological knowledge systems with contemporary scientific methods.



Submitted by Mary Ann Delemel,
Executive Director, Council of Chiefs



PILLAR 3

GROWING OUR
ECONOMY AND
LEAVING NO
ONE BEHIND



PAGE 48

Photo credit:
Palau Visitor's Authority



PILLAR 3



GROWING OUR ECONOMY WHILE LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

At independence in 1994, Palau was classified as a low-income country but, in a relatively short 24-year period, catapulted to high-income status through the hard work of building modern infrastructure and governance systems while capitalizing on key assets – strong cultural and natural heritage, strategic geographic position, educated workforce, and historically close ties to the United States and Asian neighbors.

As occurred worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic decimated tourism, disrupted trade, and ushered in higher prices, wiping out nearly a decade of economic growth. Palau, however, was resilient. The government had fiscal reserves, strong governance, and strategic regional and global partnerships, allowing it to sustain essential services while expanding social protection.

Turning to the land and sea for sustenance and kinship systems for social support, the Palauan people also drew on their cultural and natural heritage to overcome personal hardships during this period.

Post-COVID, economic recovery is underway, and prospects for future growth are favorable. As a nation, Palau is committed to learning from the COVID experience to “build back better”. Pillar 3 priorities, as set out in the Palau Development Plan 2023-2027, are:

- Diversified economic growth that focuses on small business and collective benefits and is aligned with core Palauan values,
- Increased and higher paying jobs.
- Increased government revenues.
- Reformed State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), civil service pension fund, social security, and State Government finances.
- Increased private investment.
- New land and labor policies that promote sustained growth,
- Commitment to balanced rural and urban growth and leaving no one behind.

Pillar 3 is further supported by the National Youth Policy adopted in 2023, which has education and employment as its #2 priority, the #1 being health. The Pillar is also supported by a National Labor Policy and an updated Sustainable Tourism Framework, both to be completed in 2024.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

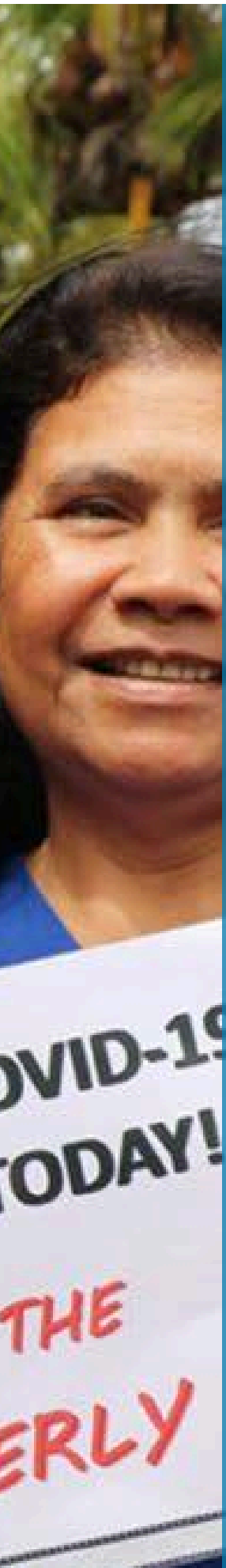


10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



11 MOETETERAU A
ALENGAR ER NGU EL
BEJUAL ME A BELJ A
BELENGCHOKI





SDGs In Action

WEATHERING THE PANDEMIC WITH HELP FROM OUR PARTNERS

Closing borders: In March 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Like all Pacific island nations, Palau responded by shuttering its borders. Thereafter, only a small number of pre-approved travelers were allowed entry after fulfilling rigorous COVID countermeasures. These measures allowed Palau to delay the introduction of COVID-19 for many months, giving the health system time to obtain supplies and vaccines and prepare to manage cases.

Health System Readiness: Palau received COVID-19 vaccines from the US CDC in January 2021 and, by mid-year, had vaccinated 100% of adults. Borders began to reopen to vaccinated travelers with negative pre-arrival COVID tests.

Economic Impacts: Shielded from the health impacts of COVID until early 2022, when the first widespread community transmission occurred, the economy was nonetheless seriously impacted. GDP contracted by 8.7% in FY2020 and 17.6% in FY2021, impacts borne almost exclusively by the private sector. By March 2021, 779 jobs had been lost, about 7.0% of the FY2019 labor force, all in the private sector.

Government responses: The government responded to COVID with the Coronavirus Relief One-Stop Shop (CROSS) Act that provided: (i) unemployment compensation, (ii) temporary public service employment, (ii) lifeline utility subsidies for low-income households, and (iii) direct assistance to impacted businesses. Citizens who lost jobs or income due to COVID-19 could also qualify for unemployment benefits under U.S. pandemic relief programs. (Note that eligible workers could choose either Palau or U.S. benefits but not both). Without mitigation, average household incomes had been projected to drop by 11.0%. With mitigation, average household income rose by 2.0% over FY2019 - a major policy success.

The government’s responses were supported by development partners who provided technical, financial, and in-kind support. Supporting partners included the United States, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Japan, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations system, and many others.

Source: Graduate School USA (2020). Where Do We Go from Here? Updating the Economic Impact of COVID-19 and Strategies for Mitigation in the Republic of Palau. Honolulu: EconMAP Technical Notes.





SDG 8: UNGIL EL OMENGEREKER ME A OKERULEL A KERRUUL (DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH)



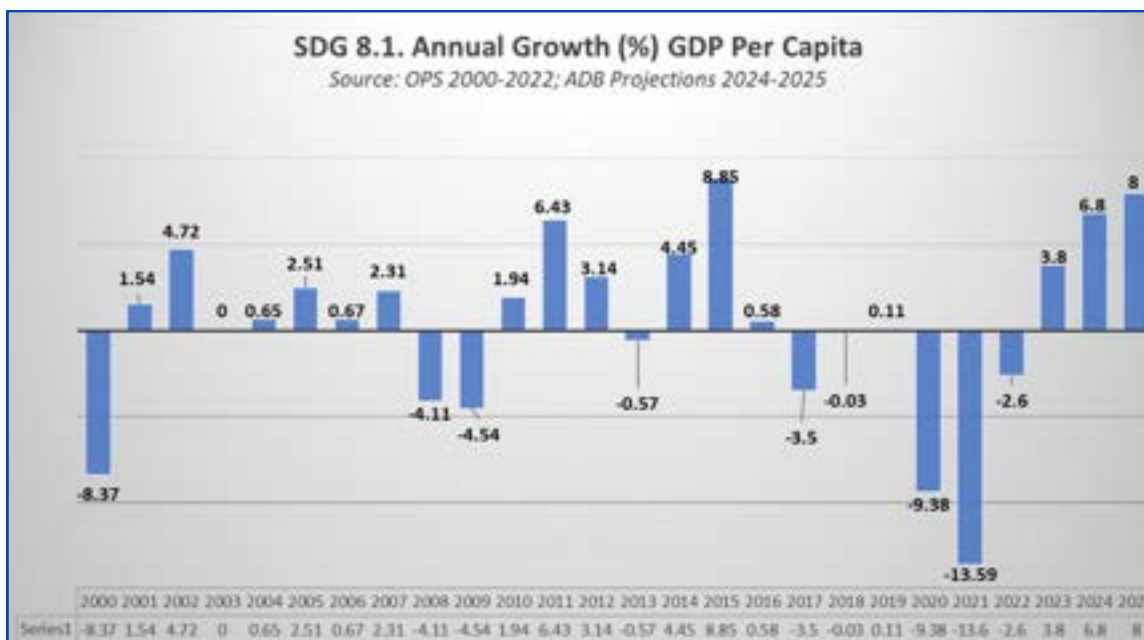
The COVID-19 pandemic significantly set back Palau's economic growth trajectory. Nevertheless, pro-growth policies, including modernizing the tax system and extension of the Compact of Free Association with the United States on more favorable terms for Palau, provide optimism for the resumption of growth over the 2024-2030 period.

When VNR-2019 was prepared, Palau was a high-income country on track to achieve all SDG 8 targets. COVID-19 set economic growth back by nearly a decade. Post-COVID, inflation, outmigration by Palauans, and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change are further challenges. Nevertheless, pro-growth policies "building back better" predict recovery and resumed growth for the 2024-2030 period. Palau integrates 11 of the 12 SDG 8 targets into its SDG framework.

OUR PROGRESS

Economic Growth (SDGs 8.1, 8.2, 8.9)

With tourism the dominant economic force contributing over 20% of GDP, the collapse of the tourism industry during COVID-19 caused GDP per capita to revert to 2014 levels and the World Bank to reclassify Palau from high-income to upper middle-income status. Growth subsequently resumed in 2023, and projections for 2024 onward are favorable (Target 8.1 accelerate progress).



Policy Reforms (SDG 8.3)

While the pandemic precipitated an unprecedented economic crisis, with support from international partners, Palau maintained economic and financial stability while avoiding severe deterioration in the well-being of the people.

Post-COVID, the government is “building back better” through increased emphasis on the private sector, including entrepreneurs and small businesses, sustainable high-value tourism, the introduction of digital residency, and improving Palau’s climate for doing business.

“Palau’s digital residency program has over 18,000 residents and since starting the program in 2022, we have raised \$3 million.”

H.E. Surangel Whipps, Jr.
2024 SORA

Over the long term, the government intends to further capitalize on digital development by harnessing emerging opportunities in the international finance sector, a merger of SDGs 8 and 9. Further investment in agriculture and aquaculture (SDG 2) will enhance food security, improve health, and create new entrepreneurial opportunities. The government has also modernized the tax system while expanding social protections for low-income workers and persons primarily involved in *makit* (market) activities (value-added agriculture, fisheries, and crafts). This sharply increased government revenues, allowing for a return to a balanced budget while enhancing social protections (SDGs 1 and 11).

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

8.1: Per capita economic growth	Accelerate Progress
8.2: Economic productivity & innovation	Accelerate Progress
8.3: Formalization of small and medium enterprises	Maintain Progress
8.4: Material resource efficiency	Accelerate Progress
8.5: Full employment & decent work	Maintain Progress
8.6: Youth NEET	Reverse Trends
8.7: Child & forced labour	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
8.8: Labour rights & safe working environment	Accelerate Progress
8.9: Sustainable tourism	Reverse Trends
8.10: Access to financial services	Accelerate Progress
8.b: Strategy for youth employment	Maintain Progress

Palau’s future National Employment Policy (2024) will be aligned with ILO Convention 122 which aims “there is work for all who are available and seeking to work and such work is as productive as possible”.



Full, Productive, and Decent Work (SDGs 8.5 and 8.6)

Although overall labor force participation rates have increased modestly and unemployment levels have declined from already low levels, labor force participation by ethnic Palauans has declined (modestly) since 2015 for both men and women while the number of youth (16-24 years of age) not in employment, education or training has increased. (Target 8.6 regression). Accordingly, the National Youth Policy of 2023 gives high priority to training and employment for youth (SDG 8.b. acceleration).

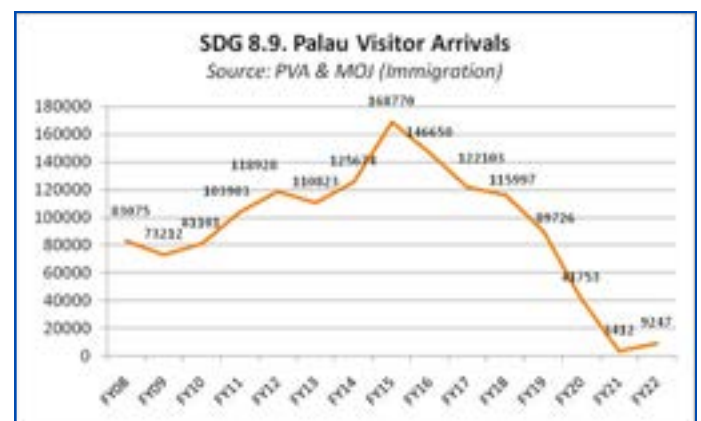
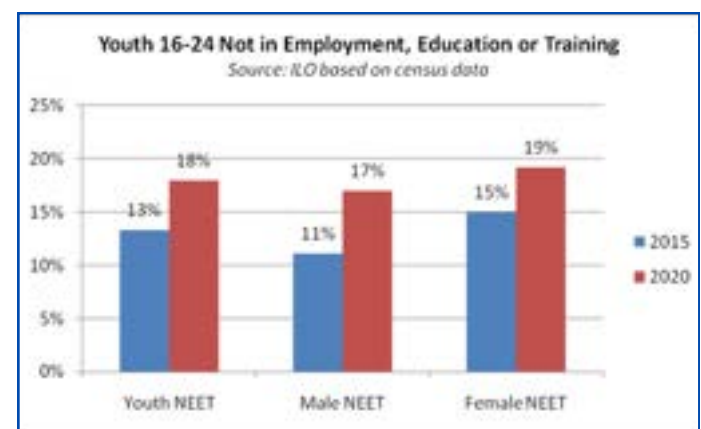
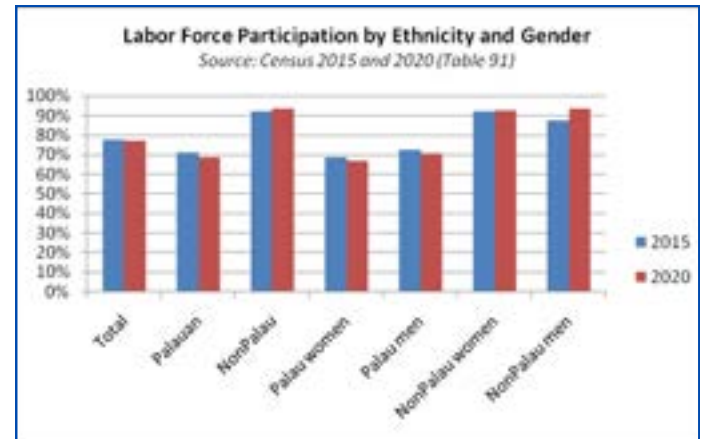
Protect Labor Rights and Ensure Safe and Secure Work for All (SDG 8.7 and 8.8)

Since 2019, Palau has (i) strengthened legislation and enforcement concerning human trafficking, (ii) ratified two ILO Conventions - No. 182 on child labor and the Maritime Labor Convention, and (iii) implemented administrative measures to make it easier for Palauans to find work and employers to hire Palauans. These measures and more will be further refined as part of the National Employment Policy to be completed in 2024. Still, the shortage of labor, especially Palauan labor, due to out-migration is a constraint to “building back better”.

Sustainable Tourism (SDG 8.9.)

Tourism did not “take off” in Palau until the 1980's. Subsequently, it has developed as Palau's leading economic sector, building almost exclusively on Palau's natural marine heritage. To ensure long-term cultural and environmental sustainability, the MHRCTD is updating the National Tourism Framework.

Since the dawn of the tourism industry, Palauans have struggled to balance economic benefits against cultural and environmental tradeoffs.





The first Sustainable Tourism Policy (1997) envisaged a network of widely dispersed small resorts facilitating authentic exchanges between Palauans and visitors with high levels of Palauan ownership and participation. Marketing was to be selective and aim to attract mature travelers willing to pay well for a unique experience (*Ecoplanet, 1997*). In many ways, the 1997 vision remains the ideal but has been tempered over time by the practical realities of implementation.

Rejecting mass tourism: From 2014-2015, Palau experienced a surge in visitors from the Chinese tourism market. Visitor arrivals increased rapidly, reaching a high of 160,000 in 2015 as the industry shifted towards a mass tourism approach. The outcomes raised concerns, such as crowding and environmental stress at popular tourist sites, social challenges as Palauans faced increased competition from international business owners and employees, a shift away from traditional high-value tourism markets, and limited retained earnings within the local economy, indicating that the rapid growth brought significant challenges and restricted benefits for the nation.

Pristine Paradise Palau: Reaffirming commitment to sustainable tourism, Palau developed the Palau Responsible Tourism Policy Framework 2017 - 2021 under the marketing banner “Pristine Paradise Palau” and, in 2018, passed the Responsible Tourism Education Act (RPPL 10-30) that provided legislative authority for the “Palau Pledge”, mandated use of reusable water and meal containers by tour operators, and outlawed “reef-toxic” sunscreens. These measures helped to partially restore balance to the industry. Still, non-marine tourism is in its infancy, with significant untapped potential for further cultural and sports tourism development and the entrepreneurial opportunities accompanying these markets.

‘Tourism arrivals are increasing, and it is very challenging to find Palauan employees – they just are not available. This places very stringent limitations on my ability to even begin to accept more customers because we don’t have the labor force available. And what is resulting of course is hiring foreign labor ...the majority of our guests don’t want to see foreign labor. They want to see Palauans involved in the industry.’

Palau Tour Operator



The Belau Omal Marathon (2023) brought over 600 runners to Palau demonstrating the potential of sports tourism.



In other developments that “build back better,” the MHRCTD promotes tour operation certifications for Palau citizens and encourages the development of more diverse tourism products, collaborating closely with state governments and the private sector. These new tourism offerings include sports tourism, land-based activities such as hiking, and products that showcase Palau's intangible cultural heritage, such as the Airai State Cultural Tour and similar programs in Ngchesar, Melekeok, Ngijwal, Aimeliik, Ngaraard, and Ngarchelong. These initiatives offer unique experiences that appeal to many of today's adventure-seeking travelers.

CHALLENGES

Besides the shortage of Palauan labor, a second major challenge is the industry's carbon footprint. The use of fossil fuels in the tourism sector results in significant emissions in the transport sector (SDGs 7, 9, 13). In addition, the importation of food and beverages results in additional carbon emissions and takes money out of the local economy (SDGs 2, 13).

To enhance sustainability, Palau is implementing initiatives to neutralize tourism's carbon footprint (SDG 13), improve the livelihoods of local food producers, increase local food security (SDG 2), and conserve coastal ecosystems and forests that act as carbon sinks (SDG 14 and 15). These efforts are crucial for addressing Palau's vulnerability to climate change, as rising sea levels and intensified tropical cyclones threaten both infrastructure and natural resources.

PATHWAYS TO 2030

SDG 8 lies at the heart of Palau's pathway to 2030 and beyond. Actions that enhance environmental sustainability, cultural congruence, and climate resilience in the economic sector significantly drive the 2030 Agenda in Palau. While devastating, COVID-19 provided an opportunity for reflection and redirection—“building back better.”



Palau seeks to become the world's first “carbon neutral” tourism destination, simultaneously addressing SDGs 2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15. (Photo credit: inhabitat.com)



Palau seeks to increase local food production by working with businesses, the community, the government, and partners, in accordance with SDGs 2, 8, 12, 14, 15, and 17. (Photo credit: Palau Resource Institute)



SDGs In Action

INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT, ENTREPRENEURS, SMALL BUSINESS

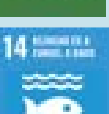
With over 2,000 micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), Palau is a “hotbed” for business development. MSMEs include small producers who sell directly to consumers, micro-businesses, cooperatives, independent consultants, and traditional “brick and mortar” operations that, in some cases, have become big businesses, at least in the Palau context. Ask most Palau business people how their business started. It is invariably a story of “micro” beginnings coupled with perseverance.

MSME products include local foods, handicrafts, artwork, artistic performances, and guided tours, to name a few. Some of these business people are full-time, but many are part-time, supplementing salaries earned in “day jobs” or from social security. Increasingly, the government recognizes the collective importance of this often-overlooked segment of the economy. Tax reforms in 2023 provide incentives for MSMEs to register and be counted which means for future VNRs, there will be hard data to assess the contribution of this sub-sector to the economy.

Some MSMEs are members of and receive technical support from the Chamber of Commerce. Others benefit from training, counseling, and services provided by the Palau Small Business Development Center. The Palau Entrepreneurs for Growth (PEFG), an NGO established in 2022, also provides support. PEFG advocates for an “entrepreneurial lifestyle” that goes beyond making money but takes a holistic approach that considers cultural values, healthy living, environmental protection, and a thriving economy. At the heart of the PEFG approach is the spirit of *klechibelau* or “coopetition” - cooperation + competition that creates win-win solutions for all.

Many entrepreneurs are involved in fisheries or agriculture. The Bureau of Agriculture, working with the Asian Development Bank, encourages community women’s organizations to become more involved in collective farming, especially of taro, for which there is strong demand. Targeting rural women, the Bureau assists twenty women’s organizations with cash and technical support to develop their farms. The Bureau also provides a market for the produce at the taro processing plant located at the agriculture support center in Ngchesar. (See also SDG 2).

Speaking about the women’s taro initiative, Melekeok resident Faustina Rengulbai had this to say, *“This project has been a blessing. Not only do I have an additional income source, but it also allows me to contribute to my community by sharing excess taro with elders, the sick, and those who can no longer farm.”*





SDG 9: SIOBAI, BECHES EL ULDASU ME A UCHETEMEL A MEKLOU EL KLALOBUI (INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, INFRASTRUCTURE)

Since independence and with support of partners, Palau has invested heavily in sustainable, clean infrastructure, especially that which supports climate resilience and innovation. With increased access to modern information technology, Palau has embraced a climate and disaster resilient digital future largely unaffected by constraints imposed by geographic remoteness.

Infrastructure

Sustainable, climate and disaster-resilient infrastructure are crucial for Palau's development and, while supporting all the SDGs, is particularly relevant in the context of SDG 13.

Palau adopted a National Infrastructure Investment Program in 2021, updated in 2023 as part of the Palau Development Plan. Over the medium term, projects directly supporting post-COVID economic recovery are prioritized with sector-wide initiatives to improve project planning, address climate change, and improve operations and maintenance (*Palau Development Plan 2023-2026*).

Industrialization

Because of Palau's small size, limited resource base, and vulnerable ecosystems, industrialization is being pursued only in information technology and cultural industries. Cultural industries link across the five pillars of VNR-24: preserving culture, empowering people, growing the economy, and protecting the environment.

Palau includes five of the twelve SDG 9 targets in its National SDG Framework.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

9.1: Infrastructure development	Accelerate Progress
9.2: Sustainable and inclusive industrialization	Accelerate Progress
9.4: Sustainable and clean industries	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
9.a: Resilient infrastructure	Maintain Progress
9.c: Access to ICT & the Internet	Accelerate Progress

The Belau National Museum provides a marketplace for entrepreneurs to sell products reflecting Palau's tangible cultural heritage (crafts, food, art) and a venue for displaying Palau's intangible heritage (dance, music, and cultural knowledge). BNM also works to inspire and train the next generation of cultural entrepreneurs.



OUR PROGRESS

Sustainable, Resilient

Infrastructure (SDGs 9.1 and 9.a)

Several major infrastructure projects have been completed since VNR 2019, including:

- Palau Solar Farm at Ngatpang (energy sector, \$29 million, financed by the Government of Australia and public-private partnership)
- Fiber optic submarine cable (ICT sector, \$25 million, financed by the United States, Japan, Australia, ADB, Palau)
- Second fiber optic submarine cable (ICT sector, \$30 million, financed by the United States, Australia, Japan, and Palau)
- Airport terminal (Transport Sector, \$40 million, Japan and public-private partnerships)
- Solid waste landfill (solid waste sector, \$10 million, Japan and Palau)
- Road projects connecting new housing subdivisions in Babeldaob to the Compact Road (Transport Sector, \$3.4 million, Republic of China (Taiwan))
- Health facility improvements (health sector, \$7 million, multiple partners).

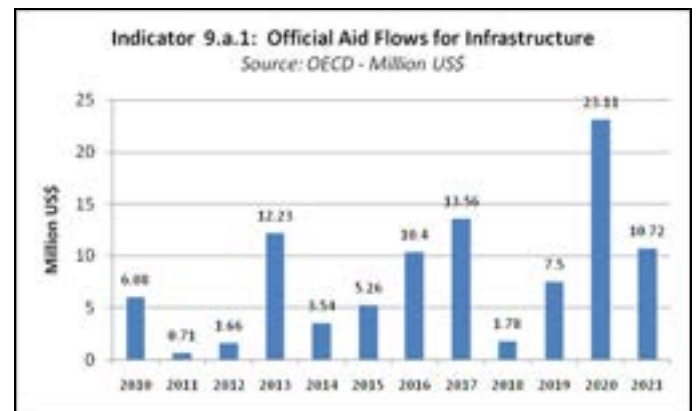
The Palau Development Plan identifies 74 new infrastructure projects valued at \$387.5 million for 2023-2027. Of these, 27 projects (\$87 million) are rated high priority and ready for implementation. Additional projects are planned but will not be completed within the PDP period.

Chief among these is a new climate-resilient national hospital to be constructed at an estimated cost of US\$120 million with funding from the newly renegotiated Compact of Free Association.

Challenges

Limited land resources and a complex land tenure system constrain infrastructure development. Financing is always going to be a constraint, but for the period 2010-2021, official development assistance for infrastructure has averaged US\$8 million per year, with a clear upward trend.

Palau actively seeks innovative project financing mechanisms and non-traditional donors. The number of public-private partnerships is increasing, as evidenced by financing for the airport terminal and the solar farm.



PATHWAYS TO 2030

The graph below shows infrastructure investments included in the PDP 2023-2027:





BUILDING BACK BETTER DIGITALLY

In 2017, Palau took a giant leap into the future with commissioning of its first submarine cable, delivering fast and (relatively) affordable internet services. At the cost of US\$25 million, co-funded by the governments of Australia, Japan, the United States, and ADB, the project has transformed life for many while creating innovative opportunities supporting sustainable development. With the first cable an overwhelming success, a second cable will open in 2024 to expand digital capacity and provide resilience through redundancy.

Digitally transforming health (SDG 3): The MHHS partnered with Australia on **Project Olangch**, an integrated digital ecosystem with three linked applications. **Tamanu** provides patient-centered digital tools for medical history, data capture, and clinical decision support. Aggregated health data is then captured for surveillance and reporting purposes using **Tupaia**. When patients present at the pharmacy, their medicines are managed in **mSupply**. Combined, these three systems improve efficiency, reduce waste and cost, improve reporting, and, most important, support better health outcomes.

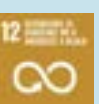
Project Okeuid and AliiPass (SDGs 2 & 8): In collaboration with Beyond Essential Systems and with funding from Australia Aid, the Bureau of Agriculture has created an online farmer dashboard that enables farmers to showcase their products and consumers to view online and directly contact farmers for purchase. Because most farmers operate on a cash basis and most buyers operate on a credit or bank transfer basis, the AliiPass app is being developed to bring farmers and buyers together with a “click”. Suppliers are paid in check or cash by a trusted intermediary, and buyers can immediately access their purchases.

ASYCUDAWorld Enhances Governance and Security (SDG 16): Palau’s Bureau of Customs and Border Protection launched digital customs clearance in 2024 using ASYCUDAWorld, a globally recognized platform. The system, funded by the European Union and UNCTAD, streamlines customs procedures, facilitates duty collection, increases government revenues, and eliminates fraud and corruption.

Building a Digital Economy (SDG 8): In 2022, Palau established a digital residency, allowing individuals worldwide to obtain a legal government-issued ID without being physically present. This is typically done to facilitate business operations, online services, or other digital transactions for global citizens. Less than two years into the program, Palau has 19,000 digital residents and has earned US\$300 million.

As highlighted in this VNR-24, digital transformation is not just a path but the future for Palau, driving sustainable development and global connectivity.

SDGs In Action





SDG 10: MENGESADEL A DIAKEL TA BESUL LOMERUUL (REDUCE INEQUALITY)

A chimad el dodersii a chimal a chad el odersii (a hand that you lend is a hand that is returned to you). This Palauan idiom underscores the importance Palauans place on cooperation and mutual support to ensure no one is left behind.

Leave no one behind (LNOB) is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Monitoring progress on this pledge is a critical component of Voluntary National Reviews. The primary tenant of LNOB is that access to basic services and opportunities should be universal regardless of household or individual characteristics or circumstances.

OUR PROGRESS

Palau incorporates five of the ten SDG 10 targets into its sustainable development framework, although progress toward the first two (SDG 10.1—income of the bottom 40% of income earners and SDG 10.2—households below 50% median income) cannot be assessed until 2023. HIES data become available in 2025. Analysis herein focuses on equality of opportunity (SDGs 10.4, 10.7, and 10.c).

EQUALITY UNDER THE LAW

The law: Article 4 of the Constitution guarantees fundamental rights to all. Section 5 of this article is most pertinent to SDG 10.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

10.1: Income growth of bottom 40% of income earners	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
10.2: Inclusion (social, economic & political)	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
10.4: Fiscal & social protection policies	Maintain Progress
10.7: Safe migration & mobility	Accelerate Progress
10.b: Resource flows for development	Maintain Progress

Article 4.5. Every person shall be equal under the law... The government shall take no action to discriminate against any person on the basis of sex, race, place of origin, language, religion or belief, social status, or clan affiliation except for the preferential treatment of citizens, for the protection of minors, elderly, indigent, physically or mentally handicapped, and other similar groups...

Palau Constitution

Palau has ratified two human rights treaties—the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1995) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2013)—as well as the U.N. Trafficking in Persons Protocol (2019), the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2019), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor.

These conventions are integrated into Palau’s domestic legislation, including the Child Abuse Act, the Family Protection Act (2012), the Disabled Persons Anti-Discrimination Act, the Handicapped Children’s Act (1989), and the Anti Smuggling and Trafficking Act (2005 and as revised in 2023).

NON-DISCRIMINATION AND INCLUSION

The Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Plan of Action (2018-2023) aims “to achieve gender equality so that women as well as men, girls as well as boys, can enjoy their fundamental human rights and have equal opportunities and responsibilities in all aspects of political, economic, social, and cultural development”. The policy is now being updated as Palau prepares for the U.N Meeting on Beijing+30 to be held in 2025. (Refer also SDG 5).

Palau National Disability Inclusive Policy (2017-2020) promotes inclusion, participation, and well-being of persons with disabilities across all sectors, focusing on creating supportive enabling environments. This policy is also being updated.

The National Policy on Care for the Aging (2023) strives to create an enabling environment that allows senior citizens to enjoy a high quality of life and continue to contribute to nation-building.

The Palau National Youth Policy (2023-2027) strives to meet the needs of youth and facilitate their contribution to the country’s social, cultural, economic, and sustainable growth. Five priority areas for action, as identified by youth, are health, education and employment, justice, social protection, and inclusion and participation (Refer to SDG 8).

Social protection: In support of these policies and the concept of LNOB, Palau is strengthening social protection as discussed under SDG 1.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Drawing from census data and with assistance from ESCAP, Palau incorporates into VNR-24 an assessment of equality of opportunity across ten indicators (see the following page). While there has been progress in achieving social inclusion, there remain inequalities in internet access (SDG 9), secondary and tertiary education (SDG 4), and youth not in employment, education, and training (SDGs 4 and 8).

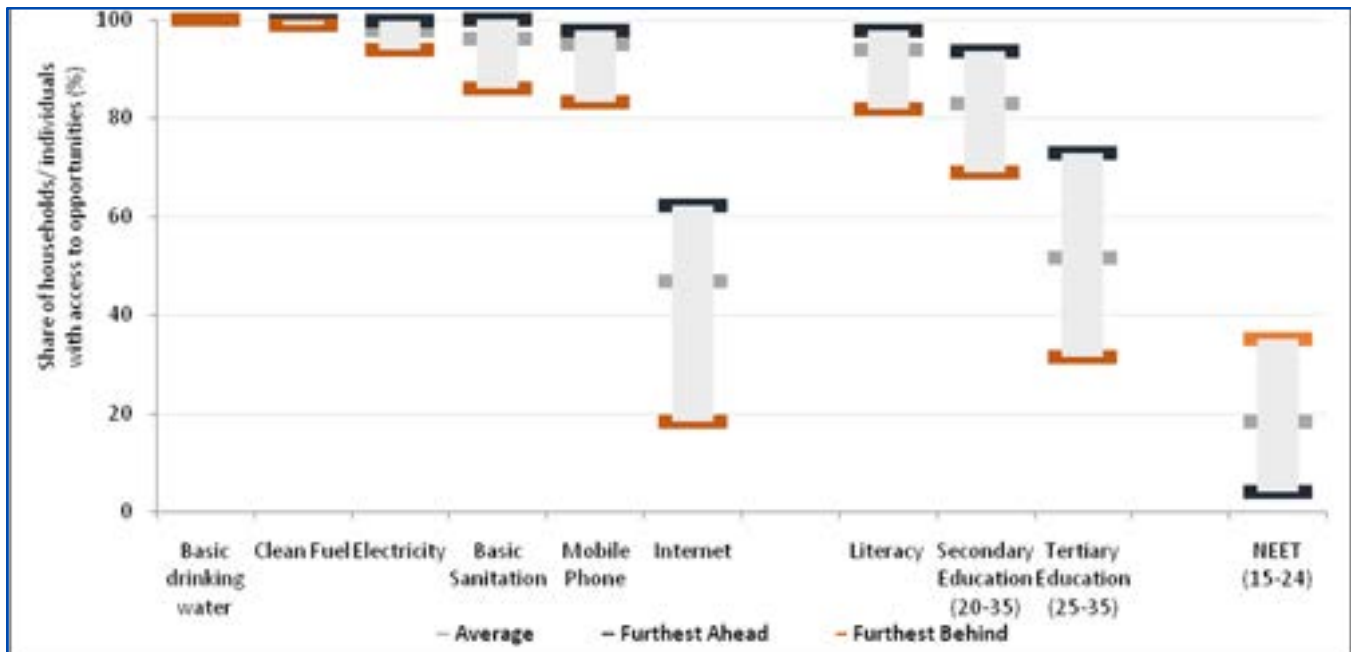
Further analysis considers individual and household characteristics associated with being left behind - household income, residential location, sex of the household head, ethnicity, language, migration status, highest level of education completed, and presence in the household of a person with severe disability.

Access to basic services: Education attainment consistently predicts access to basic services. Persons without primary education are most likely to lack access to services, while those further ahead have higher education and income, are more likely to live in Koror, and have no household member with a severe disability.



SDG 10.4 - Equality of Opportunity, 2020

Source: Palau Census, 2020, as analyzed by UN ESCAP



Literacy: 94% of adults are literate, and education is a strong predictor of literacy. Only 82% of persons living outside of Koror without a high school diploma are literate. Disability status, however, is the most significant predictor of illiteracy. Among persons with at least some disability, 69% are literate, while 97% of persons without disability are literate irrespective of income, residence, sex, and level of education.

Education: Men living in lower-income households outside of Koror are most likely to be left behind at both secondary and tertiary levels of education. Among young men (under age 25) living in rural and poor households, only 24% attend tertiary education compared to 73% of young women in higher-income households.

Youth (15-24) not in employment, education, training (NEET): Among youth 15-24, 18% are NEET. One-third of youth living in poorer households are NEET compared to 20% of those in higher income households.

In the 15-19 age group, younger women (5%) are less likely to be NEET than men (10%), but this reverses in the 20-24 age group, with women (27%) more likely to be NEET than men (14%). This may relate to women's traditional roles as caregivers for children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and persons with chronic health conditions.

Persons who identify as LGBTQIA+: Persons who identify as LGBTQIA+ are entitled to the same legal protections under the Constitution and law as other persons except for the right to marriage, which the Palau Constitution limits to being between a man and a woman. Same-sex relations are legal, and there is no legal restriction on discussing LGBTQIA+ issues. Although the non-discrimination provisions of the law apply to everyone, there is no explicit legal provision that protects LGBTQIA+ persons from discrimination in housing, employment, health care, or other matters.



Persons who identify as LGBTQIA+ are gradually gaining visibility and representation. Currently, there is a lack of comprehensive statistical data about the LGBTQIA+ population, including information on numbers, residence, education, income, and other social characteristics, which would support a thorough LNOB analysis. However, two NGOs have recently been established to support and advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community. By collaborating with these organizations, future VNRs will be better able to analyze the LNOB principle in relation to this community and ensure their inclusion in the sustainable development process.

Discussion: For vulnerable groups for which there are data, the group furthest behind is people with disabilities (PWD). PWD are less likely to be literate, complete primary education, participate in tertiary education, be employed, and live above the poverty line (*UNICEF, 2017 and ESCAP, 2024*).

Furthermore, the ESCAP analysis shows that not just persons with disabilities fall behind but members of their households as well. This points to the heavy burden in both time and money borne by household members in caregiving for PWD—a burden of care that is not adequately compensated for by the relatively small payments provided to persons with disabilities under Palau’s Severely Disabled Fund.

Addressing the needs of PWDs and their families will take more than incremental increases in payments under the fund. Structural causes for exclusion at all levels, starting with education, will need to be addressed. MOE’s post-COVID initiative to establish distance learning centers in rural schools that allow children with disabilities to live at home while attending secondary school is a significant advance. There will also be a need to promote inclusion at tertiary and vocational training levels and in mobility and employment opportunities.

In many forums, it is noted that men are frequently left behind in contemporary Palau. In education, men are less likely to excel academically than women, with the gap particularly evident at tertiary education levels. In health, young men are at higher risk due to injuries and self-harm, alcohol and tobacco consumption, and lifestyles (physical inactivity and dietary practices). Men, especially young men, are also far more likely to be in conflict with the law than women.

The National Gender Mainstreaming Policy implicitly recognizes these issues by taking a gender-responsive approach that addresses inequality that impacts both genders.

“Men have not done as well as women in this modern society - we are drowning. We need to change the education system to be active and yet still be a learning environment.”

Senator Dr. Steven Kuartei
3rd Men’s Health Conference, 2008

PATHWAYS TO 2030

Palau has exhibited a strong commitment to LNOB and has engaged in participatory processes to develop relevant population-specific policies that address the needs of key groups. These policies well address the pathway forward, but among vulnerable groups, the group furthest behind is persons with disabilities.



SDGs In Action

LNOB: FOCUS ON YOUTH (PALAU NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY)



Ke de meketek er a reneleked el mo klisichel a beluad
(Investing in our children for Palau)

Vision

All youth are healthy, happy, respected, safe, and empowered to contribute to the social, cultural, economic, and sustainable growth of the country.

Mission

Youth are supported and empowered with the knowledge, skills, opportunities, programs, and services to enable them to grow into independence, achieve their full potential, and contribute to happy, healthy, and sustainable communities and families.

Definition

For the purposes of the policy, “youth” is defined as persons 13-24 years of age. In 2023, an estimated 2,382 youth lived in Palau, 1,014 males and 924 females.

Government focal point

Ministry of Human Resources, Culture, Trade, & Development

Priorities

1. Health & healthy lifestyle (SDG 3)
2. Education, skills, employment (SDGs 4 and 8)
3. Justice, protection & social inclusion (SDGs 10 and 16)
4. Participation in politics, culture, arts, and environment (SDG 11)
5. Strengthening the enabling environment for youth (SDG 11)

Culture: A Cross-Cutting Theme

Culture is a cross-cutting theme across the policy. Linking SDGs 8, 9, and 10 and “recognizing the transformative power of technology, Palau’s youth are leveraging digital platforms to amplify their cultural preservation efforts. Social media, in particular, has become an invaluable tool for sharing Palauan stories, traditions, and cultural expressions with a wider audience. By harnessing the reach of the internet, Palau’s youth are ensuring that their cultural heritage remains vibrant and accessible to all.”

*Delaine Termeteet, Nalani Marquez,
Kyra Iskawa, Roger Santos & Ethan Alfonso
Reported in Island Times, 1 December 2023*



Photo credit:
Dirremeang Ngiraingasi



SDGs In Action

LNOB: FOCUS ON SENIOR CITIZENS

A remechuodel a otil belau, a Palauan proverb that translates as “elders are the source of tradition and values” reflecting the high social status and universal respect accorded to elders.

Overview

Senior citizens (persons 60+) comprise 16% of Palau’s population (2024), a proportion expected to increase to 27% by 2050. Women make up 53% of seniors, a proportion not expected to change significantly in the lead-up to 2050. Today’s seniors enjoy several social protections. The government pays their healthcare fund premiums, and all who previously worked in the formal economic sector (or whose spouses worked in the formal sector) are eligible for social security (minimum benefit, \$148 per month). Seniors previously employed in the civil service are also eligible for a civil service pension. Beginning in 2023, seniors earning less than \$15,000 annually and are *makit* (market) vendors may qualify for up to \$600 per year for social assistance.

Government Focal Point

Ministry of Health and Human Services

Social assistance programs

- Social programs are offered at the Koror Senior Citizens Center four days a week.
- Hot lunches are served at the center or delivered to home-bound seniors in Koror-Airai; the lunch program is being expanded nationwide.
- The MHHS Geriatric Health Unit provides home healthcare for home-bound seniors, and Belau Wellness, an NGO, provides social support services.
- Periodic commodity distribution to seniors with no income (229 persons, Census 2020).
- A step-down unit at Belau National Hospital for seniors without caregivers who need continuous care.

Challenges

While 100% of seniors receive at least one social protection benefit, many have pension incomes below the poverty line, and 8% (13% of senior women and 4% of senior men) have no income (*Census 2020*). A rapidly aging population and outmigration undermine the social security and pension fund. Outmigration also means that some seniors needing assistance do not have family support. Caregiving is expensive, whether provided by family members or by paid caregivers. Demand for services will increase significantly in the coming years.



Photo credit:
Belau National Museum



SDGs In Action

LNOB: PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



Overview

The 2020 census found that 2.4% of Palau’s population has a disability (significant difficulty or inability to perform activities in one of six domains - sight, hearing, mobility, memory, hygiene and self-care, and communications). Women over age 50 living in Babeldaob have the highest rates of disability. When compared to persons without disabilities, persons with disability are less likely to be literate, to graduate from high school, to be in the labor force, and more likely to live below the basic needs poverty line (UNICEF, 2017 and ESCAP, 2024).

Government focal point

Ministry of Health and Human Services

Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities or other special health needs receive specialized health services from birth. Between the ages of 3 and 21 (or high school graduation), children with disabilities are eligible for special education services, including assistive devices. Previously, children in rural states had to transfer to Koror to attend high school. However, in “building back better,” MOE has established e-learning centers in rural schools, giving children—both with and without disabilities—an online option for high school.

Programs

The government subsidizes health care fund premiums for persons with severe disabilities who are unable to work. Persons with disabilities (of any age) with no other income are eligible for payments from the Severely Disabled Fund of \$150-\$200 per month.

Challenges

Many persons with disabilities require specialized health care either unavailable in Palau or available only during visits by off-island specialists. To address this, MHHS is “building back better” with Telehealth.

While the Healthcare Fund assists with medical costs, persons with disabilities face high out-of-pocket costs for transport, assistive devices, supplies, and caregiving. In 2017, the MHHS reported the average out-of-pocket expenditure by families with children with disabilities to be \$700 per month per child, 250% of Palau’s 2014 Basic Needs Poverty Line. The average family also spent 40 or more hours per week caregiving, meaning one adult member (most often a woman) usually foregoes paid employment to provide caregiving, thus increasing that family’s vulnerability to poverty.



Villaney Remengesau, founder of OMEKESANG, Palau Disabled People’s Organization

SDG 11: MOTETEKAU A KLENGAR ER NGII EL BELUAL ME A BLILA DELENGCHOKL (SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES)

11



Palau has accommodated cultural change in the past; and this, in turn, has supported new investment. When implementing the overall national strategy, priority social, cultural, and environmental goals will also need to be accommodated, as will the impact on the political economy.

In SDG 9, the focus is on major infrastructure. SDG 11 focuses on community-scale infrastructure - housing, public transportation, cultural sites, green and blue spaces, and recreation facilities.

With 78% of the population concentrated in the Koror-Airai urban area, Palau is one of the most highly urbanized countries in the Pacific Region (*Census, 2020*). Despite repeated calls for de-urbanization – people to return to their home states – the proportion of urban-dwelling persons has remained virtually unchanged since independence.

While the global SDG 11 emphasizes urban communities, Palau’s VNR-24 considers the sustainability of both urban and rural communities. Palau has integrated eight of the ten SDG 11 targets into its sustainable development framework while expanding Target 8.7 to explicitly include access to sports facilities and programs in line with the National Sports Strategy adopted in April 2024.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

11.1: Access to decent housing & basic services	Maintain Progress
11.2: Access to public transport systems	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
11.4: Preserving cultural & natural heritage	Accelerate Progress
11.5: Reduce human & economic losses due to disaster	Accelerate Progress
11.6: Waste management	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
11.7: Access to urban green & public spaces	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
11.a: Urban planning	Accelerate Progress
11.b: Disaster risk management policies	Maintain Progress

OUR PROGRESS

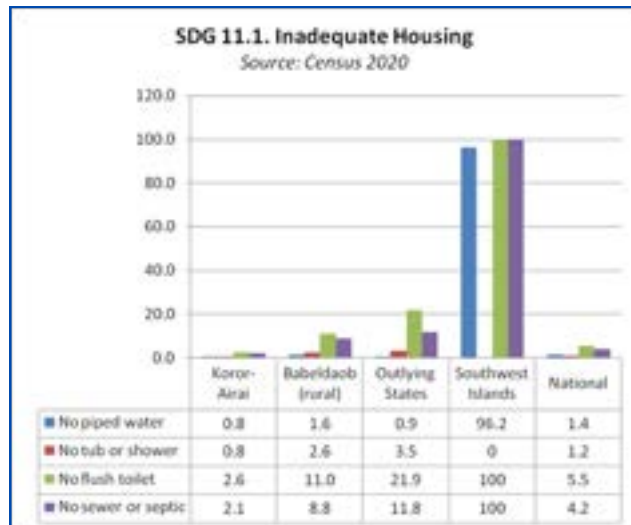
SDG 11.1 Safe and Affordable Housing

The global indicators for SDG 11.1 focus on inadequate urban housing defined as (i) no public water, (ii) no tub or shower, (iii) no flush toilet, and (iv) no sewer or septic connection. Palau, however, is concerned about adequate urban and rural housing. As the figure to the right shows, except for the remote Southwest Islands, only a small number of households have inadequate facilities per the United Nations definition (*Census 2020*).

While Palau is on track to achieve the indicators for SDG 11.1, housing remains a critical development issue essential to creating a livable, economically prosperous, and environmentally sustainable country. Accordingly, the Palau Development Plan has set the national goal for housing as “affordable housing for all residents by the year 2040”.

There are many challenges to achieving this goal, including high inflation in the construction industry due to the increasing cost of materials, an increase in real estate sales to foreign investors, land disputes, and return of land to its original owners, which in some cases displaces residents—sometimes long-term residents.

To address these complex issues, the government created a National Housing Commission (NHC) mandated to (i) make housing available at an affordable price, (ii) increase the supply of housing, (iii) coordinate development of green communities, (iv) revive abandoned villages, (v) establish new housing subdivisions, (vi) support development of multi-family housing as a short-term solution to the housing shortage, and (vii) prioritize the needs of displaced persons and first-time homeowners.



With support from the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Palau Housing Authority (PHA) and National Development Bank (NDBP) have been able to offer low-interest housing loans to Palau citizens. For persons earning less than US\$35,300 per annum, loans are available at concessional rates through the PHA. For those above this threshold, loans are available at somewhat higher rates through the NDBP.

Development of affordable housing requires planned housing development supported by basic infrastructure, including roads, water and sanitation, solid waste management, electricity, telecommunications, and transportation (SDG 9). The State Master Plans and associated land use plans are essential for housing development (SDGs 11.8 and 11.9). As one example, the Ngarchelong State Master Plan incorporates residential zones for single-family residents (2), multi-family residents (1), and a mixed-use zone (1). Some single-family dwellings are allowed in the agricultural zone, provided there is no interference with the *mesei* (wetland taro patches). Other state master plans will soon be completed with their own zoning designations.



Beyond zoning, the Ngarchelong State Master Plan also strives to retain the character of the community by requiring new construction to adhere to certain traditional construction principles and designs. This is very important. For Palau to be a liveable community that citizens want to return to and visitors want to experience, it is essential that housing and urban designs retain the unique character of Palau while also being energy efficient and climate resilient. Unfortunately, in the haste to meet critical housing demand, much of what is built today are “concrete boxes” reliant on air conditioning and without adequate space to support gardening or an extended family.

Traditional Palauan Architecture Sustainable Designs



Photo credit: Belau National Museum

The picture above shows the renovation of the *Bai er a Ngesechel a Cherechar* by the Ngaramecherocher, a men's group from Melekeok. Some of the features of the bai appear in traditional house designs, such as elevated stilts for disaster resilience and cooling, high ceilings, and the incorporation of porous building materials and Palauan motifs that reflect the culture and provide communities a distinctively "Palauan" feel. These design elements are found in very few modern homes, but revitalization of Palauan architecture would support many aspects of sustainability.

SDG 11.2 Public Transportation

Public marine transportation links Koror and the outlying states using vessels owned and operated by the Kayangel, Peleliu, and Angaur State Governments or leased by the states, in the case of Sonsorol and Hatohobi.

Several attempts have been made to launch public land transportation, but economic sustainability has been challenging. At present, Palau Visitor's Authority operates a public bus to support the twice-monthly “680 Night Market.” With support from MHRCDT and other partners, it has recently expanded to a daytime service linking the Belau National Hospital in Meyuns (Koror) with the Airai Commercial Center. It is envisaged that this service will expand subject to demand.

Despite this start-up service, Palau remains highly dependent on personal gasoline-fueled vehicles. This contributes to greenhouse gas emissions (SDG 13), NCDs (SDG 3), and particulate air pollution (SDG 12). To address the triple threats to climate, health, and the environment, a Global Environmental Facility project is being planned to reduce transportation sector emissions using a combination of electric and hybrid-fueled public transport vehicles (including infrastructure support for e-vehicles) and improved walking and biking facilities.

The focus on active transport will build on work spearheaded by the NGO PalauWalks, in partnership with Palau Visitor's Authority, PNOG, MHHS, MPIO, and the Climate Change Office since 2013, to create walk-friendly environments.



Accessible Public Spaces



Photo credit: Island Times

Palau's accessibility legislation applies only to new construction in the public sector. Hence, the progress of expanding access to public spaces for persons with disabilities has been slow. Through the partnership of the Koror State Government, the Class of '93 NGO, and the Republic of China (Taiwan), a ramp was constructed in 2023 at one of Koror's most popular public beach parks. This project demonstrates what can be achieved when committed partners at all levels work together to fully include persons with disabilities in everyday activities, ensuring their full enjoyment of human rights and equality under the law.

SDG 11.4 Protecting our (Tangible) Cultural Heritage

MHRCTD has expanded on the global indicators for SDG 11.4 with three new indicators: (i) the number of cultural and historic sites registered, (ii) the number of registered sites actively managed, and (iii) a number of registered sites imperiled by climate change and sea level rise.

The Division of Historic Preservation (within MHRCTD) estimates there are at least 4,000 cultural and historic sites recognized by communities. Less than 5% of these (193),

sites have been entered into the Palau Register of Historic Places. Due to a lack of human resources, registration proceeds slowly, with an average of 5 new sites registered each year. Of the 193 sites registered by 2023, 90 (47%) were under active management.

Unfortunately, many registered and unregistered sites are vulnerable to climate change and sea level rise. The Division, in partnership with the University of Oregon, surveyed 10 sites in 2021 and found all under threat. Given the many unregistered sites, most near the coast, the survey report concluded: "There is a critical and urgent need to document, preserve, and protect these sites in the near future or risk losing them forever". Unfortunately, resources currently available to the Division are insufficient, given the magnitude and urgency of the challenge.

SDG 11.6 Reducing Environmental Impacts of Communities

SDG 11.6 is closely related to SDG 12. Both address reducing communities' environmental "footprints" through waste management.

When the new national landfill in Aimeliik opened in 2021, the Koror landfill and small, unregulated dump sites in Babeldaob and Kayangel were closed. There is now regular household garbage collection in these states, with disposal at the landfill relieving long-standing health and environmental hazards. However, the volume of garbage disposed of in the landfill is greater than projected based on a 2019 survey, which has the potential to significantly shorten the lifespan of the landfill (Refer to SDG 12 and the Palau Development Plan).

SDG 11.7 Blue & Green Public Spaces and Sports Facilities

Palau has not identified specific indicators for SDGs 11.7-1 and 11.7-2, which are both partially addressed by state master plans and the National Infrastructure Investment Plan 2021-2030.

Many sports programs are managed by PNOC and its fifteen-member sports federations. These programs target both men and women, but many tend to be concentrated in the urban center. PNOC is a member of the International Special Olympics Organization and, in 2023, joined the International Paralympic Organization. PNOC and its members are committed to more inclusive sports programs with a goal of Palau athletes participating in the 2032 Paralympic Games in Brisbane.

SDG 11.8 and 11.9 Policies and Planning

Under Palau’s Constitution, state governments own their terrestrial natural resources and marine resources to 12 nautical miles offshore. States are responsible for land use and nearshore marine spatial planning. Recognizing, however, that the states of Babeldaob and Koror must work as one, the national government, in partnership with the states and ADB, created a “Koror-Babeldaob Regional Urban Development and Strategic Action Plan” (KBRUDSAP) in 2020. The KBRUDSAP identified priority areas for further planning, including land use, housing subdivisions, tourism, transportation, and improved governance. The KBRUDSAP also created a multi-criteria spatial analysis tool to assist with housing suitability analyses and to increase data-driven land use planning. The states subsequently incorporated these priorities in their master planning process, which began in 2020 and will be completed in 2024.

“a resilient and widespread improvement in general standards of living while preserving cultural and environmental values for the people of Palau.”

**KBRUDSAP Vision Statement
2020**

All state master plans identify economic growth and the creation of higher-paying jobs as medium-to-long-term priorities. However, outside of Koror and Airai, the conditions needed to fuel economic growth - namely, larger populations - are not currently in place. Accordingly, immediate priorities are expanding housing stock and improving infrastructure, especially secondary roads and utilities, encouraging state citizens to return home.

Other state priorities include developing entrepreneurship, restoring cultural sites and developing cultural centers, ensuring food security, and improving capacity for effective governance.

Pathways to 2030

By May 2024, only two states had completed their master planning process through to formal plan adoption, but the rest were in the final stages. Thus, by the end of 2024, all states will either have completed their plans or be close to completion. Even for states that do not explicitly make reference to the SDGs, the concepts embedded across the SDGs will be part of these plans.

In 2023, Palau joined the Local2030 Islands Network and will use this network to build closer partnerships with state governments in pursuit of the SDGs' vision. With the activation of the Local2030 network, future VNRs will incorporate stronger analysis of subnational progress toward the goals.



SDGs In Action

Palau's Earthwork Heritage

11

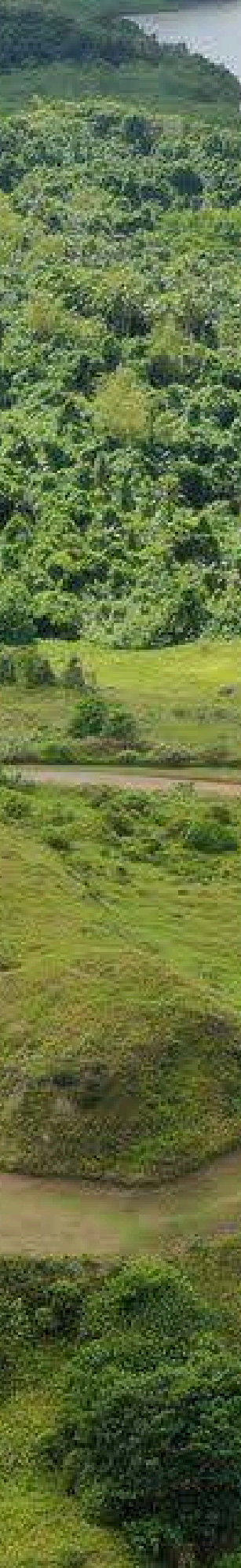
The Palauan archipelago has a rich cultural heritage dating back over 3,400 years. By 2,400 years ago, residents were sculpting the archipelago's volcanic islands into massive, morphologically diverse earth architecture. This practice would continue for at least 1300 years, creating an extensive cultural landscape covering at least a quarter of the archipelago's volcanic islands.

This engineered landscape's dimensions, extent, functions, and age exhibit Palau's cultural significance in ancient Oceania and the world. In the Pacific, only Melanesia and Polynesia contain similar examples of earth architecture. Yet, only in Palau do these structures conjoin into vast earthwork systems, each grouping defining and symbolizing the power and prestige of a sociopolitical unit. Demonstrating the ability to organize, finance, and manage a large labor force, monumental architecture is correlated with increasing sociopolitical complexity. Palauan earthworks achieved monumental status about 2,000 years ago, 800 years before monumentality emerged elsewhere in Oceania.

This earthwork landscape, an architectural and engineering marvel, is a source of civic pride in Palau's ancient heritage. Built with sophisticated cut-and-fill techniques and still standing a millennium after construction, the earthworks demonstrate early Palauans' expertise in soil mechanics, hydrogeological conditions, and engineering principles. Sustaining an inland cultivation system for some 1300 years and managing the extreme erosion and coastal sedimentation generated during millennia of deforestation and earthwork construction attests to ancient Palauans practicing effective land management strategies.

Recent research by archaeologists from the Institute for Ecosystem Research, University of Kiel in Germany, indicates some crown structures were built to hold graveyards. Currently, the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation is supporting work to amplify the cultural, social, and economic value of Palau's monumental earthwork landscape to preserve the legacy of this significant cultural heritage for future generations. This goal will be accomplished through an integrated approach combining remote sensing, archaeological fieldwork, and the collection of oral traditions, which include public education and capacity-building components.

Photo credit: Archaeology Wiki



PALAU'S EARTHWORK HERITAGE CONTINUATION...



What environmental and social dynamics resulted in early Palauans to create such huge and extensive earthworks? What construction methods were used to construct such long-standing structures? What are their multiple and transformative functions? What erosion control methods and sustainable agricultural practices were employed? What factors propelled the population to eventually relocate off of the monumental earthworks into traditional villages built on step-terraces? Unraveling these fascinating questions will take decades of archaeological and environmental investigations. Meanwhile Palau's earthwork landscape stands as a testament to the power and intelligence of ancient Palauans to instill a sense of identity and pride in the archipelago's current generations.

*Submitted by Dr. Jolie Liston
Edited for space*

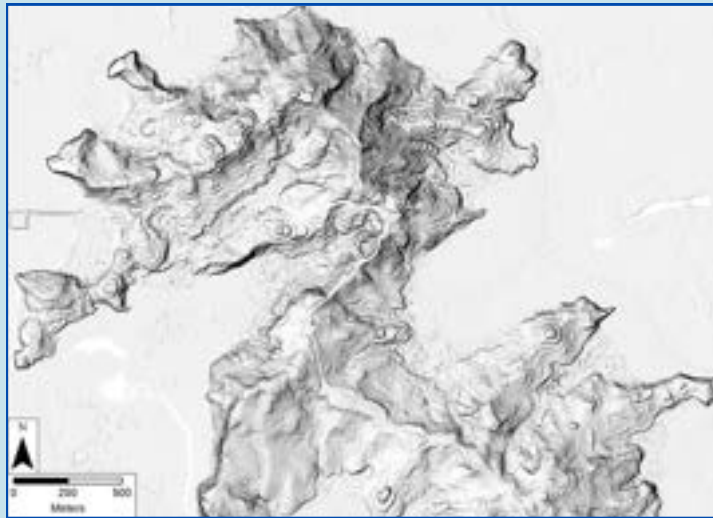


Diagram:
Ngarchelong earthworks.
Dr. Jolie Liston
Micronesia Heritage Consulting



Excavated earthworks, Roisingang Ngaraard.
Photo credit: Dr. Jolie Liston
Micronesia Heritage Consulting





PILLAR 4

PROTECTING OUR
ISLAND HOME
FROM RIDGE TO
BEYOND THE REEF



PILLAR 4



PROTECTING OUR ISLAND HOME FROM 'RIDGE TO BEYOND THE REEF'

As a small island but a large ocean state, Palau packs incredible biodiversity into a small space. Located in the Coral Triangle and acclaimed as one of the world's underwater wonders, Palau's 20 major marine habitats are home to over 10,000 species - 400 species of hard corals, 300 species of soft corals, 1,500 species of fish, 7 out of 9 of the world's species of giant clams, sea turtles, whales, dolphins, the world's most isolated dugong population, and thousands of invertebrates. While renowned for its marine biodiversity, Palau also has rich terrestrial diversity. Its 7,000 terrestrial species include 1,400 plant species, 100 orchid species (30 endemic), 60 resident bird species (13 endemic), insects, arthropods, snails, reptiles, and amphibians. Palau is also a globally significant way station for at least 100 species of migratory birds.

"We are stewards of this planet, this beautiful planet that God gave us, and it's our responsibility to do our part in every little way to protect it."

H.E. Surangel Whipps, Jr
President, Republic of Palau

Palau's culture is shaped by and has shaped the natural environment. An important part of culture is *omengereomel*, or life in harmony with nature. The traditional *bul* or moratorium on harvest imposed by a chief to preserve a resource provides the framework for today's protected area network. But the *bul* is but one traditional practice adapted for today. Palau's traditional *mesei* (wetland taro patch) is a biologically diverse multi-storied mixed gardening system producing foods, medicines, craft, and building materials while sustainably managing freshwater resources and protecting reefs through a carefully engineered system of sediment traps maintained collectively by the women farming along a water causeway.

Today, as in the past, culture, people, economy, and environment are inextricably linked. Palau is at the forefront of the global environmental movement, advocating for sustainable fisheries, ocean health, biodiversity protection, climate action, and the human right to water. At home, Palau leaders match rhetoric with actions that make contemporary Palau a beacon of environmental sustainability. As a nation, though, Palau struggles to adapt to global threats, including climate change, which impacts every aspect of life.





SDG 6: UNGIL EL RALM ME A KLIKIID EL OMESOLEL A DELENGCHOKL (CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION)

Ridge-to-reef is a traditional Pacific approach to integrated resource management that celebrates the interconnections between the natural and social systems that extend from the mountains (ridges) through coastal watersheds and habitats and across the nearshore marine area to the fringing reefs and beyond to the deep waters beyond national jurisdiction. Freshwater is the lifeblood of this management system. It is ‘watershed management’ but with social and nature elements. Just as ridge-to-reef links mountains with oceans, it also links across all seventeen SDGs.

Through the concept of “ridge-to-reef”, SDG 6 links all of the SDGs. SDG 6 has eight targets. While all are relevant to Palau, the eight have been condensed here into four – access to safe water, access to safe sanitation, integrated water resource management, and partnerships for water and sanitation.

OUR PROGRESS

Overview: Palau has achieved universal access to basic water and improved sanitation. The Koror-Airai water system consistently produces water that meets potability standards, but water quality in the small rural water systems is inconsistent. Palau relies on surface water, so drought associated with the El Niño and La Niña Southern Oscillation cycles can be severe and prolonged. Palau does not currently have an adequate integrated water resource plan that links SDG 6 with SDGs 7 (energy), 13 (climate change), 14 (oceans), and 15 (land).

Safe water: Access to basic water supplies - piped to residential dwellings - is almost universal.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

6.1: Safe drinking water	Accelerate Progress
6.2: Access to sanitation & hygiene	Maintain Progress
6.5: Integrated water resource management	Accelerate Progress
6.a: International cooperation for water & sanitation	Maintain Progress

In 2020, only 71 households out of 5,056 lacked piped water. While most households (95%) are connected to one of Palau’s 19 public water systems, only 35% drink the water (*Census 2020*). This reflects low public confidence in water quality.



The Koror-Airai system is monitored daily by the Environmental Quality Protection Board and consistently produces water that meets national standards, with the exception of occasional turbidity during heavy rainfall. Wider acceptance of the safety of Palau's urban water supplies would contribute to SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 12 (sustainable production and consumption, specifically plastic waste reduction).

Rural areas are served by small community water systems, which EQPB monitors monthly. This water does not consistently meet quality standards (*US OIA, 2020; EQPB, 2023*). Work has started at three sites to improve quality; other projects will follow as part of the National Infrastructure Investment plan.

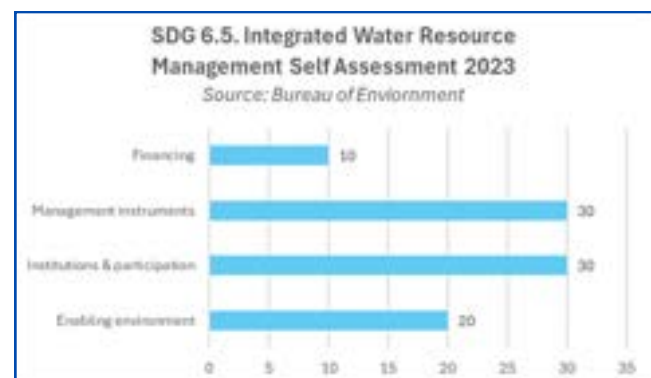
Affordability: The Palau Public Utilities Corporation (PPUC) is legally mandated to operate on a full cost-recovery basis. The Lifeline Utilities Program, administered by the Ministry of Finance, provides subsidies for up to 5,000 gallons of water per month for households earning less than \$4,023 per person per annum. This addresses the affordability component of SDG 6.1. ensuring no household is left behind due to financial constraints.

Safe sanitation: In 2020, 212 households out of 5,056 were not connected to a public sewer or private septic system. A recently upgraded public sewer system serves the Koror-Airai urban area; 64% of urban households are connected to the system. Melekeok also has a public sewer system serving the capitol and the community. Outside of these areas, most households use septic systems, which EQPB considers to be "safe" given current population densities.

Watershed protection: Protecting Babeldaob watersheds is a priority since they are the water source for 93% of the population.

All watersheds are protected to some extent by national "buffer" laws; most receive protection through state land use and zoning regulations. Watersheds also overlap with terrestrial protected areas (see SDG 15), which provides an additional layer of protection.

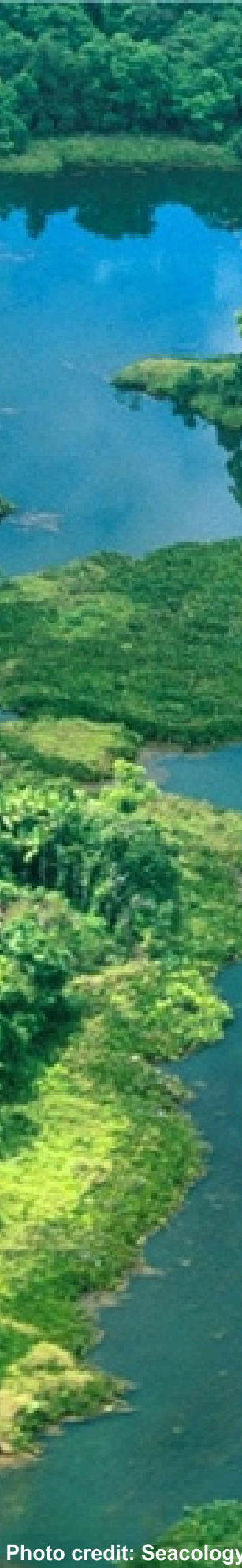
Integrated water resource management: The Bureau of Environment participated in a UNEP integrated water resource assessment in 2023. The assessment instrument comprised 18 indicators across four domains (enabling environment, institutions, management, and finance). Palau's composite score was 30 out of a possible 100 points, indicating that more work remains to realize SDG 6 fully.



PATHWAYS TO 2030

Future priorities include achieving safe (e.g., potable) water for all, meeting the increasing demand for potable water in rural communities to keep pace with development, climate-proofing water resources through redundancies, and strengthening integrated water resource management, including watershed protection and management.

To support these objectives, the Palau Development Plan includes 13 water and sanitation infrastructure projects (see SDG 12).



SDGS In Action

INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: NGARDOK NATURE RESERVE

Ngardok Lake, the largest and most biologically diverse freshwater lake in Palau and in Micronesia, is located in the state of Melekeok. In 1997, the Melekeok State Government created *Ngardok Nature Reserve* to protect and conserve the lake, streams, and surrounding waters. In 2002, Ngardok became the first Micronesian Ramsar site and, in 2008, Palau's first terrestrial Protected Area Network site.

The Melekeok community works as one to address threats to the lake and surrounding watershed. To Melekeok Governor Henaro Polloi, *"Restoring the lake is not just an environmental act, but the community's pledge to revive the lifeblood of their shared habitat."* The community worked to reforest denuded upland areas and remove the overgrowth of *cheuais*, a native plant. The state government leaders, traditional leaders, Melekeok Conservation Network, and community groups of women, men, youth, and children launched a project to restore and protect the watershed.

The removal of *cheuais* was a months-long project, while the reforestation continues, a years-long project led by the Melekeok community with the support of volunteers from community groups throughout Palau.

"Taking care of the land is the responsibility of every member of the community. We must come together to protect and preserve Ngardok, our watershed, for the good of the people of Melekeok and for Palau."

REKLAI Raphael B. Ngirmang

The importance of this wetland ecosystem to Palau was further highlighted in 2018 with the discovery of a new tree species, the *Osmoxylon ngardokense*, through the Melekeok Conservation Network Forest Dynamics Monitoring. This program is a partnership of the Ngardok Nature Reserve, Palau Forestry, and the USDA Forest Service—Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry.



Clearing "Cheuais".
Photo credit:
Dirraingas Magaria Tellei

6
UNGOLO EL NAGM NI A KUMTO EL UNKOTEL A NIKKUMUNO

6 UNGOLO EL NAGM NI A KUMTO EL UNKOTEL A NIKKUMUNO

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SDG 7: METETEKAU E KLIKIID EL DENGKI (AFFORDABLE CLEAN ENERGY)

Palau has achieved universal access to electricity and strives to achieve national energy efficiency and renewable energy production targets. These targets are crucial to Palau meeting its National Determined Contributions under the Paris Climate Change Agreement. The COVID-19 pandemic set back progress toward renewable energy targets, but with opening of the national solar farm in April 2024, more rapid progress is expected.

The Palau energy sector is comprised of three subsectors - power, land transportation, and marine transportation. The national goal is to achieve 100% renewable energy in all three subsectors by 2050. Other targets are set out in the Climate Change Policy 2024.

- Sector-wide reduction of emissions by 22% by 2025 (below 2005 baseline),
- Renewable energy to supply 45% of electric power generation by 2025 and 100% by 2032,
- Increase in total energy produced from renewable sources to 100% by 2050 (power and transport sectors),
- Increase energy efficiency by 35% by 2025 (from 2005 baseline).

SDG 7 has five targets, all relevant to Palau, but collapsed here into three.

OUR PROGRESS

Access to electricity: In 2020, every household had access to electricity, and 91% of households used clean fuel for cooking (*Census 2020, Table H07*).

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

7.1: Access to modern energy services	Maintain Progress
7.2: Share of renewable energy	Accelerate Progress
7.3: Energy efficiency	Reverse Trends

Renewable energy: Palau has made a strong policy commitment to renewable energy, but the path from fossil fuels to renewables has been challenging. Until April 2024, the primary source of renewable energy was rooftop solar installations; by the end of 2023, renewables contributed only about 7% of total power generated.



In April 2024, a new solar farm opened in Ngatpang State. When fully operational, the system will deliver 20 - 23 GWh of energy every year for 20 years, bringing Palau's renewable energy to about 22% of consumption—a giant leap forward but still short of the 45% renewable target set for 2025. Palau also works with the Republic of China (Taiwan) to establish solar demonstration parks to further ensure access to sustainable and modern energy.

Road transport: Due to a lack of investment in the road transportation sector, the population remains heavily dependent on private motor vehicles. Eighty-two percent of households own at least one motor vehicle (*Census 2020*), and having grown accustomed to the convenience of private transport, it is challenging to market alternative forms of transportation despite increasing fuel prices.

Although previous attempts to develop a sustainable public land transport system have failed due to low demand, a new initiative supported by Palau Visitor's Authority and MHRCTD launched in April 2024 links Koror with the Airai Commercial Center. The Global Environmental Facility e-mobility project is planned to develop electric and hybrid-fueled public transportation, create infrastructure to support e-vehicles and make environmental modifications to encourage active transport (walking and biking).

Marine transport: The marine transportation sector currently depends on expensive, polluting gasoline engines or diesel, in the case of the inter-island vessel fleet. With a large number of boats supporting Palau's dive-oriented tourism economy, decarbonizing the marine transportation sector is critical if Palau is to achieve energy targets while reducing

marine pollution (SDG 14) and achieving sustainable tourism (SDGs 8 and 12). This subsector, however, is the most challenging because current technologies do not fully address Palau's needs.

Palau's energy roadmap identifies several future options: (i) replace gasoline with a synthetic variant produced from renewable hydrogen and biomass, (ii) replace gasoline motors with electric motors fueled by green hydrogen, and (iii) battery-powered hydrofoiling boats, an entirely new design technology.

While new technologies are needed to fully transform the marine subsector, traditional and hybrid technologies are receiving more attention. One example is the Alingano Maisu, a double-hulled vessel that incorporates traditional and modern technologies to promote sustainability.



Alingano Maisu, 2023

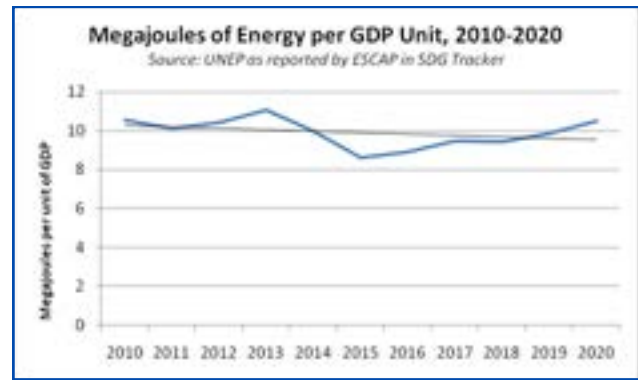
Photo credit: Palau Resource Institute (PRI)



Energy efficiency: Palau encourages energy efficiency and conservation through:

- Installing solar lighting on roadways
- Replacing incandescent lights with compact fluorescent lamps
- Energy efficiency upgrades in public buildings
- Construction of an energy efficiency demonstration building
- Phasing out two-stroke outboard gasoline engines on boats
- Conservation awareness campaigns
- Energy efficiency financing.

Despite these measures, energy consumption per GDP unit has not significantly changed (SDG 7.3).



PATHWAYS TO 2030

Although Palau's greenhouse gas emissions are minuscule on the global scale, the government has committed to reducing emissions in both the power and transportation sectors. This reflects a commitment to SDGs 7 and 13 and recognition of the co-benefits of transitioning to renewable energy while increasing energy efficiency.



Palau solar farm in Ngatpang opened in April 2024. It is the largest solar installation in the Western Pacific and was developed as a public-private partnership with support primarily from the Government of Australia.



SDGs In Action

FOCUS ON RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS: PALAU



Kayangel water pumping station fueled by solar at the intersection of SDGs 6, 7, 10, 11 and 17. Project partners include UPDP, SPREP, World Bank, and Government of Denmark.



Solar panels at Pulo Ana school at the intersection of SDGs 4, 7, 9, 11, and 17. Project partners UPDP and Government of Japan.



Home energy projects are funded by Asian Development Bank and Government of Japan through the Palau Housing Authority and the National Development Bank. intersection of SDGs 1, 7, 9, 11, and 17.



The airport solar farm, Palau's first grid-connected solar installation at the intersection of SDGs 7, 9, and 17. The Government of Japan funded this project in 2011 which became the model for several projects that have followed.





SDG 12: UTEBECHEL EL USBECHEL ME A OMEBELEL A KLALO (SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION & CONSUMPTION)

Sustainable production and consumption are integral to Palau's traditional ethic of omengereomel, or life in harmony with nature. Of the six SDG 12 targets Palau includes in this VNR, it is on track with national strategies for sustainability management and sustainable tourism, is progressing toward reducing domestic material consumption, recycling, and renewable energy, and lacks data to assess trends in food waste.

Delegates to the Rio+20 United National Conference on Sustainable Development (2012) called for changes in global production and consumption patterns - changes to achieve economic and social gains while reducing resources consumed – essentially decoupling growth from consumption. This call resulted in a Global Framework for Sustainable Production and Consumption organized into six clusters: (i) sustainable public procurement, (ii) consumer information, (iii) sustainable lifestyles and education, (iv) sustainable tourism, (v) sustainable buildings and construction, and (vi) sustainable food systems.

The legacy of the Rio +20 declaration is reflected across the 2030 agenda, with several components housed under SDG 12, which has 11 global targets. Palau has incorporated six of these into the National Environmental Management Strategy (NEMS) and SDG Framework.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

12.1: Implement the 10-year program on Sustainable Production & Consumption	Accelerate Progress
12.2: Sustainable use of natural resources	Reverse Trends
12.3: Reduce food waste & losses	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
12.5: Reduction in waste generation	Accelerate Progress
12.a: International support for sustainable consumption and production	Accelerate Progress
12.b: Sustainable tourism monitoring using SEEA (System of Economic, Environmental Accounting)	Accelerate Progress

OUR PROGRESS

SDG 12.1

Sustainability Policy

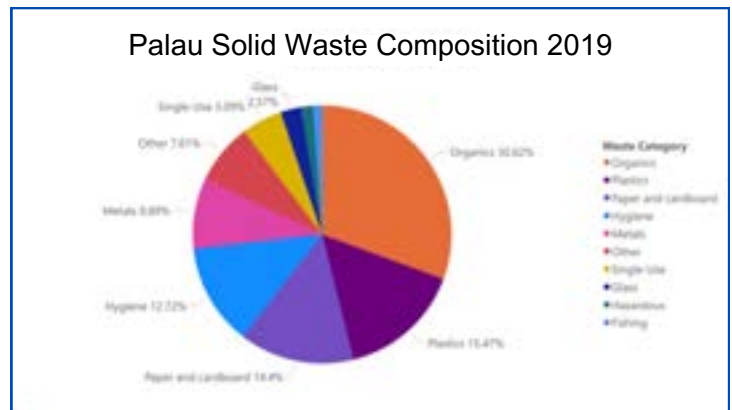
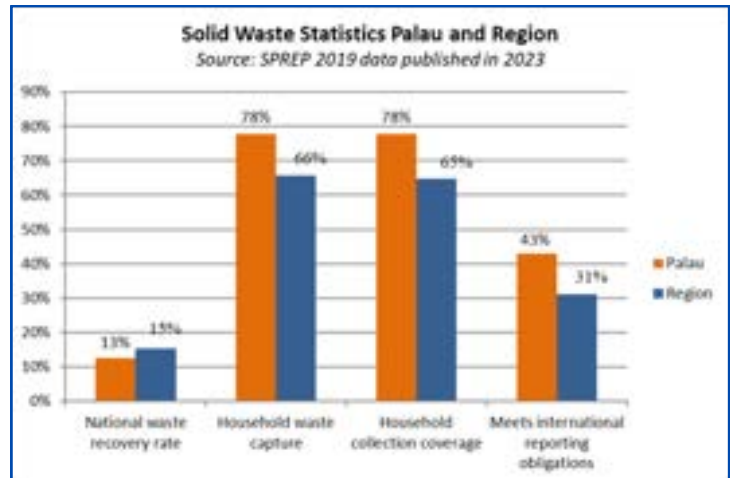
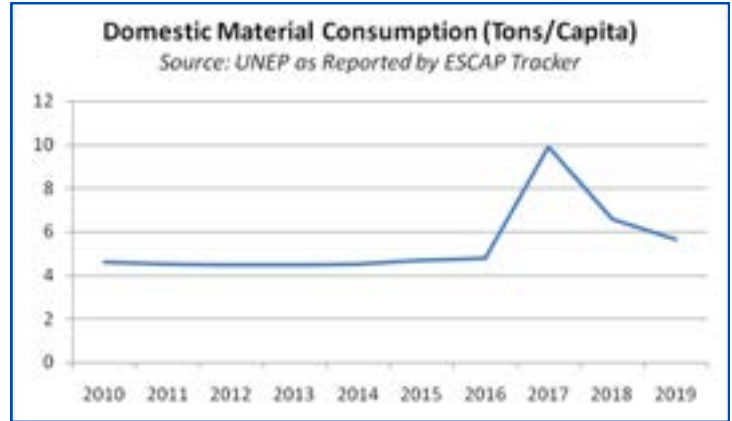
Sustainable consumption and resource extraction are integral to Palau’s traditional approach to natural resource management.

Palau’s overarching plan for sustainability is the National Environmental Management Strategy (NEMS) 2022-2030. The NEMS highlights national policies, actions, and targets across 11 thematic areas, with progress measured by 142 indicators. This comprehensive environmental roadmap links all 17 SDGs with specialized plans and strategies, including the National Biodiversity Plan 2015-2025, the National Climate Change Policy, the National Energy Policy, the National Invasive Species Plan, the Stockholm Convention (on persistent organic pollutants), the Nagoya Protocol (access and benefit sharing of genetic resources), and other international agreements to which Palau is a party. While the NEMS incorporates many elements of the six components of a 10-year Program for Sustainable Production and Consumption, it does not include all. Notably, it does not explicitly address sustainable public procurement.

SDG 12.2

Domestic Material Consumption

Domestic material consumption measures all materials (by weight) used in an economy. Despite a strong policy commitment to sustainability and a traditional conservation ethic, Palau’s average domestic material consumption has increased. However, at 8.8 tons per capita, it remains below the global average of 12.2 tons per capita.





Koror State glass recycling center.
Photo credit: Island Times.

SDG 12.3 **Solid Waste Management**

SDG 12 addresses wastes, hazardous wastes, and food wastes separately. Palau's NEMS combines the three into one thematic area.

Palau took a giant leap toward sustainable waste management with the opening of a state-of-the-art national landfill in Aimeliik in February 2021. The landfill uses the "Fukuoka method" of semi-aerobic waste disposal technology developed in Japan and funded by the Japanese Government. The landfill serves the ten states of Babeldaob, Koror, and Kayangel and has allowed the closure of unregulated dump sites on Babeldaob. This brings Palau close to a nationwide solid waste management system. The national recycling center remains in Koror, recycling glass, plastic bottles, metal, and paper cardboard.

A "3Rs" (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) campaign promotes sustainable waste management. Recyclable packaging is now available on the island at a competitive price, and the Responsible Tourism Education Act of 2018 requires tour operators to use reusable/recycled packaging.

A 2019 survey by the South Pacific Regional Environmental Program (SPREP) provides baseline data for solid waste, but updates to monitor progress are unavailable.

- Palau's waste per capita per year (128.8 kilos) is higher than the Pacific Region average (101.3 kilos) but lower than global averages (270 kilos).
- Food waste (117 kg/person/year) is similar to the global average of 122 kg/capita.
- Household collection rates were high, at 77.8% in 2019, and will probably be higher in 2024 since unregulated dump sites on Babeldaob have closed.
- Waste recovery (reuse or recycling) is only 12.5%, lower than the region's average (15.3%) and well below the average of many European countries, which is around 54% (*Our World in Data, 2024*).
- A high proportion of Palau's wastes are organics (30.6%) or paper and cardboard (14.4%), indicating significant untapped potential for recycling and composting, which alone could bring Palau in line with some of the highest-performing countries.

Although Palau lacks quantifiable data to gauge progress in waste management post-2019, the low recycling rate and speed at which the new landfill is being filled suggest a need for accelerated action. While the government explores new technologies such as waste-to-energy, the volume of compostable waste represents "low-hanging fruit" that can be combined with education that appeals to traditional conservation ethics to accelerate progress.

Food Waste: The NEMS calls for reduced food waste and increased composting. The 2019 SPREP survey provides the only data point for food waste, showing 117 kilograms of waste per capita per annum, which is similar to the global average of 121 kilograms per capita (*UNEP, 2019*).

There has been no organized initiative to address food waste. Given escalating food costs, it may be suitable to tackle this as well as “low-hanging fruit” that can simultaneously address waste management (SDG 12), food security (SDG 2), climate change (SDG 13), water quality (SDG 6), forest conservation (SDG 15), and oceans (SDG 14).

Hazardous and chemical wastes: EQPB is responsible for disposing of hazardous and chemical wastes, which include common products such as tires, batteries, and electronics, as well as medical and laboratory wastes. This area is very challenging for Palau since these items cannot be recycled locally, and finding off-island disposal sites is difficult.

Plastics: Palau imports plastics in significant volume, thereby contributing to the global plastic waste crisis. Palau is also impacted by global plastic waste in the form of off-shore wastes washing into Palau’s territory.

Palau has acted to address the plastics issue through (i) beverage container recycling legislation enacted in 2009, (ii) plastic bag reduction legislation enacted in 2017, (iii) 3-R’s promotion and education, and (iv) actions by the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Palau in partnership with the Friends of the Palau Marine Sanctuary and the MHHS to raise awareness about cigarette butts as a source of plastic pollution thus linking SDG 12 with 3.a.



“We’ve been constantly reminded that we cannot recycle our way out of this mess. The new plastics treaty is an opportunity to shift the balance from reactive waste management to proactive prevention... It’s clear that plastic has served its time. It’s been a material that has been useful but now that we have recognized it is harmful, we should use this instrument as an opportunity to incentivize more sustainable alternatives.”

Her Excellency Ilana V. Seid
Permanent Representative of Palau to the
United Nations, 2023

PATHWAYS TO 2030

Palau has limited natural resources and is highly dependent on imports for both local consumption and the tourism sector. Imports generate waste that cannot easily be reused or recycled locally. Finding off-island vendors to buy recyclable materials at a price that recoups the cost of collection and transportation is challenging.

Local alternatives to many imported packaging materials have the added benefit of encouraging local entrepreneurship (SDG 8). Promoting local alternatives and expanding composting and recycling, combined with technological solutions such as waste-to-energy, have the potential to transform Palau’s waste management sector and significantly advance progress toward SDG 12 with co-benefits across the SDGs.

Aerial view of the Palau national landfill, which opened in Aimeliik State in 2021 with financial and technical support from the Government of Japan. The landfill has an expected life expectancy of 25 years, but more progress is needed to extend its life under SDG 12.3 (“reduce, reuse, recycle”).

“NO BUTTS” - HEALTH, PLASTICS, AND OCEANS NEXUS

SDGs In Action

The Coalition for a Tobacco Free Palau, in partnership with the Friends of the Palau Marine Sanctuary and the MHHS, is raising awareness about the environmental damage caused by cigarette filters - “butts”.

The 2022 and 2023 World No Tobacco Day observances in Palau focused on plastics and oceans with themes - “Protect our Ocean and Marine Life – BUTTS out” and “CIGARETTE BUTTS; Toxic to our Ocean; One More Reason To Quit”. In 2022, Palau hosted the Our Ocean Conference and used this as an opportunity to raise awareness among delegates that cigarette butts are made of plastics, something many did not know.

Palau has urged UN member countries negotiating the Global Plastics Treaty to include cigarette butts on the list of "problematic and avoidable plastic products," noting that cigarette butts and, increasingly, e-cigarette wastes are among the most littered items in the world. These items harm land and marine ecosystems, are challenging to collect and recycle, and disintegrate into toxic microplastics.

At the WHO FCTC COP10 in Panama, Palau supported the decision FCTC/COP10(14) urging Parties to (1) counter the so-called “corporate social responsibility” activities of the tobacco industry and ensure that WHO FCTC objectives are not undermined through the industry’s implementation of extended producer responsibility systems, (2) coordinate efforts to address plastic waste of tobacco products and related electronic devices, and (3) encourage Parties to consider comprehensive regulatory options on cigarette filters and e-cigarette wastes as part of treaty negotiations on plastics and hazardous wastes.

This synergy between the FCTC, the Plastics Treaty, and ocean advocacy will progress SDGs 3.a, 14.1,12.2, and 12.5.



H.E. President Surangel Whipps, Jr and First Lady Valerie Whipps at the 2022 World No Tobacco Day Walk-Run focused on raising awareness about “butts” and plastic pollution.



SDG 13: MELISIICH A OSEBECHIKLEL A TEKOI ER A EANGED (CLIMATE ACTION)

While somewhat behind in achieving its ambitious targets for renewable energy and greenhouse gas emissions reduction, Palau takes its global commitments seriously and expects to make a significant “leap forward” by the end of 2024 as the new solar farm becomes fully operational. Palau has made significant strides toward ecosystem management and disaster risk reduction targets. An updated climate change policy and action plan was approved in 2024.

Despite contributing little to global greenhouse gas emissions (an estimated 0.0006%), Palau is vulnerable to the direct impacts of climate change - sea level rise, increase in air temperature, ocean acidification, frequency and intensity of flooding, and other natural disasters. These direct impacts trigger a cascading array of downstream effects affecting the entire development spectrum. While Palau takes its responsibilities for mitigation (reducing emissions that drive climate change) seriously, many climate-driven changes are now inevitable, making adaptation and loss and damage priorities as well.

OUR PROGRESS

Leveraging local and international research, traditional knowledge, and stakeholder expertise, Palau has mapped trajectories for climate impacts under various scenarios. It has leveraged this knowledge to guide mitigation, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction.

Policy and planning: Palau submitted its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the United Nations in 2015 and updated the NDCs in 2022.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

13.1: Resilience & adaptation to disasters	Accelerate Progress
13.2: Integrate climate change policies and plans	Accelerate Progress
13.3: Climate change awareness	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
13.a: Financing for climate actions	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
13.b: Increase capacity for climate change planning & mgmt.	Accelerate Progress

“A Belau a kldmoki, mesisiich, modeuades, e klekar (Happy, healthy, sustainable, and resilient Palauan communities in a changing world).

Vision Statement
Palau Climate Change Policy 2024

Palau developed its first Climate Change Policy in 2015 and an updated policy in 2024. Climate change is integrated into the Palau Development Plan, the National Infrastructure Investment Plan, and sector plans and policies. All states are also integrating climate change and disaster risk considerations into base maps, land use plans, and master plans.

As a direct result of the first Climate Change Policy (2015), Palau established a new energy governance scheme and an Energy Master Plan that charts a pathway to 100% renewable energy by 2050 (Refer to SDG 7). In addition, biosecurity regulations have been updated, and an Invasive Species Program has been institutionalized under the leadership of MAFE (SDG 15).

Mitigation: Palau takes its responsibilities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions seriously and recognizes the many co-benefits of mitigation across the 2030 agenda. Palau has made a strong commitment to renewable energy in both the energy and transportation sectors. Although behind target due to disruptions caused by COVID-19, it expects to make a significant “leap forward” by the end of 2024 (See SDG 7).

Highlighting the importance of oceans for carbon sequestration, in a joint statement delivered at “Our Oceans” Conference in 2022, President Whipps and U.S. Special Envoy John Kerry noted, “As governments around the world work to sustainably rebuild their economies in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we would do well to remember that the ocean holds as many opportunities for resilient low-carbon growth as can be found on land.”

Carbon sinks: Palau recognizes the potential to contribute to global climate change mitigation through ecosystem management. To this end, Palau protects 20% of its forests while sustainably managing 100% of its marine area and earmarking 80% for conservation. (See SDGs 14 and 15). Palau engages in research with partners to understand and expand the carbon sequestration capacity of its oceans, forests, and mangroves.

Disaster risk reduction: While Palau does not expect an increase in tropical storms/typhoons due to climate change, it does expect increased flooding, heat stress, and sea level

Expected Climate Change Impacts													
Source: Climate Change Policy, 2024													
Risk	Infrastructure											Cost of adaptation	Population exposed
	Airport	Seaport	Schools	Shelters	Communications	Hospitals/Clinics	Police/fire stations	Power & fuel	Water supplies	Hotels	Bridges		
Sea Level Rise	1	32	9	10	9	3	1	11	2	16	10	\$25.1. m	22%
Storm Surge	2	21	9	10	9	5	1	12	1	13	6	\$46.4 m	24%
Storms & Wind Hazards	3	32	31	44	34	14	7	27	27	51	18	\$778 m	99%



rise. To address current and future disaster risks, Palau has created a unified national disaster framework, invested over \$22 million in improving infrastructure, developed school emergency management plans, and provided states with a community disaster risk reduction toolkit that enables disaster risk to be integrated into state land use and master plans.

Adaptation: Climate change adaptation is important for knowledge generation and addressing vulnerability gaps. Overall, Palau is making good progress in making climate change part of business as usual.

Conclusions: Palau is vulnerable to climate change but has successfully integrated climate awareness into national, state, and community planning. Partnerships for climate action have expanded locally and internationally. The new Compact of Free Association adds climate change as one of four priority areas for funding, with the others being education, health, and security.

OUR CHALLENGES

Despite the commitment to climate action made by 194 countries in 2015 when ratifying the Paris Agreement, the world is woefully off-course in meeting its climate targets. Ambient temperatures have risen 1.1 degrees Celsius and are projected to hit the 1.5-degree mark by 2045. Far-reaching transformative global action is needed to change the trajectory (IPCC, 2023).

With most villages located along the coast, Palau will be among the first nations to experience the impacts of climate change. Rising sea levels threaten infrastructure, communities, cultural sites, and agriculture. Stronger and more frequent storms threaten infrastructure and human health and safety.

“Climate change is the big monster is the room but since 2015 because we have a plan, we have been able to make progress.”

**H.E. Surangel Whipps, Jr.
President, Republic of Palau**

Rising ambient temperatures threaten human health and terrestrial ecosystems. Rising ocean temperatures threaten coral reefs, marine life, and ecosystems, undermining tourism, livelihoods, and food security. Because the burden of climate change falls heavily on rural communities and low-income households, climate change exacerbates inequality and poverty and weakens social connections.

As a small island but a large ocean state, Palau has little control over climate change driven by greenhouse gas emissions beyond its borders. Accordingly Palau, like all Small Island Developing States, depends on international partnerships to help finance and implement its climate change policy.

The 2015-2020 policy projected financing needs of US\$500 million, but only US\$125 million was made available. This is a significant shortfall that the government is working to redress for the second policy, which calls for the financing of \$1.5 billion for 2024-2040 (*Palau Climate Change Policy Workshop, January 2024*).

PATHWAYS TO 2030

The climate change policy 2024-2040 provides the pathway for Palau’s climate change actions in the short term (2024-2030) and medium term (2031-2040). A summary of the policy with its five action pillars appears on the following page.

PALAU CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY AND ACTION PLAN 2024-2034



SDGs In Action

OUR CLIMATE VISION

“A Belau a kldmokl, mesisiich, moduades, e klekar”

“Happy, healthy, sustainable and resilient Palauan communities in a changing world”

FIVE ACTION PILLARS

Timeframe: 2024-2040.

Resource requirements: \$1,480,825,000.

Pillar 1: Adaptation & disaster risk reduction

- Objective: Establish an enabling environment to integrate climate change into ecosystems and society at all levels.
- 45 interventions and 83 actions.
- Cost \$706,725,000.

Pillar 2: Disaster risk management

- Objective: Maintain safe, resilient, and disaster-prepared communities.
- 11 Interventions and 16 actions.
- Cost \$36,500,000.

Pillar 3: Loss and damage

- Objective: Understand the impact of loss and damage on Palau and create a dedicated loss and damage policy.
- 4 interventions and 6 actions.
- Cost \$3,000,000.

Pillar 4: Mitigation and low emissions development

- Objective: Demonstrate Palau’s commitment to emissions reduction and sustainably managing carbon sinks (forests and oceans).
- 6 interventions and 18 actions.
- Cost \$723,300,000.

Pillar 5: Advocacy and implementation

- Objective: Implement the policy and build resilience to climate change and disasters.
- 12 interventions and 21 actions.
- Cost \$11,300,000.



SDG 14: KLENGAR ER A CHELSEL A DAOB (LIFE BELOW WATER)



Palau hosted the “Our Oceans” Conference in 2022, with the theme “Our Ocean, Our People, Our Prosperity,” the conference focused on combating climate change, promoting sustainable fisheries, creating sustainable blue economies, advancing marine protected areas, achieving a safe and secure ocean, and tackling marine pollution. The importance of ocean-based climate solutions and the centrality of a healthy ocean to small island developing states was a cross-cutting theme.

In partnership with other Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Palau led advocacy for a stand-alone SDG goal on oceans. Subsequently, Palau has continued as a global advocate for SDG 14 implementation while acting to protect its ocean resources at home.

SDG 14 has ten targets. Palau has incorporated eight of the ten into its national SDG Framework while noting that the National Environmental Management Strategy and the State of the Environment Report (2019) contain a more expansive domestic monitoring framework comprising 62 indicators (*SOE, 2019*). Of the 62, 55% were rated good, fair, or improving condition, while 45% were rated poor or declining (*SOE, 2019*).

OUR PROGRESS

Palau hosted Our Ocean Conference in 2022 and, as a global conservation leader, advocates for marine spatial planning, sustainable fisheries, climate action, plastics reduction, and a moratorium on deep-sea mining.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

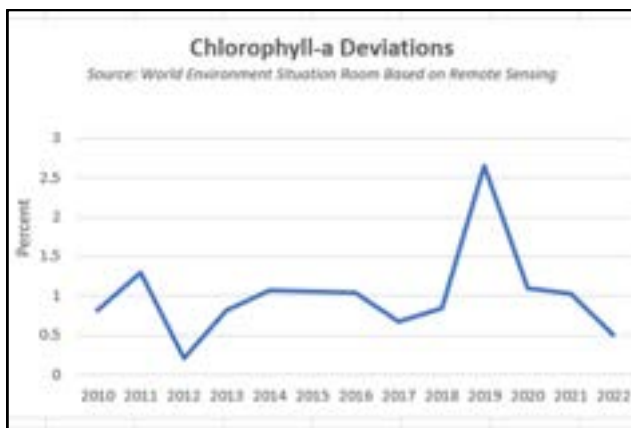
14.1: Reduce marine pollution	Reverse Trends
14.2: Sustainably manage marine & coastal ecosystems	Maintain Progress
14.3: Minimize ocean acidification	Not Assessed (insufficient data)
14.4: Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels	Not Assessed (no target set)
14.5: Marine protected areas	Maintain Progress
14.6: Fisheries subsidies	Accelerate Progress
14.b: Small-scale artisanal fishing	Reverse Trends
14.c: International legal instruments	Maintain Progress

Palau also took an active role in negotiations leading to the treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions and, in 2023, became the first country to ratify.

At home, Palau matches rhetoric with actions that make it a beacon for environmental sustainability.

Marine pollution SDG 14.1

There are two indicators for marine pollution – marine plastics and nitrogen-rich surface runoff that can cause destructive algae blooms. Palau has legislation to minimize surface runoff through the earthmoving permitting system managed by EQPB. Data on Chlorophyll-A Deviations, an indicator of nutrient load in coastal waters, has been compiled by the United Nations Environmental Program using remote sensing. With the exception of a spike in 2019, there is a slight downward trend in the data.



Palau does not currently have a systematic program for monitoring marine plastics. The Palau International Coral Reef Research Center (PICRC) has done exploratory research on marine plastics, finding microplastic particles, microplastic fibers, and nanoplastics in samples of seawater, sediment, and beach sand, even in remote “pristine” locations.

Researchers conclude that marine plastics are a pervasive threat to Palau’s marine ecosystem. Unfortunately, only one set of data points (from 2020-2021) exists. Systematic sampling across marine ecosystems is required to monitor trends and generate knowledge for action, work that is not currently funded.

Some countries have successfully used “citizen science” to monitor marine plastics by systematically conducting beach clean-ups, segregating plastics, and reporting data to a central clearinghouse. While beach clean-ups are held frequently in Palau, they are organized locally, and data are not systematically reported. There is potential for a future national monitoring program built around these clean-ups, although this will not provide information about micro and nanoplastics.

Palau has adopted legislation to ban single-use plastic bags (compostable bags are exempt) and, as part of the Responsible Tourism Education Act, bans sunscreens containing any of 10 chemicals that threaten coral reefs. Two NGOs – Coalition for a Tobacco Free Palau and Friends of the Palau National Marine Sanctuary – work to raise awareness about cigarette butts as a form of marine plastic pollution. Palau has now taken this message to the global arena, advocating for cigarettes to be included in the Global Plastics Treaty, which is now under negotiation. (See SDG 12).

Other actions to address domestic marine pollution include education as part of the school health and science curriculum and extracurricular education by PICRC, Palau Conservation Society, and other conservation NGOs. However, much of the plastic that washes onto Palau’s beaches is clearly not domestic in origin, hence the urgency of regional and global collaborative action.



Management of Marine and Coastal Ecosystems - SDG 14.2

Palau's traditional *bul* (restriction on harvest during times of scarcity) reflects its long-standing commitment to biodiversity. The *bul* tradition was used in 2003 to establish a nationwide network of coastal and terrestrial protected areas and, in 2020, extended offshore to create the Palau National Marine Sanctuary.

Under the Palau Constitution, states own their coastal resources up to 12 nautical miles offshore. States, together with traditional leaders, are therefore the main stakeholders in Palau's protected area network, which consists of three types of sites: (i) sites registered as part of the Palau protected area network; states are eligible to apply for grant funding to assist in the management of these sites, (ii) unregistered sites managed by states, and (iii) sites managed through traditional mechanisms. Currently, 44 sites are registered as part of the PAN network.

Offshore, Palau's National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS) protects 80 percent of the exclusive economic zone (500,000 square miles, an area the size of California). The remaining 20 percent is reserved for traditional fishing and newly established domestic fishing fleets serving Palau's domestic and tourist food fish markets (see SDGs 2, 8, and 12).



Beach clean-up at Choll, Ngaraard.
Photo credit: Heather Ketebengang

Establishing a Domestic Pelagic Fishing Industry

One of Palau's objectives in establishing the National Marine Sanctuary is to create a domestic pelagic fishing industry. To date, with support from MAFE and the Japanese Government, two companies have been launched. Belau Offshore Fishing Industry (BOFI) and Palau Commercial Fishing Company (PCFC) were licensed in 2023. Combined, they made 37 trips in 23,000 with a total yield of 26,672 pounds, of which 2,254 were donated to the community.

Fish Biomass and Coral Cover SDG 14.4

Besides protected areas, Palau regulates the harvest of many fish species and has banned the export of all reef fish, including for personal and customary purposes.

PICRC has established a long-term monitoring program for corals and fish to evaluate the effectiveness of various management measures. Palau's coastal fisheries resources are also strengthened with support from the Republic of China (Taiwan) to help ensure sustainable consumption and ocean conservation. While corals were negatively impacted by typhoons Bopha and Haiyan in 2012-2013, the most recent monitoring data by PICRC show good, albeit not total, recovery at most sample sites. Likewise, fish biomass is increasing at most sites, indicating that actions taken to protect fish stocks are having a positive impact.



Illegal and Unregulated Fishing

SDG 14.6

Protecting Palau's marine resources from illegal and unregulated fishing is a challenge, but progress has been made due to technological innovations that allow remote monitoring and enhanced international cooperation for monitoring the EEZ by Australia, Japan, and the United States.

“As with climate action on land, progress on ocean protection ultimately hinges on political will. It is worth reminding ourselves that, at the end of the day, we are all connected by the ocean”.

Joint statement

H.E. Surangel Whipps Jr

U.S. Special Envoy John Kerry

Opening of Our Oceans Conference 2022

OUR CHALLENGES

As a large ocean state, the well-being of oceans – those within national jurisdiction and those beyond – is inextricably linked to the well-being of Palau's people, economy, culture, and ways of living. However, illegal fishing by distant water fleets, habitat degradation, climate change, and plastics pollution are among just a few of the challenges Palau and other small island states face in sustaining the health and productivity of the ocean.

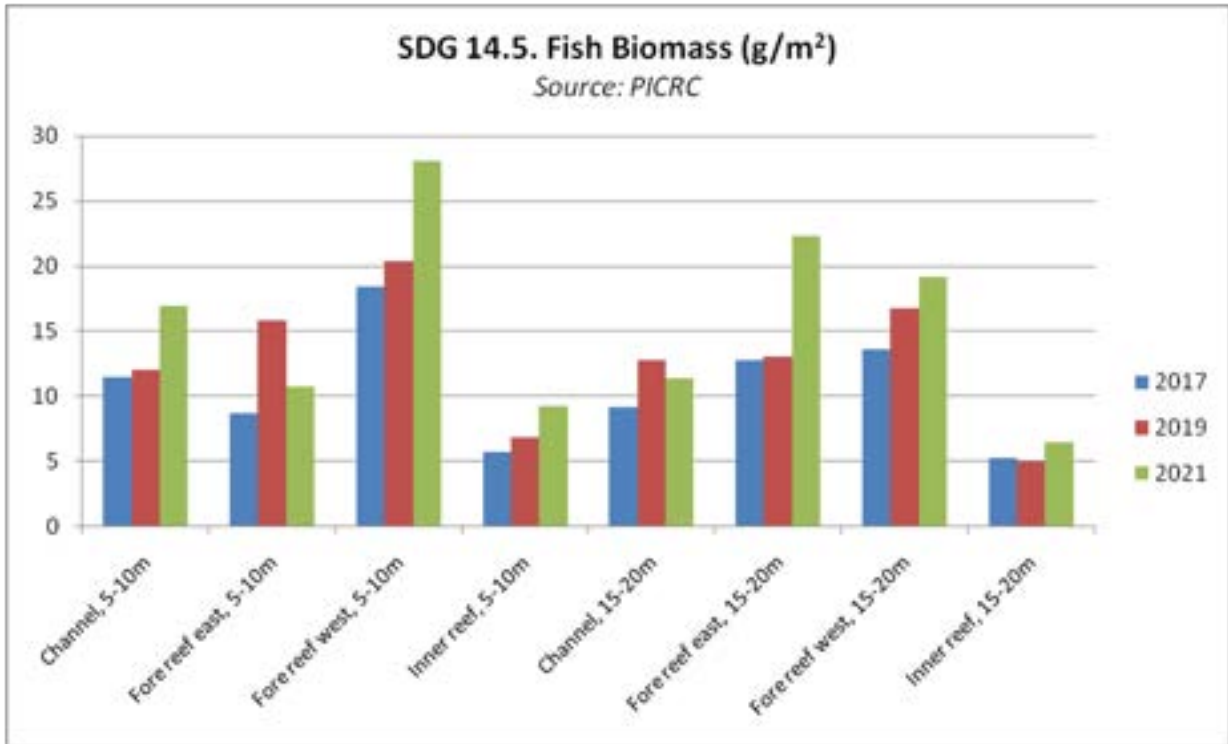
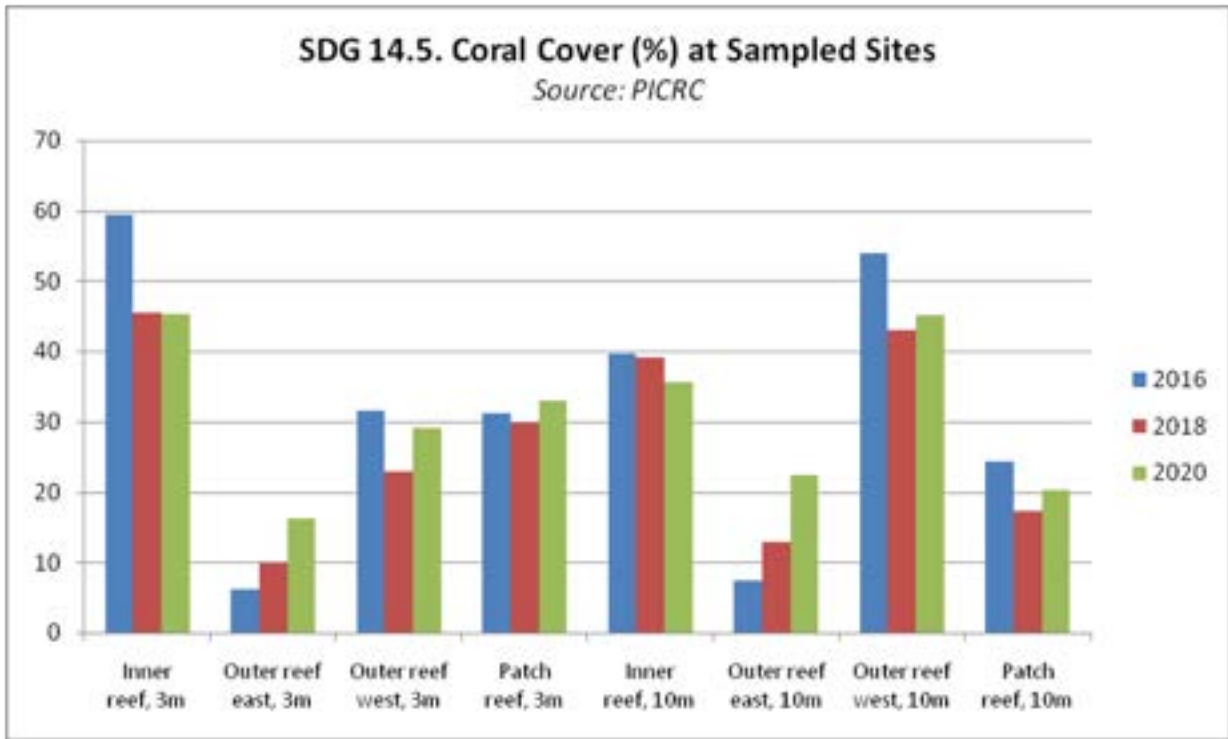
PATHWAYS TO 2030

The Palau Blue Prosperity Plan provides the framework the government has prepared to guide SDG 14 implementation to 2030 and beyond. The plan is summarized in the following section.



Oalau's Jellyfish Lake is populated by millions of golden jellyfish. These are a unique subspecies, *Mastigias papua etpisoni*, named after former Palau President Ngiratkel Etpison. This subspecies is found only in this marine lake, and nowhere else in the world (*Coral Reef Research Foundation*).

Photo credit: Palau Visitors Authority





PATHWAYS TO 2030: PALAU BLUE PROSPERITY PLAN

Palau's Blue Prosperity Plan is the nation's strategy to achieve 100% management of Palau's ocean by balancing the protection of marine resources with their sustainable use for the benefit of all Palauans. Three goals are Protection, Sustainable Economic Development, and improving the Enabling Environment. Key components:

Marine spatial planning (MSP)

MSP will guide evidence-based decisions based on an inclusive and participatory process to optimize conservation and economic returns for all stakeholders. MSP will establish deep water protected areas, identify targets for additional nearshore protection, and deliver a comprehensive marine spatial plan and the requisite capacity building to implement, monitor, manage, and maintain support for it

Offshore fisheries development

Reestablish locally-based longline fleet; refresh Palau's purse seine vessel days strategy; implement locally-based wholly-Palauan owned pole and line fishery, FAD strategic planning, streamline market access, and stabilize demand for sustainable pelagic species.

Restorative aquaculture

Develop national aquaculture policy supporting zoning, permitting, and business planning, shifting production toward restorative species.

Infrastructure and Human Resources

Build the critical physical infrastructure and human capital necessary to implement, operate, and adaptively manage Palau's Blue Economy.

Innovation

Develop innovative business models to maximize the socio-economic and environmental benefits from Palau's fisheries, aquaculture, and marine tourism, including an ecotourism/coastal insurance mechanism to protect against future global disruptions - "build back better" post-COVID.

Regional Scaling

The Palau "Blue Prosperity Plan" has been scaled up for the Region. Pacific Island Forum leaders endorsed the "Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity Plan" at the 2023 Forum meeting. The plan, championed by Palau and Tonga, aims to achieve 100% effective ocean management and at least 30% protection of the Blue Pacific continent across the region.

SDGs In Action





SDG 15: KLENGAR ER A BELUU (LIFE ON LAND)

The Palau Forest Action Plan 2021–2030 envisions “a Palau enriched by healthy forests that sustain our culture and livelihoods, expand the economy, and strengthen the resilience of the island ecosystems and communities”.

Forests cover an estimated 90% of Palau’s land area (UNEP, 2022), including swamp, volcanic, mangrove, limestone, coastal, plantations, urban, and agroforests. Approximately 30% of forested lands are owned by individuals or clans, while 70% are owned by state governments.

Forests provide products - food, timber, medicine, and materials for arts, crafts, and recreation for residents and tourists. They also provide ecosystem services vital to Palau’s economy, culture, way of life, and environmental sustainability, including an abundant supply of fresh water, control of flooding and erosion, wildlife habitats, and increasingly important in this era of climate change, carbon sinks that absorb and store carbon dioxide emissions.



Coconut trees are native species with over 40 uses.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

15.1: Conserve and protect terrestrial & freshwater ecosystems	Maintain Progress
15.2: Sustainably manage forest ecosystems	Accelerate Progress
15.3: Combat desertification and land degradation	Accelerate Progress
15.5: Halt loss of biodiversity	Reverse Trends
15.6: Fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of genetic resources	Accelerate Progress
15.8: Prevent and control invasive alien species	Accelerate Progress
15.9: Integrate biodiversity conservation in national & local planning	Accelerate Progress
15.a: Mobilize resources for biodiversity & ecosystem conservation	Maintain Progress



OUR PROGRESS

Palau has integrated 8 out of 12 SDG targets into its national SDG framework and is on track or progressing toward achieving 7 of these.

Conserve and Protect Terrestrial and Freshwater Resources - SDG 15.1 & 15.2

Despite challenges posed by development, climate change, invasive species, and fire, among others, forest coverage has slightly increased from 88% (2010) to 90% (2020). Almost half of Palau's terrestrial area is considered "important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity." Twenty percent of Palau's terrestrial area is formally protected within the Protected Area Network, but there is considerable variation in location.

- Rock Islands, 100% protected
- Babeldaob, 10% protected
- Mangroves, 40% protected

The Palau Forest Action Plan 2021-2030 governs sustainable forest management, and the Bureau of Environment (MAFE) manages implementation.



Degraded land in Ngardmau State caused by bauxite mining during the Japanese era; restoration of this long-denuded area is challenging.

Palau's Forest Action Plan 2021-2030

Managed by the Bureau of the Environment (MAFE), Palau's Forest Action Plan has three overarching priorities.

- (1) Enhance the benefits derived from forests by promoting the adoption of sustainable forest-based sources of livelihoods, including ecotourism, agroforestry, and sustainable harvesting.
- (2) Protect forests by developing and implementing fire and invasive species hazard reduction programs.
- (3) Develop a Forest Monitoring Program to increase knowledge and understanding of forest resource conditions.

Degraded Land - SDG 15.3

The percentage of land in Palau that is classified as degraded is 10.77% (UNEP, 2019). Some of this degradation, such as large swaths of denuded land in Ngardmau, dates to the colonial period. Several states have active reforestation programs underway, although the process of reclaiming degraded land is slow due to poor soil conditions.

Loss of biodiversity SDG 15.5

Despite Palau's commitment to conservation, its composite red list index has deteriorated from 0.79 (2010) to 0.66 (2023).

- Mammals, 100% at risk (2 species),
- Amphibians & reptiles, 8% at risk (1 out of 46 species),
- Birds, 58% at risk (7 out of 12 species),
- Plants are indeterminant as no official list of at-risk plants has been compiled.



Genetic Resources - SDG 15.6

Palau is a contracting party to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA) but is not fully compliant with reporting provisions.

Invasive species - SDG 15.8

Palau recognizes the threat invasive species pose to fragile island ecosystems. An Invasive Species Strategy was developed in 2004 and expanded to an Invasive Species Action Plan in 2013, the same year biosecurity legislation was enacted. The plan was updated in 2018, and implementation is managed by MAFE. States and civil society organizations, both local and international, are important partners for controlling and eradicating invasive species already present in Palau.

“Invasive species are the single biggest threat to the biodiversity of the Rock Islands and Palau.”

Tommy Hall
Island Conservation

Resources for Terrestrial Conservation - SDG 15.a

Official development assistance for terrestrial conservation has increased fivefold from US\$0.5 million (2010) to US\$2.7 million (2021) against a target of US\$3.2 million.

OUR CHALLENGES

Although Palau has adopted a “ridge-to-reef” ecosystem management approach and is doing well against the national goal of “no net loss”, forests, like all resources, are threatened by climate change, development, fire, and invasive species, among other threats. These threats, in turn, result in land degradation, deforestation, sedimentation, flooding, landslides, and drought. Although healthy forests are critical for healthy oceans, human and financial resources earmarked for forest management are modest compared to those directed toward oceans.

PATHWAYS TO 2030

The Palau Forest Action Plan sets out a pathway toward SDG 15 for 2030 and beyond, with immediate investment priorities of US\$27 million identified in the Palau Development Plan for FY 2024-FY 2027.



SDGs In Action

EBIIL SOCIETY: IMMERSIVE LEARNING

Ebiil Society has provided immersive environmental learning that represents a transformative approach in educational systems, engaging schools, children, youth, and universities in a hands-on, experiential learning process. This method is rooted in the idea that direct experience and engagement with the environment can foster a deeper understanding of ecological principles, sustainability practices, and the urgent need for conservation efforts. By stepping out of the traditional classroom setting and into the natural world, students of all ages are offered a unique educational experience that can significantly enhance their connection to and appreciation for the environment.

Ebiil Outdoor Classrooms target primary and high schools through field trips to local forests and nature reserves, marine environments, and historical sites of Palau. The lessons are based on an Ebiil curriculum integrating traditional knowledge and practices with Western science. Ebiil's 'Decolonizing Environmental Social Science Research' program targets high school students and is an 8-month program, combining research classes with traditional "borrowing knowledge,' protocols. Students learn to design, conduct research, and travel throughout Palau, interviewing experts and elders. The final product for the class is presenting research findings at local or international conferences.

Camp Ebiil is conducted twice in the summer and targets children ages 8-14 as campers and 15 and older as camp counselors. Campers have the opportunity to explore Palau's wonders while learning cultural practices and conservation. A university-level camp expands into more sophisticated and specialized experiences, including research projects, internships, and study abroad programs focused on natural resource management and sustainability. The annual number of program participants averages around 600 children.





PILLAR 5

SUSTAINING
LASTING
PARTNERSHIPS
AT HOME AND
ABROAD

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PILLAR 5



SUSTAINING LASTING PARTNERSHIPS AT HOME AND ABROAD

To realize the promise of the SDGs, the government works at home in close partnership with traditional leaders, state governments, the private sector, and civil society.

As a large ocean state, Palau relies on its regional and global partners. Playing an active member of the global community, Palau wields influence that belies its size and celebrates solidarity with like-minded multilateral, bilateral, and private partners both near and far.





SDG 17: KLAUKLEDEM E OLTAUT A TELBIIL (PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS)

No country has all of the financial, human, and technological resources needed to fully achieve the SDGs; hence, it is vital to have partnerships for the goals, both domestic and international. Palau is well-positioned to build on a firm foundation of pre-existing partnerships that have supported its journey toward sustainability since independence.

SDG 17 has 19 targets organized into four categories - finance, technology, capacity building, and systems. Palau has incorporated 12 of these targets into its SDG framework.

OUR PROGRESS

Partnerships for Financing the Goals - SDGs 17.1, 17.3, 17.4

Economic disruptions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic reduced government revenues while increasing demand for expenditures to stabilize the economy, support state-owned enterprises, and finance social protection. To meet its obligations, the government was forced to borrow extensively. External indebtedness rose from an average of 30% of GDP pre-COVID to 72% in FY 2023 (*Minister of Finance, 2023*).

Domestic resources: As part of the government's efforts to "build back better", tax reform measures adopted in 2022 and implemented in 2023 increased revenues by \$19.1 million for FY 2023 over FY 2022 - about 6.5% of GDP - and created fiscal "space" for

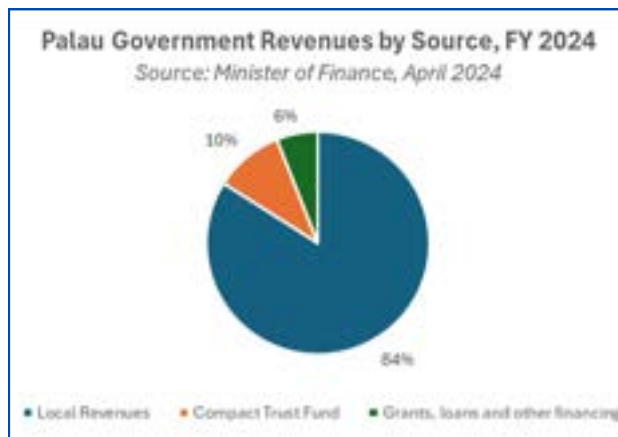
PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

17.1. Strengthen domestic resource mobilization	Maintain Progress
17.3. Mobilize financial resources from multiple sources	Accelerate Progress
17.4. Debt sustainability	Accelerate Progress
17.6. Internat'l cooperation for science, technology, & innovation	Accelerate Progress
17.7. Finance for environmentally sound technology.	Accelerate Progress
17.9. Enhance international support for capacity building	Accelerate Progress
17.13. Enhance macroeconomic stability	Accelerate Progress
17.15. Country-led results framework	Maintain Progress
17.16. Monitor progress	Accelerate Progress
17.17. Public-private and civil society partnerships	Maintain Progress
17.18 Statistical capacity	Maintain Progress
17.19. Census and birth/death registration	Maintain Progress



SDG implementation includes expanding social protection, increasing the minimum wage, paying down government debt, and improving essential services in health, education, and public safety (*Minister of Finance, 2023 and Office of the President, 2024*).

Grants and ODA: Official development assistance, including grants authorized under the Compact of Free Association, fluctuated yearly but increased sharply during COVID-19 as partners provided assistance during the crisis. Subsequently, grants have been reduced to pre-COVID levels (*Minister of Finance, 2023*).



Remittances: Unlike several other Pacific Island nations, incoming remittances captured by the statistical system are relatively modest (less than 1% of GDP). At present, remittances primarily fund customary obligations and social protection but, moving forward, represent a potential source of development finance.

Partnerships for Technology SDGs 17.6 & 17.7

Discussions under SDG 9 highlighted international cooperation for information technology, including the submarine fiber optic cable, which introduced state-of-the-art broadband internet services and, in turn, has supported multiple applications across the development spectrum.

Palau's digital connectivity has been significantly improved through two submarine cable initiatives. The first initiative established the initial connection, while the second, primarily financed through partnerships with the United States, Japan, and Australia, adds backup capacity to increase the system's resilience. This highlights the importance of international partnerships in supporting Palau's ongoing digital infrastructure development. Applications based on the cable project are supported by multiple donors, including Australia (Project Olangch in health and Project Okeuid in agriculture), the United Nations, and the European Union (customs applications).

Palau is also the beneficiary of development cooperation in support of environmentally sound technologies. State-of-the-art waste management has been supported primarily by Japan. Renewable energy technologies have been supported by multiple donors - United Nations, SPREP, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and governments of the European Union, Japan, Australia, Republic of China (Taiwan), Denmark, and others. Technology transfer in the water and sanitation sector has been supported by the Asian Development Bank, European Union, Global Environmental Facility, Asian Development Bank, United States, and the Republic of China (Taiwan).

Partnerships for Capacity Building SDG 17.9

Most development assistance projects involve some elements of capacity building - training, operations and management, and systems development. Hence, there is a significant overlap between SDG 17.9 and other SDG 17 targets. Specific to SDG 17.9, technical cooperation is defined as grants for education, training, and payments to consultants, teachers, and other personnel whose terms of reference include capacity building for the SDGs.



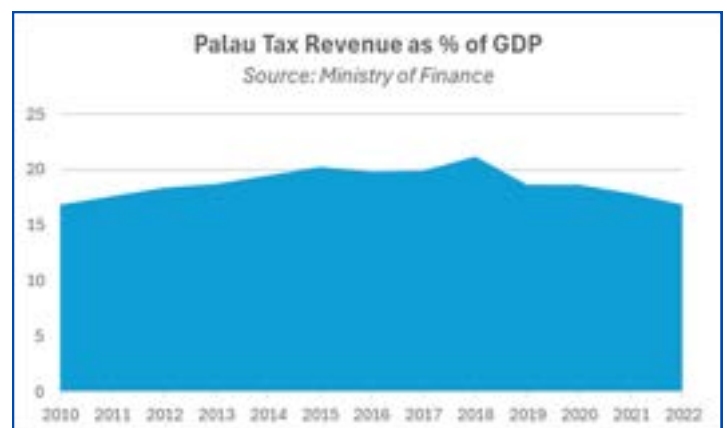
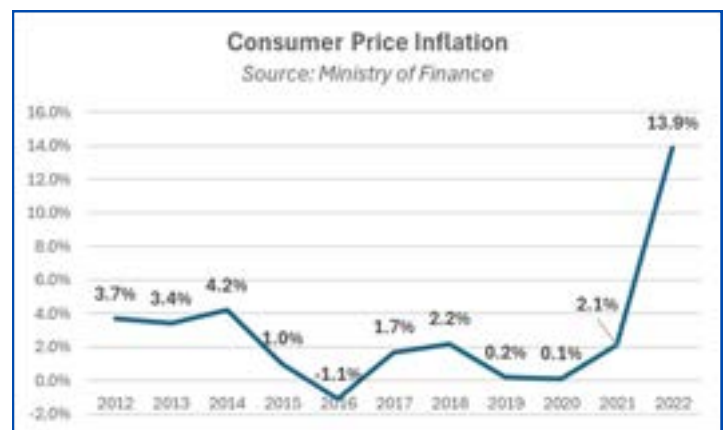
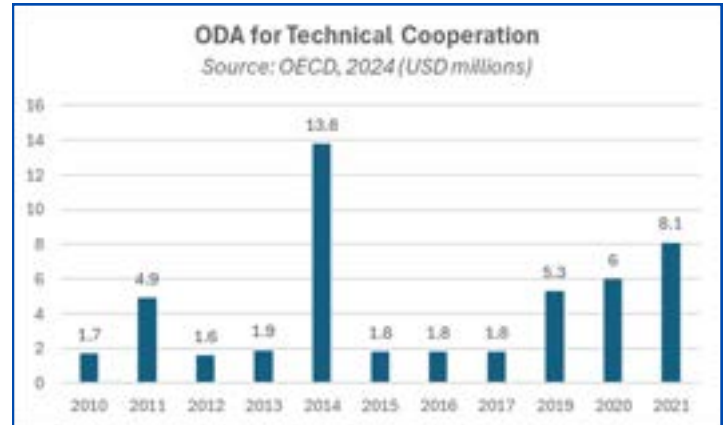
Other Development Issues

Reducing barriers to trade (SDGs 17.10, 17.11, 17.12): SDG 17.10 calls for a “universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization” measured by the weighted mean of tariffs applied to exports. Given that Palau has minimal exports (SDG 17.11), SDG 17.10 is not particularly relevant and has not been included in Palau’s SDG Framework.

Sustaining macroeconomic stability (SDG 17.13): Macroeconomic stability is measured by a dashboard of indicators that include GDP growth, consumer price inflation, cash surplus/deficit, current account balance, trade and balance of payments, investment performance, and tax revenues. These dashboard indicators are presented in Annex A. Generally, they show satisfactory economic performance pre-COVID, significant regression during COVID-19, and the start of recovery from FY 2022 onward. The outlook for a return to economic stability and growth is favorable for 2024-2030.

Respect country policy space for sustainable development (SDG 17.15). This measures the extent to which ODA is delivered according to a country-led results framework. Palau has mechanisms in place, including the Palau Development Plan and National Infrastructure Investment Plan, that ensure development assistance is country-led.

Monitoring progress toward the goals (SDG 17.16): Palau reports continuing progress under this indicator as reflected in the VNR-24. Future work is needed, however, to systematize data collection and analysis so that domestic reports on SDG implementation are available annually to guide policy decisions.





Promote public-private partnerships for the goals (SDG 17.16-A): Public-private partnerships are a relatively new form of development financing for Palau. Palau's first major PPP project was in partnership with the Japanese government and three Japanese firms to construct the new airport terminal. The PPP approach was also used to construct the solar farm. The development of PPP agreements is a relatively complex undertaking, but a progressive expansion in using this modality is expected in future years.

Promote civil society partnerships for the goals (SDG 17.16): Palau has a strong history of partnership between government and civil society, and for a relatively small country, there are many civil society groups. A mapping exercise conducted by the Canada Fund about 20 years ago identified over 1,000 civil society organizations, including *cheldebechel* (community organizations of men, women, and youth organized according to custom and tradition), legally registered NGOs, and umbrella organizations representing multiple smaller groups.

Statistical capacity for the SDGs (SDG 17.18 and 17.19): Palau has national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental

Civil Society and VNR-24

Civil society organizations have played an essential role in the preparation of VNR-24. Civil society groups that are members of the VNR Steering Committee headed by the President include

- Rubekul Belau (Council of Chiefs)
- Mechesil Belau (Palau women's council)
- Association of Governors
- Association of Speakers
- Belau Association of NGOs
- Palau Chamber of Commerce.

These groups and others have also participated as members of the secretariat:

- Small Business Development Center
- Palau Entrepreneurs for Growth
- Pacific Disabilities Council and OMEKESANG (Palau Disabled Persons Organization)
- Palau Resource Institute

Other consultation partners who have integrated the SDGs into their programs and plans include the Palau National Olympic Committee (PNOC), the Palau Conservation Society (PCS), and the National Youth and Cheldebechel Council (NYCC).

Public-Private Partnerships

In March 2019, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) signed a loan agreement for the renovation, expansion, and management of the Palau International Airport Project, a joint undertaking between the Government of Palau and three Japanese firms: Sojitz Corporation, the Japan Airport Terminal Co., Ltd., and the Japan Overseas Infrastructure Investment Corporation for Transport & Urban Development. The project was Palau's first major public-private partnership (PPP) for infrastructure development and JICA's first Private-Sector Investment Finance project in the Pacific.



Palau new airport terminal.
Photo credit: Japan Embassy Palau



PATHWAYS TO 2030

Moving toward 2030, there is a need to systematize the collection of SDG monitoring data. To this end, it would be helpful to expand the Annual Statistical Yearbook by (i) explicitly linking existing data sets to SDG indicators and (ii) adding additional data sets required for VNR preparation. This would streamline the process of annual domestic reporting on the SDGs and periodic global reporting in the form of the VNR.

Principles of Official Statistics: The focal point for official statistics is the Office of Planning and Statistics (OPS) within the Bureau of Budget and Planning (BBP) in the Ministry of Finance. The Office conducts vital periodic surveys (census and HIES) according to a regular 5-to-10-year cycle. It prepares an annual compilation of administrative statistics published in the Annual Statistical Yearbook and available publicly online.

The Office, however, lacks a comprehensive national statistical plan and financing for operations is limited. Most major statistical works, such as the census and HIES surveys (SDG 17.19), require external technical or financial assistance.

COVID-19 caused some delays in implementing the regular schedule of statistical surveys. While the 2020 census report was completed and available to support VNR-24, the 2023 HIES report has yet to be available; hence, VNR-24 has some critical data gaps relating to poverty, inequality, and food security.

The MHHS, in partnership with the Clerk of Courts, operates a National Vital Statistics registry that captures all births and deaths.

PATHWAYS TO 2030 AND BEYOND



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GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

Palau's Pathway to 2030 is set out in the Palau Development Plan 2023-2026 and the supporting National Infrastructure Investment Plan, both closely aligned with the 2030 Agenda. These overarching documents are supplemented by specialized plans and policies, several of which have been referenced in VNR-24.

OVERARCHING THEME

The theme for VNR 2024 – harnessing our cultural heritage to “build back better” for a sustainable future - is closely aligned with the government's overarching priority, “A Kot a Rechad er Belau” (Palauan People First), a theme that encompasses an enhanced quality of life both now and for the future and an enabling environment that supports people in pursuing their happiness as the driving force behind and the primary beneficiaries of our country's development and progress.

PILLAR 1

SUSTAINING OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

Sustaining Palau's cultural heritage has been a cross-cutting theme for both VNR-19 and VNR-24. Moving forward, it will be essential to continue the dialogue with domestic and regional partners, including our traditional leaders, to develop Palau-specific targets and indicators that reflect our aspirations for a thriving culture in which -

- More Palauans choose to reside at home (reduce out-migration and encourage reverse migration),
- Palauans continue to speak their language and practice their culture,
- Cultural and historic sites are restored, managed, and protected,
- Development respects and safeguards culture,

- Tangible and intangible cultural heritage provide a basis for national pride, economic growth, entrepreneurship, and an enhanced quality of life.

PILLAR 2

EMPOWERING OUR PEOPLE

Using data from the 2023 HIES when it becomes available, progress will be accelerated with an explicit poverty reduction and social protection strategy that addresses drivers of vulnerability and social protection supports, including the reinforcement of customary “caring and sharing” for those who are most vulnerable. Outcomes from the upcoming Conference of Traditional Leaders (July, 2024) will be invaluable in shaping that policy. (Refer to SDG 16).

Accelerating work already underway to create a more food-secure Palau remains a priority. Another priority is creating an enabling environment in which healthy choices are easy choices, thereby beginning to reverse overweight, obesity, and noncommunicable diseases. Other priorities include enhancing mental health and well-being, especially among youth, improving the quality of health and education systems, and promoting equality, non-discrimination, peace, and harmony.

PILLAR 3

GROWING THE ECONOMY

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

In Pillar 3, the aim is to restore sustained economic growth in harmony with Palauan values, culture, and natural heritage while diversifying the economy, improving the quality of work, and removing structural bottlenecks to development.

n Leaving No One Behind, priorities include:

- Empowering youth to take a more active part in development by enhancing education, training, and employment opportunities
- Overcoming barriers, both physical and social, that prevent persons with disabilities from fully realizing their potential and their rights
- Ensuring a high quality of life for an aging population, including addressing the structural weaknesses of social security and the pension plan, both essential social protections for persons over the age of 60.

PILLAR 4 PROTECTING OUR ISLAND HOME FROM RIDGE TO BEYOND THE REEF

Palau has established a strong framework for environmental protection, but the environment is increasingly threatened by climate change and degradation caused by outside forces (e.g., plastic pollution, illegal fishing, and others). The Climate Change Policy and Action Plan 2024 provides a pathway forward, but it will require strong international partnerships to access the financing needed for its full implementation.

PILLAR 5 BUILDING LASTING PARTNERSHIPS

Both domestic and international partnerships are critical for achieving the SDGs. The government, private sector, and civil society must continue to work collaboratively, building on their respective strengths, to achieve the goals at home while recognizing the importance of global partnerships for addressing issues that arise beyond Palau's borders and for financing domestic actions.

The Local 2030 network recently launched in Palau is needed to support more systematic monitoring of the SDGs and their localization, especially at subnational levels, as part of the state master planning processes. Both public and private organizations must be encouraged and supported to integrate the SDGs into their plans and operating systems.

ANNEXES

ANNEX A: OVERVIEW OF TARGET STATUS
ANNEX B: METHODS & STAKEHOLDERS



ANNEX A

SUMMARY OF TARGET IMPLEMENTATION STATUS



Palau SDG Target Implementation Status: VNR-24							
SDG #	Topic	Global Targets	Palau VNR Targets	IMPLEMENTATION STATUS			
				Maintain Progress	Accelerate Progress	Reverse Trends	Not Assessed
SDG 1	Poverty	7	6	1	3	0	2
SDG 2	Hunger	8	3	1	2	0	0
SDG 3	Health	13	11	3	7	1	0
SDG 4	Education	10	6	2	2	1	0
SDG 5	Gender	9	5	2	3	0	0
SDG 6	Water & Sanitation	8	4	2	2	0	0
SDG 7	Energy	5	3	1	1	1	0
SDG 8	Economy & Work	12	11	3	5	2	1
SDG 9	Infrastructure	8	5	1	3	0	1
SDG 10	Inequality	10	5	2	1	0	2
SDG 11	Communities	10	8	2	3	0	3
SDG 12	Production & Consumption	11	6	0	4	1	1
SDG 13	Climate	5	5	0	3	0	2
SDG 14	Oceans	10	8	3	1	2	2
SDG 15	Land	12	8	2	5	1	0
SDG 16	Peace & Justice	12	9	4	1	1	4
SDG 17	Partnerships	19	12	5	7	0	0
SDGs 1-17		169	115	34	53	10	18
				29%	46%	9%	16%

Supporting data for this table are found in Volume 2 of VNR-24, Data Tables. The ESCAP SDG Tracker also contains supporting data. ESCAP reports, however, only on 76 of Palau's targets. The ESCAP data tracker can be accessed at:

(<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/unescap.statistics.division/viz/SDG-PLW-2024/Story#1>).

ANNEX B

METHODS AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



INTRODUCTION

Presidential Executive Order 483, “Establishing a Framework for the Monitoring and Evaluation of the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda,” sets out the structure for consultations for VNR-24 and future reports. The structure ensures a strong voice for the subnational governments, traditional leaders, civil society, and the private sector (See the diagram below).

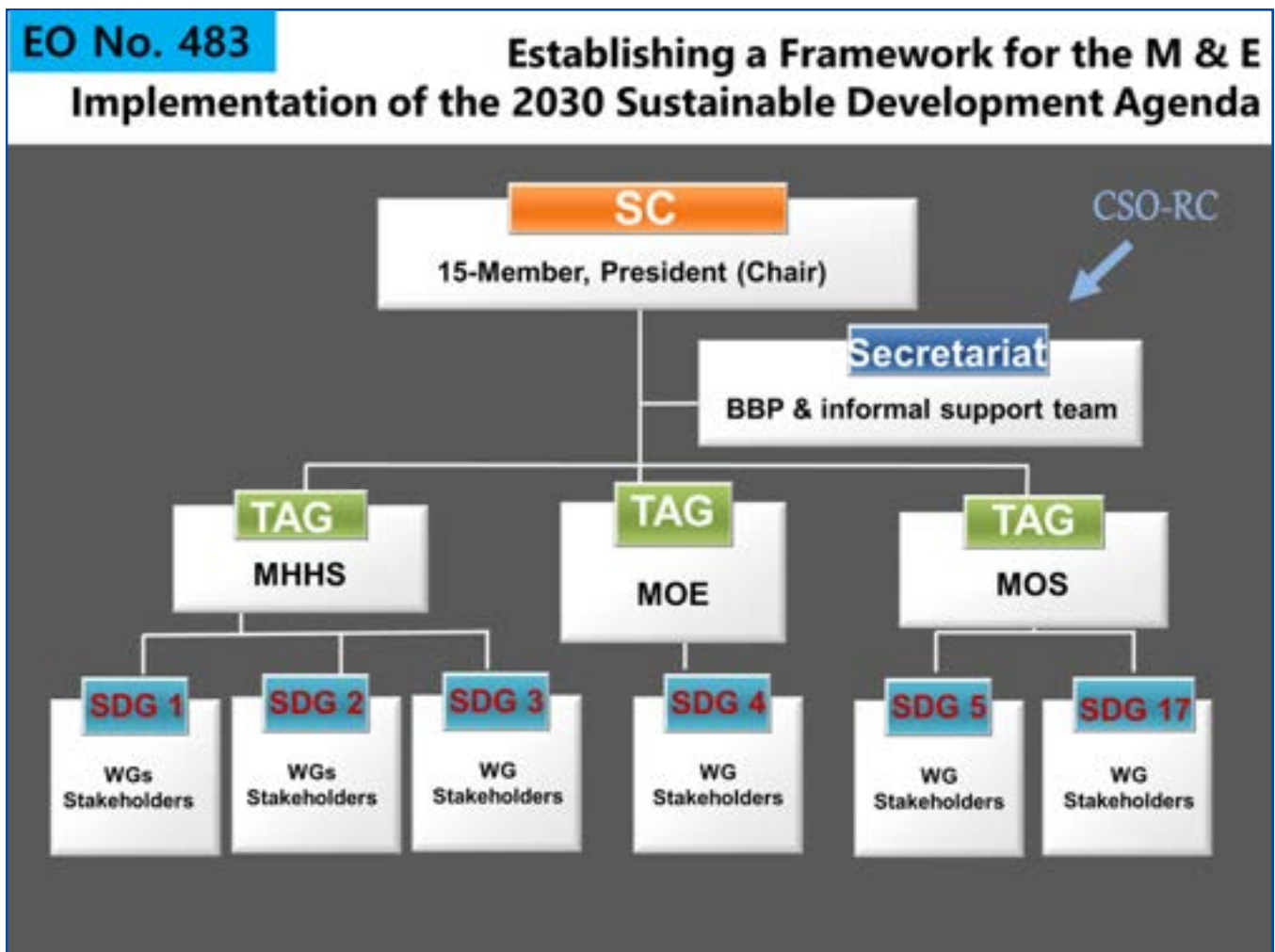
STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee is chaired by the President with 15 members representing the eight ministries, the Rubekul Belau (Council of Chiefs), the Mechesil Belau (Women of Palau), the Governor’s Association, the Speaker’s Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Belau Association of NGOs (BANGO).

The Steering Committee provides high-level guidance and is the ultimate decision-making body regarding the VNR content and presentation. The Committee has formally met five times but has been informally consulted throughout the drafting process.

SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat is housed within the Bureau of Budget and Planning (Ministry of Finance). The National Environmental Coordinator is the focal person. She is assisted by core members responsible for data compilation, analysis, and writing. An expanded secretariat meets as needed in an advisory capacity.



(Members of this expanded secretariat include the Governor's Association, the Global Environmental Fund, Palau Resources Institute, Pacific Disabilities Council, Belau Association of NGOs, Office of the President, and Local2030 Islands Network.

Other consultation partners include Palau Entrepreneurs for Growth, the Chamber of Commerce, the Small Business Development Center, and FAO-Palau.

An ad hoc group of cultural experts led by the Director of the Bureau of Culture (MHRCTD) also assisted with the formulation of VNR-24.

THEMATIC AREA GROUP LEADERS

Thematic Area Group (TAG) leads are appointed by their ministers and responsible for coordinating inputs according to their assigned SDGs. Ultimately, the TAG leads are responsible for finalizing the target and indicator sets for VNR-24, approving the data that goes into the ESCAP SDG Tracker, and shaping the report's content regarding their assigned responsibilities.

TAG Leads:

- SDGs 1, 2, and 3, led by the Bureau of Public Health, MHHS
- SDG 4 led by the Division of School Testing and Data Collection, MOE
- SDGs 5 and 16, led by the Office of the Vice President and Minister of Justice
- SDG 8, led by the Bureau of Culture, MHRCTD
- SDG 9, led by MPII
- SDGs 6 and 15, led by the Bureau of the Environment, MAFE
- SDG 14, led by the Bureau of Marine Resources, MAFE

- SDGs 7, 10, 11, and 14 led by the Office of Planning and Statistics, MOF
- SDG 17, led by the Bureau of Domestic Affairs, MOS

WORKING GROUPS

The Executive Order envisaged that thematic working groups would be established specific to individual goals and/or target clusters. TAG leads were to select, convene, and coordinate the working groupson an 'as needed' basis.

Ultimately, only two working groups were formed. One, supports SDG 14 and is comprised by the Bureau of Marine Resources, Palau International Coral Reef Research Center, and the Palau Coral Reef Research Foundation. The second is a working group on culture and language that advises on how culture can be reflected across VNR-24. The Palau National Olympic Committee has also provided input into sport as a means of implementing the SDGs.

LOCAL2030 INITIATIVE AND PALAU GREEN GROWTH DASHBOARD

The Office of the President has taken the lead on the Palau Green Growth launched in Palau in February 2024.

Data compiled for VNR-24, as reflected in Volume 2 and ESCAP's National SDG Tracker, will provide an initial foundation for the work of Local2030. It is envisaged, however, that Local2030 will go beyond VNR-24 with stronger engagement at subnational levels to create a core data set for monitoring SDG progress by states and creatively displaying this data for stakeholders.

OTHER DOMESTIC PARTNERS

In addition to the formal structure, the Secretariat engages with other stakeholders with specialized knowledge of the specific SDGs or targets (e.g., Environmental Quality Protection Board, National Emergency Management Office, Palau Protected Area Network Office, and others). The Secretariat has also engaged with community organizations engaged in innovative activities to “tell their story” using a series of “SDGs in Action” spotlights that showcase implementation activities happening “on the ground.”

The VNR-24 secretariat wishes to extend a special thanks to the Bureau of Public Health that has supported VNR-24 preparations by hosting meetings of the steering committee and TAG leads.

International Support and Assistance

As the report highlights, Palau works with many international partners to implement the SDGs. Two partners, in particular, have provided extensive support for production of VNR-24. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) provided technical support for writing the report. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is the official repository of SDG data from across Asia and the Pacific. ESCAP has compiled these data into an SDG Tracker available at [SDG-PLW-2024 | Tableau Public](#).