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EAURIPIK ATOLL Leaders interview

Conducted by Danko Taboroši
with Eddie Haleyalig and Isaac Sagopat
(Chief Manuel Bulgar was sick and unable to attend)

Interview data:

Location	Informants	Date	Audio file	Language	Length
Men's House (on Eauripik)	Eddie Haleyalig Isaac Sagopat	08/23/15	LS100236	English	1h 05'

Interview content:

Due to very short time available on Eauripik, the questions below are a combination of questions prepared for individual household interviewees in Ifalik and questions prepared for community leaders in Ifalik, with an addition of followup questions and discussions of topics that appeared relevant in Eauripik. Most of the questions were answered by Eddie Haleyalig first, with Isaac Sagopat contributing.

Danko: Where do you get your drinking water?

Respondent(s): Now we are using the water catchments. Only from the catchments.

Danko: Do you drink coconuts?

Respondent(s): We are drinking mostly water. After the typhoon, just now the coconuts are coming to recovery. Even the b

Danko: When was that typhoon?

Respondent(s): That was Haiyan. We were the first victim.

Danko: Only now you're starting to see that the coconuts are recovering?

Respondent(s): There was one after that. About a year after. That was last November.¹

Danko: Since that one, the coconuts are now recovering? All this time you haven't been drinking coconuts?

Respondent(s): No, mostly rainwater.

Danko: But in general, when the coconut palms are in good shape, recovered, no typhoons, normally, how many

1 --- 2014, probably Typhoon Hagupit (Ruby)

coconuts do you guys drink? Do you drink one every day?

Respondent(s): No, not really. We depend on water. Rainwater. Coconuts are used mostly when people are sick. That's the main thing we give to sick people.

Danko: During normal times average person of Eauripik does not drink coconuts?

Respondent(s): No.

Danko: How many would you drink in a week? In normal times?

Respondent(s): None. Maybe a month. We don't drink any coconuts. Just water.

Danko: Where do you get water for cooking?

Respondent(s): Same. From the water catchments. And we also use well water for cooking.

Danko: How do you decide which one to use?

Respondent(s): Catchment for rice, well for taro...

Danko: How about soup? Let's say you're making fish soup. Do you make soup out of fish?

Respondent(s): Yes, yes. Catchment water.

Danko: How about breadfruit?

Respondent(s): Groundwater.

Danko: So could we say that for things that you peel you use groundwater and for other things you use rainwater?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: May I ask about water for doing the dishes? Where do you get it from?

Respondent(s): Usually, we just use saltwater. Then we rinse it off.

Danko: How about laundry?

Respondent(s): With water from well.

Danko: In Ifalik they wash laundry first in seawater, then in water from wells.

Respondent(s): Yes, they also do that here. But mostly from the wells.

Danko: And showers? I suppose it's all from wells?

Respondent(s): No, ocean. And then we rinse off. Older people don't need to rinse, they just shower in saltwater.

Danko: What other things do you use water for? We mentioned drinking, cooking, dishwashing, laundry, and showers. Any other use?

Respondent(s): That's it. Toilets... we don't have any. You see, there was supposed to be a septic tank here. But before they finished the project they ran out of money.

Danko: There are no toilets here. Just normal style, going to the ocean?

Respondent(s): Yes. In the ocean.

Danko: In the water, or on the beach, or in the bushes? Or pretty much always in the water?

Respondent(s): In the ocean. Little kids, maybe on the beach.

Danko: Natural flushing, right? It's safer for your groundwater.

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: What about animals, do you have pigs?

Respondent(s): Water for the pigs is from the ground.

Danko: How about watering some of the flowers, small plants?

Respondent(s): We don't do that. Just rain.

Danko: This is a little bit hard question. Do you have any idea how much water you use per day per person? Where does the majority of the water get used for? Doesn't matter if it's rainwater, groundwater. What takes the most of water in a day, washing, cooking, rinsing, dishes? In Ifalik, some people said it's for cooking, because it takes a long time. Some people said it's for showers, because they have to use many bucketfuls. Some people said it's for drinking. What do you think?

Respondent(s): We think it would be for shower. Shower, and also drinking. A person can drink a gallon a day. Small kids maybe less.

Danko: So we have a gallon for drinking in a day, and maybe a few gallons for rinsing and showers?

Respondent(s): Yes. Some people shower maybe once a day, some people twice a day.

Danko: May I ask how many people live in your house, just your house, where you sleep, with kids included.

Respondent(s): Five.

Danko: If you had 15 Clorox bottles full of water [1 gallon each], would that last the five of you for the whole day? You can use only from those bottles, not from the tanks and not from wells. Would that be enough for you? To live normally, not to save, to have enough for drinking, cooking, shower, all that you need. Would that work?

Respondent(s): Yes, I think that would be enough. Oh, you mean, also shower? With shower, it's not enough.

Danko: Without shower it could work?

Respondent(s): Yes, for drinking, cooking, dishes.

Danko: And laundry?

Respondent(s): Laundry takes a lot of water.

Danko: So with shower and laundry it would not be enough?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: How do you catch rainwater?

Respondent(s): Most houses have thatch roofs. Not tin roofs.

Danko: Perhaps it's not such a big problem. You have tin roofs made just for the catchment tanks, they catch the rain and are easier to maintain, easier to clean, easier to keep free of vegetation and to block access to animals.

Respondent(s): We also have two concrete catchments. We don't know, maybe they have holes in them?

Danko: I do want to talk about that, let's get back to it a bit later please. Now I'd like to ask you if your families' catchment tanks have ever run out of water?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: What do you do when that happens?

Respondent(s): We go back to the wells.

Danko: When you do that, do you boil it or drink like that?

Respondent(s): We boil it.

Danko: Do you ever add bleach instead of boiling?

Respondent(s): No. We don't have it.

Danko: What about coconuts? In emergencies do you prefer to go to coconuts first and then to the well, or do you go to the well right away and boil water?

Respondent(s): Maybe we drink a coconut twice a week or so.

Danko: Basically, you use water from the wells and coconuts are just a treat?

Respondent(s): Yes. There are very few coconuts. If we [freely] use coconuts, maybe for just one week, all the coconuts will be gone.

Danko: Do you check the water level in your tank occasionally?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: How do you check it?

Respondent(s): Open the top and take a look inside. Sometimes we knock on the side.

Danko: If you determine that your tank is about half full, would you be worried?

Respondent(s): Before we used to have two concrete tanks for the whole community. When they got to half we would lock the faucets. We would open them at certain times, when all families come to get their water.

Danko: Right now, do all families have individual tanks? Does every family have at least one tank?

Respondent(s): At least one, a few have two.

Danko: So the concrete tanks are the backup?

Respondent(s): They were the backup. But now they need to be repaired, both of them are leaking.

Danko: When your family tank is full, how long would it take for it to get to half full if there is no rain for a while? If you're just using the water, and no new water is added.

Respondent(s): In two months it would finish completely, be empty.

Danko: Can you lock up your private plastic tanks?

Respondent(s): Yes. When the water is running out, we use it carefully. We reserve it for drinking, do not use it for laundry, dishes.

Danko: Has anyone in your household or family been sick from drinking water?

Respondent(s): Usually after typhoons. Saltwater and maybe other things get into tanks. People get sick after, diarrhea.

Danko: How often do you clean plastic tanks [at private residences]?

Respondent(s): It depends. If we hear on the radio that Pohnpei received heavy rain, then we know it's coming to us, four-five days. Then we can empty the tanks and clean them and wait for the rain in coming days.

Danko: What if the tank is full, and you open the tap and taste the water and see that it tastes strange. Or you see some scum coming out, or perhaps mosquito larvae, the little living things in water from your tank. What do you do?

Respondent(s): Even if it is full, we would drain the whole thing and clean it.

Danko: If you have only one tank, and it's December, and you know it won't be raining a lot, but your water seems bad, polluted, what can you do? If you drain and clean it, it won't fill up for a long time.

Respondent(s): You can still keep the water and boil it. Or use bleach. But we do not know the recipe, how much bleach.

Danko: How do you clean the tanks?

Respondent(s): We put it on the side, roll it to the ocean, we clean it in the ocean.

Danko: How often does that happen?

Respondent(s): Maybe some [people clean] every year. It depends on the location. You know these black birds [noddies], they keep dropping [on the tin roofs]. So when we get the first rain, we don't catch it, we let it run off from the tin roof.

Danko: How do you do it? Manually disconnect the gutters?

Respondent(s): Yes, manually move the gutters. If you don't, all the bad things get in there, from the birds. And then the smell gets really bad.

Danko: That is pretty difficult, right? You need to be careful all the time.

Respondent(s): Yes, but people know. When it starts raining, you let it wash the tin roof.

Danko: What is the biggest problem that you face regarding water?

Respondent(s): Some people can take care of their water. They make sure kids don't waste the water. Even some older people use it for washing dishes or... Some they don't know how valuable drinking water. When they run out of water, they start running to other people [neighbors] for water. The wells, most of these wells are for showers, to rinse off, and for washing and laundry, but there are just one or two from which you can drink.

Danko: Without boiling?

Respondent(s): No, we boil the water. But for other wells some people came and tested the water, it is too salty.

Danko: Do you know who tested the water?

Respondent(s): Some guy from [Yap State] EPA.

Danko: How is the taro patch? Also salty or normal?

Respondent(s): I think that we are lucky that it is normal. The islands in Chuuk and Pohnpei are having problems with saltwater. I don't know how saltwater gets into taro patches.

Danko: What about wells? Have any people reported salty water in their wells? Is water in any wells saltier than others? Or smelly, perhaps?

Respondent(s): [Salty not reported] If people use a well for showers and laundry, when they use soap, you can smell it. You can smell the soap. But where the well is used for cooking taro, it is OK.

Danko: I saw that there is a cemetery here. Is that the only place with graves, or do you have individual graves near people's homes?

Respondent(s): There are only two places. There is one near the end of the island, by the last household. And the main one here in the center.

Danko: What is something that can be done to improve your water situation here on Eauripik? Can something be done to make families less reliant on their neighbors, less dependant on the weather, more able to have enough of good quality water?

Respondent(s): Education. If we run out of water... If you don't drink water for 1-2 days, you die. I think that is one important thing that we should do, educate the people. We need to educate the people on how to take care of their water. For example, if we have very low water in the tank, but we have yeast, we have to use that water for mixing yeast.

Danko: Yeast?

Respondent(s): Yes, people would say, “Hey, don't get the water, 'cause we're low on water!” They need it for yeast. Yeast is “number 1” priority. For men.

Danko: So you guys are making alcoholic drinks [from yeast] all the time? How much water does that require?

Respondent(s): You take 4-5 gallons of water, then you mix it, and 4 hours later you drink it.

Danko: Yeast alcohol is not as tasty as faluba², right?

Respondent(s): I don't like the taste.

Danko: I now have a few more questions that are less related to individual families, but more related to the entire island of Eauripik as a community. How frequently do shortages of water occur? Do you feel the island happens to be short on water every year, or is it every couple of years?

Respondent(s): It's every year, starting from January or December. That is when it hardly rains. Not like before when we used to get rain all the time. Starting from December to June it hardly rains. This is one different thing between now and before.

Danko: So the shortage is from December to June? That long?

Respondent(s): It is until it rains again, in June, or in April...

Danko: Basically, every year for a couple of months in the beginning of the year you have a shortage. You said that community tanks are cracked and leaking. That is not very helpful because when people run out of water, borrow from their neighbors, and the neighbors also run out, you have no community reserves for people to turn to.

Respondent(s): That is true.

Danko: That's a huge problem. Are these community tanks being cleaned and maintained, or have you entirely given up on them because they are broken?

Respondent(s): Once in a while, when they are empty, we clean them. But now, it's [pointless], they don't hold any water.

Danko: Let's say that we recommend to Yap R&D that you need more private tanks or repair community tanks or get new community tanks, would you prefer concrete or plastic tanks? Which are better for you?

Respondent(s): The concrete tanks hold a lot of water. The one at the dispensary holds 10,000 gallons? I don't know.

Danko: Our team doing surveys now has measured it. They will know. Anyway, you said that you clean your tanks by rolling them to the ocean. How do you clean concrete tanks?

Respondent(s): People get inside and scrub it.

Danko: With water?

Respondent(s): Just with water.

² Local alcoholic drink made by fermentation of sap from the coconut palm.

Danko: When you clean concrete tanks, there are tiny pits in the rough surface of concrete. So even after cleaning the tank stays a bit dirty, no? Are concrete tanks harder to keep clean?

Respondent(s): Yes. Plastic tanks are better. If they are big.

Danko: What about during typhoons? Are plastic tanks more sensitive to damage? Can they be tipped over and broken?

Respondent(s): If there is water in it, it will not get moved. Especially those large plastic tanks at the church. That is a safe place.

Danko: How many tanks at the church, five?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: Are they considered community tanks, do they belong to everyone?

Respondent(s): They belong to households.

Danko: So they are private tanks, but you put them next to the church to use the church roof for catchment?

Respondent(s): Yes. It gets full quickly. Even if the rain is not strong.

Danko: I think the birds are causing a lot of trouble when it comes to rain. There is so many of them, they are beautiful to see, but they are difficult [to keep off roofs].

Respondent(s): Yes. You can tell, the [solar] panel, you clean it today, and tomorrow it turns white again [from bird excrement].

Danko: Someone told me you've been suggested to kill off all the birds on the island. So that the solar panels can be clean. Is that what you're planning?

Respondent(s): No, no, no. [Laughing]. There's a solution to that one. We just need to keep washing. When it rains, in the beginning, you can let runoff clean the panels and tin roofs.

Danko: Long time ago, your ancestors didn't have any tin roofs here. How do you think they were getting the water?

Respondent(s): Oh, the well. Just the well. Without boiling. When I was growing up, there was no water catchments. Just the wells. We drank from the wells.

Danko: Do you think something changed? Do you think that water in the wells was better before?

Respondent(s): When we were drinking from the wells, we didn't like the rain. Doesn't taste good. Water you get from the well was cool, like when you take it from refrigerator. Not hot, not like the one you get from catchments. But now, they say that coffee is not good when you mix it with water from the well.

Danko: Really? Coffee from well water is not good?

Respondent(s): Yes. That is what started it. To catch the rainwater. Well water doesn't really mix well.

Danko: That is what started it?

Respondent(s): People didn't drink coffee before. When they got coffee, they tried to mix it with water from well, and it didn't work. Especially "Cofee Mate".

Danko: When you hear from Bruce or someone else on the radio that there will be a drought, do you have any community-level policy that dictates what to do in such situations? Some island-level approach to conserving water? Or can every household do whatever they want?

Respondent(s): Minister at the church, on Sunday, will announce to people that there is news from Guam that we should be careful with our water. We would like the men of the houses to tell their people to be more careful with water. Other than that, people can use water how they want.

Danko: Is there some part of the year when you use more water than at other times?

Respondent(s): From December, we use less water. The weather is cooler, windy, but it hardly rains.

Danko: So it's not that your needs are different, you are simply forced to use less water.

Respondent(s): Now people don't like to drink water from the wells. People want to continue drinking from the catchments.

Danko: We talked about birds messing up your roofs. What about plants? Do people clean leaves from the roofs, or cut off branches that extend above the roofs?

Respondent(s): We use the church as typhoon shelter. So we make sure that there are not many trees above it. For almost all the houses, we make sure that we don't have big trees above the roofs.

Danko: It is also very good thing that you do not have rats on the island.

Respondent(s): Yes. This is the only island in Micronesia that does not have rats.

Danko: Maybe that is why you have so many birds. Between birds and rats, birds are a good choice.

Respondent(s): Yes. We also eat the birds. We have lots of ways to catch them.

[Conversation drifts in another direction, not relevant to water, then ends. That part is not transcribed]

Additional observations:

Observation: lots of birds on Eauripik (unlike Ifalik); most houses are traditional (wood and thatch) and built on limestone/coral platforms (such raised house foundations are unique to Eauripik, no other FSM island has them); people do not have as many separate structures beside their main hut (in contrast to Ifalik and most other islands); individual traditionally-built household structures are not used for water catchment, many families have their storage tank at the church or their neighbors that may have a non-traditional (tin-roof) house.

Stats: 110 people currently on island, 14 households/compounds, 2 community tanks: one at dispensary (built in 1980s), fixed twice already but still leaking, the other one at ECE (built in 1990s) which is still in good condition, they also have some white huge tanks which we did not see in Ifalik at all; most tanks are Type A (see Eauripik Atoll - Preliminary Household Inventory).