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## **IFALIK ATOLL**

### **Leaders interview**

Conducted by Danko Taboroši with entire team present  
with Chief Mano and 11 other community leaders

#### **Interview data:**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Informants</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Audio file</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Length</b>
Men's House (on Ifalik)	Chief Mano Pekaicheng	08/14/15	LS100242	English	1h 45'

#### **Interview content:**

*The first part of the meeting was spent by sharing with the leaders the types of work the team members have conducted and explaining the rationale for each activity. We have also explained that most of the information will require time to be processed and evaluated and we promised to share the report. Ifalik leadership requests to receive our report. The address to send it is Ifalik Atoll Leaders, c/o Council of Tamol, Colonia, Yap, FM 96943, Federated States of Micronesia. This first part of the meeting was not been transcribed.*

*Interview part of the meeting is transcribed below. There were 12 local people present. Many of the questions were answered by Chief Mano, but other people replied occasionally. Many times several people responded to a question together, completing each other's answers. We did not note names of individuals responding to specific questions and subsume everyone under the term "Respondent(s)".*

Danko: How frequently do shortages of water occur on Ifalik?

Respondent(s): It depends on how many tanks we have and how many people use the water. It also depends on maintenance of water catchments.

Danko: Given the current circumstances, current amount of tanks, catchments, current situation. When was the last time you ran out of water?

Respondent(s): From last May to June almost all our water supplies were gone.

Danko: We've heard that at such times people who run out of water will go to their neighbors and relatives to borrow. What happens when those tanks too become low or dry?

Respondent(s): The tank in school, but we've already drained it out.

Danko: But in general?

Respondent(s): The tank in school is our last resort. We also have a couple of concrete catchments, maybe you have already seen them. They are supposed to be for the community, but they are not well maintained.

Andrea: They look like they are not being used.

Respondent(s): Only one [is still used?]. But before, when each household runs out and the neighbors run out we always went to those tanks.

Andrea: How come you don't use the concrete tanks anymore?

Respondent(s): Because we do not get support from the government. Financially, the whole island cannot purchase lumber and tin roofs to maintain. We depend on our government to supply us.

Danko: If the government were to provide a community reserve tank or a couple of tanks, to be used either on regular sources or as main backup sources of rainwater, which do you feel is better and easier to maintain, the concrete tanks or those large black plastic tanks?

Respondent(s): We don't trust these concrete tanks.

Danko: What kind of problems do you feel are associated with concrete tanks?

Respondent(s): All these concrete tanks are down. We cannot move them. They just occupy the land we need for food plants, like you have seen these days, they are sitting there for nothing. They leak, fracture, have cracks all around.

Danko: Even when they leak they keep enough water for mosquitos to breed.

Chief Mano: Yes. Last year I told our chairman at the COT [Council of Tamol], we need water but we don't need any concrete tanks.

Danko: I've seen on many other islands so many concrete tanks, but so few of them are actually useful. They become breeding grounds for mosquitos and dumps for garbage.

Respondent(s): They take up space we can use for taro.

Danko: What about the big black plastic tanks, how do they behave during typhoons? Do they tip over or break?

Respondent(s): We have not seen that. No problems. And if you want to move them to another place, it is easy. You can take your tank with you. Cement tank is stuck in there, if you move you cannot use it anymore. We really want the big black plastic tanks. We need more of those. No more concrete.

Chief Mano: When I raised this issue in our meetings, all islands said they want to follow what I said. They don't want any concrete tanks to be built on their island, because no space.

Danko: When you build a big solid structure on a low island like this, where the ground slowly moves over time, it will fracture sooner or later. It's not made for this type of place. We will put in our report that you prefer big plastic tanks, especially if it something that the government can give you.

Respondent(s): Please.

Danko: When you have a water shortage at the level of the whole island, do you have some policy that dictates how to ration the water, do you have some kind of emergency mode? I know that individual families will immediately lock up their tanks, not let children play with the taps, most of the cooking will be relegated to groundwater, you will use tanks only for drinking, people try to drink more coconuts when there is not enough rain, but do you have some island-level policy. What do we do as a whole community when this happens?

Respondent(s): We leave it up to each village. We are alert of what happened. We are monitoring tanks.

Danko: Does the amount of water you use vary throughout the year?

Respondent(s): It is different.

Danko: When do you use most water?

Respondent(s): During hot days. The way people consume water is different.

Danko: Do you have any idea how much water does one person use per day? There are 12 people here from Ifalik. Imagine tomorrow you wake up and you have 12 Chlorox (=1 gallon) bottles filled with water. There are 12 of you. Could you use those 12 waters for all your needs, can you make it through the day.

Respondent(s): No, not enough.

Danko: How about 24 bottles.

Respondent(s): We could make it for the whole day.

Danko: Normal use? For everything, cooking, drinking, dishes, laundry, shower.

Respondent(s): No, not really.

Danko: So two gallons per day is not enough per person.

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: How many coconuts do you drink per day?

Chief Mano: I don't drink coconuts. I only drink them when I am out of water. If I drink coconuts, I have to go to the "main office" [toilet].

Danko: What about in general? Other people?

Respondent(s): [Different people say:] Four-five. Four. There or four. I had six this morning. On the average three-to-four per day per person.

Viviana: Is it the same for women?

Respondent(s): Oh, yes. Maybe females consume more. Especially those who are nursing. They drink more than four.

Danko: Have you had any community-level health issues that you feel are connected with water?

Peter Malmai: Like I mentioned this morning, we sometimes have epidemics of diarrhea. It's mostly young kids. For adults, we have one time, about four years back, we experienced that. Almost half of the adults came down with diarrhea. For that one we thought it was due to a disease they call coxsackie. It is a viral disease and it comes from chicken manure. During that time they raised some introduced chickens from Yap, from Department of Agriculture. Those chickens cannot fly, they only run around, stay on the ground, they are huge. Every village raised about 5 to 10 chicken, so we stopped that and that is when the diarrhea stopped.

Danko: Do people in general use bleach to chemically treat water before drinking?

Respondent(s): No.

Danko: What about boiling water? Are there families that boil water before they drink it?

Respondent(s): I doubt it.

Danko: Are there any kind of community-level efforts to monitor the tanks and ensure that they are being maintained well, or do you leave it up to the families to do what they want?

Respondent(s): Leave it to the families to maintain their own tanks.

Danko: What about some kind of inspection, does that exist?

Respondent(s): No.

Danko: Do you have some policy or community-level awareness as to what is proper maintenance for a tank? For example, does everyone know that a tank should be covered, closed...?

Respondent(s): Common knowledge.

Danko: Gutters need to be cleaned...

Respondent(s): Need to be cleaned.

Danko: What about covering the wells? Do people know that wells should be covered?

Respondent(s): It used to be so, but it's laziness of people.

Danko: It is good to cover them. When light strikes the water it allows microscopic and larger algae to thrive in the water. Other microbes multiply and feed on that. Just like we cannot feed without plants, microbes cannot feed without algae that live off light. Just like you carefully cover the rainwater catchment tanks, so you should cover the wells. Not cover and forget about it, but cover and check the water whenever you use the well.

Danko: Is it common knowledge that there shouldn't be branches going over the catchment area, so that rats cannot get up there, and leaves do not accumulate?

Respondent(s): Each family knows that.

Danko: What about cleaning the tanks? Is this something that is suggested on the community-level or every family decides on their own when to clean the tank?

Respondent(s): Yes, every family.

Danko: How do they decide when to clean it?

Respondent(s): When the tank is out of water, that is the time to clean it.

Danko: When you haven't had rain, when the tank is almost empty, that is the time to clean it?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: How do people clean them?

Respondent(s): We tip them over, and put water inside and cleanse. Scrub it, or take the faucet off and drain it.

Danko: What about concrete tanks?

Respondent(s): We go inside. There is a hole in those things.

Danko: What is easier to clean, plastic or concrete?

Respondent(s): Plastic.

Danko: How often does a tank get cleaned?

Respondent(s): Annually.

Blaz: How do you clean the cube-shaped tanks. The opening is too small to go in. The 1000 liter ones.

Respondent(s): Small kids can crawl inside and clean.

Blaz: And the big oval ones, 1000 liters?

Respondent(s): Also small kids.

Danko: Regarding the wells, have any families reported that some particular wells are worse than others? Has anyone reported that a well suddenly got salty or smelly? Any wells that are significantly worse than others?

Respondent(s): Some wells run dry. But bad smell and stuff like that, no.

Danko: What about salty water in a well.

Respondent(s): Not that I know of.

Danko: What about the taro patch? You have one big one and many small ones. Are there any indications that taro is not growing as well as it used to be?

Respondent(s): As soon as the channel closed, almost everywhere in taro patches we experienced salty water<sup>1</sup>.

Danko: Really? When the channel closed you experienced salty water?

Maria: But only in the taro patches that are in the [former] channel?

Respondent(s): Everywhere, every taro patch.

Maria: Did you have overwash during typhoons?

Respondent(s): Yes, typhoon June [Supertyphoon June (Rosing)], in 1975.

Maria: The whole island was covered with waves?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: When that happens, all taro dies?

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1 -- Referring to the natural closing of a channel and merging of the two inhabited islets on Ifalik Atoll into one.

Respondent(s): Oh, yes.

Danko: How many years does it take to be able to grow taro again?

Respondent(s): Takes a long time.

Danko: What is the taro planting cycle like? It is a couple of years, right?

Respondent(s): Yes, it takes three, four, five, more than that.

Danko: So you need at least a couple of years for the salty water to get flushed out, and at least a couple of years for taro to grow mature and be harvested.

Respondent(s): Some of the taro patches, now, still, taro cannot grow there. I don't know what happened. Maybe the saltwater is still underneath the ground.

Respondent(s): I've seen some places, especially the small taro patches on the northern side of this island, the taro did not grow very well. So I asked some ladies and they told me they no longer plant taro there because the ground is salty. And I said how come sweet taro [*Colocasia*] is growing well, and it is due to elevations being higher, so they plant sweet taro, it is fast to grow. Compared to that, taro [*Cyrtosperma*] cannot grow because of a lot of salt water.

Danko: Where are the toilets on the island?

Respondent(s): The Pacific Ocean, the lagoon, the bush, the beach.

Danko: Everyone does like this?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: Naturally flushing toilets. You don't have cabin toilets built right above water, like in Kapingamarangi?

Respondent(s): Yes, in the past we used to. Typhoon broke them. Every village had them before. No more. Typhoon wipes them out whenever we put them or replace them.

Danko: For disposal of household waste, garbage, you just dig a pit? Do you burn it before closing the pit?

Respondent(s): Some, they burn it, some they just close it. And we plant some taro, banana there.

Danko: What about waste that is not organic? Plastic, metal, old batteries? Do you do the same thing?

Respondent(s): Yes, some people. Plastic we burn, we collect it together and burn it. Plastic doesn't disappear, it stays in the ground. Like these batteries... We asked Yap State EPA, how can we get the batteries to them and dispose of them in the right place. A few years from now maybe we cannot eat anything on the island, it will be ruined by waste batteries. I have been told that it is bad to dispose of batteries on land and in the sea too.

Danko: Does the Yap State EPA recommend you collect batteries and send to them?

Respondent(s): They say it is a good idea to get them there. But they never give hints as to how would we get them there. They should provide some money to pay for the container or shipment every time a ship comes by.

Danko: If you have no money you cannot send them to Yap?

Respondent(s): For everything we put on the ship, there is a fee.

Danko: If Yap State EPA had a system to support this, would you as a community be able to prevent batteries from being thrown away everywhere, could you collect them all in one storage space and send them off?

Respondent(s): Yes, why not. There was a guy who came and told us about this problem, he had volunteers to collect them. You see this warehouse here, you couldn't see the side because of all the batteries. I don't know where they disappeared. Through the soil or what. Piled up. Every village had batteries there, mostly the kids, they lure them with candy to bring batteries, they got really excited and brought batteries.

Respondent(s): I still remember one time, about four to five years ago, they told us to collect all the trash like plastic and batteries, put them in trash bags and send them on the Caroline Voyager. They told us they had money for that. They did it just one time and stopped. All the islands collected their trash and put on the Voyager and sent to Yap. After that no more. I don't know what happened with that.

Danko: Other than batteries, is there any other type of waste on the island that you would consider dangerous? Paint, aerosols, sprays, things like that?

Respondent(s): Batteries are the main.

Danko: Since you stopped collecting batteries for that one time, there has been no designated place where community members can drop them off? Everyone just deals with them on their own, throws them away or buries them wherever they want?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: Is there a community-level policy regarding cemeteries? You have a few cemeteries, places with lots of graves together. Is this something that you as a community decided?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: There is a kind of attitude that you don't want to allow everyone to make graves wherever they want, even on own land. Do you suggest that burials always take place in these designated areas?

Respondent(s): Before, on Falalap island, they were discussing about their cemetery before they would bury the dead people, they met together, the land owners, the chiefs, they were selecting area to bury people. But after that, each individual, maybe they want their dead friends close to their house. So maybe there is just one or two cemeteries. You can see in Falachiig there are a lot of cemeteries together, maybe those people there they chose that place to bury their friends.

Danko: What do you feel are your biggest problems related to water? What are the main water challenges on Ifalik Atoll.

Respondent(s): We need more tanks. We need more big tanks. We need roofs. We need more gutters. As you can see, our tin roofs are rotten, we might get sick.

Danko: Do you need this for both community or public sites and private sites with individual families?

Respondent(s): First of all, for community sites. If you have more tanks, you can put more at the church or school building because the roofs are big. They can serve for the whole community, as island reservoirs.

Danko: Anything else?

Maria: What types of tanks do you prefer?

Respondent(s): The FEMA type is not good, they get twisted and bulging when they are full.

Maria: Other than FEMA type (bucket type), is there one you prefer?

Respondent(s): The bottle type. It does not bulge when it is full. It stays the same.

Maria: You prefer the bottle type over rectangular ones?

Respondent(s): Yes. It is little bit bigger.

Maria: But otherwise both are good?

Respondent(s): Yes.

Danko: Given this situation, have you attempted to request tanks from Yap State Government? Or do you have plans to remedy the situation? Or is this a wish at this stage, something you want but do not know how to achieve, or do you have some channels or some protocol within Yap State Government system where you can request and acquire what you need?

Chief Mano: Yes, I think so. Through my council [Council of Tamol], and through Governor's Office, and through Department of Resources and Development. I don't know, I think this is R&D responsibility.

Danko: I hope that once we have this report, it will help you in getting the things you need.

Respondent(s): To be honest and tell you the truth, I am really tired of our government and administration. We have been trying our very best to request for those catchments, they come, EPA people and other agencies come, we report to them about the catchments and they say "Yes, yes, we will take this to the governor." Ever since 1980s assessment teams come until now we have never seen anyone fix our catchments. We need you guys to help us with this. Maybe you will make a report and give it to the new governor, you will say "Ifalik needs this and this" so they cannot pretend that they don't know what is happening here in Ifalik.

Respondent(s): Like the airfield in Woleai Atoll. Every time they request for repairmen to the airstrip, there comes a new assessment team taking pictures. How many assessment teams need to come? What do they do with those pictures? They go back to Yap, nothing, no action.

Danko: How much do the black bottle-type tanks cost?

Respondent(s): We don't know.

Maria: When did you get the different types of tanks you have now? When were they supplied to the island?

Respondent(s): After a typhoon they sent us the bottle-type.

Maria: The bucket-type is from FEMA?

Respondent(s): No, the bottle-type is from FEMA<sup>2</sup>.

Maria: What about the bucket-type?

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2 -- This is opposite of what was states on the previous page, so it is best not to refer to any tanks as FEMA, but bottle-type, box-type, bucket-type, etc. based on the shape.

Respondent(s): That was before.

Maria: So you first got the bucket-type, then bottle-type, what about the box-type?

Respondent(s): It came with the bottle-type.

Maria: Somebody mentioned that you have to fill out a form for typhoon relief. What is the mechanism to get help?

Respondent(s): No forms. They just delivered as typhoon relief based on population and households.

Maria: Did the tanks come with tin roofs? And gutters?

Respondent(s): Everything came as a package. Tanks, faucets, gutters. Not the tin roofs.

Maria: So only people who already had tin roofs could use them?

Respondent(s): The chiefs distributed everything evenly among the islanders.

Danko: For any such actions in the future, who are the main points of contact on the island? Who are the people who we can say are more involved with water and decision making in water-related issues?

Respondent(s): Chiefs and the village leaders, medical assistant, school principal, and teachers<sup>3</sup>.

Maria: One more thing, Danko asked before about the last time you ran out of water and you said it was last year. What about before that, is it almost every year that you have a problem with water?

Respondent(s): Almost like that, every year, every dry season.

Maria: I hope that we are not one more of those assessment teams that come and take pictures and have no effect.

Respondent(s): We'll see.

Danko: In general, you said that the main thing you need are the tanks. Let's think about that. You need big tanks to provide major storage capacity for the community...

Respondent(s): Four big tanks.

Danko: Four big tanks, one per village, with their own catchment roofs and gutters. If the government was to deliver these materials on the ship, they are offloaded, you are able to organize everything at this end, you can build everything, all you need is for materials to come, correct?

Respondent(s): Yes, yes, of course.

Danko: Doesn't seem so hard. Doesn't seem like something that needs to be waited for since 1980s. We will do our best to convey your problems and needs. Thank you.

Maria: Thank you so much.

Respondent(s): Thank you very much.

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3 -- See file named "Ifalik Atoll Points of Contact.doc"