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THE GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE ALLIANCE PLUS INITIATIVE



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## MAJURO ATOLL LOCAL GOVERNMENT DESKTOP REVIEW, MARS 2020

Global Climate Change Alliance Plus  
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USP Component



Pacific  
Community  
Communauté  
du Pacifique



**SPREP**  
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional  
Environment Programme

**USP**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE  
SOUTH PACIFIC

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

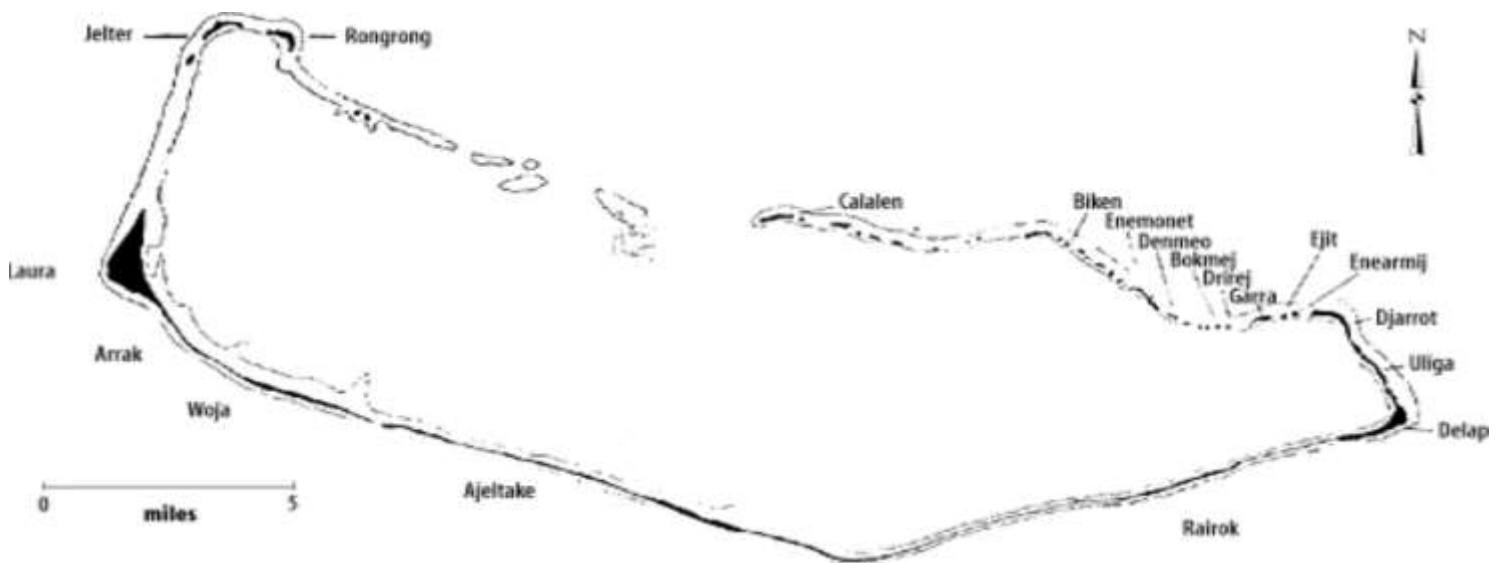
This desktop review was conducted in support of the European Union Global Climate Change Alliance Scaling Up Pacific Adaptation (EU GCCA SUPA) project. Majuro Atoll was one of two sites selected as part of the project by the South Pacific Community (SPC) through consultations and needs-based analysis. This project is funded through the European Union Global Climate Change Alliance Scaling Up Pacific Adaptation (EU GCCA SUPA) project. The SPC is leading this project in collaboration with SPREP and the University of the South Pacific (USP). This desktop review will focus on USP's capacity building component and it intends to provide a comprehensive information on the standing status of Majuro Atoll Local Government in its capacity to address the impacts of climate change, concentrating on a range of areas including governance and social system, the local government's organizational chart, constitutional and will also cover disaster risk management and capacity development. This report considers these areas and provides recommendations for potential capacity building options to address the risks from the bearings of the changing climate.

### 1.1 Site background

Majuro's largest landmass is an inter-island connection of 8 islands by land reclamation. Majuro is a flat, ring-shaped reef of 47 inter-islands that make up the whole Majuro Atoll. Majuro is also the capital of the Republic of the Marshall Islands with a land area of 3.75 square miles and a lagoon area of 112.92 square miles. Arno Atoll is closest to the East, and to the North is Aur Atoll. The nearest island to the West from Majuro is Jaluit Atoll. Mili Atoll is closest to Majuro to the South. Majuro Atoll is halfway between Hawaii and New Guinea. It is around 3,833 kilometers from Hawaii and around 3,385 kilometers to New Guinea. Majuro consists of 8 main communities and within these communities there are various watos (land parcels) under the control of

various alaps (land owners). Usually one alap oversees a wato but there are a few alaps overseeing more than one land parcel. These alaps report to their paramount chief and vice-versa. The chief also reports to the alaps and they both are involved in decision-making processes for any development on their lands.

ENTIRITY OF MAJURO ATOLL, 7 DEGREES NORTH OF THE EQUATOR IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC



## 2. METHODOLOGY

This desktop review was produced based on available resources, related studies and recent vulnerability assessments made for other projects in Majuro. Meeting consultations with Majuro Atoll Local Government officials and relevant stakeholders were also conducted to gather the details provided in this review. Available resources from the Majuro Atoll Local Government were also used to compile this document. Such resources provided a comprehensive details on the governance structure and functions of the Majuro Atoll Local Government.

## 3. Governance and social system

### 3.1 Demography

Being the capital of the Marshall Islands, Majuro Atoll is the most populated with a total population of 27,797 persons living on Majuro as of the 2011 census. The population has increased 7fold since then. Majuro is very close to the equator. As a result it is characterized by a tropical marine climate exhibiting a wet season from November to March and a dry season from April to September but rainfall patterns show major inconsistency between years. The wet season (anon rak in Marshallese), is from November to Mars and the dry season (anon ean) is between April and September. The typical yearly rainfall is around 132 inches. The total households on Majuro is around 4,092 with a density of 7,413 persons per square mile. Majuro's usual temperature is 81 degrees Fahrenheit. Humidity levels are high year-round. The main offices and facilities of the national government of the Marshall Islands and the Majuro Atoll Local Government, including all international, Non-Government Organizations and private sectors are based on Majuro.

### 3.2. Government Structure

Majuro is represented by 5 senators in the National Government (Nitijela) of the Marshall Islands, who face election every four years. The Majuro Atoll Local Government is comprised of an elected Mayor and 15 council members who represent the 8 communities (Rita, Uliga, Delap, Rairok, Ajeltake, Woja, Laura and Aenkan) on Majuro. Like all local governments of the Marshall Islands, Majuro Atoll Local Government works closely with the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs, which regulates and supports all the functions and duties of each local government. Majuro's traditional leadership is also represented in the council. The cultural hierarchy in Majuro is composed of two chiefly orders.

These are derived from Paramount Chief Kaiboke Tobinwa and Iroojdrik (debuty Chief) Jebdrik. In the Majuro Atoll Local Government, these houses are represented in the council. These council members are appointed by the Mayor and must be a member from the chief's line, but the chiefs are always appointed first and they will decide if they will personally take on the role or delegate the position to a member of the family. As previously mentioned, in each community or village, there are various watos (land parcels) being managed by alaps (land owners) and their Irooj (Chief). Most of the residents in Majuro come from the outer islands, or are born and raised in Majuro but have no land rights. Therefore, they must acquire permission from alaps and irooj to live within their wato. As a result, the traditional leadership holds a substantial control in every aspect of decision-making processes in Majuro. Governments, traditional leadership and church leaders all play leadership roles in Majuro.

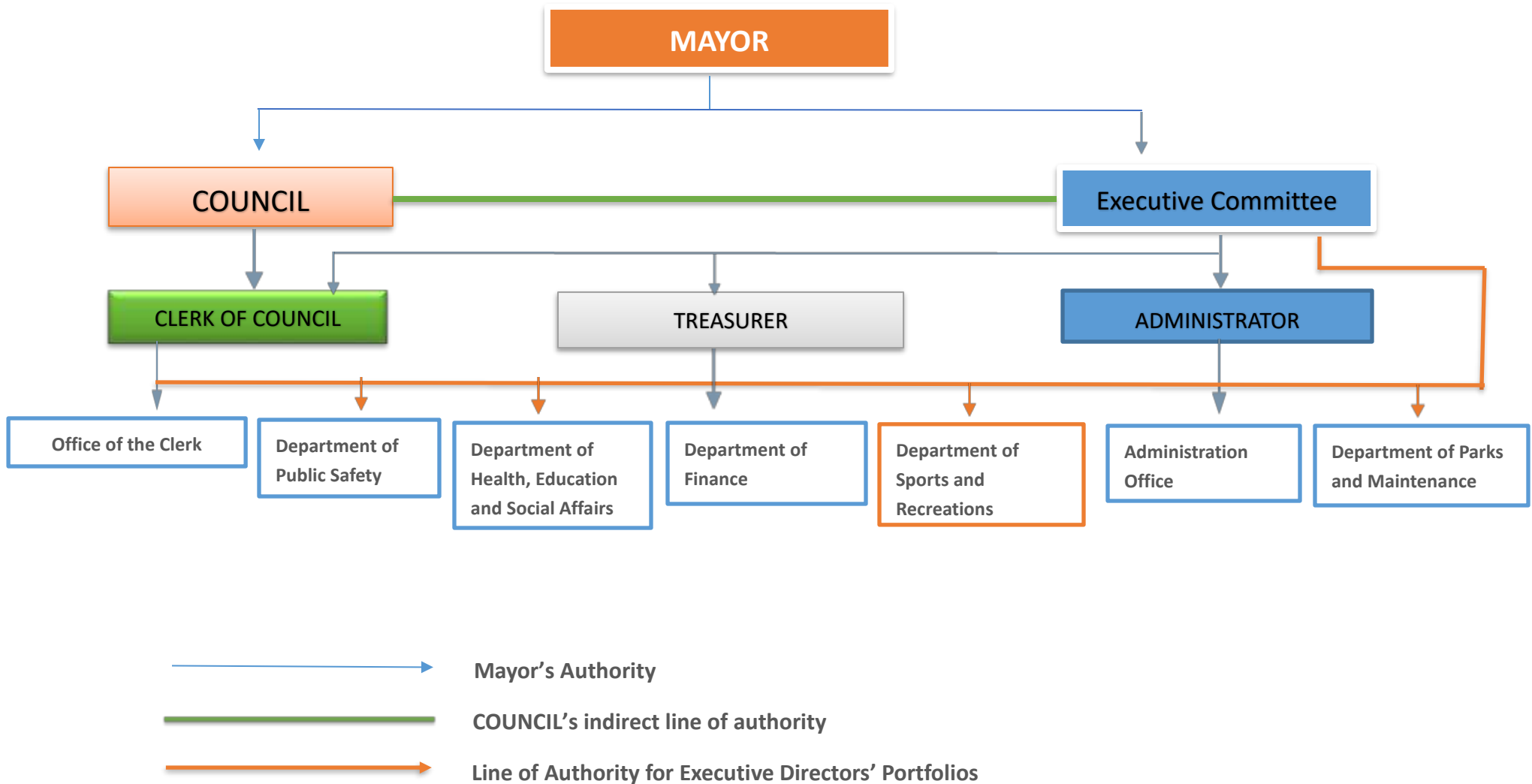
The Majuro Atoll Local Government has a Legislative branch and Executive branch. The Legislative Branch consists of the Mayor and the 15 council members. The council consists of 13 elected members and two appointed members from Iroojlaplap Kaiboke Tobinwa's domain and Iroojdrik Jebdrik's domain. Delap and Djaret or Rita each have 2 elected council members as these are the two most populated areas in Majuro. All the other wards are represented by 1 elected council member. Together, the Majuro Atoll Local Government council and the Mayor create and pass ordinances that serve to protect the welfare of people residing in Majuro. Other functions of the council includes approving budgets, appointments of Mayor, agreements and amend and repeal laws. The Mayor appoints 5 Executive directors from the council and these directors including the Mayor make up the Executive Branch of the Majuro Atoll Local Government. These 5 directors are responsible for 5 departments, which are the Department of Finance, Public Safety, Health,

Education and Social Affairs (HESSA), Sports and Recreation and Department of Parks and Maintenance. The administration office and the Office of the Clerk are also of the Executive Branch. Some functions of the Executive Committee include making and approving regulations and policies. The executive committee also implements all mandatory functions of the local government created by ordinances, manage the administrative and fiscal functions of the departments including approved annual appropriation and budget of each portfolio. The executive committee can also perform other special and urgent duties within the powers and authorities of the Executive Branch.

### **3.3 Constitution**

Majuro Atoll Local Government has its own constitution. The constitution states in section 3 that the jurisdiction of the Majuro Atoll Local Government covers the whole of Majuro Atoll and 5 miles sea coverage from land. This coverage is governed by the Majuro Atoll Local Government and this is also in accordance with the constitution of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Section 12 articles 1, 2 and 3 state that the council or the Legislative Branch shall record all its meetings and shall, in accordance with the Constitution of the Marshall Islands, make ordinances for the Local Government and shall have the final decision on all and any ordinances to be made for the local government. The Mayor is a member of both the Legislative and Executive branches of the Local Government. In the absence of the Mayor, an executive member appointed by the Mayor shall take his place and resume the Mayor's duties and responsibilities. The Executive Branch shall consists of the Mayor, appointed directors, Administration Office and the Office of the Clerk. The Executive Branch is responsible for all functions of the Local Government in the. Jurisdiction mandated by the traditional leadership and the National Government.

3.4 Majuro Atoll Local Government's Organizational Chart





## 4. Disaster Risk Management

Majuro is highly vulnerable to natural disasters. The widest part of Majuro is Laura which is around 600 meters but in most areas, the width is less than 200 meters. In some areas the width is alarmingly less than 30 meters and the elevation in all these areas is less than 2 meters. As a result, Majuro has suffered costly damages to properties, health, land and livelihoods of people from storm surges and sea inundations. Since 2008, there has been at least two storm surges in a year. The



*2014 flood from high tides near the old USP Campus*

frequency of inundations from storm surges increases each year. With the sea level rising, even normal high tides are now a risk to the environment and people's livelihoods. Majuro has also suffered droughts and long dry seasons since 2008. The droughts during the years 2013 and 2015 were the most severe where the Government had to release 'states of disaster' due to the severity of the droughts and the impacts they had on people's lives and the environment. In reaction to the threat from storm surges, the Majuro Atoll Local Government and the National Government have constructed sea walls around the most vulnerable areas. In some areas, these sea walls are poorly constructed and are

causing erosion to neighboring coasts that are naturally protected. Vegetation on every coast is depleting from these storm surges.

### **5. Capacity Development**

Majuro Atoll Local Government oversees the largest domain in the Marshall Islands and caters for the livelihoods of almost half of the Marshallese population. Through the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs, the National Government allocates financial assistance to the Majuro Atoll Local Government and other local governments. Majuro also receives assistance from international donors such as Taiwan, United States, European Union, Japan and other international entities. There is also the local taxes from businesses, land leases and from other entities conducting business on land and within Majuro's waters. These funds are often for infrastructural development. Human resource development is often overlooked. The executive offices of the Majuro Atoll Local Government execute their duties and roles according to the ordinances created by the legislative committee. Such ordinances allow for the executive committee to strategize and manage their own allocated resources. Many council members lack the capacity to manage these resources. As a result, each executive director gets creative to plan and create their own schemes to implement their projects or programs. To date, there has been no capacity development plan nor there have been any management or action plan created for each executive department.

The Majuro Atoll Local Government is privileged with capacity engagements from international, national and local workshops. Nevertheless, capacity development has never been a hot topic. With the rising sea level, increase in frequency of droughts and long dry seasons, water scarcity, health and

environmental hazards from the impacts of climate change, there is a dire need to equip the local governments to address these threats.

### **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

Majuro Atoll is challenged to respond to the impacts of climate change, particularly sea level rise and increased frequency of droughts and dry seasons but lacking the capacity to respond to these effectively. Capacity development for the local government should be a high priority. Such ideas from local government officials include implementing a scheme for capacity development on the particulars of the Majuro constitution, the roles of the council and the local government as a whole, and to create a pathway for formal capacity development opportunities.

Since 2008 Majuro has suffered extreme water shortages, sea water intrusion, health, environmental and socioeconomic problems. For each year, there is always at least two inundations from king-tides. Today Majuro Atoll Local Government is also moved by the threat of the corona virus pandemic, requiring assistance from the National Government and the international community to prepare for it should it arrive on the shores of the Marshall Islands. To date, there is no disaster risk management plan or a capacity development plan for the local government. Local government officials strongly recommended that a capacity development plan should be a high priority.

Climate Change is more likely to have a major impact on all aspects of life in Majuro. Natural resources are more prone to depletion as a result. The Local Government must be equipped to manage their terrestrial and aquatic resources as well.

### Sources:

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EPPSO, 2012. Republic of the Marshall Islands 2011 Census of Population and Housing Final Report.

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