

RMI Climate Change and Health Seminar Outcome Report
July 19th-31, 2021
Majuro, Marshall Islands

The Climate Change and Health Arts Seminar took place from July 19 - 31, 2021. The Seminar was funded by the RMI Ministry of Health and Human Services, the World Health Organization (WHO) and Scaling up Pacific Adaptation (SUPA) GCCA+. The Seminar was coordinated and facilitated by the nonprofit Jo-Jikum, a local youth environmental nonprofit. The purpose of the Seminar was to use the arts to engage students in issues related to climate change and health.

The Seminar took place at the College of the Marshall Islands campus, and from 9am - 3:00 pm Monday through Friday. The Seminar worked with 38 students in total, 12 boys and 25 girls and 1 who preferred not to name their gender. School representation came from high schools across the Marshall Islands. The 33 students came from the Marshall Islands High School, Assumption High School, COOP School, Seventh Day Adventist High School, Kwajalein High School, Marshall Islands Baptist Christian Academy, and this year included Wotje and Jaluit High School, two outer island schools. The grades ranged from 9th to 12 grades.

The Seminar daily schedule was broken up into team building exercises and presentations from relevant stakeholders in the mornings for the first three days of the Seminar, followed by all day intensive art classes for the remainder of the Seminar. Students were able to choose between weaving, painting, and songwriting for their art classes - this year because of low sign up for poetry, we decided to cancel the poetry class and have students join their second choice. This year we also allowed for "collaborative art projects" meaning students who wanted to incorporate more than one art form into their art project could do so (meaning a painting and a weaving, or writing a song and doing a painting, etc) provided they submitted a form detailing their collaborative art project. Only one student opted to do this - she combined weaving into her painting.

Local artist professionals taught the art classes. Mural artist Aravapo Leo and Debbie Shultz taught painting, master weaver Susan Jieta taught traditional Marshallese jaki-ed weaving, and Barab Harris and Timothy Kabua, local singers, taught songwriting. The camp was also assisted and facilitated by 5 college student interns - these interns acted as "camp counselors" and provided additional administrative support as well as moral support for the students. A component of preparation for the seminar was spent in providing leadership workshops to these 5 interns to provide proper support for them as well.

The team building exercises component of the seminar was meant to help develop a safe space for the students, one where they could be comfortable with one another and with the instructors and interns. It was also meant to support community building so the participants could see themselves as artists together.

This year we decided to choose a specific focus of intersections between climate change and health, understanding that if we overloaded students with too much information, they would not have time to invest in a well-thought out art project. With this in mind the themes we focused on were: mental health, disease outbreak focusing on COVID-19, and adaptation and local food crops. The presentations included representatives from the Ministry of Health and Human Service-Public Health Medical Director and Mental Health Clinical Director, the Climate Change Directorate, Culture Language and Law Commission, and Ministry of Natural Resources. The topics of discussions included COVID-19 and links to climate change, general climate change and health linkages, climate change and its effects on manit (Marshallese culture) and our natural resources and the National Adaptation plan.

The presentations filled the first full three days of the workshop, with group art workshops following as an introduction to the art forms. The final showcase was the night of July 31, with students sharing their painted and woven pieces, and the songwriters performing their new work, with opening remarks from the Minister of Health and Human Services, Bruce Bilimon. During this showcase, we decided to have our first silent auction, as approved by the Minister. Community members bid on the paintings and the woven pots and roses that were created by the weaving students.

The products created from the Seminar are in the process of being shared. The songs will be recorded by the local radio station 103.5, while the artwork will be turned into posters and postcards by local printers. The weaving will be framed and along with the artwork will be transferred to the Majuro Hospital for display, before being transferred to other locations for the purposes of dissemination. A video showing the highlights of the camp will also be shared through social media online, while a blog post will be written by the interns about their experience running the camp for the Jo-Jikum website.

