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Traditional knowledge and the environment

Category: [Green Tips](#) By Christy Sakaziro - sakazirochristina@yahoo.com - Palau & Micronesia Humanities Project Director



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IN the Micronesian region, traditional knowledge and practices can be adapted for the purpose of environmental preservation.

Canoe-making, for example, is heavily dependent on plant biodiversity in the Pacific Islands.

Dr. Takuya Nagaoka, a Japanese anthropologist conducting research in Pohnpei, believes that heightened awareness of the value of biodiversity that is linked to traditional knowledge is key to biological conservation and can help support conservation programs.



TAKUYA NAGAOKA

In Pohnpei, he interviews elders as part of an oral tradition project that aims to preserve traditional folklore, legends, chants and history. In the old days, some of the elders said, island people had the wisdom to preserve their environment and natural resource, but today's cash economy has spoiled their natural resources, destroyed forests and disrupted social ties within families and communities. They said western education enlightens students, but it also makes traditional culture less important.

Researchers Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares and Mar Cabeza from the Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland said conservation practitioners may become more aware of indigenous world views by listening to the stories of the elderly.

The researchers said the act of storytelling may also facilitate a dialogue with feelings that can help maintain intergenerational exchanges and the transmission of local environmental knowledge.

It is also crucial to respect the intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples, as well as the customary mechanisms of control, ownership and transmission of indigenous stories, the researchers said.

Cultural practices and traditional knowledge have enabled people to survive on islands since time immemorial. It is for this reason that island governments today consider cultural diversity as an important component of biodiversity programs and biocultural conservation.


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