DISSERTATION

RESPONSIBLE EXITS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES OF CONSERVATION PHILANTHROPY

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ABSTRACT

RESPONSIBLE EXITS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES OF CONSERVATION PHILANTHROPY

Environmental philanthropy is witnessing unprecedented growth. In recent years, several foundations have invested billions of dollars to solve environmental issues such as biodiversity loss, climate change, and sustainable resource management (Betsill et al., 2021; Mufson, 2021; Greenfield, 2021). Ocean philanthropy has seen a particularly significant increase, with ocean conservation funding more than doubling over the past decade, exceeding USD 1 billion in 2022 (CEA, 2023). Within this landscape, small-scale fisheries are estimated to receive $10-$23 million annually (Rare, 2016). While philanthropic funding has contributed to significant progress in conservation, there is growing scrutiny regarding its efficiency, legitimacy, and the concentration of power in the hands of a few billionaires influencing public policies. This dissertation answers the growing calls for opening the black box of philanthropy (Rogers, 2015; Goss, 2016; Skocpol, 2016; Betsill et al., 2021; Gruby et al., 2021). Specifically, a critical aspect of conservation philanthropy that remains unexplored is the process of exiting and the consequences for grantees and communities. The impetus for the three manuscripts that make up this dissertation is the Packard Foundation's exit from the Western Pacific region after twenty years of funding marine conservation. Through a multi-scalar approach, this dissertation explores responsible exits and the social outcomes of conservation philanthropy. Case studies across global, regional/national, and local governance scales contribute a comprehensive analysis that is theoretically informed and empirically grounded of the way foundations navigate exits and the social outcomes of the projects they fund. This dissertation moves beyond the binary critiques of foundations as "good" or "bad" and takes a solution-oriented approach while also engaging in critical and reflexive research. This

dissertation is grounded in two important fields: environmental governance and environmental philanthropy. I argue for greater shared learning between these two fields to advance conservation philanthropy's understanding and practice. Specifically, environmental philanthropy can benefit from the existing conceptual frameworks, empirical research and methodologies of environmental governance, while environmental governance should recognize philanthropic foundations as influential actors that need more research attention.

Foundations often lack a clear framework to guide their exit strategies in a responsible way, sometimes leading to poorly executed exits which can leave grantees and the work they do struggling to sustain conservation efforts. The second chapter fills that gap by developing an exit typology and a set of best practices, offering guidance for funders who navigate exits. The key takeaway of this chapter is that exits should not be an afterthought but an integral part of the decision-making process, ideally planning from the very start to ensure long-term sustainability.

But how are exits experienced on the receiving end? Chapter three explores the exit viewpoints of ocean conservation practitioners, including grantees, who experienced the Packard Foundation exit in Fiji and Palau. This Chapter reveals that viewpoints were diverse (i.e., optimistic, pessimistic, ambivalent, and apathetic) and shaped by a combination of rationales. While optimistic viewpoints were mostly linked to Packard implementing exit best practices that relate to the *principles* and *administration and management* categories of the responsible exit framework (Chapter 2), pessimistic viewpoints were linked to challenges related to the *sustainability* category of the framework, which are more systemic in nature. This Chapter reasserts that exit best practices are key to conducting a responsible exit and that some of these practices must be addressed by foundations at both the field and individual organizational levels.

The fourth Chapter examines how philanthropic funding affects communities. This Chapter examines the social outcomes of conservation philanthropy through the case study of a Packard-funded small-scale fisheries project in Palau. Using Photovoice, a participatory research method that centers the voices and experiences of fishers, this Chapter reveals a mix of positive and negative outcomes. A key takeaway is the importance of strong community engagement in the design and implementation of philanthropic-supported conservation projects.

Growing critiques of current models of giving must be taken seriously. Changes are needed to ensure that philanthropy operates in a responsible and just manner for both people and the environment by being more transparent, inclusive, and accountable to the communities it directly supports. This dissertation informs these conversations with an empirical analysis that centers the perspectives of grantees and communities affected by philanthropic-funded projects.

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DEDICATION

To Léon, you make everything more meaningful.

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1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

Environmental philanthropy is on the rise. Philanthropic foundations are increasingly playing a crucial role in tackling global environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate change, and sustainable resource management through unprecedented investments (Brulle, 2014; Betsill et al., 2021). For example, in 2021, the Wyss Foundation and eight other foundations pledged the "largest-ever private gift for conservation" (Mufson, 2021) by allocating $5 billion to support an international push for the 30 by 30 target (Greenfield, 2021). That same year, the Bezos Earth Fund announced that they would commit $1 billion of their $10 billion climate pledge to conservation (Kulish, 2021). Within this landscape, ocean philanthropy has seen particularly significant growth, with ocean conservation funding more than doubling over the past decade to exceed USD 1 billion in 2022 (CEA, 2023). When looking at issue areas, funding for fisheries and aquaculture has historically ranked as the second highest level of ocean funding. In recent years, philanthropic foundations have become key funders of small-scale fisheries (SSF), which support the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide and play a crucial role in food security and local economies (Berkes et al., 2001; Kittinger et al., 2013; Kolding et al., 2014; Short et al., 2021; Hendricks, 2022, Basurto et al., 2025). While the World Bank is the largest funder of small-scale fisheries (Rare, 2016; Basurto et al., 2017, Hamilton et al., 2021), a study estimated that philanthropic foundations fund $10-$23 million annually in grants to small-scale fisheries projects, or 5-12% of all grant-making for ocean conservation (Rare, 2016).

While this growth in conservation philanthropy has the potential to drive social and environmental change, the current landscape presents significant challenges. Recent critiques in

the media about philanthropy's efficiency and legitimacy led to further questioning about the concentration of power in the hands of a few billionaires influencing public policies and undermining democratic processes. Some argue that the current model of philanthropic giving is fundamentally flawed. For example, Mechanic (2024) describes philanthropy as "broken" and needing intervention. A 2025 New York Times article, "The Impossible Math of Philanthropy" (Taparia & Buchanan, 2025), emphasizes how philanthropy often perpetuates existing power structures and inequalities, ultimately strengthening the influence of the wealthy rather than addressing deep-rooted social and environmental issues. In light of these growing critiques, calls for reforming philanthropy have intensified (Giridharadas, 2018; LaMarche, 2020). Social scientists are urging the need for further research on foundations' power and influence on public policy and governance to understand societal implications (Jung & Harrow, 2015; Rogers, 2015; Goss, 2016; Reich, 2016; Skocpol, 2016). Philanthropic foundations often operate behind the scenes by making influential decisions, but they remain largely understudied by scholars in this field, "giving the impression that foundation funding is a neutral act" (Betsill et al., 2021, p.3). There is a clear need to "make foundation agency visible, to understand how foundations engage with and impact environmental governance, and to interrogate the legitimacy of foundations as agents of environmental governance" (Betsill et al., 2021, p.2).

This dissertation builds on these calls for social science research on philanthropy (Rogers, 2015; Goss, 2016; Skocpol, 2016; Betsill et al., 2021) and ocean philanthropy specifically (Blasiak et al., 2019; Wabnitz & Blasiak, 2019) by opening the "black box" (Gruby et al., 2021, p.1) of philanthropy. Specifically, this dissertation focuses on philanthropic exits and the social outcomes of philanthropy, two areas identified as needing urgent scholarship by social scientists as mentioned above, but also by both funders and practitioners (Gruby et al., 2021). The impetus for

the three manuscripts that make up this dissertation is the Packard Foundation's ending of their Western Pacific program. Exits can be a vulnerable time and carry significant consequences for the grantees and communities involved. This dissertation aims to provide insights into how conservation philanthropy can better conceptualize and implement exit strategies, ensuring they are conducted thoughtfully and responsibly (Chapter 2). In addition, by understanding grantees perspectives of exits, this dissertation reasserts that exit best practices are crucial and that issues of resource dependence and power imbalances need to be addressed to fully conduct a responsible exit (Chapter 3). Finally, by exploring the impacts of a philanthropic-supported project in the Northern Reef of Palau, this dissertation reveals a mix of positive and negative outcomes experienced by fishers and community members directly affected by this funded project. Further exploration emphasizes the importance of strong community engagement in the design and implementation of philanthropic-funded conservation projects (Chapter 4). This dissertation contributes to ongoing discussions on improving conservation philanthropy. Ultimately, a responsible exit that is well-planned and well-executed should not signal the end of support but rather a transition toward sustainable, locally-led conservation efforts that endure beyond the funding cycle.

As explained later in this introduction, the literature on philanthropy has been dominated by two distinct theoretical perspectives: a critical and a pluralist perspective. The way this dissertation answers these calls for more research on the roles and impacts of philanthropy moves beyond these theoretical divides to take a solution-oriented approach while also engaging in critical and reflexive research around power dynamics between and among funders, grantees and communities. I engage with the two fields of environmental governance and environmental philanthropy while diving deeper into specific literatures on philanthropic exits, resource

dependence theory, social outcomes of conservation, small-scale fisheries governance. As an environmental governance scholar, I bring in a rich toolbox of additional perspectives drawing from insights in the environmental governance literature that can offer more diverse ways of thinking about how foundations can and should engage in ocean conservation.

1.2. Research gaps and questions addressed by dissertation

As discussed above, this dissertation addresses gaps on understudied aspects of environmental philanthropy: responsible exits and social outcomes. This dissertation focuses on these critical areas because, although foundations may have well-defined strategies for project initiation and implementation, exit strategies are frequently lacking. This can disrupt local governance, particularly in complex environments like small-scale fisheries, leaving grantees struggling to secure alternative funding and undermining long-term project success. To start filling these gaps, I examine the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's conclusion of its Western Pacific program and one of its SSF funded projects in Palau as case studies. This research makes key contributions through its multi-scalar approach, recognizing that conservation philanthropy operates at different levels, each revealing challenges and opportunities to improve. Taken together, these chapters provide a comprehensive analysis for understanding exits in conservation philanthropy, emphasizing that a responsible and inclusive process must be integrated at every stage, not just during exits. The research questions I seek to answer in this dissertation are:

Global scale (Chapter 2): How are exits conceptualized and implemented in conservation philanthropy? What are best practices for responsible exits?

National/regional scale (Chapter 3): How did grantees and non-grantees experience the Packard exit in Fiji and Palau? What factors shaped their diverse experiences?

Local scale (Chapter 4): What are the social outcomes of a small-scale fisheries philanthropic-supported initiatives in the Northern Reef of Palau?

1.3. Theoretical foundation

To address the research gaps and questions outlined above, this dissertation connects the fields of environmental governance and environmental philanthropy, arguing for better integrating insights from each body of literature. After introducing both theoretical approaches, I present key research on philanthropic exits, resource dependence theory, and social outcomes of conservation. I argue that environmental philanthropy can benefit from the existing conceptual frameworks, empirical research and methodologies of environmental governance, while environmental governance should recognize philanthropic foundations as influential actors that need more research attention. I briefly summarize these theoretical approaches in Sections 1.2.1–1.2.3 and review them in depth in later chapters, with theoretical contributions detailed in Section 1.3.

1.3.1. Environmental governance

In this dissertation I engage with the broad field of environmental governance which emerged in response to increasing environmental challenges including "depletion of natural resources, loss of commons, declining biodiversity and wildlife, increasing pollution, falling water tables, and growing desertification", among others (Agrawal et al., 2022, p.615) and a recognition that alternative approaches that draw from broader social science research were needed beyond government-led environmental management. A widely accepted definition of environmental governance is the "set of regulatory processes, mechanisms and organizations through which political actors influence environmental actions and outcomes" (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006, p.298).

Governance encompasses both formal and informal institutions and processes involving state and non-state actors that shape human-environment interactions in various arrangements and across multiple scales. Of relevance to this dissertation is the growing recognition of governance actors beyond traditional government systems (i.e., businesses, NGOs, and communities) and their role in hybrid partnerships between state and these non-state actors (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006; Armitage et al., 2012; Bennett & Satterfield, 2018). Among these, philanthropic foundations play an increasingly influential role, reconfiguring power dynamics in environmental governance (Betsill & Milkoreit, 2020). Philanthropic foundations provide substantial resources through grants but also hold influence in shaping environmental agendas and governance systems (Blackwatters et al., 2022, Enrici et al., 2023). Effective governance is essential for solving environmental issues and it begins with recognizing the role of each actor within the system. Philanthropic foundations are key agents in environmental governance, thus, research on such influential actors is crucial. In Chapters 2 and 3, I explore philanthropic exits and the dynamics of foundation-grantee relationships during this often-vulnerable transition period, where power imbalances can emerge or become exacerbated. The environmental governance literature can benefit from these case studies to better understand the implications of foundations exits on the long-term sustainability of funded projects. In Chapter 4, I focus on the case study of a philanthropic supported small-scale fisheries management project. SSFs are unique systems that often involve hybrid governance arrangements with multiple actors, like co-management. SSFs are a "well-documented wicked problem" (Jentoft & Chuenpagdee, 2009, p.553) as they are operating in complex governance systems that involve numerous actors with problems that are difficult to define, and with no clear solutions. As governments often lack resources to remediate these multifaceted problems, SSFs have increasingly depended on external funding (de Oliveira Leis et al., 2019; Gruby et al., 2021),

including, and increasingly, philanthropy. While there is extensive literature on various aspects of SSF governance, there is little research on the impacts of philanthropic-funded projects, despite their growing involvement in funding SSFs projects.

1.3.2. Environmental philanthropy

Each chapter in this dissertation studies aspects of environmental philanthropy. Philanthropy (from the Greek 'love of humanity') is broadly defined as private giving for public purposes (Salamon & Anheier, 1992; Barman, 2017). Private are a type of tax-exempt independent grant-making organization whose income predominantly derives from private wealth (Jung et al., 2018). Foundations funding is directed to a wide array of issue areas, including conservation, religion, education, health, arts, culture, among others (Barman, 2017; Jung et al., 2018). The study of philanthropy is a growing field of scholarship, with academic interest from wide-ranging disciplines: political science, psychology, economics, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, etc. (Katz, 1999; Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Skocpol, 2016; Barman, 2017). However, many questions still persist on the roles, impacts and legitimacy of philanthropic foundations. Other authors also emphasize the fact that philanthropic foundations remain "black boxes" that lack transparency and accountability regarding their internal funding mechanisms and lack appropriate tools and frameworks to embed them in governance studies, when compared to governments and markets (Callahan, 2017; Jung et al., 2018). Phillips (2018, p.152) describes them as "ethereal, aristocratic and slow-moving creatures […] surrounded by a certain mystique" and existing in "carefully curated, protected, opaque environments which are controlled by their creators and intentionally closed to external influences". In addition to the opacity surrounding the way philanthropic foundations operate, many authors argue that with concentrated wealth comes

concentrated power (Rogers, 2015). For example, the 'Giving Pledge', a "moral commitment…not a legal contract" (Mechanic, 2024) for America's elites to give away half of their wealth to charity during their lifetimes or at the time of their deaths, reinforces the idea that foundations are increasingly gaining power in all aspects of society (Goss, 2016). The pledge has also been criticized as a consolidation of plutocratic power (Mechanic, 2024). Given the diminishing role of welfare states, Eikenberry (2006, p.589) points out that they increasingly act like "mini-governments" that can make public policy decisions on their own with no accountability, transparency and a misalignment between the policy priorities of the wealthy and the general public (on issues about health, education, conservation, etc.).

The literature on philanthropy "has been dominated by two distinct theoretical perspectives" (Betsill et al., 2021, p.5). Scholars adopting a more critical perspective view foundations' role through the lens of global capitalism where a small number of very wealthy elite individuals exert a disproportionate amount of social, moral and political influence in society (Daly, 2012; Rogers, 2015; Reich, 2018). These critiques were solidified in the 1990s when new business models and technologies created an economic boom and instead of just keep building up the already established foundations, the 'newly' wealthy wanted their own foundations and, more importantly, they wanted their foundations to emulate the experimental, innovative, technology-oriented solutions that had created the new wealth, hence perpetuating capitalist ideas in philanthropy as the most efficient means of solving public issues. These new practices have been called 'venture philanthropy', 'effective philanthropy', 'effective altruism' or 'strategic philanthropy' and scholars often group them under the umbrella of 'philanthrocapitalism' (Katz, 2005; Holmes, 2012; Jones, 2012; Rogers, 2015; Tedesco, 2015; Reckhow, 2016; Reich, 2016). Another perspective is more pluralist and calls attention to the multi-dimensionality of

philanthropy. Pluralist scholars believe that philanthropic foundations have diverse interests and motivation, and therefore expect giving to be diffused to a wide variety of causes. By challenging the assumption that all foundations are instruments of global capitalism, pluralists emphasize the multitude of intents, motivations, internal cultures, grant-making mechanisms and other specificities of foundations (Delfin & Tang, 2007). They criticize many of the claims by critics of elitism and philanthrocapitalism concerning foundations and their grant-making (Karl & Katz, 1987) and are more likely to view foundations as drivers, partners or catalysts (Fleishman, 2007). Daly (2012, 543-544) describes them as "a source and leader of innovation, champion of a range of social problems and issues, supporter of multiple perspectives on how these problems should be addressed, and engaged in complementing the government by acting on 'unpopular' or difficult areas, often over the long term".

1.3.3. Philanthropic exits

Chapters 2 and 3 mainly focus on the topic of philanthropic exits, an understudied research area in in the environmental philanthropy literature. As Kibbe (2017, p.50) points out: "little is known about the effects of foundation exits on the work, the grantees, and the related fields. Given the frequency and ubiquity of foundation exits, the literature is painfully thin." With the increasing reliance on philanthropic foundations in conservation and the current trend toward spend-down foundations and strategic philanthropy (Petrovitch, 2011; Behrens & Gordillo, 2019), there is a critical need and growing interest in better understanding and improving exit processes. To date, the existing literature on philanthropic exits is predominantly found in the grey literature (Mackinnon & Jaffe, 2007; Petrovich, 2011; Herweijer & Kerkhoven, 2013; Behrens & Gordillo, 2019) with a growing presence in the peer-reviewed literature (Cao Yu & Berman, 2017; Beadnell

et al., 2017; Gienapp et al., 2017; Halverstadt & Kerman, 2017; Kibbe, 2017; Knox, 2017; Perez, 2017; Le Cornu et al., 2022). Overall, this body of literature addresses various aspects of exit processes in different situations (i.e., specific grants or programs, large-scale initiatives, or limited-life foundations) and touches on reasons for exiting, best practices and lessons learned, challenges, and long-term outcomes. In 2017, the Foundation Review published a special issue on 'exit strategies' which included eight articles written by and for foundation staff and emphasized that philanthropic exits were a critical topic that deserves more research and attention. While there is significant practical knowledge and experience with exits, this topic has not been a priority for systematic research, learning, or discussion. Specifically, this dissertation addresses key gaps in the limited literature on foundation exits. First, in Chapter 2, a review of the literature indicates that there is no shared definition or typology of philanthropic exits. Current conceptualizations lack clarity, which limits systematic learning, and are too narrow to capture the range of exit types and dimensions that matter for planning and managing exits responsibly (Kibbe, 2017; Perez, 2017). Second, the same review of the literature highlights the insufficient guidance for planning and conducting responsible exits. There are a handful of studies in the grey literature that consider exit best practices (Mackinnon & Jaffe, 2007; Petrovitch, 2011) and, although growing, the peer-reviewed literature is still quite limited. There is a need for much finer-grained guidance to conduct responsible exits. Third, in Chapter 3, a review of the literature emphasizes that while responsible exits and their implementation are often addressed from the perspective of funders, there is still a significant research gap regarding grantees' perspectives on exits, recognizing the power imbalances inherent in funder-grantee relationships. Aside from a few peer-reviewed publications (Kibbe, 2017) and reports in the grey literature (CEP Grantee Perception Report, 2016; Behrens &

Gordillo, 2019), there is still a clear lack of systematic research that looks into the various experiences of grantees during the exit process and what shapes them.

1.3.4. Resource Dependence Theory

In Chapter 3, I introduce Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) as a useful lens for understanding the power dynamics between actors within environmental governance, specifically between foundations and their grantees during an exit. This chapter highlights how grantees' dependence on funding can shape their experiences during exits. Power imbalances are inherent in funder-grantee relationships. Most research on this topic argues that these relationships are often asymmetrical (Parks, 2008; Mount, 2022) and they reinforce unequal power dynamics, as acknowledged by Parks (2008, p.217): "As the controller of funding decisions, the donor sets the terms of the relationship." Funders hold significant power when it comes to financial resources (Reith, 2010) and their decisions often determine who receives funding and how it is distributed. When money comes to an end during an exit, power relations can become even more relevant. As such, these power imbalances often result in grantees being dependent on funding from external donors in order to sustain their operations and implement their projects. Resource dependence theory (RDT) provides valuable insights into these dynamics. RDT has its roots in Emerson's "Power-Dependence Relations" (1962) and Pfeffer and Salancik's The External Control of Organizations (1978) and is guided by some key principles (Hillman et al., 2009; Davis & Cobb, 2010; Drees & Heugens, 2013): "1) it recognizes that organizations rely on critical resources to survive and pursue their goals, 2) that these resources can be acquired from other organizations (i.e., funders), and 3) that power and its inverse, dependence, play key roles in understanding the relationships between organizations" and "this last principle implies that the balance of power

usually favors the organization that possesses what other organizations need, leading to imbalances in the relationship" (Malatesta & Smith, 2014, p.14). In addition, the international development literature, which explores the relationships between donors and NGOs in the context of aid, provides valuable insights on issues related to grantees' dependence on funding. I review the specific contributions of this literature in Chapter 3. Insights from existing theories and literatures can help better understanding the different viewpoints of the Packard exit and some of the rationales put forth by grantees.

1.3.5. Social outcomes

In Chapter 4, I explore the social outcomes of ocean philanthropy, focusing specifically on small-scale fisheries. To better understand and organize the social outcomes of conservation philanthropy, I draw on an existing framework known as Social Impact Assessment (SIA) (Vanclay, 2002). SIA is an applied field that is over 50 years old (Vanclay & Esteves, 2024) and that started as a regulatory tool in the 1970s to help determining whether a project should be approved and under what conditions (Tilt et al., 2009; Esteves et al., 2012). SIA has been generally defined as following: "Social Impact Assessment includes the processes of analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programmes, plans, projects) and any social change processes invoked by those interventions. Its primary purpose is to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment" (Vanclay, 2003, p. 6). In the case study of the Northern Reef of Palau, we use SIA as a research tool to frame and understand the impacts resulting from a philanthropic-supported SSF intervention. The adapted framework used in Chapter 4 (Gruby et al., 2017) includes both social change processes (i.e., the "intervening variables that

might lead to social impacts under certain conditions", Vanclay, 2002, p.207) and social impacts. These impacts are "actually experienced by humans (at individual and higher aggregation levels) in either a corporeal (physical) or cognitive (perceptual) sense" (Vanclay, 2002, p.191). In addition, they may be direct or indirect, intended or unintended, positive or negative and they span every conceivable social dimension (e.g., cultural, demographic, economic, health, institutional, political). Most importantly, impacts can be experienced or perceived. There is a growing body of literature that studies whether SSF interventions achieve specific social and ecological goals, the conditions for successful implementation (Pollnac et al., 2001; Napier et al., 2005; Chuenpagdee & Jentoft, 2007), and whether they create additional unintended consequences. I dive deeper into these examples in Chapter 4.

1.4. Chapter summaries and contributions

1.4.1. Global scale: Conceptualizing exits and their best practices

Exiting can have tremendous implications for the people and places foundations invest in. Despite the ubiquity of exits, there are still significant gaps in understanding them and a critical need for research that can inform practice. This chapter addresses these gaps with the first empirical study of exit processes in the context of ocean conservation philanthropy. It draws on insights from foundations working in ocean conservation globally to better conceptualize exits. Specifically, this chapter addresses two key gaps in the limited literature on foundation exits. First, the literature rarely defines exits explicitly when referring to them. Current conceptualizations lack clarity, which limits systematic learning, and are too narrow to capture the range of exit types and dimensions that matter for planning and managing exits responsibly. In this chapter, the exit typology that is developed distinguishes three exit types: embedded, organic, and forced. These

types are defined primarily in terms of their distinct drivers. The typology also considers how exits may vary along three additional dimensions: what is ending or shifting, at what scale and to what degree. Second, there is insufficient guidance for planning and conducting responsible exits. There are a few studies in the grey literature that consider exit best practices (Mackinnon & Jaffe, 2007; Petrovitch, 2011) and, although growing, the peer-reviewed literature is still quite limited. This suggests there is a need for better guidance to conduct responsible exits (Gruby et al., 2021). For many funders, there is still a great deal of uncertainty and lack of planning around exits, which can lead to 'irresponsible' exit practices where foundations simply do not address or plan appropriately for the exit (Giloth & Gewirtz, 2009; Beadnell, 2017). In this chapter, a total of 54 best practices are identified and organized into three categories, administration and management, sustainability and principles, and 17 sub-categories. This comprehensive conceptual framework not only captures the diversity of exit types and dimensions, it also highlights the complexity of an exit as a process relevant to all stages of grant-making and moving from the idea that exits are a single defined moment in the process. These best practices are a good starting point for reflection, discussion, planning and actions that may be further contextualized to fit particular organizations, exit types, and grant-making contexts.

1.4.2. Regional/national scale: Understanding grantees' exit viewpoints

In Chapter 3, I continue the exploration of philanthropic exits by understanding how grantees experience philanthropic exits. Exiting is common practice in the philanthropic world, but exits are often portrayed as painful processes with the underlying assumption that they are inherently negative: grantees may lose a funding source that is critical to the functioning of their organization, while funders lose an asset to carry out their overall mission and goals. This chapter

argues that exits are more nuanced and that grantees experience them differently. The literature on exits is often addressed from the perspective of funders and there is still a significant research gap regarding grantees' perspectives on exits (Kibbe, 2017). By learning from grantees' experiences, their successes and their failures, funders can address issues and improve their strategies and practices in current and future exits (CEP Grantee Perception Report, 2016; Kintisch, 2019a; 2019b; Le Cornu et al., 2022). For example, grantees have valuable knowledge of local contexts and the potential challenges in continuing their work without ongoing financial support. Their perspective can inform strategies for long-term sustainability and the development of context-appropriate exit plans that serve communities, which are seldom involved in these processes (Le Cornu et al., 2022; Betsill et al., 2024, Le Cornu et al., In Prep). This chapter focuses on an empirical study of the end of the Packard Foundation's long-term regional investment in the Western Pacific and explores the exit viewpoints of grantees in Fiji and Palau (i.e., optimistic, pessimistic, ambivalent and apathetic viewpoints) and identifies the rationales they used to explain these viewpoints. Overall, our findings suggest that implementing best practices for exiting responsibly is key (Le Cornu et al., 2022). Rationales for optimistic viewpoints were closely linked to best practices Packard implemented related to the *principles* and *administration and management* categories of the framework (Le Cornu et al, 2022). However, the rationales for pessimistic and ambivalent viewpoints were closely linked to the challenges pertaining to the *sustainability* category of the framework, reflecting more systematic issues related to resource dependency.

1.4.3. Local scale: Social outcomes of conservation philanthropy

In Chapter 4, I shift attention to the social outcomes of conservation philanthropy, particularly in small-scale fisheries governance. As ocean philanthropy continues to grow, its influence on small-scale fisheries governance has become increasingly significant (CEA, 2023). However, the social outcomes of philanthropic-supported conservation projects remain largely understudied, particularly from the perspective of local communities. To address this gap, this chapter examines the social outcomes of conservation philanthropy through a case study of a Packard Foundation-funded fisheries management project in the Northern Reef of Palau, using a participatory research methodology called Photovoice. To better understand and organize the social outcomes of conservation philanthropy, we draw on an existing framework known as Social Impact Assessment (SIA). The chapter identifies 8 multi-faceted social outcomes experienced by those directly affected by the fisheries management project. Findings reveal a complex mix of positive and negative social outcomes, ranging from increased fish size and economic opportunities to unfulfilled promises, power imbalances, and feelings of exclusion from decision-making processes. This chapter highlights the need for more inclusive and equitable practices in conservation, emphasizing the importance of stronger community engagement in philanthropic-funded projects. This chapter contributes to the literatures on environmental governance and environmental philanthropy by 1) emphasizing that the SSF community needs to better understand the potential impacts of philanthropy, an understudied actor in SSF governance and 2) providing the conservation philanthropy community with insights into how their funding affects the local communities directly impacted by the projects they support and fund. By documenting both the successes and challenges of conservation philanthropy, the lessons from Palau's Northern Reef

project offers lessons for foundations, grantees, and conservation practitioners working in Palau and globally.

1.5. Methodology

1.5.1. Chapter 2 & 3

The research methodology for Chapters 2 and 3 is a combination of qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and knowledge co-production workshops with research participants. For Chapter 2, the interviews were conducted by other team members in 2019 and 2020 with 47 individuals (primarily program officers) who had experience working in 36 ocean foundations. In addition, a virtual knowledge co-production workshop was held in 2021 with 41 individuals (32 of whom also participated in the interviews) from 22 foundations to share and to co-interpret our preliminary findings. For Chapter 3, the interviews were conducted by other team members between 2018 and 2019 in Fiji and Palau. Two virtual knowledge co-production workshops were also held in 2021. In both chapters, thematic analyses with QSR NVivo were used.

1.5.2. Chapter 4

The research methodology for Chapter 3 is a visual participatory research methodology called Photovoice. Photovoice empowers research participants to document, reflect upon, and communicate issues of concern via photographs, while stimulating social change (Wang & Burris, 1997). In addition, Photovoice can offer a practical way to access rich, contextual and candid knowledge about communities and capture nuanced perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked, which is particularly relevant when documenting the diversity of social outcomes linked to conservation interventions. Photovoice is not a static methodology, and it has evolved

and been modified to fit various contexts and research topics (Castleden et al. 2008; Bennett and Dearden et al. 2013; Simmance et al., 2016). This study uses an adapted framework for Photovoice tailored to fisheries and aquaculture research (Simmance et al., 2016). This Photovoice study involved five phases over four years, which required extensive resources, engagement and trust-building in Palau's Northern Reef communities. Each Phase is described in more details in the Methods section of Chapter 4.

1.6. Research setting

The research setting for Chapter 2 is global. Chapter 3 focuses on the Packard Western Pacific Program exit in Fiji and Palau. The Packard Foundation initiated the Western Pacific program in 1998 and invested in more than $100 million in ocean conservation in the Asia-Pacific region over the course of two decades making it the "largest and most consistent sources of marine conservation funding in the region". (Kintisch, 2019, p.2). The Foundation initially invested in eight countries: Malaysia, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji and Palau. After nearly two decades, the Foundation made the decision to exit from the region. Chapter 3 focuses on the exits from Fiji and Palau because of the Foundation's interest in learning from the exit experience in the region, as well as the authors' experience working in those countries. This study emerged, in part, from a recognition that the exit was a unique opportunity to document and learn from the process and share these lessons and insights with the broader field of ocean conservation funders and practitioners. As for chapter 4, the setting of the case study is the Northern Reef region of Palau. I offer a detailed section on the research setting in Chapter 4 and describe the Northern Reef region, the characteristics of the fishery, a background on Customary Marine Tenure in Palau and the Packard Foundation Western

Pacific program focusing specifically on the implementation of the Northern Reef Fisheries Management Project.

1.7. Positionality statement

Acknowledging that qualitative research is subjective is an essential step. Research is a "shared space, shaped by both researcher and participants (England, 1994). As such, the identities of both researcher and participants have the potential to impact the research process" (Bourke, 2014, p.1). Maintaining reflexivity, credibility, and ethical integrity during the research process requires researchers to identify and articulate their positionality. Holmes (2020) describes positionality as someone's world view both conscious and unconscious, or "where the researcher is coming from" (p.1), including their beliefs and assumptions about the world and "the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context" (p.1). It is also important to recognize that positionality is not fixed and can evolve. In this statement, I articulate my positionality and how it has shaped my research on the interactions between foundations, their grantees, and communities in the Western Pacific region. I reflect on questions that have the potential to shape the outcomes of the research I conducted: Who am I in relation to this research? How does who I am affect how I approach this research and my interactions with participants? What have I done to acknowledge or mitigate my influence on this research?

I am a White, French, university-educated woman pursuing a Ph.D. at a U.S. University. My academic and professional background situates me within the social sciences, and I consider myself as a conservation social scientist working on efforts to govern the oceans and I am committed to social justice. I am driven by research that offers practical insights and can lead to tangible solutions. My research seeks to bridge the gap between conservation philanthropy and the

communities they serve, fostering a just and equitable world where conservation is effective, inclusive, and locally driven. However, I recognize the inherent power imbalances and ethical considerations of being a researcher from the Global North working in the Global South. Historically, conservation has been dominated by Western, top-down approaches, often marginalizing local and Indigenous voices. My positionality in this world comes with privileges that many of the communities I study may lack. Throughout my dissertation I have committed to being mindful of these dynamics and trying to mitigate their impact. My research involved participants from diverse backgrounds, professions, and geographies, including foundation staff involved in ocean conservation funding, ocean conservation practitioners including grantees implementing philanthropic-funded projects, and small-scale fishers in the Pacific region.

Research with foundation staff and ocean practitioners presented its own challenges, and my own assumptions. While I did not collect data from funders, I am aware that these biases could be reflected in the analyses and interpretations. For instance, I came in with the assumption that foundations always act in the best interest of communities. While they face criticism, I felt that not all foundations are the same and that some are more effective and caring, especially those working in the conservation arena and supporting communities.

Research in Palau was more challenging. Prior to my research, I had no field experience in Palau, and I was fully aware of my outsider status (Holmes, 2020). Fieldwork experiences can be defining moments in researchers' career, but they can also be intimidating and stressful. While my research was the continuation of long-term work, trust and relationship building that my advisor, Dr. Gruby, and her lab have been conducting for many years in Palau, and while my intentions were rooted in social justice and equity, I still felt anxious about my potential to "parachute in". Parachute science is a phenomenon where researchers from the Global North conduct extractive

research in the Global South and leave without investing in local capacity or infrastructure (de Vos & Schwartz, 2022). I was also conscious that how I, and my research, were perceived affected participant willingness to share information. I came in with baggage being an outside scientist. Research fatigue was also evident in Ngarchelong due to the numerous conservation projects initiated there.

To mitigate my influence, center community voices, and avoid parachute science practices I integrated participatory research methods throughout my dissertation. Chapters 2 and 3 are part of a research co-design process, embedded in a participatory research approach known as knowledge co-production. This iterative process brings together people with diverse knowledge and expertise to develop knowledge and engage with its use in policy and practice (Moser, 2016). Our research co-design process, a key element of knowledge co-production, involved interviews, workshops, and meetings with local communities to collaboratively identify research questions and conceptualize the project. In addition, Chapter 2 was reviewed by an advisory committee. In Chapter 4, I used Photovoice, a visual participatory research methodology that empowers research participants to document, reflect upon, and communicate issues of concern via photographs, while stimulating social change (Wang & Burris, 1997). However, Photovoice also presents challenges. It requires careful attention to ethical concerns regarding informed consent, privacy, and image use (Teti, 2019; Rosemberg & Evans-Agnew, 2020). Participant selection, interpretation of results, access to technology, and potential power imbalances between researchers and participants must be carefully considered (Liebenberg, 2018). While Photovoice does not guarantee empowerment, it can be a valuable tool when implemented thoughtfully and ethically. In my research, Photovoice helped build trust and rapport, especially when combined with one-on-one interviews where participants could speak more freely. Participant observation, engagement in community events

and participation in fishing activities also contributed to building trust. My multiple visits to Palau over four years, including an extended stay in 2021, significantly helped as well. In 2019, before I began my fieldwork, I traveled to Palau for a preliminary visit with the communities I would be working with. I consulted with local practitioners, fishers and other community members to gauge their interest in working with me to expand on the work my lab had previously done, and to gauge whether our goals and methods were aligned. To carry out the research, I built a partnership with a local Non-Governmental Organization, the Ebiil Society. This partnership was essential to ensuring my fieldwork experience was successful – scientifically, ethically, and socially. The Ebiil Society director, Ann Singeo, and her team, generously contributed their tremendous knowledge and expertise on the research topic, along with guidance on how to conduct research in the Northern Reef communities effectively and in a culturally appropriate way. I simply could not – and should not – have conducted this research without them (Singeo & Ferguson, 2022). I am also mindful of the male-dominated nature of the industry and strive to be respectful of traditions and boundaries. This research was really iterative as I shared emerging research findings and invited feedback from fishers and community members during a workshop before I left in 2022, and I came back in 2023 to share the final research results.

My motivations for this research include intellectual curiosity, a desire to contribute to knowledge, finding just and equitable solutions for ocean conservation, and pursuing a doctoral degree. I have no personal stake in the outcome of this research. While the research was funded by a foundation invested in conservation in Palau, including a fishery intervention at my field site, that did not influence the research outcomes. I was personally more concerned about how the research might reflect on small-scale fishers in Palau. With this dissertation, I learned the importance of participatory and inclusive research practices by prioritizing local knowledge,

participatory approaches, and collaborative decision-making. I challenge the notion that scientific knowledge and expertise only pertains to academia. I will take with me throughout my career the fact that one needs to critically examine whose knowledge is valued and whose voices are heard, and I will work to elevate the voices that are marginalized. My goal is to conduct research that is academically rigorous, practical, people-centered, and transformative. I hope that this research can contribute to more just and equitable giving practices that reflect the priorities of the people most affected in ocean conservation and beyond.

1.8. Dissertation structure

This dissertation follows a manuscript format and Chapters 2, 3, and 4 were prepared for separate publications in academic journals. While the chapters are linked by the common theme of environmental philanthropy and more specifically around exits and social outcomes, they are stand-alone co-authored studies that draws from a unique combination of methods and theoretical frameworks, the specifics of which are detailed in the chapters themselves. The goal of my dissertation is to ground my work in theoretical foundations and contribute to existing literature on environmental governance and environmental philanthropy, but I also offer practical insights for the field of conservation philanthropy as they navigate exits and think about potential social outcomes. Chapter 2 is published as part of a special issue in Conservation Science and Practice and co-authored with team members from the Ocean Philanthropy Research Initiative. Chapters 3 is being prepared for publication and also co-authored with my advisor, Dr. Gruby. Chapter 4 was in part motivated by my interest and expertise in small-scale fisheries and long-standing working relationship of Dr. Gruby in the Northern Reef and was later added to the Ocean Philanthropy Research Initiative. Data collection for this chapter was conducted by myself. Although the themes

of the chapters were identified during an extensive research co-design process, data analysis and text within this dissertation reflect my original intellectual work and that of co-authors.

2. CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALIZING RESPONSIBLE EXITS IN CONSERVATION PHILANTHROPY[1]

2.1. Introduction

The past decade has witnessed significant growth in philanthropic giving (Kolbert, 2018), with the environmental sector seeing some of the highest rates of growth in the field overall (Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network, 2022; Environmental Grantmaking Association, 2021, Betsill *et al*., 2021). For example, in 2021, the Wyss Foundation and eight other philanthropic organizations pledged the "largest-ever private gift for conservation" (Mufson, 2021) consisting of $5 billion to support an international push to protect at least 30% of the planet's land and sea by 2030, known as the 30 by 30 target (Greenfield, 2021). That same year, the Bezos Earth Fund announced that they would commit $1 billion of their $10 billion climate pledge to conservation (Kulish, 2021), also with the goal of advancing the 30 by 30 target. With the unprecedented growth in 'green giving', we argue that now is the time to think seriously not only about the beginning of new funding relationships, initiatives, and partnerships – but also their end. Responsible giving must include responsible exits.

Responsible exits warrant research attention for several key reasons. First, there is a timely opportunity to include exit planning in the early development of what may be the "new green era" of philanthropic giving (Greenfield, 2021). Second, foundations are increasingly moving away from multi-year grants as they turn to alternative funding modes like 'strategic philanthropy', where they fund time-limited grants that lead to near-constant exits (Behrens & Gordillo, 2019;

[1] Le Cornu, E., Gruby, R. L., Blackwatters, J. E., Enrici, A., Basurto, X., & Betsill, M. (2022). Conceptualizing responsible exits in conservation philanthropy. *Conservation science and practice*, *5*(5), e12868. Reprinted here with permission.

Boris *et al*., 2016; Brest & Harvey, 2018; Buchanan & Patrizi, 2016; Buteau *et al*., 2009, Rogers, 2015). Third, exits were identified as a top research priority by the ocean philanthropy community, who expressed an interest in applied research that can inform donors about how to design "respectful exit processes" (Gruby *et al.*, 2021, p.7). Fourth, poorly planned and executed exits present tremendous risks and implications for the people and places foundations invest in. The consequences can be broad and devastating for conservation organizations (e.g., wasted resources, weakened governance, loss of community trust) and can ultimately compromise conservation goals (Ruiz-Miranda *et al*., 2020). Grantees may fear that their organizations or initiatives will suffer financial setbacks during and after an exit, which could lead to reduced capacity and sustainability of conservation initiatives and raises broader issues of resource dependency (Davis & Cobb, 2010; Hillman *et al*., 2009; Le Cornu *et al.*, In Prep; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). While scholars and practitioners tend to focus on the financial aspects of exits, there is also a recognition that more than money is at stake. Funders and grantees can develop close relationships which means that exits are also personal and, in some cases, long-term partnerships – sometimes friendships – may end along with funding (Kibbe, 2017; Perez, 2017). Kibbe (2017, p.50) even compares exits to a "breakup". This is why exits are often characterized as risky, painful, confusing, and potentially damaging and destabilizing forces (Kibbe, 2017; Petrovitch, 2011). But is this always the case? What can foundations do to manage exits in a responsible manner and reduce the potential for adverse impacts? Answers to even the most basic questions about foundation exits remain elusive: "given the frequency and ubiquity of foundation exits, the literature is painfully thin" (Kibbe, 2017, p 50).

This paper begins to address this gap with the first empirical study of exit processes in the context of ocean conservation philanthropy. The growth in 'green giving' is reflected in the oceans,

where private foundations are injecting hundreds of millions of dollars each year to address ocean degradation and climate change (Berger *et al.*, 2019; CEA, 2017, 2018, 2021; Hamilton *et al.,* 2021). Philanthropic grants for ocean conservation have more than doubled in the past decade (CEA, 2021), and foundations have been recognized as "increasingly important players" within ocean conservation (Wabnitz & Blasiak, 2019, p.2). Gruby and colleagues (2021, p.11) compare them to: "keystone actors in ecosystems with a profound and disproportionate influence on conservation agendas, research, organizations, networks, policy, and the local societies affected by these interventions." This paper draws on an empirical analysis of interviews and a knowledge co-production workshop with staff from 36 foundations working in ocean conservation globally to: (1) develop a conceptual framework that broadens and clarifies definitions of exits and provides a common language to characterize exits along varied dimensions, and (2) derive best practices for exiting responsibly. We emphasize there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to exits. Instead, the typology and best practices can be used by funders and grantees as a starting point for conceptualizing, planning, and implementing exits in a broader and more intentional way. While our empirical focus is ocean conservation philanthropy, there was nothing specific to this context in our findings that limit their broader applicability. The contributions of this paper will be useful for the conservation field generally and other philanthropic sectors beyond the environment.

2.2. Philanthropic exits

With the increasing reliance on philanthropic foundations in conservation and the trends toward limited-life or spend-down foundations, where foundations themselves have a defined endpoint, and strategic philanthropy, where foundations increasingly fund time-limited strategic initiatives (Behrens & Gordillo, 2019; Boris *et al*., 2016; Loh & Buteau, 2017; Markham &

Ditkoff, 2013; Petrovitch, 2011; Wolcheck & Renz, 2009), there is a critical need and growing interest in better understanding and improving exit processes. In 2017, the *Foundation Review* published a special issue on 'exit strategies' which included eight articles written by and for foundation staff. Every article identified philanthropic exits as a critical topic that deserves more research and attention. While there is significant practical knowledge and experience with exits, this topic has not been a priority for systematic research, learning, or discussion at the field level.

This paper addresses two key gaps in the limited literature on foundation exits. First, there is no shared definition or typology of philanthropic exits. When referring to exits, authors rarely define them explicitly. Rather, they implicitly characterize them in diverse ways, such as: closing a program or initiative, ending a funding relationship with specific organizations, or withdrawing from an entire country, region or field (Kibbe, 2017; Perez, 2017). Current conceptualizations lack clarity, which limits systematic learning, and are too narrow to capture the range of exit types and dimensions that matter for planning and managing exits responsibly. In some cases, this lack of conceptual clarity may mean a funder and/or grantee does not even recognize when they are going through an exit, or results in a failure to plan or pursue exits at all: "too often funders and grantees fail to acknowledge that exiting is a part of the investment life cycle. As a result, they also fail to discuss the realities of it and the importance and value of exiting" (Perez, 2017, p.105). In addition, while the philanthropic exits literature mentions drivers of exits (Herweijer & Kerhoven, 2013; Petrovich, 2011), these discussions are usually quite general and descriptive and not considered in relation to diverse exit types. A comprehensive conceptual framework that captures the diversity of exit types and associated drivers, as we contribute here, can help foundations, grantees and practitioners to better identify, discuss, plan for, and navigate exits.

Second, and relatedly, there is insufficient guidance for planning and conducting responsible exits. There are a handful of studies in the grey literature that consider exit best practices (Herweijer & Kerhoven, 2013; Mackinnon & Jaffe, 2007; Petrovitch, 2011) and, although growing, the peer-reviewed literature is still quite limited. The existing literature tends to focus on how funders can exit from specific grants or programs (Gienapp *et al.*, 2017), with a few publications focusing on strategies for exiting from a field or on spend-down foundations specifically (Fleishman, 2017; Gardner *et al.*, 2005; Halverstadt, 2017; Loh & Buteau, 2017; Markham & Ditkoff, 2013; Ostrower, 2009, 2011). We identified only one publication focusing on how funders exited from a major place-based initiatives (Cao Yu, 2017). In this literature, the authors focus on the importance of: (1) planning for and carefully executing the end of a funding relationship, (2) having early and continuous communication with grantees, and (3) developing strategies for ensuring sustainability after the exit. There is a need for much finer-grained guidance to conduct responsible exits. For many funders, there is still a great deal of uncertainty and lack of planning and learning around exits (Beadnell, 2017; Giloth & Gewirtz, 2009), which can lead to irresponsible exit practices where foundations simply do not address or plan appropriately for the exit. Cao Yu et al. (2017, p.64) explains that: "the [exit] process is too often treated as an afterthought, and funders rarely devote enough time to planning for and working through the tensions and issues that arise." A more comprehensive framework delineating best practices for exiting responsibly in various exit contexts could help funders, grantees and other practitioners think about exits as a priority on par with other parts of their grant-making strategies.

2.3. Methods

Our study conceptualizes responsible exits in conservation philanthropy by examining the process of exiting as it is practiced by foundations funding ocean conservation. This study was conducted as part of a larger project on ocean philanthropy, where we used a knowledge co-production approach (Lemos *et al.*, 2018; Wyborn *et al.*, 2017) to engage more than 100 individuals from local, regional, and international NGOs, foundations, national governments, universities, and intergovernmental organizations to develop the project's research themes. Responsible exits emerged as one of five research priorities (Gruby *et al.*, 2021). Our analysis is based on semi-structured interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020 with 47 individuals (primarily program officers from private foundations) with experience working – formerly or currently – with 36 ocean foundations (see Appendices 1 and 2 for a list of interviewees, workshop participations, and foundations represented in this study), and a virtual knowledge co-production workshop held in 2021 with 41 individuals (32 of whom also participated in the interviews) to share and to co-interpret our preliminary findings. Participants were initially selected based on an assessment of the foundations with the largest investments in oceans in 2018-2020 from the fundingtheocean.org website, then through snowball sampling. Additionally, some participants responded to a call for research participants from our funders sent to the Biodiversity Funders Group's Marine Conservation listserv. Our sample includes 10 of the 20 largest marine philanthropic funders globally in the period 2010-2016 (CEA, 2019). Each interview lasted between 1-1.5 hours and included prompts to encourage reflection on: (1) what defines an exit; (2) why a foundation decides to shift funding away from a geography, organization or issue; (3) lessons learned from a specific exit 'story' or 'experience'; and 4) advice for those embarking on an exit.

We conducted a systematic thematic analysis of interview transcripts and detailed notes from the workshops using QSR NVivo to identify general themes for the exit typology and best practices. Then, through an iterative process with co-authors and with feedback from workshop participants we nuanced the typology and discussed challenges and opportunities for conducting responsible exits. This process culminated in the development of: (1) a conceptual framework that identifies three different types of exits, their associated drivers and three other dimensions of difference, and (2) a set of best practices that can be implemented in various exit contexts. We present these findings below.

2.4. Findings

2.4.1. Exit typology

Our typology captures the diverse ways that research participants define and talk about exits (Figure 1). These results suggest that exits vary across a broader range of dimensions than is currently recognized in the limited literature on philanthropic exits. First, we differentiate between three exit types: *embedded*, *organic*, and *forced*. These types are defined primarily in terms of their distinct drivers. We then consider how exits may vary along three additional dimensions: *what is ending or shifting*, *at what scale* and *to what degree.* Overall, the typology highlights the complexity of an exit *as a process* relevant to all stages of grantmaking. In so doing, it reveals diverse opportunities for applying exit best practices from the moment a grant is initiated until well after it has concluded.

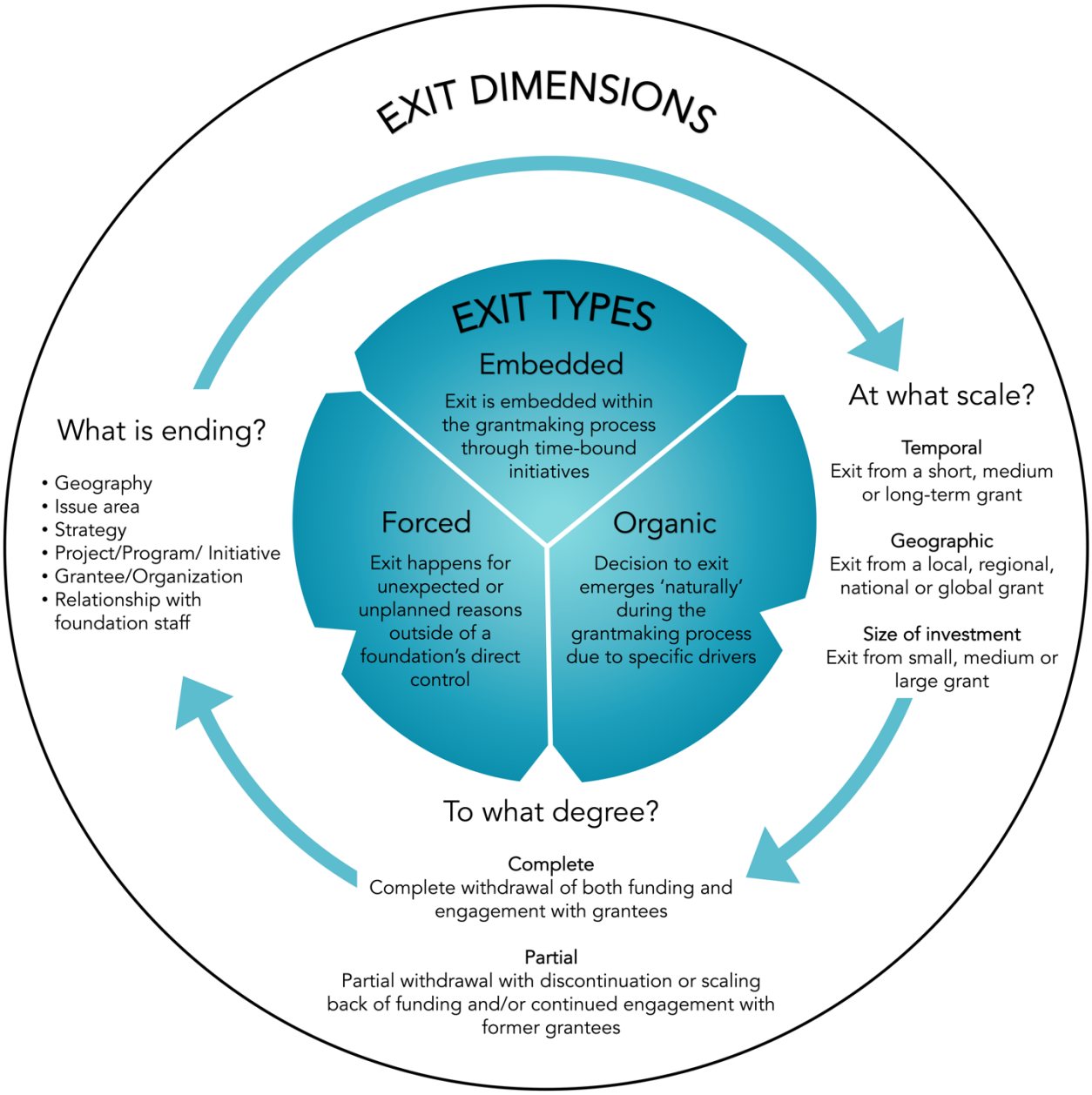


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for philanthropic exits. The framework differentiates between three exit types: embedded, organic, and forced, that are defined primarily in terms of their distinct drivers, and three additional dimensions: what is ending or shifting, at what scale and to what degree.

2.4.1.1. Exit types

Embedded exits are inherent to the grantmaking process and associated with a definitive and planned ending. These exits are most common in time-limited strategic grants with no expectations for continued funding, long-term initiatives with a set duration, and in some cases, limited-life foundations that operate from the beginning with the intention to spend down all their resources within a given period. What was particularly striking about embedded exits was that participants often did not think about them as exits. Some would even begin the conversation claiming they had little experience to share. Here is how one participant wrestled with the characterization:

> It wasn't really an exit per se, though, is it? […] We had a few one-off grants, or two-year grants with organizations but then we hadn't actually supported them for a couple of years. By the time we made this move, we haven't been through that process of supporting [grantees] in a space for several years and then leaving. (RP29)

In our view, embedded exits are a particularly important type of exit to reflect on and learn from in light of the growing interest in strategic philanthropy, where exits from time-limited grants are fundamental to the grantmaking philosophy and require near-constant attention and management from both funders and grantees.

Organic exits emerge more naturally in the course of the grantmaking cycle due to a specific driver or a combination of drivers both internal and external to the foundation. Examples of internal drivers may be that the board or program officer changes priorities based on new scientific discoveries, donor fatigue, results from a mid-way evaluation, personal interests or passion. One participant also made a 'spread the love' argument:

> There is so much to be done in this field. And when we select a handful of places, lucky them. We owe it to the planet to spread the love is what [the funder] would say. And so, we can't just commit ourselves forever to [a place]. (RP7)

Organic exits may also be driven by external factors. For example, a project, program or initiative may achieve its goals or financial sustainability earlier than expected – or the opposite, when insufficient progress is made. These exits may occur because a grantee or organization's performance is unsatisfactory, or a grantee or organization lacks engagement or communication with the funder. There are also instances of organic exits when a new funder enters a space and takes over some of the work.

Forced exits tend to be unexpected, unplanned, and abrupt and can be very disruptive for foundations, grantees and other practitioners. They occur for reasons outside of a foundation's direct control. For example, drivers may include sudden shifts in personnel at the foundation (e.g., death of a board member), serious financial setbacks or economic downturns, or mismanagement of funds by grantees. Sometimes a foundation can be asked to leave a geography, or a political context makes it too hard to achieve goals. All research participants who had direct experience with forced exits described them as a particularly painful and difficult process for all parties involved. The following are a few examples, in their own words:

> Sometimes you have to exit because the economy tanked. I lived through the bubble bursting, we had to lay off half the foundation staff, and cut back on a lot of grantees. And it's tough. But sometimes your hand is forced. (RP35);
>
> So, sadly, our trustee passed away [...] and the program was dismantled. So that [exit] process was really just cold. I mean, there was just no process. (RP38)

2.4.1.2. Exit dimensions

We found that each exit type varies along three additional dimensions: *what is ending or shifting, at what scale, and to what degree.* The first dimension is related to *what is ending or shifting*. Foundations may exit from a particular geography (i.e., from a specific locality, country or region); a conservation issue (e.g., a shift from focusing on Marine Protected Areas to small-scale fisheries); or a specific project, program, or initiative. The *what* that is ending may also include a funding relationship with a grantee or an organization (e.g., when conservation goals are achieved or, conversely, when goals are hard to achieve), or a relationship with a foundation staff member (e.g., when a program officer quits), which can sometimes come with ideological and/or financial changes as new staff bring their own ideas, grantmaking styles, and funding priorities. A shift in staff or programmatic foci can be experienced as what some participants referred to as 'mini exits' where the organization may stay engaged with the same geography and grantees. As this participant explains:

> We have not really had a hard exit, we've had transitions. So, the marine protected area work went from design to implementation. Many of the grantees have continued to engage but have shifted gears, and new grantees have come in, some have fallen out. But it wasn't like we left the space. (RP15)

The second dimension refers to the *scale* of the exit and is related to time, geography, and investment levels. The temporal scale of the exit calls attention to the differences in ending long-term, medium-term or short-term grants: ending a short-term strategic grant for a one-year project with a specific organization is qualitatively different than ending a 20-year investment including multi-year grants for multiple organizations. Second, the geographic scale of the exit could range from small to large, calling attention to the difference between exiting from a local, regional, national or global scale project, program or initiative – and implications for the types of grantees

and ‘communities’ who are likely to be affected. Third, the scale of the investment could range from small to large, acknowledging that the relative size of the project, program or initiative that is ending will matter for the exit process. Again, we expect the impacts from ending a small investment versus a larger one to differ in ways that shape the stakes of an exit process – and managing it well.

The third dimension is the *degree* of the exit. Here we draw a distinction between complete or partial exits, with a focus on both the funding relationship and other relationships (e.g., personal and working). A complete withdrawal refers to the discontinuation of both funding and engagement with grantees and other relevant practitioners. A partial withdrawal may involve discontinuation of new large grants, scaling back of funding, continued funding through endowments, or a cessation of funding coupled with ongoing dialogue and working relationships with current or former grantees. This is especially important when a foundation has set high standards in their relationships with grantees and wants to continue fostering these relationships even after an exit, maybe by providing connections to other funders or simply giving advice.

This conceptual framework broadens and clarifies definitions of exits and provides a common language to characterize exits along varied dimensions. The exit types and dimensions co-occur and they should be considered together to characterize where a given exit ‘sits’ within the conceptual framework. In identifying key distinguishing features, the typology may help reveal broader patterns of difference and similarity that can help funders, grantees and other practitioners deliberate, share lessons, and make informed decisions on how best to navigate specific exit types, a point we turn to in the next section.

2.4.2. Best practices for exiting responsibly

We identified a total of 52 best practices, which we organized into three categories, *principles, administration and management*, and *sustainability*, and 17 sub-categories (see Tables 1, 2 and 3). Importantly, there is not a single 'exit moment'; we identified best practices within all stages of the grantmaking process, with a majority appearing at the inception of a new grant. We emphasize that these best practices are a good starting point for reflection, discussion, planning and actions that may be further contextualized to fit particular organizations, exit types, and grantmaking contexts.

2.4.2.1. Principles

Table 1: Best practices for exiting responsibly: Principles. The table displays exit best practices pertaining to the 'Principles' category (n=20) in (1) their respective sub-categories (on the left) and 2) the different phases of the grantmaking process (at the top) based on when research participants mentioned they were implemented. The most-mentioned best practices are in red.

		Funding Decision	Grant Management	Exit	Post-Exit
Principles	Respect	• Be respectful of local contexts especially when working with smaller organizations, locally-rooted and Indigenous-led organizations			
	Transparency	• Be honest and transparent			
	Inclusivity	• Design and conduct exit strategy with grantees	• Take into consideration expertise of all involved foundation staff during exit process • Include all relevant players during exit process		
	Reflexivity	• Learn from mistakes • Get feedback from grantees to improve exit process • Be more reflective and thoughtful about impacts of exits on people • "Drop the ego" and who gets credit for the work • Don't forget primary audience (grantees & local communities) in exit process • Think about impacts of other funders exiting	• Think about impacts on other funders while exiting • Accept unpredictable and messy nature of exits • Ask other funders for advice about exit process • Think about scaling potential of the project/program/initiative when it ends		• Take pride in successes and celebrate accomplishments
	Flexibility	• Be flexible throughout the exit process • Have an exit 'living document'		• Extend grants when needed • Avoid being too bureaucratic during reporting stage	

The first category introduces overarching guiding principles and ethics. This category includes best practices that reflect a 'code of conduct' that guides the exit process, grounded in principles of respect, inclusivity, reflexivity, transparency and flexibility. First, research participants emphasized that being thoughtful and respectful of local contexts, especially when funding smaller, local, and/or Indigenous-led organizations, was key to conducting a responsible exit. This research participant illustrates the point that the principle of respect coupled with long-term relationship-building is crucial in settings where Indigenous communities have been disrupted over the years:

> If nothing else, have a more gentle withdrawal and transition because ultimately there are certain best practices in the field that we value. It's long-term, it's flexible and multi-year and it's sticking with things especially in the Indigenous world where things got so dismantled for so long. The infrastructure and capacity need to be rebuilt and it takes a long time. It's easy for us over the years to do this but other funders come in and give a year [of funding] and leave. (RP32)

In addition, participants emphasized that the process should be inclusive of all players affected by the exit, including grantees, program officers and communities that are directly affected. For example, this participant explains that the foundation works with an Indigenous-led council to help them make decisions, including the decision to exit:

> This new Indigenous group and council has actually preferred to focus on the Americas and the Pacific, so we're now in the process of exiting. (RP32)

Being inclusive of all relevant players during the design and the implementation of the exit is one step forward in addressing the issue of power dynamics in decision-making during the exit.

Participants also indicated that reflexivity is important. They specifically mentioned intentionally learning from the exit process to improve it, whether it is learning from mistakes,

getting feedback from grantees or asking other funders for advice about their exit experiences. This research participant reflected on exits as an opportunity to learn from affected communities:

> If we were really a lot more intentional in thinking about exits as an opportunity for […] putting the folks in the communities that have experienced the changes in the driver's seat to tell that story, it can be both a therapeutic moment and it also can be empowering. […] Some of the great examples I've heard about but never done is like using videography, you know, giving everybody a camera within that community. (RP3)

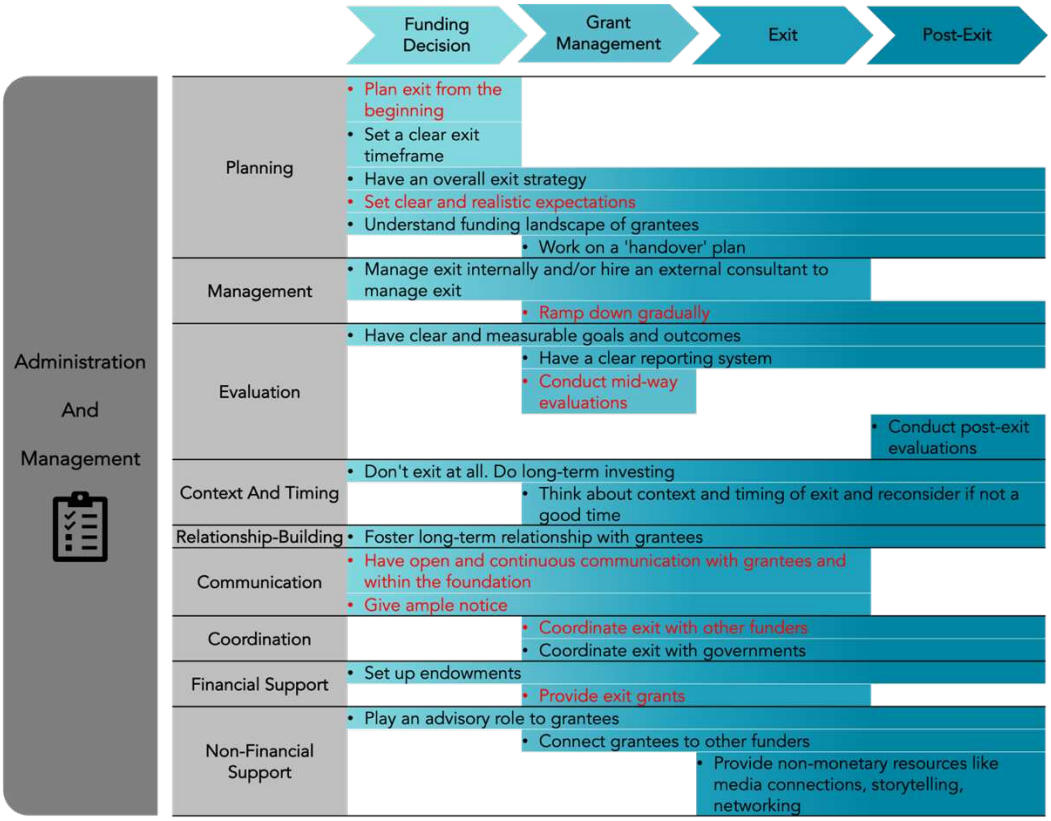
Research participants also emphasized the importance of transparency. This participant explains that honesty and transparency are critical but sometimes can be hard to implement:

> […] If you're looking at exits, I think it's important to be honest about how some of the actual decision-making at foundations is done. It's messy, and even when it's intended to be really thoughtful, it can get really distorted and it doesn't sometimes turn out the way even that the leadership wants it to. (RP11)

Finally, participants said that it is also important to be flexible with the process and be ready for surprises and unplanned events. This is especially true for forced exits, when funders and grantees have to respond to unexpected circumstances. Some suggested that having a living exit strategy document or simply extending grants when needed are simple practices that could introduce some flexibility in the process while being guided by the original plan.

2.4.2.2. Administration and management

Table 2: Best practices for exiting responsibly: Administration and Management. The table displays exit best practices pertaining to the 'Administration and Management' category (n=24) in (1) their respective sub-categories (on the left) and 2) the different phases of the grantmaking process (at the top) based on when research participants mentioned they were implemented. The most-mentioned best practices are in red.



The second category describes concrete, actionable steps that foundations can take to plan, manage, evaluate and coordinate the exit responsibly. It includes measures to address the exit context and its timing, communication, and financial and non-financial support. Most research participants emphasized the importance of planning the exit from the beginning of the grantmaking process, as in the following:

> Exits to me that's like life, birth, and death, it's going to happen and if we could just face the mortality upfront, we might live better and more fully […] and we can get out of that fantasy world on both sides. (RP32)

This allows funders and grantees to face and accept the reality that this relationship can eventually end. It also allows funders and grantees to prepare for the exit in a timely manner as funders devise an exit strategy, set clear and realistic expectations and end goals with grantees, a

clear timeframe, determine the existing funding landscape of grantees, and start building a 'handover' plan.

Participants also identified best practices related to the way foundations manage and evaluate the exit. In this regard, participants said that ramping down gradually is important, especially for organizations that are already struggling and may further suffer from an abrupt exit. In addition, conducting mid-way evaluations was identified as a best practice because it allows funders to assess the progress of a certain project or the needs of a grantee and adapt depending on the situation (e.g., provide additional support or end the relationship sooner). Post-exit evaluations were also identified as important to assess the success of a project or a partnership with a grantee and its associated conservation outcomes. Participants highlighted the importance of using a clear set of metrics and criteria for these evaluations and having a clear reporting system that grantees can use to inform their work. Although considered as necessary by many, these evaluations are not always implemented, and some participants questioned their utility:

> At the end of a strategy, we'll do some exit evaluations. Occasionally, there's a big tension in the foundation, whether or not we should be investing in those because oftentimes, they're things that are for grantees. It's not clear if the grantees want them. They're sort of puff pieces. (RP3)

The context and timing of the exit also emerged as key considerations. Some participants recommended postponing the exit if the context and/or the timing of the exit are unfavorable for the grantee, while others even questioned the premise of exiting altogether. During our knowledge co-production workshop, research participants engaged in a passionate discussion where several participants argued that exits are ultimately a value judgment and that the field needs to rethink the assumption and/or goal of an eventual exit entirely. Participants talked about the need to be more explicit about an exit's definition, methodology and conceptualization (i.e., is 'exit' the

wrong word?) and emphasized that the way exits are currently conceptualized reinforces a power dynamic where funders 'call the shots', assuming that there is little opportunity for grantees to inform or shape decisions to exits. Other research participants *questioned whether exits are necessary at all* and argued that donors should prioritize long-term investing.

Having open and frequent communication with grantees was identified as particularly important for building relationships between funders and grantees where the exit can be co-constructed. A strong relationship can help foster transparent communication channels where funders and grantees can be honest and give each other feedback, and work through challenges together, as this participant explains:

> I think trust and relationship building is key so that you can have those clear honest channels for conversation and receive real feedback on what an exit looks like. […] Actually, this is good practice of philanthropy in general. (RP4)

Participants emphasized that communication is particularly key when discussing an exit timeframe and expectations with grantees. Specifically, participants stressed the importance of giving ample notice before exiting and being crystal clear about when and why it is happening. As this research participant explains:

> Notice is key and giving a signal and then executing on that signal is really essential. I just recently had a conversation with a dear colleague who runs an NGO and she was lamenting the fact that one of her major funders kept saying maybe, maybe, maybe [about the exit timeframe], and she was essentially desperate. (RP17)

Research participants also emphasized the importance of internal communication within the foundation – especially between program officers, program directors and board members, so that expectations and goals that are set at a higher level within the foundation are communicated properly to grantees and other practitioners, usually through program officers.

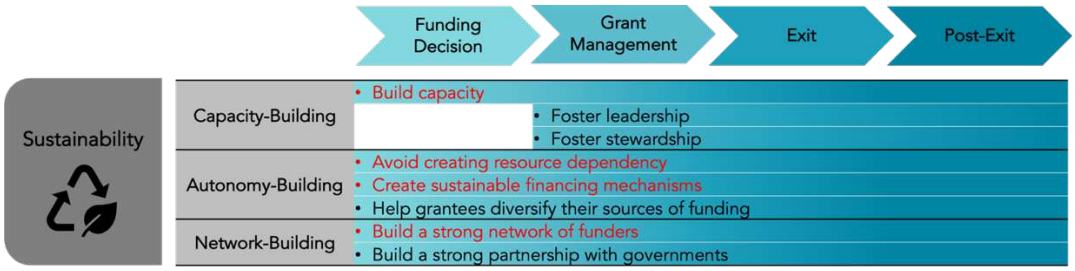
Participants identified best practices related to coordination to help ensure the void of their exit is filled by others (e.g., foundations, government, etc.). This includes working closely with governments to transition to other sources of funding after the exit or 'showcasing' the work that has been done to a potential funding audience and gauge their interest for taking over and continuing the work after the exit. This is also true when a foundation leaves a space where another foundation is continuing to work. The exiting and remaining foundations should try their best to coordinate the exit. If multiple foundations exit around the same time, it can have devastating implications for grantees who would face a significant funding gap.

Finally, foundations can provide financial (e.g., setting up an endowment or providing exit grants) and non-financial support to grantees during the exit. Non-financial support can include providing grantees with resources beyond money, through networking or simply playing an advisory role if grantees need guidance on what to do next in terms of projects, partnerships, or funding sources. This research participant lists some of the non-financial support foundations can offer:

> We recognize that our primary goal is to offer financial resources, but what are the other things where we could maybe help? Is it media connections? Storytelling? Is it networking? Is it introductions to other funders or funding spaces? (RP28)

2.4.2.3. Sustainability

Table 3: Best practices for exiting responsibly: Sustainability. The table displays exit best practices pertaining to the 'Sustainability' category (n=8) in (1) their respective sub-categories (on the left) and 2) the different phases of the grantmaking process (at the top) based on when research participants mentioned they were implemented. The most-mentioned best practices are in red.



The third category focuses on strategies that foundations can implement to ensure the long-term sustainability of the funded project, program, initiative, or organization after the exit. This category includes best practices related to building capacity and autonomy of grantees, and developing strong funder networks. First, participants underscored the value of including capacity-building strategies as part of the grantmaking process as they are intended to contribute to outcomes that endure beyond the exit. Foundations that invest in capacity-building may provide grantees with organizational, human, and infrastructure support to foster leadership and develop the skills and confidence to continue their work and/or pursue new priorities after an exit (Blackwatters *et al.*, 2022; Enrici *et al.*, 2023). In addition, participants discussed the importance of avoiding resource dependency by investing in sustainable financing mechanisms and supporting grantees in diversifying their sources of funding to ensure they are financially stable once the exit comes, if it is something grantees see as beneficial. Participants emphasized the importance of being creative with these mechanisms whether they are endowments, government grants, revolving loan funds, community trusts or simply introducing new funders to grantees. This research participant defines exit strategies as a 'pathway' to sustainability:

> An exit strategy is a deliberate pathway toward financial safeguards and transformational change that, once you leave, permanence is guaranteed because the structure is in place, like human capacity, but also financial flows. (RP9)

Finally, participants stressed the importance of building a strong network of funders who can 'take over' after an exit. New funders could be philanthropic foundations already working in the

space or planning on entering the space, but also official development aid, businesses, or governments. Research participants saw the value of transitioning to other funders as an exit best practice to avoid letting down grantees, as this research participant explains:

> Get somebody else to take over. That's the best way to exit. You don't let down your grantees, you just transfer [them] to another funder. (RP35)

2.4.2.4. Tailoring best practices to specific exit types?

During the co-production workshop, research participants suggested that not all the best practices can be implemented in every situation and that it is important to differentiate which best practices are most relevant for each type of exit. Our typology can help guide future research on this important topic. While we did not comprehensively investigate this link in the current work, a few patterns arose in our data.

Within each category, we observed that specific best practices were more mentioned than others across all exit types (see Tables 1, 2 and 3 for the 15 most-mentioned best practices across all exit types in red). For example, research participants stressed the importance of having an exit strategy at the beginning of the grantmaking process and to have clear and continuous communication regarding the exit throughout the grantmaking process. Participants also mentioned mid-way evaluations as a key step to assess the progress of a grant and to make appropriate decisions for continuing the work or phasing it down. Capacity-building and creating sustainable financing mechanisms also emerged as transcending best practices that are necessary for grantees to attain a level of independence and to be sustainable long after an exit. Finally, ramping down slowly and giving ample notice were also consistently mentioned as important to help funders, and especially grantees, have a smoother transition. Although mentioned across all exit types, some of these best practices were much less mentioned by participants who experienced

embedded exits compared to those who experienced organic and forced exits. One reason could be that they are simply less relevant for embedded exits. Another is that these participants did not think about embedded exits as 'exits' and thus had not yet honed a point of view on what constituted 'exit' best practices in these situations – whether they include best practices captured in our study or others unique to embedded exits. We argue that there is a significant missed opportunity for foundations to better plan and manage embedded exits. In combination, the typology and best practices can help funders to further operationalize their exit to best fit their particular exit scenario.

2.4.2.5. Challenges to implementing best practices

Research participants identified several challenges to implementing responsible exits during the co-production workshop. These include internal constraints such as lack of capacity (e.g., lack of resources, knowledge or experience to execute the exit, or staff turnover) and hierarchical issues within the foundation (e.g., decisions to exit being made at the board level with program officers lacking control around when and why exiting). They also shared challenges related to managing relationships with grantees. For example, participants spoke of the tensions between grantees' expectations/needs for continued funding; the appropriate roles and responsibilities of grantees (i.e., should it be entirely the responsibility of funders to manage the exit responsibly?); and navigating relationships with grantees who have a hard time facing the reality of an exit and not being proactive in planning for it. In addition, they raised questions around their relationship with other funders working in the same space. For example, research participants were worried about the impacts of their exits on other funders because it can shift an unwanted funding burden to their

colleagues, which can create disagreements and tensions. Future research and discussions should focus on how to overcome these challenges and others.

2.5. Discussion

This paper draws on an empirical study of exits in ocean conservation philanthropy to distill a conceptual framework and lessons learned that are relevant for research and practice in this specific context and beyond.

First, we advance the small body of literature on philanthropic exits by adding conceptual clarity around definitions of exits and nuance to discussions of exit best practices. The conceptual framework can provide a basis for more systematic research and learning about the different types of exits and associated best practices for managing them. A limitation of this study is that the framework is currently derived from best practices identified exclusively by funders. Future research must incorporate perspectives from grantees and other affected communities on what constitutes a responsible exit. There are many additional topics ripe for continued research including: understanding the long-term impacts of different types of exits, grantees' experience with exits, impacts of exits on affected communities, and further refinement in best practices and how they may be tailored to particular types of exits. There is also a need to consider how broader systemic issues like resource dependency shape exit impacts. Additionally, there is a clear need for research on how funders overcome the challenges they identified in terms of implementing the best practices. More broadly, in light of the rapid growth in 'green giving' – and associated exits – we hope this work can help elevate philanthropic exits as a topic deserving more scholarly attention.

Second, this study has potential to inform practice, not only for philanthropic foundations but also for grantees and other conservation practitioners such as NGOs, governments, other types of funders, and 'local communities'. Foundations could use the typology to identify the type of exit they plan on conducting or are currently going through. The typology offers a shared language for foundation staff and boards to use internally and across organizations, to discuss, plan for and implement exits; share lessons learned; and deliberate on how to solve common challenges, or coordinate exit processes. Additionally, foundations could draw on the best practices to proactively create responsible exit strategies and embed them within grantmaking process as soon as they start investing. While some of the best practices will be more or less relevant to particular exit contexts, the broad categories transcend all types of exits and are a useful starting point for more contextualized discussions about how to design a responsible exit. In this sense, they may also provide a useful starting point for funders who may find the task of exit planning daunting.

This work may also help grantees and other ocean conservation practitioners to take a more proactive role in exit processes. This is especially relevant in the context of an increasing push for a more inclusive philanthropic field that: "aims to create broader communal involvement and benefit, to expand the circle of those who participate in shaping public decisions, and to center philanthropy in community, rather than in managerial efficiency and effectiveness" (The Faculty of the Lilly Family School, 2020). The typology and best practices provide a basis for initiating conversations about exit planning as early as possible – a conversation grantees can initiate if funders fail to do so. When grantees are working with long-term funding that is potentially renewable, the typology suggests they should be mindful of events (i.e., exit drivers) that might lead to forced or organic exits and better prepare for it. In addition, grantees and other practitioners could have more proactive conversations with funders about the type of practices they can expect

or would like to see around exits – or push back against or question the rationale for exiting in the first place. For example, they could create a contextualized set of best practices they wish to see around exits and share it with the funders they are working with as a basis for a co-produced exit strategy (e.g., discuss a realistic timeline, explain the type of capacity or needs they will need to be sustainable after an exit, ask for non-financial support, ask for introductions to other funders or request a certain type of program evaluations). This would also be an opportunity for grantees to include affected communities, who are seldom engaged directly in exit processes. There are a number of emerging initiatives aimed at working towards a more inclusive philanthropic field, such as the 'Trust-Based Philanthropy Project', 'Center for Evaluation Innovation', 'Fund for Shared Insight' and 'Decolonizing Wealth Project'. These resources offer additional tools that could be tailored in the context of exits (e.g., providing long-term flexible funding, offering support beyond funding, listening to the people at the heart of the work, etc.). In addition, grantees also develop their own exit strategies from conservation initiatives that may be on different timelines than funders' exits (Ruiz-Miranda *et al.*, 2020; WWF, 2017). These exit experiences coupled with our framework offer opportunities for funders and grantees to learn in partnership and coordinate plans for conservation exits in a more deliberative way.

Exits can be messy, scary, difficult and painful processes that can have significant risks for both funders and grantees, but they needn't and shouldn't be this way. With the rapid growth in 'green giving', there is a pressing need for applied research that can inform practice. We call upon communities of research and practice to give responsible exits a more prominent place in our work as responsible exits are an ethical imperative with tremendous opportunity to positively impact the trajectories of philanthropic-supported initiatives, grantees, practitioners and affected communities.

3. CHAPTER 3: NAVIGATING EXITS IN CONSERVATION PHILANTHROPY: THE GRANTEE EXPERIENCE[2]

3.1. Introduction

In the literature and in practice, exiting is often considered as a "normal part of the grant-making process" (Mackinnon & Jaffe, 2007, p.2) in philanthropy (Petrovich, 2011; Kibbe, 2017; Bissell et al., 2021). The end of a funding relationship can be an opportunity for funders and grantees to show resilience, but it can also be a detrimental experience, one that damages "relationships, reputations, and the grantee organization's prospects for future success" (Norris, 2019). Kibbe (2017, p.50) even compares them to a "break-up". During exits, funder-grantee relationships are tested, and power dynamics can emerge or become more apparent. In the best-case scenario, funding allows grantees to pursue their visions and goals while giving foundations the opportunity to "do good" (Arvidson & Linde, 2021, p.208). In reality, funder-grantee relationships are far more complex and display various levels of power dynamics. Reith (2010, p.448) argues that when foundations "give the gift of money", they are "taking the gift of power". Once funding ends, there are legitimate concerns that exits may disrupt funder-grantee relationships and there is a real need to better understand these dynamics. Exit processes are diverse (Le Cornu et al., 2022) and so are funder-grantee relationship dynamics during an exit.

To date, the literature on philanthropic exits mainly focuses on funders' perspectives (Mackinnon & Jaffe, 2007; Petrovich, 2011; Kibbe, 2017; Le Cornu et al, 2022). There is a significant gap regarding grantees' perspectives on this topic. How do grantees experience

[2] Le Cornu, E., Gruby, R.L., Betsill, M., Blackwatters, J.E., Enrici, A., Basurto, X. (In Prep). Navigating exits in conservation philanthropy: the grantee experience.

philanthropic exits? What factors shape their experiences? Understanding grantees' experiences with exits is key to conducting a responsible exit, for both funders and grantees to prepare for the changes and to "anticipate the challenges and opportunities it will bring" (Norris, 2019). In addition, grantees' exit experiences offer valuable insights to improve exit processes and to ensure the long-term sustainability of organizations and projects. Grantees' perspectives allow for the development of context-appropriate exit strategies that consider impacts on organizations and the communities they represent, which are seldom part of the process (Le Cornu et al., 2022; Betsill et al., 2024, Le Cornu et al., In Prep). Ultimately, including grantees' perspectives fosters a more inclusive and participatory approach to philanthropic exits. It is crucial to address this gap in the philanthropic exit literature to better understand, from grantees' perspectives, the power dynamics in funder-grantee relationships that shape exit experiences.

Using an empirical study of the Packard Foundation's Western Pacific program exit in Fiji and Palau, we explore grantees and other conservation practitioners' viewpoints of the exit and identify the rationales that shaped their viewpoints. First, we provide a background on the Packard exit in Fiji and Palau. By using Le Cornu et al.'s (2022) framework on best practices for exiting responsibly, we identify how Packard exhibited a number of exit best practices in an effort to exit responsibly. Second, we examine the literature on philanthropic exits to assess current knowledge and identify gaps related to grantees' perspectives and power dynamics at play during an exit. We engage resource dependence theory and the international development literature to understand how other literatures have thought about power dynamics in funder-grantee relationships and to help us interpret our findings. Third, we explain our study's methodology. Fourth, we present our findings which suggest that grantees experienced the exit differentially, with exit viewpoints being fairly evenly distributed across optimistic, pessimistic and ambivalent, with very few apathetic. The

factors that shaped these viewpoints are equally diverse. We connect the previously examined literatures to help us interpret these findings and contextualize them in current debates. Finally, we conclude by providing ways forward for the field. Ultimately, our study of grantees' experiences with Packard's exit signals that best practices for exiting responsibly are key, but that the field needs to address issues of resource dependence and power imbalances that may hinder the sustainability of funded projects and grantees and to fully conduct a responsible exit. We urge both funders and grantees to consider exits as an opportunity for change and to start having critical discussions around power imbalances and how to transform the field.

3.2. The Packard Western Pacific Program exit from Fiji and Palau

3.2.1. Background on the Packard Western Pacific Program exit

The Packard Foundation initiated the Western Pacific program in 1998 and invested in more than $100 million in ocean conservation in the Asia-Pacific region over the course of two decades making it the "largest and most consistent sources of marine conservation funding in the region" (Kintisch, 2019, p.2). The main goal of the program was to "restore and ensure the health and productivity of coastal marine environments in the face of rapidly increasing pressures, in particular from overfishing" (Western Pacific Archives). The Foundation initially invested in eight countries: Malaysia, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji and Palau. The Foundation exited from Malaysia, the Philippines, and the Solomon Islands in previous years and will continue working in Indonesia for the foreseeable future. After nearly two decades, the Foundation made the decision to exit from the four remaining countries in the program: Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji and Palau. We are focusing on the exits from Fiji and Palau because of the

Foundation's interest in learning from the exit experience in the region, as well as the authors' experience working in those countries. In Fiji, Packard invested a total of $11,952,000 through 71 grants to 22 organizations and in Palau, Packard invested $8,168,000 through 52 grants to 13 organizations. The program's approach to grantmaking was divided in three distinct phases that correspond to the evolution of the program's strategy over the years. The final phase of the program was approved in 2013 with a planned exit in the four remaining countries by 2020. According to Packard, the combination of internal shifts in the Foundation's strategy, solid organizational and institutional capacity and infrastructure, the accomplishment of the program's goals, and the confidence in future financial avenues were all reasons that Packard's support was no longer needed in Fiji and Palau. This study emerged, in part, from a recognition that the exit was a unique opportunity to document and learn from the process and share these lessons and insights with the broader field of ocean conservation funders and practitioners.

3.2.2. Packard's best practices for exiting responsibly

As previously mentioned, after more than twenty years of investment in ocean conservation, The Packard Foundation conducted an exit in Fiji and Palau as part of their regional exit from the Western Pacific Program. Based on interviews with Packard staff, archives from their website and two journalistic pieces (Kintisch 2019 a, b), we identified a number of exit best practices that Packard exhibited. Using Le Cornu et al.'s (2022) framework, we summarize Packard's exit best practices reflected in the three main categories of the framework: *principles*, *administration and management*, and *sustainability.*

Throughout the grant-making process and especially during the final stages of the exit, the Western Pacific Program staff at Packard demonstrated overarching guiding principles and ethics

"that reflect a sort of "code of conduct" that guides the exit process, grounded in principles of respect, inclusivity, reflexivity, transparency and flexibility" (Le Cornu et al., 2022, p.6). They spent time reflecting on the most responsible way to approach their exit and decided to carefully plan to "phase out" to mitigate the disruption the Foundation would cause. Packard conducted a slow exit by gradually ramping down grants over a period of several years, and thus giving ample notice to their grantees. Packard staff took this as an opportunity to deeply reflect, learn and share what worked and what did not work during the exit. Packard staff was also intentional in trying to be as respectful and inclusive of all players in the exit process, especially grantees and other conservation practitioners.

In addition, Packard staff developed a clear exit strategy that was documented and comprised a number of internal and external activities and outputs including evaluations and assessments of the program in the form of country briefs and journalistic in-depth profiles; retrospectives from program staff; and a multi-year research project, co-developed by social scientists in collaboration with Foundation staff and other key practitioners – which this study is part of. Over the years, Packard staff developed trusted relationships that contributed to a solid ground for open and continuous communication with their grantees, whether in person – during field visits, workshops and meetings, remote – via emails or phone calls, or through intermediaries or re-granters (Enrici et al., 2023). Packard staff ensured that the reasons, goals, plans and expectations of the exit were clearly conveyed to their grantees. Throughout the grantmaking process, Packard was proactive in its coordination efforts with other funders through annual gatherings and discussions at meetings, workshops or conferences. These were used as learning platforms for the Foundation and other funders but also, during the final stages of the exit, as a means to understand how the Western Pacific Program's exit would affect other the conservation

community in those countries. Packard staff actively encouraged grantees to work more closely with governments in Fiji and Palau and diversify their funding sources. This is especially relevant in Fiji where another major funder also exited in a similar timeframe, which could have serious implications in terms of funding availability.

Finally, Packard implemented best practices to ensure the long-term sustainability of the funded project, program, initiative, or organization after the exit. Throughout the grant-making process, Packard staff made deliberate choices to invest in building the individual skills of ocean conservation and fisheries practitioners (e.g., through trainings, mentoring networks, and degree programs) "to foster leadership and develop the skills and confidence to continue their work and/or pursue new priorities after an exit" (Le Cornu et al., 2022, p.10) and building the institutional foundations needed to sustain their work beyond the exit. To that end, the Western Pacific Program staff worked closely with the Foundation's Organizational Effectiveness Program to make grants towards capacity-building. In addition, program staff recognized the importance of autonomy-building and avoiding grantees' dependence on funding "by investing in sustainable financing mechanisms and supporting grantees in diversifying their sources of funding to ensure grantees are financially stable once the exit comes" (Le Cornu et al., 2022, p.10). A striking example of a successful sustainable financing mechanism is the creation of a "green fee" in Palau. Through the nationally legislated Protected Area Network (PAN) and the creation of both the PAN Fund and, later, the Green Fund, Palau is the first and the only country in the region that implemented a national tourist fee system dedicated to cover the costs of ocean conservation with the vision of having a fully self-financed and thriving MPA network by 2025. Finally, Packard staff recognized that building a strong network of funders (i.e., including other foundations, governments, Official Development Aid (ODA), businesses, etc.) during the grant-making process is crucial in the final

stages of the exit and beyond as it alleviates the funding void created by one or multiple funders leaving the region and it offers a rich portfolio of funding opportunities to grantees and other practitioners. However, a major caveat of exiting is not knowing what new funders' approaches and strategies to grantmaking and exiting are going to be, and if they will be respectful of a country's culture and context and meet the needs of grantees, other practitioners and communities.

3.3. Funder-grantee relationships: navigating the power dynamics of philanthropic exits

In this section, we examine existing literatures on funder-grantee relationships to help us better understand the factors that shape grantees' experiences with exits. We draw upon the philanthropic exit literature to assess the current state of knowledge on this topic. We identify and address a significant gap related to grantees' perspectives during philanthropic exits. More specifically, we draw on the limited, but growing, body of literature around best practices for exiting responsibly. Additionally, we incorporate insights from the international development literature and resource dependence theory by looking deeper into the power dynamics inherent in funder-grantee relationships which are brought to the forefront during exits, as funding reaches its conclusion. These literatures serve as valuable lenses to guide our data interpretation and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the multi-faceted factors that shape grantees' experiences during exits. By acknowledging the power relations at play during an exit, our aim is to identify opportunities for improving exit processes and to provide practical recommendations to foundations, grantees and other conservation practitioners. Ultimately, our study is an important contribution for navigating these dynamics responsibly during the stages that lead to an exit.

3.3.1. Funder-grantee relationships during exits: what about grantees' perspectives?

Although the literature on philanthropic exits is "painfully thin", as Kibbe acknowledges (2017, p.50), there is a growing interest on this issue both in terms of research and practice (Mackinnon & Jaffe, 2007; Petrovich, 2011; Special Issue of *The Foundation Review*, 2017; Le Cornu et al., 2022). For example, Le Cornu et al. (2022) recently developed a framework that conceptualizes exits and identifies best practices for responsible exits. Specifically, the study brings clarity and nuance to discussions about exits by providing a common language for foundation staff and their grantees to reflect on what defines an exit – by moving beyond the conventional definition of an exit as the sole ending of funding, and by helping guide responsible exit processes that strive to support grantees' long-term success. While the study primarily focuses on exits within environmental philanthropy, the insights gained can be broadly applied to diverse sectors and issues. The existing literature on philanthropic exits is predominantly found in the grey literature (Mackinnon & Jaffe, 2007; Petrovich, 2011; Herweijer & Kerkhoven, 2013; Behrens & Gordillo, 2019) with a growing presence in the peer-reviewed literature (Cao Yu & Berman, 2017; Beadnell et al., 2017; Gienapp et al., 2017; Halverstadt & Kerman, 2017; Kibbe, 2017; Knox, 2017; Perez, 2017; Le Cornu et al., 2022). Overall, this body of literature addresses various aspects of exit processes in different situations (i.e., specific grants or programs, large-scale initiatives, or limited-life foundations) and touches on reasons for exiting, best practices and lessons learned, challenges, and long-term outcomes. Overall, scholars urge foundations to communicate early and clearly about exits, build grantees and organizations capacity to sustain long-term outcomes and help grantees find alternative sources of funding (Kibbe, 2017, Le Cornu et al., 2022).

While responsible exits and their implementation are often addressed from the perspective of funders, there is still a significant research gap regarding grantees' perspectives on exits, as

highlighted by Kibbe (2017, p. 50): “Yet little is known about the effects of foundation exits on the work, the grantees, and the related fields.” The author starts addressing this gap by identifying a set of helpful advice “from grantee to grantee” alongside advice “from funder to funder” while navigating an exit. The Center for Effective Philanthropy conducted a survey (CEP Grantee Perception Report, 2016) of the MacArthur Foundation grantees and in a 2017 article, Julia M. Stasch, the former President of the foundation, explains regretting “that there was confusion among grantees about how we made decisions about what areas we intended to exit and which would be priorities beyond 2016”, signaling the importance of grantees’ perspective on the exit. In addition, in their work on foundation exits, Behrens and Gordillo (2019, p.5) report that even though foundations “took steps during the exit process to prepare the field or nonprofits for loss of funding, the steps taken by foundations and experienced by nonprofits differed”. There is still a clear lack of systematic research that studies the various experiences of grantees during the exit process and what shapes them. This study is the first at examining of the lived experiences of grantees in the context of a foundation exit from a long-term regional investment in conservation.

It is important to incorporate grantees’ perspectives during an exit for many reasons. By learning from grantees’ experiences, their successes and their failures, funders can address issues and improve their strategies and practices in current and future exits (CEP Grantee Perception Report, 2016; Kintisch, 2019a; 2019b; Le Cornu et al. 2022). Grantees have valuable knowledge of local contexts and the potential challenges in continuing their work without ongoing financial support. Their perspective can inform strategies for long-term sustainability and the development of context-appropriate exit plans that serve communities, which are seldom involved in these processes (Le Cornu et al., 2022; Betsill et al., 2024). Rather than signaling the end of relationships between funders and grantees, philanthropic exits can also be viewed as an opportunity for

relationship-building. By considering the grantee perspective, funders can explore ways to maintain connections, provide non-financial support, and facilitate collaborations with other partners (Le Cornu et al., 2022). In turn, this more inclusive and participatory approach to philanthropic exits starts to address power imbalances between funders and grantees and fosters trust, respect, and collaboration, and opens doors for future shared goals and mutual learning (The Faculty of the Lilly Family School, 2020).

3.3.2. Funder-grantee relationships during exits: the power dynamics at play

Power imbalances are inherent in funder-grantee relationships. Research on this topic mostly argues that these relationships are often asymmetrical (Parks, 2008; Mount, 2022) and they reinforce unequal power dynamics, as acknowledged by Parks (2008, p.217): "As the controller of funding decisions, the donor sets the terms of the relationship." Funders hold significant power when it comes to financial resources (Reith, 2010) and their decisions often determine who receives funding and how it is distributed. When money comes to an end during an exit, power relations can become even more relevant. As such, these power imbalances often result in grantees being dependent on funding from external donors in order to sustain their operations and implement their projects. Resource dependence theory (RDT) provides valuable insights into these dynamics. RDT has its roots in Emerson's "Power-Dependence Relations" (1962) and Pfeffer and Salancik's *The External Control of Organizations* (1978) and is guided by some key principles (Hillman et al., 2009; Davis & Cobb, 2010; Drees & Heugens, 2013). According to Malatesta & Smith, (2014, p.14): "1) it recognizes that organizations rely on critical resources to survive and pursue their goals, 2) that these resources can be acquired from other organizations (i.e., funders), and 3) that power and its inverse, dependence, play key roles in understanding the relationships

between organizations". As Malatesta and Smith (2014, p.14) point out: "this last principle implies that the balance of power usually favors the organization that possesses what other organizations need, leading to imbalances in the relationship".

In addition, the international development literature, which explores the relationships between donors and NGOs in the context of aid, provides valuable insights on issues related to grantees' dependence on funding. Scholars call attention to a number of issues that are relevant to our study and can help us interpret our findings. Specifically, scholars have raised various critiques and concerns regarding the power dynamics and constraints of current NGO funding structures. Specifically, they highlight the unidirectional funding flows from donors from the Global North to NGOs in the Global South (Kamat, 2004; Nagar, 2006; Brass et al., 2018; Mount, 2022); the financial insecurity caused by the fluctuations in donor funding priorities (Parks, 2008; Guenther, 2011); the challenges NGOs face to attract new funding (e.g., competing with other organizations); the reduction of overhead costs known as the "starvation cycle" (Gregory & Howard, 2009); and the pressure to demonstrate results that sometimes lead to shifts in the goals and commitments of NGOs (i.e., a phenomenon known as "mission creep", Mount, 2022). These issues contribute to unequal power dynamics and to the decline in NGO legitimacy and their inability to advocate for the communities they represent (Reith, 2010). This is even more problematic for small NGOs from the Global South (Minkoff & Powell, 2006). Certainly, power relations and levels of resource dependence vary between funders and grantees depending on contextual dynamics as donors display different funding styles and NGOs are diverse in terms of their size, leadership, geography and field (Hilhorst, 2003; Parks, 2008). While the literature raises several critiques related to funder-grantee relationships, other scholars present a more nuanced view where NGOs can "offer spaces of resistance" (Mount, 2022, p.71) and find creative solutions to balance these power

asymmetries within existing constraints while remaining committed to their mission and goals, and the communities they represent. NGOs have their own agency and existing resources that they can leverage when interacting with funders. For example, they have on-the-ground expertise, contextual knowledge, and direct relationships with communities who are impacted by funded projects. They can use this power to influence funders to align with the priorities of their organization and the communities they represent.

Overall, this section sheds light on the complex power dynamics between funders and grantees, which can be exacerbated during an exit – when a funding relationship ends. Insights from existing literatures help us better understanding the different viewpoints of the Packard exit and some of the rationales put forth by grantees.

3.4. Methodology

This study explores conservation practitioners' – including grantees and non-grantees – viewpoints of the Packard Foundation Western Pacific Program's exit in Fiji and Palau. This study is part of a five-year research project called the Ocean Philanthropy Research Initiative. Starting in 2018, our team undertook an extensive knowledge co-production process with more than 100 conservation practitioners (i.e., local, regional, and international NGOs, foundations, national governments, universities, and intergovernmental organizations), which led to the development of the project's research themes (Gruby et al., 2021). This study addresses one of the five main themes that emerged from the co-production process: responsible exits. In addition, a motivation for this study was Packard's interest in understanding their roles and impacts in relation to their exit in Fiji and Palau. As stated in another published paper from our project: "We acknowledge that our own and interviewees' multi-faceted relationship with Packard as both funder and research subject has

the potential to introduce real and/or perceived bias into this study. We have managed this with the help of a research advisory committee tasked with holding us accountable in pursuing culturally appropriate research, with a multi-faceted and balanced perspective on foundations. Through biannual meetings, committee members provided feedback on the relevance and usefulness of this paper's topic, the theoretical conceptualization of the paper, and its results." (Blackwatters et al., 2022, p.3).

For this study, we draw on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews conducted between 2018 and 2019 in Fiji and Palau and two virtual knowledge co-production workshops held in June 2021. After a preliminary examination of 91 interview transcripts with 165 research participants (Fiji n=70, Palau n=95), we pared down interviews based on if participants talked about the exit. The interviews were structured to ask questions about the five main themes of the research project and, depending on time constraints or participants' knowledge of the exit, the exit question was not systematically included. Ultimately, the dataset for this analysis includes 50 interviews, with 20 in Fiji and 30 in Palau, representing the viewpoints of 68 research participants in total. An interview had one or several research participants in it, and we report findings at the level of the interview rather than at the level of the participant. In Fiji, 75% of the research participants were Packard grantees compared to 70% in Palau. Non-grantees were primarily government staff, private consultants or other donors. The interview question related to exits was: "How will Packard's exit affect your organization and conservation in your country?". It is important to note that the findings are specific to how people experienced the exit right in 2018 or 2019 – just before grants closed in 2020. Thus, the viewpoints have to be contextualized in this specific moment in time with the possibility that they could change over time. Understanding grantees viewpoints at this particular moment in time is useful because, 1) the final moments of an

exit, right before grants end, can be more stressful for both the foundation and grantees as a number of issues and tensions can arise and 2), the foundation is still involved and can still adapt its exit strategy, manage expectations better, be prepared to deal with different reactions to the exit. We supplemented our data with 8 additional interviews with Packard staff from 2019 and 2020 as well as publicly available reports, internal documents, two journalistic pieces (Kintisch 2019 a, b), archives from the Packard website that summarize the scope and scale of Packard's investments in marine conservation in Fiji and Palau and their exit strategy.

First, we conducted a thematic analysis of verbatim interview transcripts and other supporting data using QSR Nvivo. As themes emerged, we created a framework comprised of three interrelated components: attitude statements, rationales and exit viewpoints. The concept of "attitude" is one that has been frequently studied in the social sciences. There is no universally accepted convention where definition and measurement are integrated (Chaiklin, 2011) but an attitude is often defined as the evaluation of an object where the object can be an issue, an entity, behavior. In this study, we focus on the attitude of grantees and non-grantees in Fiji and Palau towards Packard's exit. In order to guide data analysis, we created a framework (Figure 2) that displays four types of attitudes (i.e., positive, negative, mixed (both positive and negative), and neutral (neither positive nor negative)) which are informed by various rationales (n=65). We define "rationales" as the multitude of perceptions of the exit by including feelings, emotions, experienced and expected impacts as well as strategies used to navigate the exit. In turn, these various attitudes, and their corresponding rationales, are combined into an overall viewpoint of the exit (i.e., optimistic, pessimistic, ambivalent and apathetic).

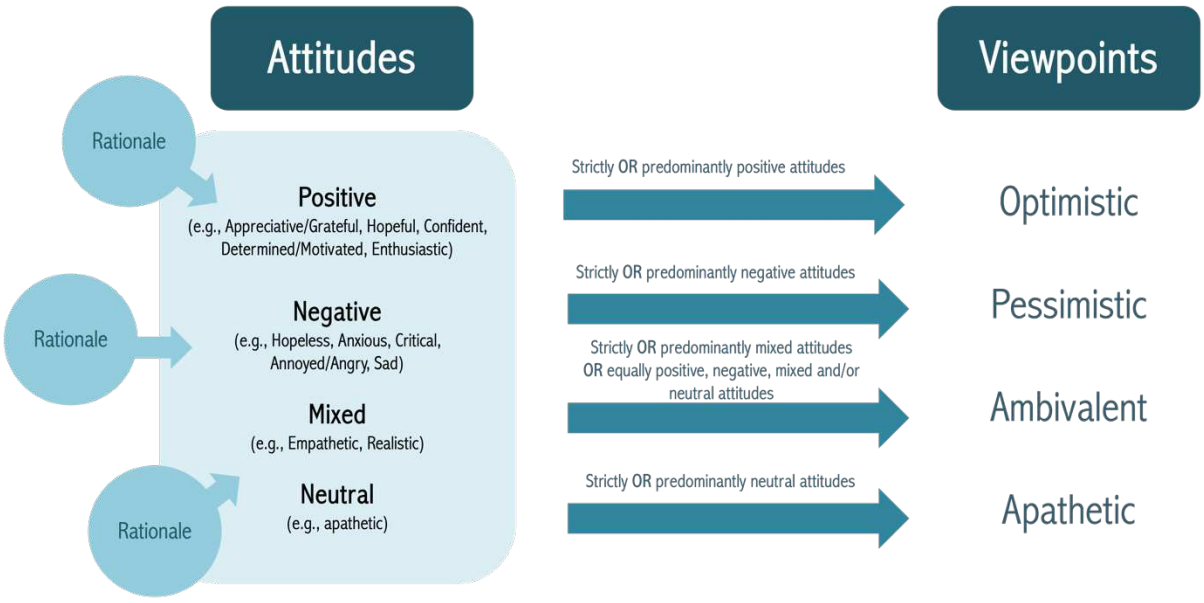


Figure 2: Conceptual framework of exit viewpoints. The framework displays attitudes (on the left) which are influenced by various rationales. A list of rationale categories is provided in Table 4. In combination, the attitudes and their corresponding rationales form an overall viewpoint of the exit. The four viewpoints are: optimistic, pessimistic, ambivalent and apathetic.

Through discussions with co-authors and after refining our framework, we arrive to a total of four viewpoints and 65 unique rationales that we organized under 24 larger categories (Table 4). This framework highlights the complexity behind people's experiences with the exit. One participant can have various attitudes that are influenced by various rationales that all come together to inform their overall viewpoint. To identify the overall viewpoint of the exit for each of the 50 interviews we looked across all of the attitudes towards the exit in each interview to determine the predominance of attitudes and we assigned the overall viewpoint as followed: if the participant(s) in the interview predominantly displayed positive attitudes it would reflect an overall optimistic viewpoint; if the participant(s) in the interview predominantly displayed negative attitudes it would reflect an overall pessimistic viewpoint; if the participant(s) in the interview predominantly displayed mixed attitudes towards the exit it would reflect an overall ambivalent

viewpoint; and finally, if the participant(s) in the interview predominantly displayed neutral attitudes towards the exit, it would reflect an overall apathetic viewpoint.

Table 4: List of the rationale categories (n=24) that informed the four exit viewpoints.

We shared our findings during two virtual workshops in June 2021 with conservation practitioners in Fiji and Palau who participated in the research and helped us with adding nuance to the findings and identifying gaps. When we asked the poll question "How well does the analysis of exit viewpoints resonate with your observations and experiences?", workshop participants in Fiji and Palau responded in majority "Strongly or Mostly resonate". We then incorporated their feedback in our final analysis, presented here. We aggregated findings regardless of the country of the research participant or their affiliation as we did not find major differences between Fiji and Palau, between grantees and non-grantees, and among different types of affiliations. In the findings section, we focus on the four overall viewpoints and the rationales that shaped them. As we qualitatively describe these viewpoints, we use quotes from research participants to illustrate them and add nuance.

We acknowledge that our findings cannot be generalized to all foundations going through an exit. Our study specifically focuses on a foundation exit from a long-term regional investment in small island states (or large ocean nations) and the interviews were conducted right before all grants closed, which could limit the scope of our findings by not representing the diverse range of exit scenarios that exist (Le Cornu et al., 2022). However, our findings raised critical issues around the importance of best practices for exiting responsibly and the need to address power dynamics during exit processes that are broadly valuable across the philanthropic field.

3.5. Grantees' viewpoints of the Packard exit

In this section, we explore the various factors that shaped grantees' viewpoints vis-à-vis Packard's exit. By looking deeper into the experiences of grantees, 1) we uncover the reasons behind participants' feelings of optimism, pessimism, ambivalence or apathy towards the exit, and

2) we connect our findings with relevant literature – previously examined (see Section 3), to contextualize them. Our study reveals that exit viewpoints are fairly evenly distributed across optimistic (28%), pessimistic (37%), and ambivalent (31%), indicating that there is not a single viewpoint that is dominant. The apathetic viewpoint (4%) is notably less prevalent. To gain insights into these varied experiences, we closely look into the rationales provided by research participants to explain their respective viewpoints (Table 4).

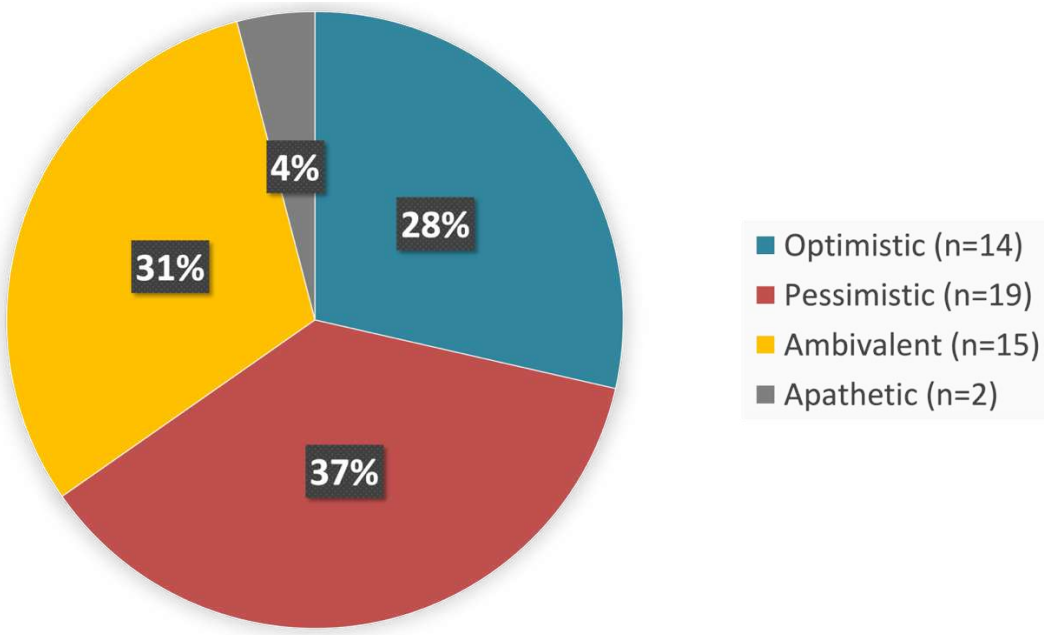


Figure 3: Distribution of cases (n=50) by overall exit viewpoints.

3.5.1. Optimistic viewpoint

The optimistic viewpoint is characterized by an overall feeling of confidence about the future. Research participants explained that they saw the exit as an opportunity for organizational growth and independence. The optimist embraced the exit as a means to become stronger, more resilient and independent. A few participants even considered the exit as an opportunity to think outside of the box and to create room for new ideas and projects, or even reinvent themselves in

terms of the type of work that they would carry on in the future. Optimistic participants stated that being proactive and putting in place adaptive strategies long before the exit was important to cope with the exit, whether grantees and organizations did it on their own or with the help of Packard. Specifically, they explained that their organization put it place mitigating strategies (e.g., evolution in programs, fundraising, organizational restructuring, etc.) as this research participant explains:

> "We have been aware of this for a while, and we had already been putting in place mitigating strategies to address that once Packard actually leaves it's not something that is very abrupt. And we know that there will come a point when some of the donors will leave and that's always been at the back of our minds, when we do fundraising, and when we design our programs and as our programs evolve." (Case 1)

In addition, already having other sources of funding lined up, or seeking alternative sources of funding was a key factor for a positive exit experience. Several research participants explained that their organization was already looking into diversifying their sources of funding (e.g., government, aid, other philanthropic foundations, etc.) as this research participant points out:

> "You know, as we've come out of that we've had to diversify. It has forced us to realize that, you know, money doesn't grow on coconut trees and we need to, as an NGO, if we want to be the last woman standing, we need to make sure that we're not putting all of our eggs in one basket, and that includes the government." (Case 47)

In fact, the optimist was confident that there is an overall interest in continuing funding marine conservation in the region. Some stated that other donors were about to or were already funding organizations in the region. For example, they mentioned funding from FAO, UNICEF, UNDP, MacArthur, or GEF Small Grants Program. One research participants even said that: "There's too much money overall in Palau. With GEF SGP, I have more than I can spend" (Case 27). In a way, Packard contributed to elevating the marine conservation profile of both countries and gave reassurance for other local and international donors to step in. For example, participants mentioned that the exit will give the government a chance to step up and fund conservation work

and that the exit will create room for new types of donors including the private sector, aid or other foundations.

Importantly, these research participants felt overall optimistic because they perceived the exit process as being responsible. They felt that Packard gave them ample notice to prepare for the exit, as this participant highlights: “I think Packard has done a phenomenal job on preparing people giving advanced notice giving bridge grants, they've done everything they could.” (Case 14). They also mentioned that Packard staff helped them diversify their sources of funding, introduced them to other funders, or that they helped them put a strategic plan in place to cope with the exit and sustain their work in the future. In addition, some participants emphasized that Packard directly invested in building their organizational capacity so they could adapt and sustain their activity in the long-term. For example, research participants explained that Packard invested in skill building for fundraising or helped them develop a business plan with a value proposition to attract new funders as highlighted by these quotes below:

> “Packard exit has just sort of made us grow stronger in terms of our skills and our ability to round up other sources of grants.” (Case 43)
>
> “They left us in a great place because people here have the capacity to continue the work and to get funding and keep the work going.” (Case 50)

Finally, the optimist felt that the exit would not disrupt the current state of collaborations among conservation organizations to achieve common objectives and that they would continue working together even after Packard’s exit.

3.5.2. Pessimistic viewpoint

Overall, there were more rationales to explain the pessimistic viewpoint. Although research participants recognized that Packard implemented a number of best practices to ensure a

responsible exit, some of them identified certain aspects of the exit process not resonating with a responsible exit. For example, the pessimist felt that exit grants were unequally distributed among grantees. In addition, some research participants felt that it was overall bad timing for Packard to exit and that Packard staff should have considered contextual factors more thoroughly before exiting (e.g., the MacArthur Foundation, another major donor in the region, was exiting in a similar timeframe).

Several research participants were concerned about the "funding style" of future potential donors entering the space after the exit. Most research participants felt like Packard set a 'gold standard' for philanthropy in the region (Enrici et al., 2023), and participants worried about new funders coming in and not being up to par. For example, they were worried that other donors would be less flexible and more proscriptive than Packard; that they would reinvent the wheel; that they would only fund short-term grants; and that they would not being considerate of the local context. This research participant illustrates this overall feeling of "funder style" incompatibility with this example:

> "The danger is that clueless donors come in and want to fund something that might be ridiculous without understanding local governance structures, like large MPAs" (Case 4).

Some participants also felt like Packard considered them as partners throughout their investment journey and built solid relationships with them and, thus, were afraid that other funders would not strive to reach these standards with them, as these participants acknowledge:

> "It's a bummer I mean, you want more like Packard, it was a bummer that they were exiting. […] We need real partnership. That includes people who are willing to take the time to understand our context and look under the rug a little bit, take off the global goggles, you know what I mean? And see the lens through our people's eye and I feel like Packard of all of the donor community was most willing to do that, in my experience." (Case 37)

> "Some of these other grant opportunities, their processes are longer, and it doesn't feel as relationship oriented. Whereas Packard they had a relationship with us. You know you have to talk to the person, except for ghosting is a thing now, but in a healthy relationship you have to say hey, this is not working out anymore or there needs to be some kind of transition or exit. And that's what happened Packard." (Case 47)

The pessimist was worried about the consequences of the exit on grantees and organizations. This included, for example, having to do piecemeal work because grantees will be more involved in grant-writing; having to rush, scale back or end some work; losing employment opportunities and skills that were funded by Packard; or needing to restructure organizations. Some participants even feared the potential of successful conservation outcomes being reversed after the exit because they would lack the necessary support to continue enforcing and monitoring these ongoing efforts. Research participants with a pessimistic viewpoint were also worried about the exit having a ripple effect on the government and as one research participant explained, "the government is going to have to pick up the slack" (Case 45). The pessimist also raised issues that go beyond impacts on direct grantees and other conservation practitioners. They were concerned about the impacts of the exit on local communities affected by funded projects and their outcomes. A research participant mentioned that it could be confusing to communities on the ground if the exit message was not clearly communicated.

Participants felt anxious about the uncertainty of acquiring future funding because they felt that the current pool of alternative funders in the region was small. Some expressed that there is never any guarantee that other donors are going to step in after an exit, and that the government is not necessarily willing to fund their work, as this participant states:

> "Palauans are unique because we go for things, and we know what we want, but without foundations though there are things the government can't help us with, foundations are needed to do things the government can't or won't do." (Case 39)

Other participants also explained that only certain organizations get funding from the government or have access to other types of funding which could make it difficult for all Packard grantees to equally acquire funding after the exit. Pessimistic participants were also critical because they felt that their organization was still too dependent on Packard funding and felt like they lacked capacity to cope with the exit. The pessimist identified a number of consequences due to the uncertainty of funding, the potential incompatibility of new donor's "funding style" or their dependence to external money to sustain their activities. For example, participants mentioned having to shift priorities and write grants that are not necessarily aligned with the organization's core mission, and an overall concern that certain grantees would need to demonstrate their value and "sell" themselves to new donors to attract funding, as these participants point out:

> "Now everything is about climate change, so we have to shift." (Case 32)
>
> "Well, people that do the work that I do are basically mercenaries, they'll work for anybody that pays." (Case 5)

Some also raised the issue that the exit would lead to competition for funding between organizations and that it could potentially affect communication and collaboration within the conservation field in their country.

3.5.3. Ambivalent viewpoint

The ambivalent viewpoint is distinguished by the fact that research participants expressed mixed feelings about the exit. Ambivalent participants did not have an overall optimistic or pessimistic viewpoint. Instead, they had mixed feelings towards the exit. During the interviews, these research participants often contrasted their feelings with opposite ones. For example, one participant stated: "I think initially people were worried. But now people have adapted." (Case 13). This participant expressed initial feelings of doubt and anxiety but eventually became more

hopeful and confident. Although they felt that their organization would likely not be heavily impacted by the exit, ambivalent participants shared a few common concerns. While they felt like the exit was not disruptive for their own organization due to Packard's responsible exit strategy, which included providing exit grants and other non-financial support such as introducing them to other funders and gradually scaling down grants with ample notice, or because they had sufficient funding lined up and enough capacity built to cope with the exit, they were anxious that other organizations would be faced with challenges. Their concerns were particularly focused on small local NGOs that heavily relied on Packard funding. These NGOs might struggle to access certain types of grants due to their niche focus, or lack of grant writing capacity and support, unlike larger international NGOs (BINGOS) that typically have more opportunities: "Communities aren't getting access, funding gets funneled to those with the capacity to write grants" (Case 27). Again, this raises issues of resource dependence, unequal power dynamics and the risk for organizations to shift their priorities to acquire new funding. As Minkoff and Powell (2006, p.593) explain: "cash-starved" smaller organizations often must "chase after funds" that tend to be "tied more closely to a donor's interests" than to the original mission of the organization". On the other hand, Mount (2022, p.72) argues that "large NGOs with "a long history in the field" and "well-connected board[s] of directors" who have personal relationships with donor agencies are more likely to receive funding since they are perceived as having the capacity to operate major projects (Abdelrahman 2007, 82)". This participant's quote reinforces this idea:

> "Bigger organization will be stronger, the smaller ones seem to be suffering when Packard leaves, because they now have to improve their capacity to access grants. We're fighting a lot of issues with that. That means we can't partner with most of the organizations that Packard easily could just fund, we can't even promote them to be funded because they will say "no" because we did not meet EU standards. So, they can't access the grant." (Case 13)

Therefore, funders should pay extra attention to small NGOs and ensure they have alternative sources of funding in place. The ambivalent also believes that even though their organization might be fine, the overall ocean conservation community in their country and region will be impacted. They feel that Packard should remain longer because there are still unresolved issues. They express that leaving too early would hinder progress because there is still more work to be done. As this participant states, “I really think they're leaving two years too early. It's extraordinary how many things are coming together [...] and if there's no foundation available, it could become difficult through partner funders.” (Case 14). On the other hand, some ambivalent participants feel that Packard should not leave because other funders will benefit from the groundwork they laid in marine conservation and “reap the benefits”. This participant’s quote illustrates this overall feeling:

> “All the years of commitment will be taken over by someone else who will benefit from the work they have done... That is the sort of thing that will happen because Packard has laid the groundwork for marine resource management.” (Case 6)

3.5.4. Apathetic viewpoint

Our findings suggest that there is a fourth viewpoint towards the exit, however, it only represents 4% of the viewpoints expressed by participants. Only two interviews reflected an overall apathetic viewpoint which indicates that participants cared about the exit to some extent as they expressed diverse feelings about the exit whether positive, negative, or mixed. Participants who felt neutral towards the exit either were not aware about it or were not dependent on Packard funding. One participant seemed to be in denial about the exit during the time of the interview: “I don’t expect them to leave, every 5 years I hear that they are pulling out but they don’t. If they do leave another group will step in” (Case 34). Apathetic participants explained that the exit did not

have any major impacts on them or that they simply were still uncertain about the potential impacts of the exit and therefore preferred not to speculate. Participants with an apathetic viewpoint were not direct grantees of Packard – they were government officials or conservation practitioners not directly funded by Packard. This suggests that Packard could improve its communication regarding exits to its partners in the conservation field to avoid any confusion, even if they are not direct grantees. That being said, these findings (i.e., the very low number of participants being apathetic) also indicate that Packard effectively communicated with its own grantees, ensuring they were aware of the exit despite their varying experiences.

3.6. Conclusions and ways forward

This study contributes to the existing literature on philanthropic exits. By exploring ocean conservation practitioners' – including grantees and non-grantees – perspectives of the Packard exit: 1) we reiterate that best practices are key to conduct a responsible exit (Le Cornu et al., 2022) and can lead to optimistic viewpoints of philanthropic exits, and 2) we urge the field to address issues of resource dependence and power imbalances that may hinder the sustainability of funded projects and initiatives and can lead to pessimist and ambivalent viewpoints when donors exit. To better understand these power dynamics between funders and grantees, which are accentuated during exits, we bring in resource dependence theory and the international development literature to interpret our findings.

A key takeaway from this study Is that grantees' Ies with exits are diverse and so are the factors that shape them. Even though the Packard Foundation was considered the 'gold standard' (Blackwatters et al., 2022; Enrici et al., 2023) in light of their multi-year investment in both countries, their grant-making approach, and their efforts to conduct a responsible exit, there was

not one dominant viewpoint of the exit among grantees and other conservation practitioners. Rather, there were four main viewpoints (optimistic, pessimistic, ambivalent and apathetic) and a combination of several rationales that came into play to shape each participant's viewpoint. Taking a closer look at these rationales can help us Identify unique opportunities and challenges facing grantees during an exit and emphasizes the importance of including grantees' perspectives throughout the grant-making process to better understand and mitigate some of these viewpoints.

Specifically, our study highlights that implementing best practices for exiting responsibly is key (Le Cornu et al., 2022). The majority of the factors explaining optimistic viewpoints strongly align with Le Cornu et al.'s (2022) best practices framework, especially the *principles* and *administration and management* categories. These best practices include those adopted by grantees themselves to prepare for the exit and those implemented by Packard to ensure a responsible exit. As mentioned in Section 3.2, Packard staff invested significant time, energy and resources to conduct a responsible exit from Fiji and Palau. They developed a clear exit strategy that was articulated around principles of transparency, inclusivity, reflexivity and flexibility. The exit process was gradual with grants ramping down over a period of several years, and thus giving ample notice to grantees and conservation practitioners. Throughout the years, Packard staff fostered trusted relationships that facilitated open and continuous communication with grantees to ensure they convey the reasons, goals, plans and expectations of the exit. Packard staff also made intentional efforts to build a strong network of donors and coordinate funding efforts in the region through annual gatherings and discussions at meetings, workshops or conferences. Packard invested in capacity building for staff and organizations to mitigate dependency and for them to sustain their activities in the future. Regardless of the duration or size of the investment,

foundations can greatly improve the overall experience of grantees and other conservation practitioners by implementing best practices for responsible exits.

The rationales for pessimistic and ambivalent viewpoints were closely linked to the challenges associated with the *sustainability* category of the best practices framework, which encompass activities related to capacity-building, autonomy-building, and network-building. While the interviews suggested that there may have been some specific actions that Packard could have taken to address some of the concerns about *sustainability* (e.g. helping more vulnerable grantees diversity funding sources before the exit, etc.), these are systemic issues that must also be addressed at the field level. For example, while pessimists worried about the "funding style" of new donors entering the space, Packard has little control over the pool or behavior of alternative funders after they exit. Pessimists also worried about having to change their priorities to fit new donor agendas – again, not something Packard has a lot of direct control over. Addressing these issues of resource dependence and donor-grantee power relationships suggests that successfully implementing the *sustainability* best practices associated with responsible exits must be a collective as much as an individual endeavor. There are also things grantees can do. For grantees, additional suggestions to reduce resource dependence and address power imbalances include considering a wider range of options beyond traditional funding models. For example, self-funding as an alternative strategy (i.e., being funded by the same people the organization serves), independent sources of revenue (e.g., social entrepreneurship and social enterprise), diversification strategies, such as interorganizational arrangements and maintaining alternative sources of funding, have also been explored in the literature (Pratt, 2007). Although these strategies provide useful guidance for reducing dependence and power imbalances, they are not a "one-size-fits-all".

4. CHAPTER 4: EXPLORING THE SOCIAL OUTCOMES OF CONSERVATION PHILANTHROPY: A PHOTOVOICE STUDY OF SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN THE NORTHERN REEF OF PALAU

4.1. Introduction

Environmental philanthropy is experiencing a significant growth (Greenfield, 2021), especially in ocean-related issues. Ocean philanthropy has more than doubled over the past decade, reaching USD 1 billion in 2022 (CEA, 2023). Notably, philanthropy has become a key funder of small-scale fisheries, playing a critical role in supporting the livelihoods of millions of people across the globe (Berkes et al., 2001; Kittinger et al., 2013; Kolding et al., 2014; Smith & Basurto, 2019; Short et al., 2021; Hendricks, 2022). SSFs contribute significantly to global fish catch, employment and food security (Béné et al., 2007; FAO, 2022; FAO, 2024). They are diverse and dynamic, comprise various fishing activities targeting a wide range of species, and are often embedded in deeply rooted cultural traditions (Johnson, 2018; Chuenpagdee & Jentoft, 2019). However, SSFs face a multitude of challenges, including global climate change, environmental degradations, competition with large-sale fisheries and political marginalization (Kittinger et al., 2013; Basurto et al., 2017, Hamilton et al., 2021). SSFs are a "well-documented wicked problem" (Jentoft & Chuenpagdee, 2009, p.553) as they are operating in complex governance systems that involve numerous actors with problems that are difficult to define, and with no clear solutions. As governments often lack resources to remediate these multifaceted problems, SSFs have increasingly depended on external funding (de Oliveira Leis et al., 2019; Gruby et al., 2021).

Historically, the World Bank has been the largest provider of funding for small-scale fisheries (Rare, 2016; Basurto et al., 2017, Hamilton et al., 2021, Our Shared Seas, 2022), but ocean philanthropy is on the rise, with several philanthropic foundations prioritizing funding for small-scale fisheries in recent years (CEA, 2023). Although it is difficult to gather exact figures, it is estimated that philanthropic foundations fund $10-$23 million per year in grants for small-scale fisheries projects, which is approximately 5-12% of the total grantmaking for ocean conservation (Rare, 2016).

This growing interest in funding more localized and culturally embedded projects and initiatives, including in small-scale fisheries, is happening at the same time that both the philanthropic and ocean conservation fields are facing critiques of social injustices, inequity and illegitimacy (Bennett et al., 2017; LaMarche, 2020; Pitkin, 2020). Despite these critiques, little research attention is given to ocean philanthropy and understanding the impacts of the conservation projects and initiatives they fund (Gruby et al., 2021). This study is part of a broader effort to help build a field of research on ocean philanthropy and that can also contribute practical insights funders and practitioners can use to advance effective, equitable, and enduring conservation globally (Gruby et al., 2021; Betsill et al., 2021, Le Cornu et al., 2022, Blackwatters et al., 2022; Enrici et al., 2023). The impetus for this project is the Packard Foundation's decision to end their Western Pacific Program after twenty years of funding ocean conservation in the region. This decision presented a unique opportunity to empirically understand the impacts of philanthropy on local communities. Specifically, this study addresses a gap in the broader environmental philanthropy literature on the impacts of philanthropic-supported projects on local communities (Gruby et al., 2021; Betsill et al., 2021). In addition, while philanthropy increasingly fund small-scale fisheries projects, they remain largely understudied in the literature on small-scale fisheries

governance. While the focus of this study is to better understand the impacts of philanthropic-supported fisheries, we make various contributions to both literatures. Drawing from the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) framework and literature, we explore the social outcomes of a Packard-supported fisheries management project in the Northern Reef of Palau. In response to calls for more inclusive and participatory conservation practices, this study uses participatory research methodology called Photovoice, which aims at elevating the voices, stories and experiences of local communities while fostering change (Wang & Burris, 1997). This approach offers a unique lens to assess the impacts of philanthropic-funded projects and initiatives as it helps capture candid insights and contextual knowledge from fishers and community members.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we identify existing gaps in the literatures on small-scale fisheries governance and environmental philanthropy, particularly related to social outcomes. We also provide a brief overview on the existing literature on Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and how we operationalized the framework in the case of the Northern Reef of Palau. Second, we present the case study background on the Northern Reef fisheries and on the management project supported by the Packard Foundation. Third, we outline our research methods focusing on the participatory research methodology called Photovoice. Fourth, we present our findings. We describe eight social outcomes experienced by fishers using photographs and quotes from participants to illustrate them. Additionally, we describe the various other social change processes that interacted with the fisheries management project and influenced the social outcomes. We also draw on additional interviews with government officials, NGO staff and other practitioners involved with fisheries management to explore their perspectives and insights. Finally, we conclude by highlighting the study's contributions to research and practice, particularly as it relates to community engagement. This study offers valuable practical insights for

practitioners working in ocean philanthropy, informing future funding for small-scale fisheries in Palau, the Pacific, and beyond.

4.2. Social outcomes of conservation philanthropy

This section explores the research gaps in understanding the social outcomes of philanthropic-supported projects and initiatives in the context of small-scale fisheries. We bring together two bodies of literature: small-scale fisheries governance and environmental philanthropy. By addressing gaps in these literatures related to the social outcomes of conservation philanthropy, we aim to 1) contribute to the SSF community's understanding of the potential impacts of philanthropic foundations, an understudied actor in SSF governance, and 2) provide the conservation philanthropy community with insights into how their funding affects the local communities directly impacted by the projects they support and fund. To better understand and organize the social outcomes of conservation philanthropy, we draw on an existing framework known as Social Impact Assessment (SIA). We provide a brief background on the framework and how we operationalized it in the case of the Northern Reef of Palau.

4.2.1. Literature review on small-scale fisheries governance

Despite being 'small' in scale, SSFs play a significant role in both local and global economies, food security, and cultural traditions, as they support the livelihoods of many coastal communities around the world (Berkes, 2001; Kittinger et al., 2013; Kolding et al., 2014; Short et al., 2021; Hendricks, 2022, Basurto et al., 2025). They account for at least 40% of the world's catch (FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, 2022; FAO, 2024), employ over 90% of the world's fishers in harvest and post-harvest activities (Béné et al., 2007; FAO, 2022; FAO, 2024), and

supply the majority of fish directly consumed by people. Compared to large-scale fisheries, whose catches are often used for other purposes, such as fishmeal production, 95% of SSF catches are for human consumption (Chuenpagdee & Jentoft, 2019). Beyond supporting livelihoods and ensuring food security for millions (Béné et al., 2007), SSFs are also deeply embedded in cultural traditions and represent a way of life for many coastal communities worldwide (Johnson, 2018; Chuenpagdee & Jentoft, 2019). However, SSFs face increasing challenges, including overfishing, competition with large-scale industrial fisheries, market shifts, habitat destruction, water pollution, and population pressures in coastal areas (Kittinger et al., 2013; Basurto et al., 2017, Hamilton et al., 2021). These issues are exacerbated in more vulnerable contexts of poverty, high dependence on natural resources and climate change (Andrew et al., 2007; Brander, 2007; Béné et al., 2009; Barange et al. 2014; Blasiak et al., 2017). In addition, because of the limited capacity of many under-funded governments (Acheson, 2006; Young et al., 2007; Evans et al., 2011), practitioners working in this space often depend on other external funding to support the numerous, diverse, dynamic and complex small-scale fisheries that exist (Allison, 2001; Kolding et al., 2014; Basurto et al., 2017; de Oliveira Leis et al., 2019; Gruby et al., 2021; López-Ercilla et al., 2024).

In response to these challenges, donors such as philanthropic foundations have increasingly injected millions of dollars towards supporting the implementation of small-scale fisheries projects and initiatives. These include a combination of management tools, policies, and measures such as seasonal closures, species bans, quota-based and area-based measures such as Territorial User Rights for Fisheries (TURFs), Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), traditional management like Customary Marine Tenure systems, or co-management. Our focus here is on a philanthropic-funded fisheries co-management initiative in Palau. Co-management, which can be defined as the shared "responsibility and authority between the state and resource-users but often involves

collaboration between a variety of stakeholders, including different government agencies, non-governmental organizations, research organizations, private enterprises and civil society more generally (Carlsson & Berkes, 2005)" (Evans et al., 2011, p.1), has proliferated in the small-scale fisheries sector (Berkes, 2009; Evans et al., 2011; d'Armengol et al., 2018) as it is considered to be better suited for the diverse and dynamic nature of SSFs (Basurto et al., 2017). In fact, co-management is now estimated to be implemented for approximately 20% of SSF catches globally (FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, 2022). This alternative approach aims to support multiple goals beyond environmental sustainability (Evans et al., 2011). Authors argue that it creates more legitimate norms that better fit local conditions (Jentoft, 1989), strengthens tenure rights, ensures more inclusive and transparent decision-making processes (Nielsen & Vedsmand, 1999; Oldekop et al., 2016), enhances social equality (Loucks et al., 2003), reduces management costs (Carlsson & Berkes, 2005), reduces conflict, and increases compliance (Pomeroy et al., 2007; Kuperan et al., 2008;Berkes, 2009). As with many other fisheries in the world, Palau's Northern Reef small-scale fisheries are governed by a co-management system between two States (Kayangel and Ngarchelong), the people of the Northern Reef, and various other practitioners, including local and international NGOs, funders, researchers, among others.

A growing body of literature examines whether these various SSF interventions achieve specific social and ecological goals, the conditions for successful implementation (Pollnac et al., 2001; Napier et al., 2005; Chuenpagdee & Jentoft, 2007), and whether they create additional unintended consequences. For example, several published studies evaluate general fisheries management effectiveness (Béné & Neiland, 2003; Mora et al., 2009) or the effectiveness of specific management interventions like catch shares (Costello et al., 2008), TURFs (Auriemma et al., 2014; Quynh et al., 2017), Marine Protected Areas (Bennett & Dearden, 2014; Pomeroy et al.,

2005; Mascia et al., 2010), Large Marine Protected Areas (Gruby et al., 2017), co-managed fisheries (Sverdrup-Jensen & Nielsen, 1999; Allison & Badjeck, 2004; Wilson et al., 2003, 2006), or community-based managed fisheries (Pomeroy & Carlos, 1997; Maliao et al., 2009). In the case of co-management, meta-analyses, such as Evans and colleagues (2011) and d'Armengol and colleagues (2018), demonstrate that these approaches can lead to beneficial social outcomes like improve fishers' income, well-being, compliance, and participation while also improving ecological conditions, such as species abundance and habitat health. A study by Gutiérrez and colleagues (2011) identifies key factors contributing to successful co-management outcomes, such as the presence of strong community leaders, social cohesion, individual or community fish quotas, and community-based protected areas. However, authors have also highlighted potential challenges and unintended consequences of co-management, including exacerbating conflicts, increasing power asymmetries, unequal distribution of benefits (d'Armengol et al., 2018), weakened traditional institutions, and decreased trust within the community (Gelcich et al., 2006).

Despite growing research and progress in understanding the social outcomes of small-scale fisheries projects, one critical actor remains understudied in the web of actors involved in those projects and initiatives: philanthropic foundations. Even though philanthropic foundations have been characterized as 'keystone actors' (Österblom, 2017) "with a profound and disproportionate influence on conservation agendas, research, organizations, networks, policy, and the local societies affected by these interventions" (Gruby et al., 2021, p.1), they often act behind the scenes and are overlooked in small-scale fisheries governance, particularly in co-management settings where multiple practitioners collaborate with fishers to fund, develop, and implement projects. More importantly, the literature rarely links the social outcomes of these funded projects to philanthropy. There is an opportunity to make this actor more visible in the complex systems that

govern small-scale fisheries. More research is needed to understand the relationship between philanthropy and the potential social outcomes experienced by the communities where they invest in. There is recent research on the various roles that foundations play beyond funding, including "influencing agendas, capacity-building and coordinating, facilitating knowledge, and rule-making and regulation" (Blackwatters et al., 2022 p.1; Enrici et al., 2023), and the field would benefit from understanding the roles of philanthropy in shaping these social outcomes, however, the focus of this study is to understand the impacts of the projects they fund through their grantees.

4.2.2. Literature review on environmental philanthropy

To better understand the social outcomes of philanthropic-supported projects, including in small-scale fisheries, this study also engages with the literature on environmental philanthropy, particularly ocean philanthropy. In the past decade, environmental philanthropy "saw one of the highest rates of growth across the philanthropic sector" (IUPUI Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2021; Betsill et al., 2024). When looking into ocean philanthropy specifically, a 2023 report from California Environmental Associates presents a number of trends and patterns that are relevant to our study (CEA, 2023). First, although ocean philanthropy only represents less than one percent of the USD 811 billion global philanthropic funding in 2022, funding for ocean conservation has more than doubled in last decade, from USD 430 million in 2010 to USD 1 billion in 2022 (CEA, 2023). Second, the report highlights that funding for fisheries and aquaculture has historically ranked as the second highest level of ocean funding by issue area. However, funding for small-scale fisheries is rarely defined as a distinct issue area, which makes extracting exact numbers difficult as they are often unaccounted for or grouped in other programmatic categories like MPAs, science, technology, etc. (Basurto et al., 2017). Historically, the World Bank has been

the largest provider of funding for small-scale fisheries in the last 50 years with approximately 47% (~$1.17 billion) of the $2.48 billion that have been allocated by the World Bank to marine fisheries (Rare, 2016; Basurto et al., 2017, Hamilton et al., 2021, Our Shared Seas, 2022). Nonetheless, several ocean conservation philanthropic foundations have prioritized funding for small-scale fisheries in recent years (CEA, 2023). Rare (2016) estimated that $91 million in grants have been directly funding small-scale fisheries projects between 2007 and 2015 and that an additional $136 million in grants has been funding projects that may include aspects of small-scale fisheries (e.g., Marine Protected Areas). Philanthropic foundations fund $10-$23 million per year in grants for small-scale fisheries projects, which represents 5-12% of the total grantmaking for marine conservation. In 2015, "the top five by volume of funds active" (Basurto et al., 2017, p.47) were The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, The Oak Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The MacArthur Foundation, and The Marisla Foundation. Basurto and colleagues (2017) explain that "philanthropy's presence and interventions touch a wide variety of aspects related to SSFs governance" (p. 40), including funding research, capacity building, policy development, specific management tools (e.g., Locally-Managed Marine Area (LMMA)), and market-based approaches to support a global demand for sustainable seafood.

With this steady growth in environmental philanthropy funding ocean conservation projects and initiatives, research on its impacts, particularly the social outcomes of philanthropic-funded initiatives, remains largely understudied (Betsill et al, 2021; Gruby et al., 2021). Although philanthropic foundations provide critical support for small-scale fisheries, little is known about the effects of these funded interventions on local communities' livelihoods and governance systems. The broader literature on philanthropy highlights the importance of evaluating philanthropic funding impacts, which is often framed as "impact evaluation" and "outcome

measurement" (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). However, such evaluations are rare (Kibbe, 2017) and often occur after funding ends, which has been referred as 'sunset evaluations' (Beadnell et al., 2017). These evaluations can be valuable in measuring broad outcomes (i.e., poverty reduction, health improvements, employment opportunities, etc.) and to understand the long-term effects of philanthropic-supported projects (Kibbe, 2017) but often miss opportunities to self-reflect and embed learning throughout the funding cycle and address challenges in real time (Beadnell et al., 2017; Giloth & Gerwitz, 2009). Criticism of these evaluations also highlight their lack of independence and transparency, as they are often driven and conducted by foundations themselves and not co-created with communities, and tend to focus on successes rather than challenges and unintended consequences (Leat, 2006; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; Betsill et al., 2021). While assessing these impacts is necessary, it may not always feasible for all philanthropic foundations (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014) as they face a number of challenges and barriers (e.g., the nature of the relationship between funders and grantees, the fear of reporting failure on both ends, distance with funding sites, among others) (Leat, 2006).

In the context of environmental philanthropy, including ocean philanthropy, research on the impacts of philanthropic-supported projects on local communities is even scarcer (Betsill et al., 2021; Gruby et al., 2021). Although evaluating the impacts of philanthropic foundations is challenging in complex social and environmental settings, such as small-scale fisheries, there is a significant gap in understanding how philanthropic foundations may affect local communities who are directly impacted by these projects and initiatives, both in the long-term but also in the short-term, while these interventions are being implemented (Betsill et al., 2021). One of the recent studies led by the Ocean Philanthropy Research Initiative, reinforces the need for more research on this topic. Indeed, the study presents a co-produced social science research agenda for ocean

philanthropy that reflects the priorities of more than a hundred ocean conservation practitioners. Out of the five research priorities identified during this process, the 'outcomes of ocean philanthropy' (Gruby et al, 2021, p.6) was raised as a significant research gap and of interest for the ocean philanthropy community. One of the main questions raised by practitioners through the research co-design process was: "How does conservation funding affect local livelihoods, customary rights, gender equity, culture, and knowledge systems?" (Gruby et al., 2021, p.5).

This study aims to better understand the impacts of conservation philanthropy by exploring the social outcomes of a philanthropic-supported SSF project in the Northern Reef of Palau. In doing so, this study broadens the traditional subjects of study in the small-scale fisheries governance literature to better understand the diversity of actors involved in these projects by conducting a case study of a philanthropic-supported project and exploring its impacts. It also offers valuable insights for the environmental philanthropy sector on the social outcomes these funded projects have on local communities.

4.2.3. Social Impact Assessment (SIA) framework

In order to frame and analyze the findings of this study, we draw on the literature on Social Impact Assessment (Vanclay, 2002). SIA has been generally defined as: 'the processes of analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programmes, plans, projects) and any social change processes invoked by those interventions. Its primary purpose is to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment" (Vanclay, 2003, p. 6). SIA is an applied field that is over 50 years old (Vanclay & Esteves, 2024) and that started as a regulatory tool in the 1970s to help determining whether a project should be approved and under

what conditions (Tilt et al., 2009; Esteves et al., 2012). Authors explain that it could be done as an independent evaluation or, in many cases, as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). In their newest article, that reflects on decades of SIA research and application, Vanclay and Esteves (2024) argue that SIA has evolved over time and in addition to being a useful tool, it has become "a field of research and practice, a discourse, and a paradigm" (p.12) involving hundreds of practitioners across the world.

In the case of the Northern Reef of Palau, we use SIA as a research tool to frame and understand the impacts resulting from a philanthropic-supported SSF intervention. More specifically, we identified both social change processes and social impacts. Social change processes are the "intervening variables that might lead to social impacts under certain conditions" (Vanclay, 2002, p.207) while social impacts are impacts "actually experienced by humans (at individual and higher aggregation levels) in either a corporeal (physical) or cognitive (perceptual) sense" (Vanclay, 2002, p.191). In addition, they may be direct or indirect, intended or unintended, positive or negative and they span every conceivable social dimension (e.g., cultural, demographic, economic, health, institutional, political). Most importantly, impacts can be experienced or perceived. Vanclay explains that "perceived impacts are real social impacts. Although some scientists and practitioners might discount people's perceptions because they are not real and may be based on incorrect information, the important social understanding is that, right or wrong, the way individuals perceive things affects their feelings. […] People act on their perceptions and people feel as a result of their perceptions." (Vanclay, 2012, p.152). In our adapted analytical framework (Figure 4), the two spheres represent social change processes (on the left side) which can lead to social impacts (on the right side). Social change processes include the many tools, policies and fishing regulations implemented as part of the philanthropic-supported project (e.g.

fishing ban, permit, size limit, cooperative and alternative livelihoods) as well as other interacting and exacerbating external factors such as climate change or globalization for example, which led to intended and unintended social impacts. When presenting our findings, we use with a descriptor to reference particular types of social impacts linked to the fisheries management project, and we dedicate a separate section on external social changes process that exacerbated these impacts and led to sometimes led to unintended consequences.

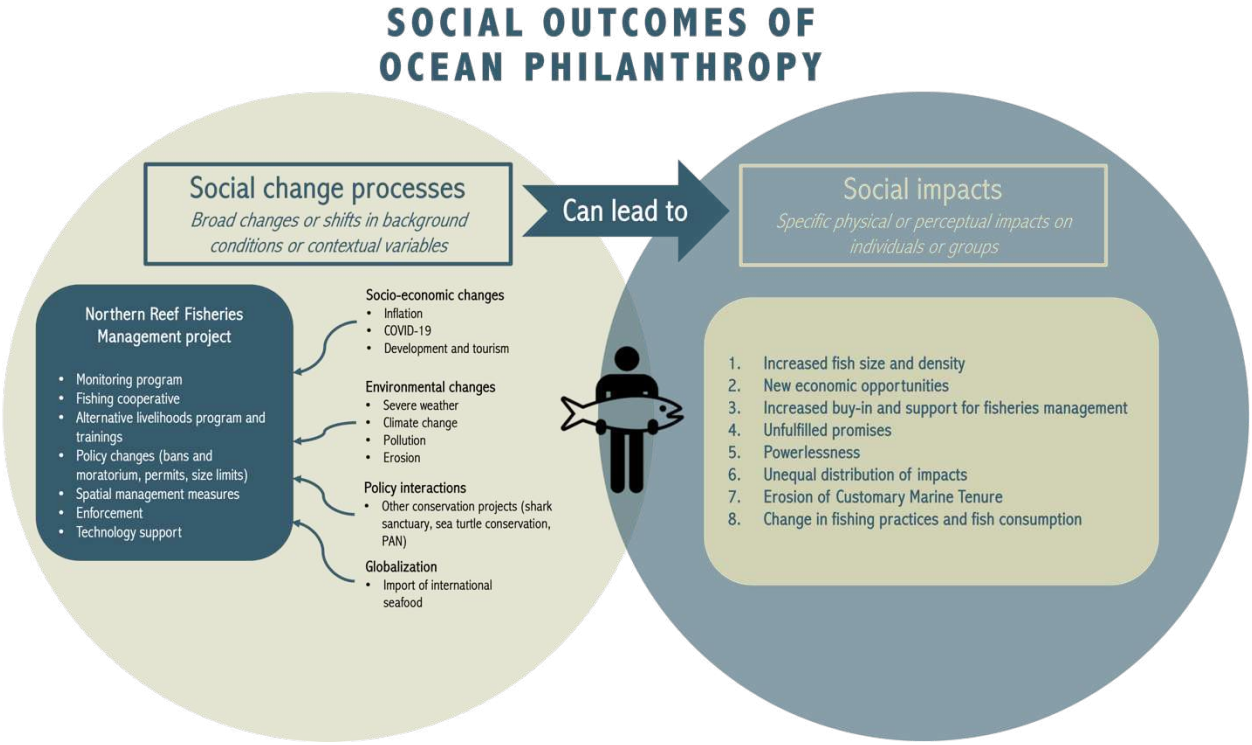


Figure 4: Conceptual framework for understanding the social outcomes of ocean philanthropy, highlighting the findings of the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project (informed by Vanclay 2002, adapted from Gruby et al., 2017).

4.3. Case study setting

4.3.1. The Northern Reef fishery

The Northern Reef spans 3,930 km2 of territorial waters between Palau's two northernmost states (Figure 5), Ngarchelong and Kayangel, and features diverse ecosystems, including mangroves, seagrasses, reefs, lagoons, channels, and deep water that extends beyond 1000m in depth (The Nature Conservancy Micronesia, n.d.). Ngarchelong and Kayangel together combine a little over 400 people, with Ngarchelong being the home of eight hamlets and a population of 384 people. Kayangel, an island atoll located 25 nautical miles away from the main island Babeldoab, is the home of two hamlets and a population of 41 people (Carlisle & Gruby, 2018, 2019; Palau Office of Planning and Statistics, 2022). Fishers in the Northern Reef engage in a tropical multispecies fishery targeting over 50 finfish species, mainly located in nearshore reefs (Carlisle & Gruby, 2019). Most fishers own or have access to a canoe or small motorboat, and spearfishing and handline fishing are the main fishing techniques (Prince et al., 2015). Based on a 2016 socio-economic survey (Isechal et al., 2016), 87 fishers who engaged in fishing at least once a week were identified in 2014 for Ngarchelong and Kayangel States, and the average age of fishers was 52 years old. Ferguson (2021, p.3) explains that in Palau, "the use of marine resources is customarily gendered, with men "fishing" finfish and women "gleaning" marine invertebrates". Although the fishery comprises primarily men, women also participate in gleaning activities for invertebrate species, such as sea cucumbers and bivalve mollusks (Ferguson et al., 2020; Ferguson, 2021) and "typically wade into shallow waters on foot or use man- powered boats (e.g., kayaks, bamboo rafts) to access nearshore invertebrates in waters typically less than 1 m deep" (Ferguson, 2021, p.3). Fishing usually does not represent a full-time occupation, and most fishers have other sources of income and employment (Prince et al., 2015; Carlisle & Gruby, 2018).

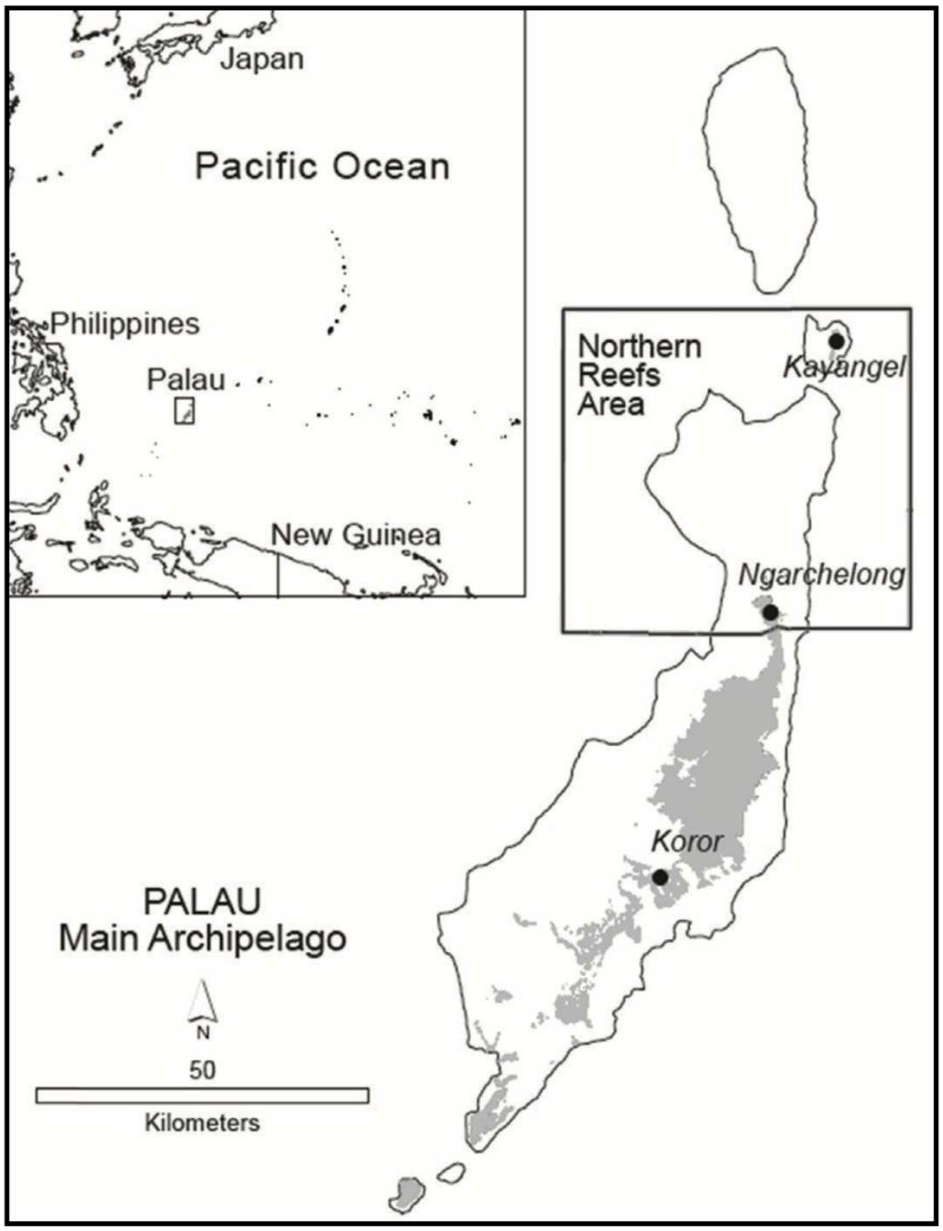


Figure 5: Map of Palau showing its size and position in the Western Pacific Ocean, and the location of the Northern Reef Area, the location of this study. (Source: TNC Micronesia)

4.3.2. Customary Marine Tenure in Palau

Palau has a long-standing history of marine conservation that is embedded in Customary Marine Tenure systems (CMT). Historically, village chiefs controlled the use and access of marine

resources by imposing various restrictions to conserve marine resources, including temporary area closures and temporary bans on the harvest of particular species, known as *bul* (Johannes, 1978; Johannes, 1981; Carlisle & Gruby, 2019). Over time, Palau experienced deep societal changes, including colonialization, economic development, and nation-building (Wilson, 1995; Graham & Idechong, 1998; Carlisle & Gruby, 2019; Ferguson, 2021), which led to a shift of resource ownership and management from villages to the State and the erosion of many of these CMT systems. However, these systems did not completely disappear, instead, they evolved and now exist in broader governance systems. In their 2019 study, Carlisle and Gruby explain that: "the customary tenure institutions are produced and reproduced by the behaviors of individuals who draw upon multiple sources of authority and precedent (including state law and *bul*) to secure and contest resource access and usage. The successor to historical CMT is, in effect, an amalgam of state law, *bul*, norms, strategies, and historical artifacts – a product of legal pluralism in Palau." (Carlisle & Gruby, 2019, p.533). In the same study, the authors documented the specific characteristics of the CMT system in Ngarchelong and identified three main categories related to fishing rights: 1) Ngarchelong residents have universal fishing rights and can use resources for consumption, customs, and commercial sale, 2) nonresidents from Ngarchelong are allowed to fish, but they need to support the community in return (e.g., cemetery clean up, funerals) and 3), nonresidents who are not from Ngarchelong are not allowed to fish. At the time of their study, a permit system was discussed as part of the Northern Reef Fisheries Management Project that would redefine fishery access as a privilege granted by the government, which was eventually implemented in 2017 and further discussed in the findings. The authors discussed that a possible outcome could be the erosion of the existing customary system. This is aligned with other studies that have looked at the superimposition of state-based fishing rights on existing customary fishing

rights leading to the erosion of trust relationships and weakening of local institutions (Gelcich et al., 2006).

4.3.3. The Packard Foundation Western Pacific program

As part of the Western Pacific program, initiated in 1998, Packard invested over $100 million in ocean conservation in eight countries across the Asia-Pacific region (Kintisch, 2019). In Palau, Packard invested $8,168,000 through 52 grants to 13 organizations, including organizations that are instrumental in the design and implementation of the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project. This significant support over the course of two decades established the Packard Foundation as one of the largest and most consistent sources of marine conservation funding in the region. The final phase of the Western Pacific program was approved in 2012, with a redefined mission that shifted from MPAs as a key tool for conservation to focus more broadly on sustainable fisheries management. The Northern Reef Fisheries Management project was a core initiative in the Western Pacific program's final phase.

4.3.4. The Northern Reef Fisheries Management Project

The Northern Reef Fisheries Management project, funded by the Packard Foundation, was collaboratively developed by scientists, conservation practitioners, and community members from Kayangel and Ngarchelong States to establish a co-management system with the goal of protecting and managing fisheries resources for the benefit of local communities. The project was initially prompted by fishers' concerns over declining fish stocks in the Northern Reef, one of Palau's richest fishing grounds, despite "Palau having kept ~40% of their reef area closed to fishing for the last 20 years" (Prince et al., 2015, p.43). In response, The Nature Conservancy, supported by

funding from the Packard Foundation and in collaboration with local NGOs such as the Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) and Palau Conservation Society (PCS), launched a comprehensive co-management project in 2012 to address the need for improved fishery management in the Northern Reef. This collaborative project had several core objectives, including among others, increasing fisher engagement in various management activities, improving understanding of fish stocks, improving fishers' livelihoods and establishing a co-management system for the Northern Reef. Notably, the project mostly focuses on fisheries that are considered to be traditionally operated by men. To achieve these objectives, the project included the design and implementation of various tools and regulations to improve fisheries management including: the creation of the Northern Reef Fishing Cooperative (NRFC), an alternative livelihoods program with trainings in pelagic fishing, flying fish fishing, clam farming or tuna canning, a monitoring program, several policy changes (bans and moratorium, permit system, size limits), spatial management measures like protected areas, enforcement activities, and the integration of technology to further support these efforts.

The Packard exit from the Western Pacific region coupled with discussions about additional sites for fisheries management in Palau, created a unique opportunity to explore the critical role that philanthropic funding plays in small-scale fisheries and how these funded projects impact and transform communities, particularly those with complex traditional conservation systems. The insights from this study can inform the decision-making of foundations and their partners in Palau and beyond, ensuring that future efforts account for the diversity and complexity of local governance systems while mitigating unintended consequences and fostering sustainable social outcomes.

4.4. Methods

4.4.1. The origins, applications and barriers of Photovoice

Participatory research is central to this study, reflecting a commitment to honor the lived experiences and knowledge of those involved in and impacted by philanthropic-supported initiatives. In fact, this approach guided the design of the Ocean Philanthropy Research Initiative (OPRI), as participatory methods were prioritized to co-produce research questions, generate knowledge, and advance the field for responsible giving (Moser, 2016; Wyborn et al., 2017, 2019; Lemos et al., 2018; Gruby et al., 2021). This study is attentive to the call to decolonize science and confront a long history of parachute research in conservation (deVos & Schwartz, 2022) by developing more equitable research partnerships that address on-the-ground priorities. In this study, we use Photovoice – a visual participatory research methodology that empowers research participants to document, reflect upon, and communicate issues of concern via photographs, while stimulating social change (Wang & Burris, 1997). In addition, Photovoice can offer a practical way to access rich, contextual and candid knowledge about communities and capture nuanced perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked, which is particularly relevant when documenting the diversity of social outcomes linked to conservation interventions.

This methodology originated in public health (Wang & Burris, 1997), and it has since been applied in diverse fields such as education, psychology, community development research, conservation (Castleden et al., 2008, 2012; Beh et al., 2013; Bennett & Dearden, 2013; Mahajan & Daw, 2016; Masterston et al., 2018; Swanson & Ardoin, 2021), and more recently, in small-scale fisheries contexts (Simmance et al., 2016; Gomese et al., 2019). Photovoice is especially valuable for addressing complex and people-centered environmental issues as it enables researchers to collaborate with communities directly impacted by these issues and those

implementing solutions. The authors acknowledge that the 'community' is never homogenous (Vanclay, 2012) and use 'the community' and 'communities' interchangeably. The terms are used to reflect a group with diverse characteristics who are linked by specific social ties or a geographic location and in this study, they have been directly or indirectly affected but the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project. By combining visual and narrative storytelling, Photovoice helps stimulate social change as it has the potential to empower communities to use photographs and stories to reach decision-makers, including funders, NGOs, and governments, and foster meaningful dialogue. Indeed, Photovoice aims to elevate the voices of those who often lack representation and cannot share their concerns or feel that their experiences are systematically misrepresented. Communities can articulate core messages in a more impactful and emotionally resonant way than words alone as "a picture is worth a thousand words" (Swanson & Ardoin, 2021, p.2). Visual evidence makes it more difficult for decision-makers to overlook issues than relying solely on written evidence. In addition, Photovoice is a versatile tool for data collection, analysis, and dissemination. As a "user-friendly" methodology, it is relatively easy to learn, and it is accessible to most. Photographs can serve as conversation starters in interviews and focus groups and as a means to probe follow-up explanations, as it is sometimes difficult to investigate using direct lines of questioning via formal interviews. Taking photographs can also prompt participants to reflect on their own experiences critically and help them articulate ideas to others more effectively. Sitting down with a researcher and discussing the significance and meaning behind a photograph can be a useful self-reflecting exercise for participants. It can also be a way for researchers to access unique and contextual data, including insights from settings that are otherwise challenging to access, such as on boats, underwater, within homes, or during community gatherings.

However, it is important to recognize that as promising as Photovoice can be, there are growing concerns regarding rigor in the method's use and application. Some authors caution that "the 'user-friendliness' of Photovoice can lead to its misuse as a 'quick-and-easy' replacement for long-term ethnographic engagement." (Liebenberg, 2018, p.1). Other caveats and challenges include ethical concerns, particularly as it relates to informed consent, privacy, and how images are used, shared, and displayed. There might also be biases and challenges in selecting participants that truly represent "the community", and the interpretation of the results can be subjective. Access to technology and providing cameras or smartphones to participants can be a logistical challenge. Participants may feel burdened by the responsibility and the time-consuming nature of taking photos and participating in all the activities. There are also power imbalances between researchers and participants, as researchers often determine the research focus and how the data is analyzed and used (Teti, 2019; Rosemberg & Evans-Agnew, 2020). And finally, Photovoice does not guarantee achieving its goal of community empowerment simply because a study is using this approach (Liebenberg, 2018, 2022), and everyone involved in the study need to be able to navigate these expectations. Despite these challenges, Photovoice can be a powerful and effective research methodology when conducted thoughtfully, ethically, and with attention to these potential issues.

4.4.2. Photovoice project in the Northern Reef of Palau

Photovoice is not a static methodology, and it has evolved and been modified to fit various contexts and research topics (Castleden et al. 2008; Bennett and Dearden et al. 2013; Simmance et al., 2016). This study uses an adapted framework for Photovoice tailored to fisheries and aquaculture research (Simmance et al., 2016). This Photovoice study involved five phases (Figure

6) over four years, which required extensive resources, engagement and trust-building in Palau's Northern Reef communities.

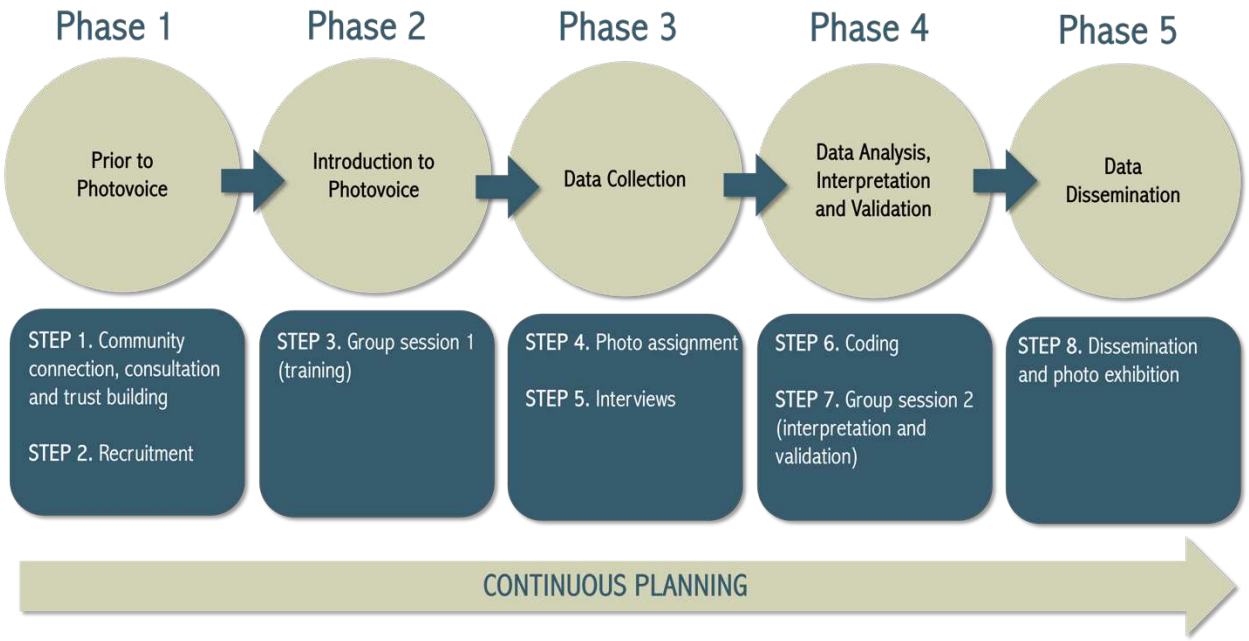


Figure 6: Process of conducting Photovoice (adapted from Simmance et al., 2021).

Phase One focused on community connection, consultation and trust-building. In August 2019, the authors conducted an initial visit to the Northern Reef to gauge interest and feasibility for using Photovoice, invite any feedback and request permission to return to conduct the research. This work builds upon years of trust established by the authors and other colleagues (Carlisle & Gruby, 2018, 2019). After receiving positive feedback and an invitation to conduct the research, the first author returned in the Fall of 2021 for 8 weeks in the Northern Reef to conduct the Photovoice project. Fieldwork was thus conducted the year after Packard funding had ended for the project. As part of this study, we partnered with the Ebiil Society which was essential to ensuring this project was successful – scientifically, ethically, and socially. Ann Singeo and her

team generously contributed their tremendous knowledge and expertise on the research topic, along with guidance on how to conduct research in the Northern Reef communities effectively and in a culturally appropriate way. The first author, Le Cornu, began her visit by reconnecting with people who already expressed interest in participating, then participants were selected using a combination of snowball and purposive sampling to include a diversity of viewpoints and profiles. This approach captured a wide range of socio-economic statuses, years of experience in the fishing sector, and representation across genders, ethnicities, and livelihoods. For the purpose of this study, data was collected only in the State of Ngarchelong where the majority of the activities related to the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project are concentrated. Simmance and colleagues (2016, p.7) explain that "as a rule of thumb, Wang and Burris (1997) recommend to recruit a group of 7 to 10 people to participate in a Photovoice project". A total of 16 individuals participated in the study.

During Phase Two, Le Cornu introduced Photovoice to the research participants by hosting two workshops in the first two weeks of the visit to discuss the research project's objectives, steps, parties involved, participant rights, and ethical considerations. At that point, she also explained the photo assignment and how to work the cameras using photography tips, visual aids, and demonstrations.

Phase Three focused on data collection. As previously mentioned, 16 individuals participated in the Photovoice project, 12 of them were men and 4 of them were women. The ages ranged from 30 to 66 years old. There were 9 individuals – who were all men, over the age of 50. Only one participant fished as a full-time occupation, everyone else had another source of income or was retired. One individual was also a ranger and helped with the monitoring and enforcement of the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project. Participants started with the photo assignment

and were each equipped with a 4K digital waterproof camera (make: Ysence) and, when needed, they had access to 4K underwater action cameras (make: Akaso). Over a period of two weeks, they captured photographs related to the following topics: documenting changes in their natural environment, in their community and in their personal life, as well as benefits and challenges they experienced related to any aspects of the fisheries management project. Following the photograph assignments, Le Cornu conducted semi-structured interviews with Photovoice participants to collect additional information. Participants shared information about themselves and their fishing activities, described their photographs and reflected on topics such as the Packard Foundation exit, their long-term vision for fisheries management in the Northern Reef, and next steps for this Photovoice project. As a complement to the Photovoice project, the author also conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 ocean practitioners involved in the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project including NGO staff, government officials, Packard staff, consultants and scientists, among others. While these practitioners were not the focus of this study – which aimed at elevating the voices of community and fishers impacted by the project – their perspectives offered valuable insights about the decision-making process and implementation of the project. In addition, the dataset included field notes from informal interviews and discussions with over 60 individuals who were familiar with the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project (e.g., fishers, family members of fishers, rangers, other community members of Ngarchelong, NGO staff, scientists, government officials). The dataset also included participant observation, attendance to community events and fishing activities, and document analysis (field notes, management plans, reports, articles, etc.).

During Phase Four, which is focused on data analysis, interpretation and validation, Le Cornu presented preliminary findings during a group session with participants during the last week

of the visit. This session aimed to share emerging themes, ensure that the meanings behind the photos and the stories and the participants voices were accurately captured and represented, and gather feedback on the Photovoice experience. The group also discussed project outcomes and dissemination strategies. After leaving Palau, the author coded, analyzed and interpreted the findings through inductive and deductive thematic using QSR Nvivo. Data analysis mainly focused on findings from the photograph assignment, semi-structured interviews and group sessions with 16 community members in Ngarchelong State. This analysis revealed eight social outcomes of the philanthropic-supported fisheries management project in the Northern Reef. In line with the SIA literature, these social outcomes are both experienced and perceived, direct or indirect, intended or unintended, positive or negative, and span every conceivable social dimension (e.g., cultural, demographic, economic, health, institutional, political).

The final phase (Phase Five) focused on disseminating the study's findings. Throughout the length of project, the authors stayed in regular communication with research participants to keep them informed about the process and providing updates along the way. In December 2023, the first author returned to Palau to present the results back to the community during a group session at the port of Ollei. In addition, the author presented the results during a seminar at the Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) Aquarium with an audience that was comprised of individuals involved in the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project and members of the broader ocean conservation community in Palau. Le Cornu also appeared on a local radio show (Palau Wave Radio) to discuss the study's origin and goals, local partners and key highlights.

4.5. Findings

The findings of this study are organized under eight categories that represent the social outcomes experienced by research participants throughout the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project. In the following sections, 1) we describe these social outcomes in detail, using photographs and quotes from participants to illustrate them. The social outcomes represent a mix of perceived and experienced outcomes, including benefits and challenges associated with the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project. We note that the social outcomes are not always directly linked to specific photographs. Indeed, while some social outcomes emerged from specific photographs, some emerged from follow-up interview conversations. In addition, some photographs might capture multiple outcomes. In addition, 2) we describe the various other contextual factors that research participants mentioned which together with the fisheries management project interacted with to the eight social outcomes. Finally, 3) we discuss the perspectives of ocean conservation practitioners who were involved in the Northern Reef project and highlight common themes that resonated with fishers and community members and key takeaways from the project.

4.5.1. The social outcomes of a philanthropic-supported fisheries management in the Northern Reef

4.5.1.1. Social Outcome 1: Increased fish size and density

Figure 7: Photographs for Social Outcome 1.

Research participants have observed various positive environmental changes and tangible benefits of the fisheries management project. These include an increase in fish population, larger fish, spillover from protected areas, which they directly attributed to seasonal closures, protected

areas, and bans. These findings are supported by a socio-economic study carried out by the Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) to assess the community's overall perspective and understanding of their conservation areas (Marino et al., 2019). The report explains that a majority of respondents believe they see positive environmental impacts as a result of the regulations. One participant compared their area, where regulations are in place, to others lacking such regulations:

> "A good example is fish size limits. The ones that they are catching down south, they're very small, because they're not monitoring the sizes. But here, they're big." (RP13)

RP15 captured a photograph (Photograph 1) of the catch of the day in a cooler to express the effectiveness of the regulations in improving fish size and density. Another participant emphasized the success of the grouper ban in improving fish population and expressed hope for continued regulation in the future:

> "I can see that there's a change. There's more fish. I was diving in the channel and before the ban they were really small and there were a few. After they used that ban, two weeks ago, I went there and there is a lot. I went there, and then I see a lot of groupers. The ban was really, really good and worked. But the ban was three years, and then they want to open for how many years? Forever. Maybe they can ban it for two years and then open for two years and then ban it again. I see the changes." (RP15)

Photograph 2 (RP13) illustrates a "No entry buoy" floating around a protected area which represents the spatial closures implemented as part of the fisheries management project and led to an increase in fish size and density, according to many participants. This participant recognized the importance of protected areas to allow fish populations to grow and overspill, benefiting fisheries in the long-term:

> "A lot of fishermen agreed to put on that protected area because they knew that channel in the protected area has so many different species of fish spawning there. So the idea was, this is closed, it's a really good place for spawning and for the fish to grow there. And eventually they will overspill, then you can fish outside the conservation area." (RP1)

4.5.1.2. Social Outcome 2: New economic opportunities

Figure 8: Photographs for Social Outcome 2.

Research participants highlighted that some aspects of the fisheries management project introduced new economic opportunities for the community. A key component was the alternative livelihoods program, which included the creation of the Northern Reef Fishing Cooperative

(NRFC) (captured in Photograph 3 by RP1) and the introduction of diverse alternative fishing activities such as pelagic fishing, deep sea fishing, flying fish fishing, clam farming and tuna canning. These initiatives generated both additional employment opportunities (e.g., cooperative staff, monitoring role with TNC, and ranger positions) and revenue streams (e.g., sales to the cooperative, restaurants, schools, and other buyers). In Photographs 4, 5 and 6, RP4 captured the process of tuna canning, a new economic opportunity as part of the alternative livelihoods program. One participant explains that these benefits extend beyond cooperative members to the wider community:

> "So this is our coop, this is a good thing for the fishermen and the community. Not only for here in Ngarchelong but also Kayangel State. We sell fish, even though we have a lot of regulations to follow, it's good we still have a little money from our fish and then also the ladies they do arts and craft. It's not only for the coop members but also for the community, for anybody who wants to sell something." (RP1)

Photograph 7 also captures seafood-derived products prepared to be sold by RP9 at the cooperative. Additionally, participants noted that the introduction of new technologies such as Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) – captured in Photograph 8 (RP4), upgraded fishing gears (e.g., new reels) and the acquisition of a new boat for pelagic fishing, have increased fishing efficiency and further expanded economic opportunities, as this participant explains:

> "Before we just have that FAD buoy thing and, now they added that satellite app. More efficient and really helpful." (RP4)

4.5.1.3. Social Outcome 3: Increased buy-in and support for fisheries management

Figure 9: Photographs for Social Outcome 3.

An encouraging outcome is an increase buy-in and support towards the fisheries regulations among community members and a renewed sense of pride and stewardship for the environment. Several participants pointed that support for the regulations has not always been consistent and after an initial opposition, they witnessed an increase in buy-in and support. It is important to note that even today, not every participant supports all aspects of the regulations, but a majority of the 16 participants acknowledge the necessity of conserving fish populations. Many participants emphasized that conservation is deeply rooted in Palauan culture as traditional practices of conserving fish has been observed for a long time (Carlisle & Gruby, 2019). Photograph 9 (RP6) illustrates the growing participation in activities related to fisheries management, by showing the number of fishers who participated in a training at the cooperative. Additionally, the regulations have amplified an already existing sense of stewardship and pride for their environment among some participants. Fishers themselves are now taking on educational roles, informing outsiders, including other fishers and tourists, about the benefits of the regulations:

> "Luckily enough, the ones that own the whole year permit they're the ones reminding the passengers about the regulations." (RP13)

This participant echoed the sentiment, and highlighted the importance of educating about the regulations to ensure the sustainability of resources:

> "I favor regulations. I think from permit to size limit to boat registration to seasonal closures, I think these things help the community and it helps people understand that our resources are not gonna be there forever. If you misuse them, believe me, they're gonna be gone and we'll be empty. We need regulations, we need to educate people and to be more conservative and we gotta think of our resources, they are not just gonna grow, it takes years before we came here, it's been growing and reproducing so we can really enjoy this but it can be gone in very short time." (RP4)

The cooperative has become a central hub and plays a significant role in fostering this sense of stewardship and pride. Active participation of fishers in monitoring activities, particularly in the port of Ollei, where these efforts are concentrated, have resulted in increased compliance with the regulations. These efforts have been made easier with the introduction of new technology, such as cameras, measuring tables, and weighing stations, as well as the involvement of contractors to streamline data collection and monitoring (captured in Photographs 10, 11 and 12 by RP5). One participant noted:

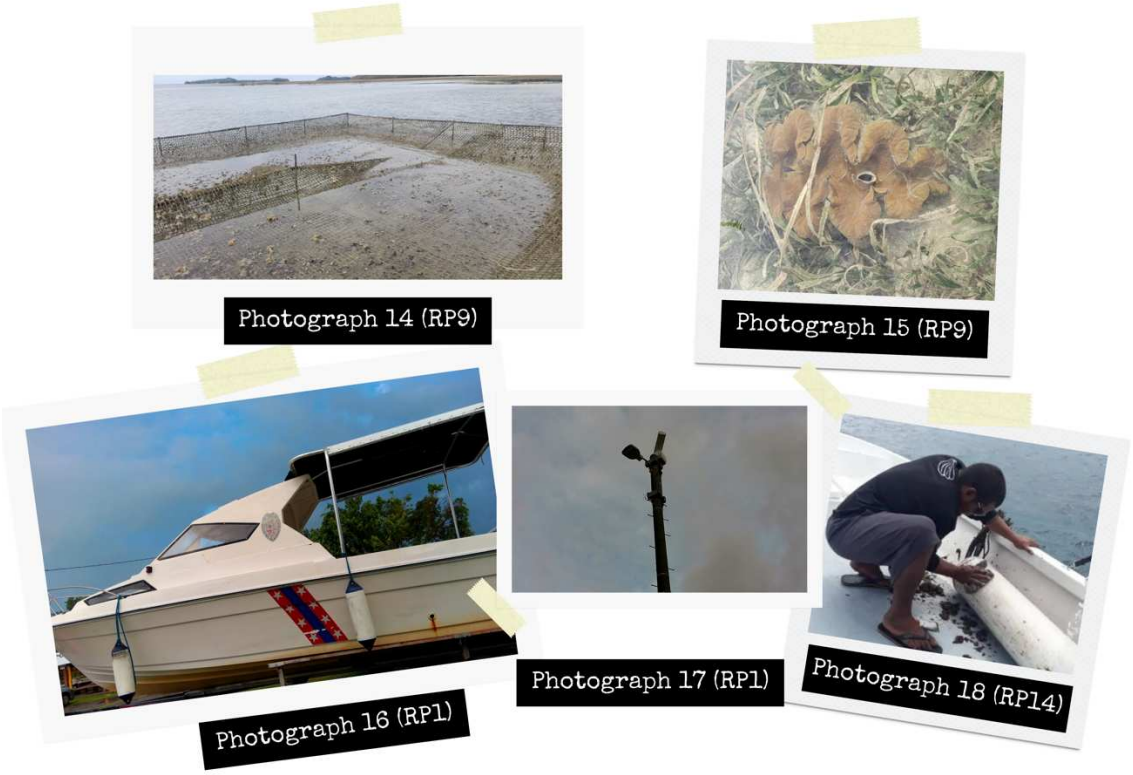
> "I think it's really giving us some idea about the future, what kind of fish is landing in this town. Because we made the regulation so that everybody is going to depart from here and then come back here to check everything. And so, we can at least get the count of the fish. But now with the camera, everybody can do their own, everybody's willing to do that." (RP2)

Incentives, such as raffles for fishing gear (captured in Photograph 13 by RP5), have also encouraged participation and a sense of stewardship. Participants described this initiative:

> "And there's a little price now for that. You get the most pound or weight or something you get the fishing rod and fishing gear. So people are very interested. Everybody's doing it now. That's gonna give you some reward." (RP2)

> "I don't know if I told you about this box thing. So we're trying to incentivize them because, you know, we're asking them to do extra steps. So they run their fish to the table and then they fill a form and at end of the year, we're just gonna collect all those forms and do a raffle. It's a rod and reel combo, that thing is like $800 worth of stuff. None of them have it here. Only one guy that told me that he had one, even the coop doesn't have that kind of gear." (RP5)

4.5.1.4. Social Outcome 4: Unfulfilled promises



Social Outcome 4: Unfulfilled promises

RP9 used photographs of an underwater clam farm (Photographs 14 and 15) to express their frustration with the current challenges the alternative livelihoods program is facing. Challenges with enforcement are highlighted by RP1 in Photographs 16 and 17, which show the patrol boat stationed at the port of Ollei as well as the radar system, both intended as tools to improve enforcement but not being used to their fullest potential. Photograph 18 (RP14) represents the burden on rangers, showing one cleaning a buoy as part of the many additional tasks they must manage alongside enforcement duties.

Figure 10: Photographs for Social Outcome 4.

Despite the experienced and perceived benefits from the fisheries management project described above, participants also pointed that the project introduced many challenges. Indeed, participants expressed frustration that the fisheries management project did not fulfill some of its intended goals, particularly in terms of capacity building and continued support for the cooperative and alternative livelihoods program. While the introduction of alternative livelihoods such as clam farming, flying fish fishing, and pelagic fishing brought some benefits, many participants felt these

initiatives were not supported in the long-term and, at times, created additional burdens. Challenges identified by participants include insufficient support for marketing and business skills on the one hand and for monitoring and enforcement on the other hand. When talking about the alternative livelihoods program, one participant voiced their frustration with the lack of continued capacity and resources to maintain these activities:

> "They tried to find alternatives but they bring another thing that gives us more headache. We still don't know what to do with. If you help somebody with another thing you need to make it work. Here is your coop, here is your fund, find a way to sell your fish. And then end of the day maybe we have not enough money or not enough connection. They need to help us doing this." (RP1)

This participant used the example of clam farming to illustrate their point:

> "I've been fishing for a long time. Clam farming, I never did that thing. So if you just throw me a clam and say "okay, there's yours" and don't show me. I say "oh, it's better I eat one, that's the only thing I know how to do that". So I give some to my relatives, my family and then at the end of the day, I just have nothing to sell." (RP1)

Another participant (RP9) used photographs of an underwater clam farm (Photographs 14 and 15) to express their frustration with the current challenges the alternative livelihoods program is facing. They pointed to other challenges, including poaching, which further undermines the profitability of such initiatives.

In addition, alternative livelihoods, such as pelagic fishing, often require increased resources – fuel, larger boats, expensive gear, and pose greater safety risks. Many participants found this was incompatible with their current capacities and misaligned with their fishing livelihoods:

> "Right now, we have only two fishing boats, few fishing gears, and let's say like 10% of the fishermen know how to use this stuff so we still need a lot of training to be more efficient. Our main target the last two years with this program of pelagic fishing, is mainly tuna all types of tuna and then swordfish, marlin. All pelagic fish, barracuda, wahoo. Those

> are the fish that we're concentrating on. That's actually part of coop, they are they trying to reduce fishing in the reef and concentrate more on the outer reef and pelagic fish. But it's been a challenge. It's a new fishing to us, especially tuna. Out in the blue fishing tuna and marlin. It's really new fishing to us so we're still two years doing it. We got some fish, but not as if I go in the reef. I know I can just go fill up cooler with fish. So it's still learning." (RP4)

Another challenge is the absence of effective support for marketing and business skills to be able to sell fish at the cooperative, along with the inconsistency in catches and a shortage of active fishers which makes it difficult to meet the current demand. There are currently about 90 active cooperative members but a minority actively engages with activities in the cooperative. Some participants have also expressed concern over the absence of full-time employees at the cooperative, which can impact their ability to effectively and regularly engage in activities. Some participants mentioned that they sometimes have to volunteer to keep the cooperative open, as this participant explains:

> "Most of the time in the summerhouse, the phone keeps ringing asking for the coop if there's fish. Most of the time, the guys from the summerhouse, they say "yes there's fish but sorry, there's nobody to sell the fish." So maybe we can find funding that is just to pay somebody to sell the fish. I think it will boost the coop a little bit. […] Most of the time when I come back fishing, I really want to put my fish in the coop because if not, I have to pay additional ice to take care and wait for the cashier to come and buy the fish. And if next day she doesn't show up, then I have to buy more ice. So by the time I sell my fish my expense really keep climbing." (RP1)

Participants also highlighted some challenges with enforcement that could hinder the benefits of the regulations. Specifically, they've pointed out challenges such as a lack of financial, personnel, and infrastructure resources, which have been exacerbated by factors like high fuel prices and the impact of COVID-19 (i.e., the absence of funds coming from the Green Fees and from tourists led to financial cutbacks for rangers). In addition, there are institutional challenges between the National government and the State government, with rangers having limitations in dealing with certain infractions (i.e., they can give warnings and citations, but they cannot arrest

or detain people). These challenges are highlighted by RP1 in Photographs 16 and 17, which show the patrol boat stationed at the port of Ollei as well as the radar system, both intended as tools to improve enforcement but not being used to their fullest potential. Photograph 18 (RP14) represents the burden on rangers, showing one cleaning a buoy as part of the many additional tasks they must manage alongside enforcement duties. At the time of the interviews, there was also a leadership gap resulting from the departure of the rangers' director. As many rangers are relatives of fishers, participants mentioned some struggles managing these relationships and effectively enforce some of the regulations. Finally, enforcement efforts are primarily concentrated in the Ollei area, while other ports within the Northern Reef receive less attention and enforcement. This participant points at inconsistencies in enforcement:

> "The people here, this water and all the fish belongs to them, but then here comes people telling them not to fish that. They don't know why. No one showed them why. So they're going to keep complaining, and they're going to keep doing the same thing. And our law enforcement is going to be stuck in one area, when they could move out, instead of trying to catch the people from their community to be able to focus on other illegal fishing but no they're spending their time trying to do what's not their job." (RP14)

4.5.1.5. Social Outcome 5: Powerlessness

Figure 11: Photographs for Social Outcome 5.

Participants expressed powerlessness regarding the decisions made in the design, funding, implementation, and enforcement of the fisheries management project in the Northern Reef. Powerlessness stemmed from an overall sense of confusion regarding the roles of numerous decision-makers and the activities comprised in the fisheries regulations, discontent for the top-down nature of the decision-making process and a lack of engagement, as well as a lack of communication and transparency.

Confusion about decision-makers' roles and regulations: The involvement of multiple decision-makers in the project was a source of confusion for participants. These decision-makers included NGOs, funders, the government – both State and national, and scientists. In some cases, participants collectively referred to them as "they" when they could not clearly identify the specific roles and responsibilities of each decision-maker involved in the process. In fact, very few participants were aware of the Packard's role in the process, as well as their imminent exit from the region at the time. In addition, participants pointed the lack of clarity surrounding the sheer volume and complexity of the regulations themselves (e.g., size limits, catch limits, bans, seasonal closures, etc.), as this participant explains:

> "I don't think the people know what the regulations are. […] Like, people don't understand "why are we measuring them? why are we doing closures?". Even if they did understand it, they don't have the full information." (RP14)

For example, some of the regulations are implemented by both the government and the cooperative but have different requirements. Specifically, participants mentioned that the size limit for certain species is set to a different number by the State and the cooperative, making it hard for fishers to make sense of the regulations and which fish size they are allowed to catch. Photograph 19 illustrates the catch of RP1 and their confusion about which fish they can sell at the cooperative or not, depending on their size.

Discontent with decision-making processes: In addition to being overwhelmed by the number and complexity of the regulations and the roles of each decision-makers, many participants stressed that there were issues with the decision-making process for designing and implementing regulations which was often perceived as top-down, and occasionally as "aggressive":

> "This fisheries management, I have a really negative opinion on it because I think the government should have started this thing without an aggressive approach to it, toward the

> implementation, enforcement, marketing, it completely failed. I mean, right now, as I take those pictures, I'm telling you the stories that I see. I'm not happy, you know." (RP11)

Although the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project emphasized the importance of community engagement through the establishment of a co-management committee, community meetings, and outreach and awareness campaigns, participants felt excluded from decisions directly affecting their lives. This sense of exclusion was particularly pronounced in cases where decisions were seen as undermining traditional practices like the *bul* (a customary resource management practice). Participants also emphasized that decisions did not include fishers' deep traditional knowledge about their community and the environment:

> "Learn from fishermen, don't give your opinion or decision without fishermen. They know inside the water. They know when the fish is spawning. They know what time or what season there's some fish." (RP8)

Photograph 20 shows two fish with their gonads exposed, as RP12 explained that fishers have deep knowledge about spawning periods through years of observing the environment. Photograph 21 captures fishers in a boat. RP1 was reflecting on the lack of engagement from scientists, NGOs, and funders who rarely join fishers on the water to gain deeper understanding of their livelihoods and daily challenges.

When engaged in community meetings, for example, participants felt that there was unequal representation of the community, as only certain voices, most often the loudest ones, were heard. One participant was especially concerned that "non-fishers" had influence over the decisions made about the regulations:

> "A lot of people are not fishermen but they always influence the Congressmen to change the regulations and the rules. […] At the end of the day, it really hurts the fishermen because you always have so many confusion between fishermen and the guys who make the law. You need to just follow the fishermen, follow the science […] but if you listen to anybody, that's the part where we screw up things." (RP1)

Participants also emphasized the importance of the way decision-makers engage with fishers. Some participants feel like larger gatherings during community meetings can be intimidating and prevent them from expressing their views and opinion, especially when bringing up negative aspects of the regulations or the process.

> "You know, talking during meetings with a lot of people, not all the people can do that. It's hard for me to say something. That is why I really like this thing that we can sit down and talk one on one, we can say everything that we think of and then you empty everything that you want to say […] then it will be heard later because we are not directly talking to them. And if we talk like this at those meetings that TNC conducts with the whole community and these Packard guys, outsiders, researchers, and then sometimes it makes you like nervous, sometimes you just shut down. Sometimes you don't want to say negative things about the thing. I think Packard they came up with TNC but Palauans are like really respectful even though at the meeting there's something that some of us don't like, but to respect TNC and Packard people we didn't want to say it right there. It's hard." (RP1)

When engagement happened, participants felt that it was superficial and that they were being used as a "check-off" on a list rather than being meaningfully involved. This often happens in the weakest level of community engagement when communities are only consulted rather than being empowered in the decision-making process (Betsill et al., 2024). The following quotes illustrate this sentiment:

> "See that's the thing, because they will say that they did one meeting at the bai. They called everybody, whoever shows up shows up, whoever doesn't doesn't and they do that meeting, they checked off their list, they go back to their office, and they do it and they're able to get their money." (RP14)

> "This regulation, I don't like this regulation. Well, in the beginning, they just come and interview the fishermen. They didn't go out fishing and learn about the ocean, and study the ocean […] then they went to their office and make regulations and fishermen suffer for what they did." (RP3)

Additionally, participants voiced concerns around an excess of research activities that has not effectively addressed the actual needs and challenges of local communities and sometimes

created new challenges, reinforcing "parachute science" practices (de Vos & Schwartz, 2022; Singeo & Ferguson, 2022). The following quote illustrates this sentiment:

> "All the fishermen really hate the research, especially the marine biologists. Why? Because every time you come right to us and at the end of the day, there's a new thing that will stop the fishermen from fishing or end up hurting us. And I'm not going to do that." (RP1)

Lack of communication and transparency: Along with a perceived top-down process, research participants emphasized a lack of transparency and communication which further exacerbated tensions and disconnect between decision-makers and community members. Participants emphasized the need for better engagement of fishers to ensure that their voices and concerns are heard, as this participant expresses:

> "They have to inform the community of the decisions. Ask them for what their opinions are, what their challenges are because every time they're called to a meeting, it's to fight whether to say yes or no about something. They just need to be part of the process, but they were never in the beginning." (RP14)

Participants also stressed the importance of communicating often and clearly, especially when it comes to the outcomes and effectiveness of the regulations. Fishers dedicate significant time and resources to comply with regulations that are supposed to produce positive environmental impacts but are rarely informed by decision-makers about whether these regulations are achieving their intended goals and how fishers' efforts contributed to these outcomes. These participants put it in their own words:

> "There should be some sort of monitoring system that can actually tell the people of Ngarchelong "this is what's happening since the closure". Because this thing has been going on for years, and people are complaining about the same thing. Why do I need a permit? Why do I have to catch fish at a certain time? But if they see their results, it would probably change." (RP14)

> “The thing is those funders, they just come to the NGOs office, they take their study from fishermen. But at least we want to see the results. […] We are waiting for the results, but nobody came in for this. Nothing. We're really confused. They just came talking to the fishermen and when they left, we were in the blind.” (RP3)

Another recurring theme among participant was the lack of transparency, particularly regarding funding and its allocation. Participants believed that “people with money” had a significant impact on shaping regulations and policies, but often in ways that diverged from the actual needs of local communities. As this participant explains:

> “I don't know who came in and said you're doing it wrong and we need to change it. People with money. Money changes everything. Almost everything.” (RP10)

Participants questioned the accountability of decision-makers, suggesting that there should be more transparency to ensure that the financial resources provided to NGOs align with the intended purposes, and that they ultimately benefit fishers. While disagreeing on whether funders and NGOs are “good” or “bad”, these two participants emphasized a need for better understanding how funding flows directly to communities:

> “I think the NGOs are really great. They have a good, I should say they have emotional feelings to do something that hopefully elevate standards, or creating something that's useful for others. I'm not contesting that. The implementation and the regulation and how they use the money is what needs to be scrutinized. NGOs should be regulated to ensure that the donor purpose match what they pay for. I mean, imagine you pay for a car, and you're gonna get a wheelbarrow?” (RP11)

> “The funders they just come here and they give us a headache. […] NGOs just take money. What about fishermen? What about money? You just get the money, what about the fishermen? They just get the grant from the grantor just for them not for fishermen. Because they’re the ones to get the grant for what they want. They earned money. What about the fishermen and local people who stay in this area. What are they gonna do?” (RP3)

Finally, in some cases, participants went beyond expressing exhaustion, frustration or anger towards decision-makers and reported tension and conflict between the community and decision-makers. Photograph 22 (RP8) displays a meeting with lawmakers, chiefs and delegates

and represents the tension between decision-makers and community members. This participant voiced:

> "This is impacting the community. This is a picture with a lawmaker there, here are the chiefs and here are the delegates. And I took the picture because I can show the community in conflict with lawmakers." (RP8)

Feeling of not mattering: Powerlessness also stemmed from a feeling among participants that "conserving fish" is prioritized over their livelihoods. For example, one participant expresses frustration about the perceived disconnect between the value placed on conservation efforts and the lack of support for the local fishing communities:

> "I give you an example, so we're going to make a decision so we can conserve the fish. They say there is no fish so we got to conserve it. So then they convince people from our legislature this is a good thing, it's for conservation. All of these people will help us conserve our fish, which is a good thing, only problem is they forgot about the fishermen." (RP10)

This quote highlights the participant's frustration with decision-makers' – especially the government – lack of understanding and support for fishers' needs and realities. They contrast their experience with cooperatives in Japan, which are specifically designed to facilitate fishermen's work:

> "For example, we get this coop. The board members of this coop should be people who understand business and who are fishermen. I've heard in Japan the fishermen go to the coop and all they gotta do is just park the boat, people will tie it, get their fish and everything. They cater that thing to support the fishermen. Here, no, fishermen come here, it's closed, you got to call, you got to buy ice so the fish won't get bad. Because it's full of these people who don't understand how hard it is to fish. And they're not in business. So, they there's no customer service here. Not only we're trying to figure these things out, but there's not a lot of funding, the government is not even catering to this." (RP5)

4.5.1.6. Social Outcome 6: Unequal distribution of impacts

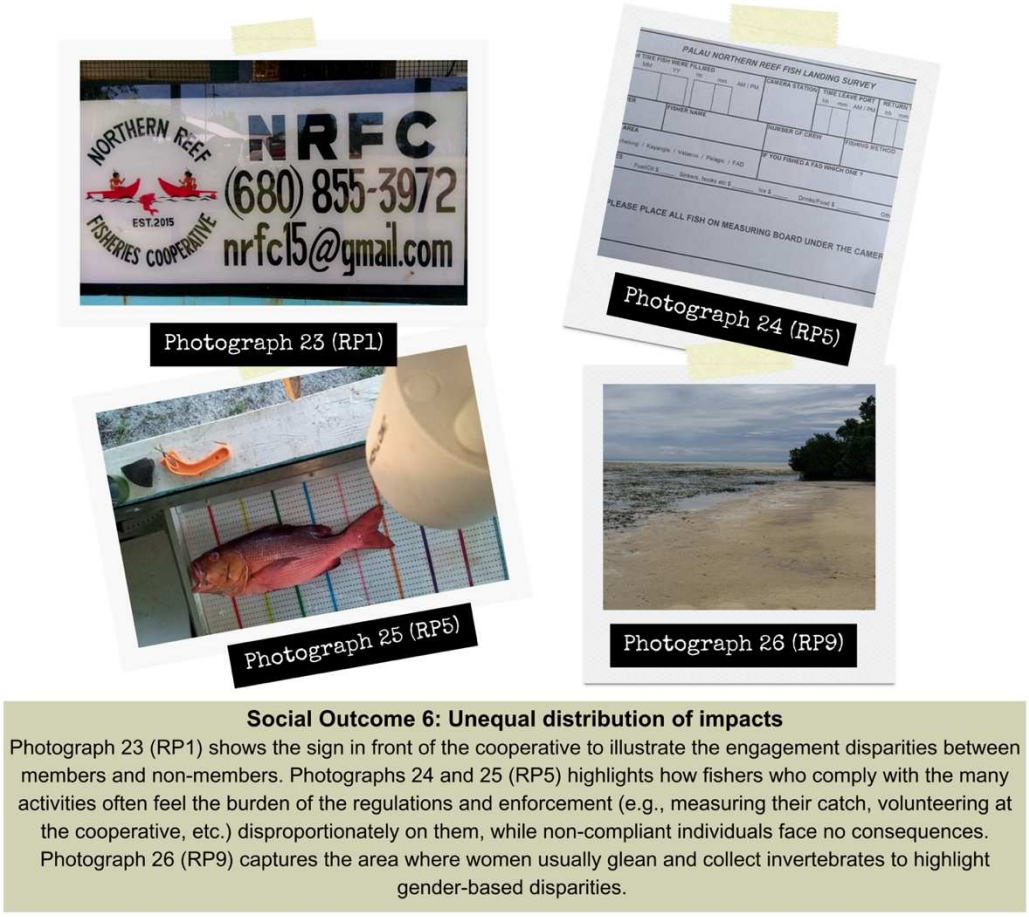


Figure 12: Photographs for Social Outcome 6.

Many participants felt that the activities, burden and impacts (both positive and negative) related to the fisheries management project were unequally distributed, with significant disparities among different groups in the community. Participants identified engagement disparities, compliance disparities geographic-based disparities, gender-based disparities and economic status disparities.

Engagement disparities: There are significant disparities linked to the level of engagement and benefits received from the cooperative between members and non-members. While over 90

individuals are technically members of the cooperative, only a small number actively contribute and participate. Non-members often face challenges navigating regulations and understanding how to leverage benefits of the cooperative to their advantage, such as accessing markets to sell their catch. Photograph 23 (RP1) shows the sign in front of the cooperative to illustrate the engagement disparities between members and non-members of the cooperative. This participant explains the challenges facing non-members:

> "I mean, so let's say in the whole community of Ngarchelong, more than half are impacted negatively. I just say that because they are not members of the cooperative. They are always having trouble with the regulations and the rules. There are a lot of people who refuse to get their permit. […] I think more people understand, and more people know how to use all the reforms. But most of the community, they don't understand, and they don't know how to use it to their benefit. That's how I see it. For example, those who are members of the cooperative, they have a better access and easy access to selling the fish, and I believe that the others, who are not members, would probably have the same easy access if they were to be members of the cooperative." (RP14)

Compliance disparities: Participants mentioned the disparities between individuals who comply with the regulations and the ones who engage in poaching activities or disregard the regulations. Those who comply with the regulations often feel the burden of the regulations and enforcement (e.g., measuring their catch, volunteering at the cooperative, etc.) disproportionately on them – captured in Photographs 24 and 25 (RP5), while non-compliant individuals face no consequences. Participants expressed frustration, as regulations appear to reward rule-breakers rather than support those who follow the system:

> "What's the point? All these regulations they're just going to work on the people that don't follow them. And you're just rewarding the criminals." (RP5)

> "The main reason they were putting this permit thing on so it will discourage people from outside. But it was really the opposite, it really encouraged them to come because if you pay $5 which is really cheap then you get some more fish and then nobody sees you and then you get whatever you want and go. The only thing I think about is, why don't we increase the permit for outsiders to make them not wanting to come?" (RP1)

Location-based disparities: Another disparity exists in the attention and resources allocated to different ports in the state of Ngarchelong. The cooperative and activities associated with the regulations and alternative livelihoods program are concentrated around the port of Ollei, leading to a lack of involvement and engagement from fishers in other areas. Participants attributed this disparity to historical factors (i.e., fishing is based on hamlet boundaries), a lack of awareness and communication regarding the regulations and their benefits outside of Ollei and a reluctance to have to comply with the regulations. One participant highlighted this divide:

> "Nothing's happening in the rest of the areas. And I think that's also why people don't want to participate because even if it's a whole community, there's still some barriers, the hamlets and the history. But it's always been like that. So it's kind of hard to, they have their own side, and they want to have something in their own lives to support them. Even though the NRFC is for all of Ngarchelong people, but I bet you if it was placed in between villages, there probably be more people taking advantage of it. It's all the way here. And only people who are from here, who are comfortable being here are the ones taking advantage. Because there's two other ports, there's the other port on the other side, and this side. They have pretty much the same water access to fish but still they don't want to come here and weighing their stuff and then go. It's just too much. I know that the cooperative has put some effort into having people go there. […] The location is one thing. But then again, they did not put time to inform the public about what's going on. I think there's a lot of things that contribute to why they don't take advantage of the cooperative. Maybe not just the location, but just overall not knowing what it means to the environment is probably why. They just think about what they get. They don't bother to comply with the laws." (RP14)

Another participant described the reluctance in other areas:

> "So like, we have our station set up here and we've tried to start this with other port, and they were like "No cause last time these fishery people came and last time they were here they left and then all of a sudden, we cannot catch this fish and we cannot catch this other fish." So they're like, "No we don't want it." (RP5)

Gender-based disparities: Some participants highlighted gender-based disparities in the support and management of different types of fisheries. Women, who have historically engaged in activities such as gleaning, are now faced with additional burden and required to pay a permit

without receiving equivalent support for monitoring, enforcement, or marketing. The focus of the Northen Reef Fisheries Management project, which predominately involves men, focuses on the reef and outer reef, neglecting the needs and concerns of fisherwomen. Photograph 26 (RP9) captures the area where women usually glean and collect invertebrates to highlight gender-based disparities. This quote highlights how women's fishing activities are under-supported compared to the more structured support available for reef fisheries:

> **"**Part of the reforms was to have everyone have permits in order to go fishing, or to do any activities in the water. So the women they have to pay the $10 to go and glean but in return, there's nothing to support them. All of the conservation management are focusing on the reef and the outer reef. They have to pay but nobody's supporting them. No monitoring, no enforcement, no management plan for them. Nothing. No marketing support for them. Even the cooperative they would have opened their doors for them but it's not like a focus for them." (RP14)

Economic-based disparities: Economic disparities were also a recurring problem, particularly as recent conversation about increasing permit fees raised concerns about its impact on low-income individuals as it is seen as a potential challenge for those who depend on fishing for their livelihoods. Participants suggest that the burden of the increased fees should be shifted to foreign and "outside" fishers rather than local fishers. One participant expressed:

> "The fish permit system is really good idea and I'm happy to buy and pay for it for $10. Just recently they said we're going to increase it to $20, I fought that not for me because you know I don't care if it's $50 a year I'm still fine with it. But the thing is the poor low-income people who depend on this fishing this is not going to work out for them. Our state or foreign fishing people should pay that you know. They can go fish and enjoy and spend money to support that." (RP11)

> "I have to pay the money to get a permit to go fishing, that's income for the State and they don't raise the salaries, a lot of people still earn 3.50 an hour. It's so hard, they're really suffering, it's not enough money to provide them the welfare." (RP16)

4.5.1.7. Social Outcome 7: Erosion of Customary Marine Tenure

Social Outcome 7: Erosion of Customary Marine Tenure

RP10 reminisced about the importance of passing down traditional fishing knowledge and practices and how important it is to "Teach your child something new every day", as illustrated in Photograph 27. RP10 also mentioned the paradox of decision-makers focusing on community-based, a concepted rooted in traditional practices, as captured in a conservation poster in Photograph 28.

Figure 13: Photographs for Social Outcome 7.

Participants expressed that the fisheries management project contributed to the erosion of Customary Marine Tenure in the Northern Reef. Specifically, they pointed to the loss of certain traditional conservation practices, a perceived appropriation of traditional practices, and disruptions in community dynamics.

Loss of traditional conservation practices: The introduction of fisheries management in the Northern Reef has raised questions about its impacts on existing systems of Customary Marine Tenure (CMT). Participants were concerned that the regulations further eroded traditional systems, which historically played a critical role in resource management and conservation practices. Palau's CMT systems empowered villages to manage their natural resources, with chiefs serving as stewards who implemented a suite of measures and restrictions to ensure sustainable use. These

included practices like temporary area closures and bans on harvesting certain species, known as *bul*. These practices relied heavily on community cohesion, as explained in this participant's description of restrictions put in place by the chief:

> "In here, before in this place, we have one chief and nine members. So, when everybody's doing some kind of trouble in the village, then the chief say we have a community meeting. So we go to a bai. What's the problem in this community? Curfew? Okay. Nine o'clock." (RP3)

While participants acknowledged that broader societal factors contributed to this social outcome, they expressed that those fisheries regulations further eroded traditional practices, and especially modified access to resources from culturally-embedded practices to a top-down government-regulated approach, and interfered with traditional village boundaries and chiefs' authority. Participants reflected on this transition, explaining that public lands and waters now fall under the governor's jurisdiction, not only challenging the legitimacy of the *bul* but also created inconsistencies in enforcement. Traditional enforcement, which was grounded in local authority and community cohesion, has been replaced by formal laws that many perceived as less effective. Other participants complained about the new regulations and the lack of robust enforcement mechanisms, which has weakened traditional practices:

> "The enforcement is not there. You know, there's no enforcement. I know, from my early childhood, the chief will say, "Okay, you're not going to fish on this part of the reef." And anybody who go in there, the penalty is not something you want to mess with because it was local law. It was not written law. But now, we have all kinds of law that people get away with." (RP11)

Others reminisced about the importance of passing down traditional fishing knowledge and practices. This participant highlights how important it is to "Teach your child something new every day", as illustrated in Photograph 27 (RP10) and the following quote:

> "That's a father and son that went fishing and then he's teaching the son how to clean the fish and then wrapping it traditionally. When we cook the fish we put coconut leaves on it. So we cook the fish, especially fish that has been cut or like part fish so when you give it to somebody they can pick up one of those wrappers. No gas just firewood. The painting says "Teach your child something new every day." (RP10)

Perceived appropriation of traditional practices: Some participants expressed frustration that aspects of the fisheries management project seem to appropriate traditional practices. One participant mentioned the paradox of decision-makers focusing on community-based conservation, a concepted rooted in traditional practices, as captured in a conservation poster in Photograph 28 (RP10). This participant felt that these practices have been institutionalized and are now being used against them as conservation efforts have taken away their autonomy while dictating how their traditional practices should be implemented:

> "They always say "community-based this, community-based that, oh this is community-based conservation". They say it is good for us. […] And it's true because we're self-governed communities. […] The buls are very specific to their place, pretty specific to a community. It's community-based." We've been doing this for a long time. Are you trying to revive our own traditions? You took it away from us and then now you're trying to tell us this is what we're supposed to do?" (RP10)

Disruption of community dynamics: As part of the management project, a new permit system was introduced in 2017, which fundamentally altered the dynamics of resource access in the Northern Reef. This permit system allows non-residents to fish by purchasing permits, redefining fishery access from a communal right governed by CMT to a privilege granted by the government. As Carlisle (2019, p.527) noted, this redefinition "potentially [impacts] the social benefits supported by the community's administration of CMT". Historically, "outsiders" (non-residents) had to follow a number of rules to gain access to the fishery which helped "support a flow of benefits that contribute to the welfare of the resident community" (p.535). A participant described how the permit system disrupted these longstanding practices:

> “The state law is just killing our culture. You just mainly broke our culture and invited the whole Palau to come fish here. So if anything, the whole Palau is safe, because they have their own rules that they're still following. But this is not working for me. Because originally where I'm from, when I bring my husband, they ask me “is he going fishing?” because everybody in town, every kid and every ranger is aware that if he does, it's only once a month. In Ngeremlengui, they're very strict. And then they know that I'm from there, so I can fish there anytime I want, but he's not. So he goes once a month with me and that's it.” (RP9)

Although the permit system was designed to track fishing activities, help with enforcement, promote local access, limit non-residents access, and generate revenues to cover administrative costs, participants felt that it led to the erosion of traditional resource access and management systems. By allowing non-residents to fish in the Northern Reef, the system undermined the community’s ability to regulate resource use. In addition, participants pointed out challenges in monitoring fishing activities and enforcing regulations on “outside” fishers who often bypass measuring checkpoints at the Ollei port and are difficult to track on the water.

4.5.1.8. Social Outcome 8: Change in fishing practices and fish consumption

Social Outcome 8: Changes in fishing practices and fish consumption
Participants attributed this decline in youth interest to the growing preference among youth for conservation efforts over preserving fishing traditions (e.g., Palauan youth is taught to be "friends" with fish, turtles and sharks and not to consume them, as represented in Photograph 29 by RP9). Photograph 30 (RP12) shows a family fishing together, representing the participant's hope that Palauan youth will continue carrying on these traditions. Photograph 31 captures a meal cooked with reef fish, a dietary preference for many Palauans that is disrupted by the regulations.

Figure 14: Photographs for Social Outcome 8.

Participants noted a change in fishing practices and consumption patterns in Palau. These shifts are influenced by various external factors such as declining youth interest in fishing and eating fish, global commodification of fish, and the introduction of foreign seafood markets. However, participants specifically highlighted the role of the fisheries regulations in eroding fishing practices and ways of consuming fish, especially the introduction of new fishing techniques and target species to reduce pressure on reef areas, which often do not align with Palauan fishing traditions or dietary preferences.

Declining fishing activities and livelihoods: Fishing in Palau has historically held immense significance and served multiple purposes (e.g., commercial sale, consumption, and customary use). However, societal changes and the implementation of fisheries regulations led to a decline in

fishing activities and livelihoods. While fishing continues to hold significance for customs and consumption, there has been a notable decline in the number of individuals engaged in full-time fishing. For many, fishing is no longer a viable full-time occupation for the majority of fishers, and they now rely on additional sources of income to sustain their livelihoods (e.g., in the tourism industry or through government employment). Participants attributed this change to the regulations, such as bans and quota on certain species. These restrictions would limit the volume of fish that can be caught, making it difficult to earn enough income to support themselves through fishing alone.

It is also worth noting the growing disinterest in fishing among Palauan youth which further exacerbates the decline of fishing practices and livelihoods. Participants frequently expressed concern about younger generations' lack of interest in fishing or even eating fish:

> "Because kids for now, they're usually on the internet. So I don't know if they know how to fish or know how to tie a hook. For now, they prefer indoors than outdoors." (RP10)

Participants attributed this decline in youth interest to the growing preference among youth for conservation efforts over preserving fishing traditions (e.g., Palauan youth is taught to be "friends" with fish, turtles and sharks and not to consume them, as represented in Photograph 30 by RP9). This participant reinforces this sentiment:

> "It's the same with the turtles, they had a whole big campaign about "turtles are our friends and blah blah blah". […] Right now, we have too many sharks. Because we're a sanctuary. They forgot about that too. They teach kids at school and then kids don't kill the sharks. Because if you kill the sharks, it's going to upset the whole picture. The sharks have grown, they're smart. We cannot do anything to the sharks, they are almost extinct. Not here. Are you saving them for somebody else? Or us? Tell us the truth?" (RP10)

The same participant mentioned that the notion of success in contemporary Palau is often associated with professions beyond fishing and farming, which can create significant barriers for the younger generation to embrace traditional practices:

> "Success today means, as far as our education system is set up, you cannot be a fisherman, you cannot be a farmer unless you have so much money. You either become a doctor and become a politician or become something that makes money, that's success. So that's why it's very difficult." (RP10)

Participants also attributed this decline in youth participation in fishing activities to the erosion of Customary Marine Tenure (CMT), as described earlier. Fisheries regulations have transformed traditional practices, often leaving the youth disconnected and excluded from these cultural activities. Participants proposed that supporting youth through funding, whether related to conservation or other activities, could be a solution to address this challenge, helping them reconnect with traditional practices and find their place in the community and connect with their traditions, including fishing:

> "I think with conservation growing, people like myself, who is very involved in the youth need to find more support. If it's not conservation, something else but to be able to find themselves, fit in the community, find a purpose, because Palauans youth grew up knowing "this is my part, this is my role". But it's fading away, people are just growing up struggling to find their role in the community. I think that's one of the problems in Palau. We have so much money and so much support for like conservation but there's very less support for the youth of Palau." (RP14)

Furthermore, participants felt that excluding individuals under 18 from getting a permit exacerbated the decline of younger fishers participating in those activities as it disrupted an intergenerational transfer of traditional fishing skills and knowledge while fishing with family members. Photograph 31 (RP12) shows a family fishing together, representing the participant's hope that Palauan youth will continue carrying on these traditions.

Change in fishing techniques and target species: The evolution of fishing practices also includes the techniques employed and the species targeted by fishers. The alternative livelihoods program introduced new livelihood opportunities but also introduced new fishing practices and techniques. These include methods like flying fish, deep bottom fishing, and pelagic fishing, which stand in contrast to traditional practices such as spearfishing and handlining.

Commodification of fish: Another shift is the perception of fish and its increasing commercialization (e.g., locally for restaurants and tourists, or for exporting). Fish, which was traditionally not seen as a source of income, has now become a valuable commodity. Participants attributed this change to the fisheries management project, and more specifically the creation of the cooperative for selling fish, and the growing importance of fish to the tourism industry. However, this commercialization has also raised concerns among participants. They emphasized that conservation, while promoting fish as a valuable resource, has placed a burden on fishers.

> "Fish has become money right now, before it was not. Conservation has made it money. Tourists are for money. Conservation has become more of a burden to people. The fish are happy." (RP10)

Change in fish consumption: Research participants explained that some aspects of the regulations do not align with the social context, as many Palauans prefer reef fish over pelagic fish. Transitioning to pelagic fishing to alleviate the pressure on reef fish would necessitate a significant shift in dietary habits, as many Palauans prefer smaller reef fish. Participants felt that pelagic fish should serve as a source of additional revenue for the tourism sector (i.e., be sold to restaurants), but many participants expressed they would prefer to not consume it. This preference for reef fish is deeply rooted in cultural values and often a preference for older generations in Palau, due to their familiarity with its taste and use, as this participant explains:

> "Also Palauans, they prefer reef fish. It's also a new thing for them to eat pelagic fish, so it's a new thing for the whole entire nation. It's not easy to sell pelagic fish to a whole nation who is used to eating reef fish. It's about the taste in Palau reef fish. If you go to different states, different areas have different tastes of fish. […] Older people in Palau eat reef fish. They eat reef fish because that was the available resource to them, and they're used to the taste, they're used to how to use it, when to use it, what to use it for. So when you bring a pelagic fish to people, they are gonna be like no, you cannot use pelagic fish." (RP14)

Photograph 32 captures a meal cooked with reef fish, a dietary preference for many Palauans that is disrupted by the regulations. As mentioned earlier, a pattern in dietary changes is the fact that the youth is not interest in eating fish anymore, as this participant points out:

> "You cook fish, but they don't like to eat it. They say they protect this reef for next generation, but next generation they just eat chicken or meat." (RP3)

Participants mentioned being proud that the government is taking steps to reintroduce fish at school and that the cooperative is playing a supplier role:

> "The coop is providing for all the public schools in Palau. That is one thing that I'm really proud of because most of the time these national congressmen say, even the late, former president Tommy, he said we keep this for the future generations. So always, in my mind is for them to just see, cause in my house they don't wanna eat fresh fish. They prefer spam or tuna. So one thing we need to do is let them eat fish so they know that it is our food and it's good. Also good for our health. So I always try to make my kids want to eat fish but only few kind of menu they want only fry. Cooking like the old ways they don't want it." (RP1)

4.5.2. Interactions with broader social change processes

All of these social outcomes are not working in isolation. Indeed, participants acknowledge that other factors play a significant role in shaping social outcomes in conjunction with the fisheries management project which sometimes exacerbate these outcomes. We categorized them under: policy interactions, environmental changes, socio-economic changes and globalization (Figure

15). As an example, this participant sums up the various other obstacles fishers face when going fishing:

> "The gas it's too expensive. It's just riskier. Then you go there and you battle sharks. They bite into your wallet because once they got the fish you cannot sell it. And then there's the weather. There's a lot of obstacles." (RP5)

Figure 15: Photographs of the broader social change processes interacting with social outcomes. They are organized under four categories: policy interactions, environmental changes, socio-economic changes and globalization.

Policy interactions: The implementation of the fisheries regulations interacts with and is influenced by other ongoing conservation activities, both historical and current. Participants frequently mentioned the broader realm of conservation when discussing the regulations, making

it challenging to separate the two when specifically asked about the Northern Reef project. For example, the establishment of a shark sanctuary, or regulations for species like turtles, or the national export ban for certain species are often referred as conservation broadly. This participant used the example of shark conservation:

> "These Congressmen, once they told the public that one shark is worth a million dollar. There's 1000 sharks here and we don't have a penny for them. Nobody's watching them, and they're eating our fish. It's worthless. We do not sell them, we do not eat them and they eat our fish. So how come you say they're worth a million dollar?" (RP10)

Indeed, participants are increasingly worried about their catch being eaten by sharks and the associated economic consequences (i.e., not being able to sell their catch). RP10 explained that because of shark sanctuaries, they are not allowed to catch sharks for consumption and feel like they are over-populated in some areas. Photographs 32 (RP5) and 33 (RP6) show fish being eaten by sharks and discarded because they cannot be consumed or sold.

Environmental changes: Environmental factors, especially those related to climate change, can strongly shape the experiences of fishers. Participants pointed out that increasing occurrences of extreme weather events like typhoons and storms make fishing riskier and can damage the reefs, affecting the availability of fish, as these participant explain:

> "One of the problems for the fishermen, not only fishermen but the communities who depend on the water. Before it takes a really long time to have a bad weather. But now these days, the weather is changing. It makes it hard for the fishermen to go out. And also, it shows that the weather's changing, it means there's the red flag, it means there is a depression or storm or mostly typhoon. Every time there's typhoon there is always damage for the reef. That's the one of the things I always said that it's not only overfishing, that destroys or declines the number of fish, it includes the weather and it also includes human activities like this pollution, like too much plastic bottles, plastic parts, or erosion from the construction from houses or roads or whatever else. And those are the problems to damage the reef, that's the other reasons why the fish are declining. I always want the people to know that all these together including fishing, not only fishing are the ones, all these together kill the corals and the fish." (RP1)

> "The fishes maybe they're relocated? Or the current or this climate change. Before when we have a spot when we go out fishing, you just drop your anchor that's the time you catch fish. But today the fish I don't know where they stay now." (RP3)

Photographs 34 (RP1) and 35 (RP2) respectively capture a red flag signifying an upcoming storm and the aftermath of the storm at the port.

Pollution and garbage from international waters have become significant issues, contaminating mangroves, reefs, and shorelines, further degrading the reef, as this participant explains:

> "The biggest problem in Palau is trash, commercial trash from plastic, nets, slippers shoes, gill net, you name it. And we don't have control on that. If we can somehow manage to keep it clean and recycle these things for human use or whatever can be done to keep our ocean clean." (RP11)

Participants highlighted that other factors like deforestation increasingly lead to erosion and sedimentation. Soil erosion from the mountains can affect the quality of water and the health of the marine environment. Photographs 36 and 37 (RP3) respectively show a mountain being eroded and an area near the port of Ollei that used to have fish, but the participant explains that erosion killed the fish. This participant expresses concerns about erosion:

> "So that mountain over there, they have a grant since last three months ago. We have to plant the tree so to protect the erosion to the ocean. We protect that area so the erosion cannot go into the water. [..] The erosion from the mountain through the dam to the waterfall to the water. We have to protect that erosion because the erosion can destroy the water." (RP3)

Socio-economic changes: A majority of participants voiced their struggle with inflation, particularly in fuel prices, and how it affects the affordability of their fishing activities. In conjunction with catch limits, several participants explain that they sometimes do not "break even" at the end of a fishing trip, as these participants explain:

> "Like I said I pay my gas and sometimes I lose." (RP7)

> “I think one of the problem here is people don't go fishing all the time because the gas price is too high now.” (RP2)
>
> “The thing is, this small company and this big company should buy direct to this coop. They support the state coop and the majority of the price go to the fishermen they're the ones who do the hard work. They are sitting in the hot sun all day. The fisherman has to catch it, bring it to the port, put ice in it and transport it to Koror. And the thing is, when it doesn't break even, or fishermen experience a loss, they have to wait to earn that money back to reimburse them or not to reimburse but to continue the fishing activity. Because you don't have money. You don't have gas. What are you gonna do?” (RP11)

Participants also voiced that the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the absence of tourists, had negative effects on the local economy, leading to the closure of restaurants and affecting the livelihoods of those dependent on tourism for direct or additional income. These participants point out how COVID affected them:

> “Of course, we still have this issue. COVID. Before we were 120,000 tourists a year, now we're practically nothing? So restaurants are closing.” (RP11)
>
> “So those ones [fish], they sell higher and the coop would buy them at a higher price, they used to buy them for $4.50 a pound and then the COVID happened so then the restaurant, the hotel they stop buying from the coop and the price dropped.” (RP5)

Finally, while being a significant additional source of income, tourism and its consequences (e.g., infrastructure development, such as roads, hotels, houses, and foreign investment) can lead to erosion and affect the environment. Participants explained that the growth of the tourism sector has led to changes in land use and can contribute to the depletion of marine resources. In Photograph 38, RP11 captured the numerous developments happening in Palau such as new road constructions.

Globalization: Some participants emphasized that the increase of imported and foreign seafood into local markets have had repercussions for local markets and in conjunction with limiting

fisheries regulations, the availability of fish for the local market has shrunk, as this participant point out:

> "This is the where the community market is. But the thing is, there are really few fish there because the fishermen most of those making market actually they use the small fish but these rules and regulation they just come and then tell the people don't get the small ones. So you cannot sell... The thing is these rules and regulation are really affecting the community. [Foreign sellers] already take over the market only buy their stuff from the store, they cook and sell. There's no local food in there." (RP3)

Photograph 39 (RP3) shows a seller at the local market and illustrates the concerns voiced in the quote above. In the following quote, the participant explains their concern about the over-reliance on imported goods:

> "He went to Surangel [supermarket store] and said: Look Korean product, US product, Filipino product that's the worst thing", he didn't even see any local product over there so I don't know why we are always telling the world that we are independent we have our spot in the United Nations and we can't even feed ourselves. […] We're using US money and we're eating worldwide variety of food, that's the thing that we need to change." (RP1)

In Photograph 40, RP11 captured the catch of the day at a supermarket store to illustrate that local fishers often have to compete with imported goods.

4.5.3. Practitioners' perspectives on the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project

In addition to the Photovoice project with community members, we conducted interviews with 16 ocean conservation practitioners who have been involved in the funding, design and implementation of the Northern Reef project. As a reminder, these interviews included NGO staff, government officials, Packard staff, consultants and scientists, among others. While practitioners were not the focus of this study, these interviews offered valuable insights that complement and contextualize community perspectives within the challenges practitioners face in implementing

projects supported by foreign donors. These interviews also highlight practitioners' reflexivity and eagerness to learn from the Northern Reef experience.

Practitioners were aware of power imbalances due to the perceived top-down nature of the project, a lack of community engagement, communication and transparency, and occasional conflict which led to an overall sense of distrust and frustration from community members towards the project and decision-makers. Practitioners emphasized that, at the beginning, the project faced resistance from certain community members. Some of them mentioned that it was difficult to balance Packard's global conservation goals with local community needs, which sometimes created tensions. As this practitioner explains:

> *"*Making sure that when we show up, we show up in support of, and in concert with, and behind local needs. Now that's sometimes put into conflict with our global goals." (RP26)

Practitioners also mentioned that partnerships with larger international NGOs were necessary but raised questions about their legitimacy, especially their ambitious ideas and implementation plans which were not always perceived as being aligned with local needs. In addition, some practitioners highlighted that community engagement efforts, such as meetings and outreach, were sometimes seen as excessive or inefficient and they recognized that the process lacked meaningful engagement and empowerment of communities, as this practitioner explains:

> "The process was not perfect. […] It really comes down to that they [fishers] didn't feel they were heard. […] And when people are upset at the process, it's hard to talk to them." (RP23)

Others pointed to the fact that traditional conservation practices and traditional knowledge were often overshadowed by scientific approaches. These participants explain:

> "And personally, I don't think we did a very good job in utilizing the traditional knowledge and traditional experiences of the fisherman." (RP18)

> "I also think that this is part of the colonizing concept. This approach to conservation is a very Western concept that we're not familiar with. It's a concept that forbids the interaction of humans and the spirit." (RP17)

> "You can't be a helicopter scientist, you need to be present, go fishing with the fishers, and listen to their advice." (RP24)

In addition, while Packard encouraged collaboration among grantees, collaboration and communication between decision-makers varied depending on organizational willingness to work together. Practitioners explained that Palau is a small, interconnected community and resource scarcity fostered competition among organizations, complicating collaborative efforts.

> "I think the coordination and communication has a lot of breadcrumbs. And so with that, I say, there was too many cooks in the kitchen. And we don't have a chef." (RP21).

This led to further distrust from fishers and other community members, as one of them explains:

> "Maintaining trust is hard. We've worked for years to build it, but any missteps by partners can harm the perception of the entire conservation community." (RP19)

While practitioners acknowledged significant accomplishments in the Northern Reef, they also recognized missed opportunities, especially meaningfully engaging communities and addressing systemic challenges. When prompted to reflect on the project, practitioners emphasized the importance of empowering communities, integrating traditional knowledge into conservation practices, and rebuilding trust with community members through stronger collaboration, partnerships and communication within the conservation community. This participant highlights efforts currently underway:

> "We are building an alliance of all the community groups in this area to better collaborate, maximize resources, and support one another." (RP17)

Donor coordination was also identified as critical to aligning goals and avoiding funding gaps, particularly when a major funder like Packard ends their funding. While funding was sufficient

during the project's implementation, sustainability became a significant concern when Packard announced their exit from the region. Practitioners questioned whether local organizations and projects could be independently sustained, which raised the issue of dependency on external funding (Le Cornu et al., In Prep; Enrici et al., In Prep). As these practitioners observed:

> "Foundations like Packard were here for 20 years, but the projects are so big they need something more to continue when the funding leaves." (RP20)

> "The project was nearly a million dollars… but there was no sustainability strategy. Money should have been spent preparing people, not just buying radars or equipment." (RP18)

Practitioners indicated that the Northern Reef project served as a pilot and that plans for replication and scaling up were under discussion at the time of the study. The findings of this study can offer valuable insights for these ongoing conversations, and we further discuss implications for the broader ocean philanthropy field in the following section.

4.6. Discussion

In this study on the social outcomes of a philanthropic-supported SSF management project in the Northern Reef of Palau, we make several contributions to existing literatures and provide practical insights for foundations and other conservation practitioners. We advance the literature on environmental philanthropy and small-scale fisheries governance by exploring the social outcomes of a philanthropic-supported initiative. By using an existing framework (i.e., Social Impact Assessment framework), we provide a practical tool for foundations to proactively consider the social outcomes of their projects and mitigate any unintended consequences. Our findings emphasize the critical need for grantees to conduct meaningful community engagement, which foundations can play a role in incentivizing through their grantmaking.

The case study in the Northern Reef contributes to understanding how philanthropic-supported projects impact communities. The findings of this study highlight a combination of perceived and experienced positive and negative outcomes arising from the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project. On one hand, research participants emphasized tangible improvements such as increased fish size and density which they attributed to regulations like size limits and seasonal closures, as well as and new economic opportunities from alternative livelihoods programs and increased buy-in and support for the regulations. However, participants also stressed that significant challenges persisted, including unfulfilled promises, distrust in decision-makers due to the top-down nature of decision-making processes, and a sense of powerlessness among community members, which exacerbated community frustrations. Participants also mentioned social outcomes including unequal distribution of impacts, erosion of Customary Marine Tenure systems and changes in fishing practices and consumption. Some of these social outcomes can be detrimental to communities, exacerbating existing issues or even creating new ones. Some of them, such as erosion of CMT, increased conflict, and lack of trust, are well-documented in the SSF governance literature (Gelcich et al., 2006; Mascia et al., 2010; Evans et al., 2011) but rarely mitigated. This study highlights the complexity and diversity of social outcomes and the importance of examining them in conservation contexts. First, this study emphasizes that perceptions are real social impacts that affect people's lives and behaviors (Vanclay, 2002; 2012). Social impacts such as anxiety, frustration and perceptions of exclusion, emerged as significant impacts of the Packard Foundation's interventions in the Northern Reef, highlighting that the perceived success of a project is often judged by those directly affected and can have significant consequences for the actual success of conservation projects. Additionally, this study highlights that these social outcomes do not occur in isolation as they interact with – and

sometimes contradict - one another and with broader external factors. The co-existence of social outcomes such as “increased buy-in and support for fisheries management” and some of the negative social outcomes like “erosion of Customary Marine Tenure” reflects the heterogenous nature of communities and perceptions. While some community members may support new regulations, others may still resist change. Support for fisheries management evolved from an overall initial resistance to greater support over time as younger members entered the fishery and because the benefits of the project were better communicated and were increasingly experienced firsthand (e.g., new economic opportunities, increase in fish size and density). Participants also mentioned the presence of other interacting external factors that, in combination with the changes from the fisheries management project have the potential to exacerbate these social outcomes. Among others, participants highlighted environmental issues such as climate change, erosion, severe weather, or socio-economic changes like inflation and COVID-19 or the role of globalization in seafood markets and interactions with other conservation policies. While many participants reflected on years of implementing some of the activities of the fisheries management project, it is important to recognize that this study provides a snapshot of social outcomes that were experienced at a certain moment in time. If repeated in five years, the findings might evolve. However, they offer a valuable picture of the potential outcomes of a philanthropic-supported project reflecting a diversity of both positive and negative perceive outcomes in a certain context and at a certain time. This picture can serve as a starting point for those wanting to better understand and mitigate the social outcomes of conservation philanthropy.

4.6.1. Empowering communities for better conservation outcomes

This study, along with the gaps it addresses in the literature, highlights a critical step forward in practice: the need for more meaningful community engagement in the design and implementation of conservation projects, including funding decisions (Betsill et al., 2024). An increasing body of literature emphasizes that engaging local communities from the beginning, and throughout the design, planning and implementation of conservation initiatives fosters trust, enhances buy-in, and supports long-term sustainability, leading to more effective and equitable conservation outcomes, both social and ecological (Dawson et al., 2021; Newig et al., 2023). This study in the Northern Reef resonates with these claims. This study responds to the growing calls for justice and equity in conservation (Spalding et al., 2023) and urges conservation philanthropy to adopt similar approaches (Bennett et al., 2021; Betsill et al., 2024) by practicing more inclusive and context-sensitive grant-making that center the voices of local communities and Indigenous peoples. This requires recognizing and respecting existing traditional practices (Singeo & Ferguson, 2022) by ensuring that interventions genuinely embed the priorities, values, knowledge, and practices of local communities into projects design and implementation. Such engagement can help mitigate risks like conflict, power imbalances, and the perception of exclusion. Betsill and colleagues (2024, p.11) point us to the vast social science literature on community-based conservation and participation in conservation that could help foundations "reflect on which communities to engage by advancing more nuanced and sophisticated thinking about how to define community and approach community engagement". Organizations and grantees working with communities must use stronger forms of engagement, and foundations can also play a role to ensure that grantees, re-granters and intermediaries tasked with implementing 'on-the-ground' work with communities engage them meaningfully throughout their projects (Blackwatters et al.,

2025). Finally, the use of existing frameworks like SIA can be a helpful tool in better understanding the social outcomes of funded projects. Foundations and practitioners should prioritize social outcomes in the design and funding phases of projects as well as in their post-exit evaluations. Gruby and colleagues (2017) argue that on the one hand, decision-makers can highlight potential benefits from the beginning and use those as a "deciding factor in public support" (p.419) for conservation interventions like small-scale fisheries and, on the other hand, understanding and mitigating negative social impacts is equally important for improving social acceptance of [interventions] and reducing conflict, which, again, is instrumental to ecological success" (Gruby et al., 2017, p.419).

Small-scale fisheries are inherently complex governance systems that require thoughtful management interventions to ensure long lasting outcomes. Increasingly, philanthropic foundations are becoming influential actors in the funding, design and implementation of these projects. This study of the Northern Reef Fisheries Management project provides valuable insights on the social outcomes of ocean philanthropy experienced by the local communities directly affected by these projects. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the critical need for further research to deepen our understanding of the social outcomes of philanthropic-supported conservation. The lessons from Palau's Northern Reef project may be useful for foundations working in small-scale fisheries and beyond.

5. CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I examine responsible exits and the social outcomes of conservation philanthropy. Case studies across global, regional/national, and local governance scales contribute a comprehensive analysis that is theoretically informed and empirically grounded of the way foundations navigate exits. This dissertation moves beyond the binary critiques of foundations as "good" or "bad" and takes a solution-oriented approach while also engaging in critical and reflexive research. This dissertation is grounded in two important fields: environmental governance and environmental philanthropy. I argue for greater shared learning and cross-pollination of ideas, methodologies and case studies between these two fields. Environmental philanthropy can benefit from the existing conceptual frameworks, empirical research and methodologies of environmental governance, while environmental governance should recognize philanthropic foundations as influential actors, conceptualizing them as agents of environmental governance. Both fields can build upon each other's findings to advance conservation philanthropy's understanding and practice. Growing critiques of current models of philanthropic giving must be taken seriously. Changes are needed to ensure that philanthropy operates in a responsible and just manner for both people and the environment. Below, I summarize the key findings and contributions of this dissertation and highlight topics for consideration in future research.

5.1. Key findings and contributions

5.1.1. Chapter 2: How are exits conceptualized and implemented in conservation philanthropy? What are best practices for responsible exits?

In Chapter 2, I developed a conceptual framework for responsible philanthropic exits, including an exit typology and a set of best practices. I make several contributions to research and practice on responsible exits in ocean conservation philanthropy and beyond. First, by providing a clear and encompassing definition of exits, and a framework for identifying and implementing best practices during the lifecycle of a grant, I advance the small body of literature on philanthropic exits and contribute clarity on what exits are and how to best navigate them. The conceptual framework serves as a foundation for more systematic research as it offers a structured approach for understanding the different types of exits and associated best practices for managing them. Second, this research has direct implications for practice. The lack of conceptual clarity sometimes meant that a funder and/or grantee would not recognize when they were going through an exit, or resulted in a failure to plan or pursue exits at all. The typology introduces a shared language that can help foundations internally conceptualize, plan and implement exits. It also facilitates discussions across organization, enabling funders and practitioners to exchanges lessons learns, collaborate and better coordinate exit strategies. I see this framework as a starting point and a roadmap for those who may find the task of exit planning daunting. Beyond funders, this research also empowers grantees and other ocean conservation practitioners to play a more prominent role in exit processes. The framework provides them with a tool to start early discussions about exits with their funders and the type of practices they can expect or would like to see in their situation. Most importantly, this research presents an opportunity to involve affected communities, who are

often excluded from exit processes despite being directly impacted, which in turn can foster more responsible exits that prioritize local needs.

5.1.2. Chapter 3: How did grantees and non-grantees experience the Packard exit in Fiji and Palau? What factors shaped their diverse experiences?

In Chapter 3, I explore the exit viewpoints of ocean conservation practitioners in Fiji and Palau. This research also contributes to the existing literature on philanthropic exits. By exploring grantees' experiences with the Packard exit 1) I reassert that best practices are key to conducting a responsible exit, however, 2) I argue that foundations need to address issues of resource dependence and power imbalances to be fully conducting a responsible exit. A key takeaway from this study is that exit viewpoints are diverse and each shaped by a combination of rationales. This was surprising because conservation practitioners have described Packard's grant-making approach positively and "characterized by relationship building, collaborative decision making, convening and promoting of collective action, flexibility, and long-term funding" (Enrici et al., 2023, p.1). This study reveals that there was not a dominant exit viewpoint that emerged among grantees and other conservation practitioners. In fact, four viewpoints (i.e., optimistic, pessimistic, ambivalent, and apathetic) were identified. Examining these rationales provided insights into the specific opportunities and challenges grantees face during an exit, emphasizing the importance of including their perspectives throughout the grant-making process. While optimistic viewpoints were mostly linked to exit best practices that Packard implemented in the *principles* and *administration and management* categories of the responsible exit framework (Le Cornu et al., 2022), pessimistic viewpoints were linked to challenges with the best practices in the *sustainability* category of the framework highlighting issues of resource dependence and power imbalances,

which are exacerbate when funding comes to an end. To address these issues, it is essential for both funders and grantees to first acknowledge these issues, to then reflect upon and redefine these relationships. I describe in length how funders and practitioners can start this self-reflective work in Chapter 3 by providing tools, methodologies and questions to reflect on.

5.1.3. Chapter 4: What are the social outcomes of a small-scale fisheries philanthropic-supported initiatives in the Northern Reefs of Palau?

In Chapter 4, I uncover the social outcomes of a philanthropic-supported SSF management project in the Northern Reefs of Palau. This chapter makes several contributions to existing literatures and provide practical insights for foundations and other conservation practitioners. First, I contribute to the vast body of literature on SSF governance by explicitly examining the social impacts of a philanthropic-supported initiative. Second, I advance the literature on environmental philanthropy by exploring an understudied aspect of their grant-making: social outcomes. By using an existing framework (i.e., Social Impact Assessment framework, Vanclay, 2002, 2012), I provide a practical tool for foundations to proactively consider the social outcomes of their projects and mitigate any unintended consequences. The study of the impacts of the Northern Reefs project, funded by the Packard Foundation, highlights a number of social outcomes reflecting perceived benefits and challenges. I emphasize the need for meaningful community engagement throughout philanthropic-supported small-scale fisheries initiatives.

5.2. Future directions

This dissertation highlights critical gaps in our understanding of conservation philanthropy, particularly regarding philanthropic exits and social outcomes. Exits are a focal point of this

dissertation, and they are also part of a broader conversation about how funding decisions are made and implemented throughout the grant-making lifecycle. This dissertation continues opening the black box of philanthropic decision-making and contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to make conservation philanthropy more transparent, equitable, and effective. Through a nuanced approach that balances critique with practical solutions and the use of participatory research methodologies, this dissertation also offers guidance for funders, grantees, and practitioners to shape a more inclusive and sustainable conservation funding. Several pressing questions remain for scholars and practitioners in the environmental governance and environmental philanthropy fields, as proposed below.

Chapter 2 introduces a framework for conceptualizing and improving exits, but more empirical research is needed to test and refine the best practices and how they may be tailored to particular types of exits. For example, a topic for further research includes examining forced exits, where funders abruptly withdraw support. This type of research could highlight the vulnerabilities and dependencies created by philanthropy. Or it could highlight the importance of planning exits from the beginning and including scenarios where these unforeseen circumstances may happen. Applying the exit framework to different geographies and conservation settings would also provide deeper insights into best practices and their long-term effectiveness based on diverse contexts. Additionally, there is a clear need for research on how funders overcome the challenges they identified in terms of implementing the best practices. More research is also needed to understand how exits affect the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts. Conservation often requires decades of sustained efforts to be effective, as this dissertation emphasizes with Packard's 20-year investment in the Western Pacific region. With the rise of spend-down foundations and shorter funding cycles, examining the implications for conservation efforts that require long-term

engagement is crucial. For example, are conservation outcomes truly achieved at the time of the exit? Is more funding needed to ensure the sustainability of these conservation efforts and if so, who fills the funding void associated with a foundation exit? We are addressing several of these questions in ongoing work (Enrici et al., In Prep).

Using a case study of the Packard foundation's exit in Fiji and Palau, Chapter 3 demonstrates that best practices for exiting responsibly are important, and that issues of resource dependence and power imbalances related to *sustainability* best practices need to be addressed to fully conduct a responsible exit. Future research should explore ways to mitigate these challenges. How can philanthropy design funding mechanisms that reduce dependence from the outset? Resource dependence theory suggests potential strategies to mitigate financial vulnerability, such as funding diversification or co-funding with governments or markets, for example. In addition, this dissertation sheds light on how grantees experience a foundation exit that invested in a region for twenty years, further studies across different types of exits and various foundations could deepen our understanding of the challenges and strategies for navigating these transitions. Hearing directly from grantees about the potential challenges of exiting could help foundations, for example, reevaluate a timeline for exiting, or focus their exit strategies on providing more resources, whether they are financial or not, or even reconsider the premise of exiting altogether.

Finally, Chapter 4 examines the social outcomes of a philanthropic-supported project in a fishing community in the Northern Reefs of Palau. While this case study offers valuable insights on the social impacts of philanthropic-supported initiatives, additional research is needed to better understand the link between social outcomes and the various roles of philanthropy. How can philanthropy adopt models that are more inclusive and integrate local knowledge and ensure that communities are empowered to decide their own futures? Further research should also focus on

how meaningful community engagement is operationalized and explore guidance on how to center the voices of those directly affected by funding decisions.

By addressing these questions, the field of conservation philanthropy can move toward more equitable, effective, and sustainable giving. Future scholarship must continue to critically examine the roles and impacts of foundations during the grantmaking cycle, including exit strategies and understanding social outcomes.

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