

Update from GEF Fourth Assembly, Punta Del Este, Uruguay (26th May)

Today I was privileged to be chosen out of many NGOs from around the world to address the GEF-Small Grants Program about LājeRotuma Initiative and how LRI as a community based organization is able to help our small Island of Rotuma through the various activities and programs with assistance from GEF-SGP.

My presentation was on the Rotuma Schools Annual Eco-Camp and how the eco-camp is creating environmental awareness amongst the children who are the future custodians of the island of Rotuma. The assistance from GEF-SGP allows us to plant the seed of awareness, appreciation and respect towards the environment at a very young age so that as these young people grow up and mature, they will be able to conserve Rotuma's natural and cultural heritage. The activities from the eco-camp are fun, very hands on and interactive, and the campers learn a lot of life skills that will contribute toward character development and protection of their environment. It also contributes towards building the capacity of the Rotuman people to be empowered to make informed decisions on how to use their natural resources sustainably and improve livelihood options. The eco-camp also complements environmental education in schools and provides an opportunity for the eco-campers to move out of their classroom situation to learn more about Rotuma's biodiversity first hand in their natural surroundings.

I also talked about how our identity as Rotumans, our traditional culture and way of doing things is intricately connected and cannot be separated from our natural environment and unique island biodiversity. Losing our biodiversity means loss of our livelihood, culture and unique identity. So GEF-SGP is helping us to help ourselves to conserve and protect our unique island biodiversity, our culture, livelihood options and identity. I learnt from the discussions at the end of my presentation that small actions can effect change for the better and improve livelihood options for the grassroots communities.

It was an honour and humble experience for me as an individual from a very small island representing a very small organization to stand in front of a room full of government delegates, civil society delegates and UN officials from all around the world and share my experiences as an individual, as a member of LRI and as a Rotuman. Never had I imagined nor dreamt that I will be part of such a prestigious assembly and it is an experience I will have with me for ever.





