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Attending COP23 on Papua New Guinea’s official delegation

From November 6 to 17, 2017 I was afforded the incredible experience to attend the 23rd Conference of the Parties (COP23) as a member of the official delegation from Papua New Guinea. I was able to join in this capacity thanks to connections I made during a CIERP-funded summer internship with UNDP in Port Moresby, PNG, where I worked closely with the leadership of PNG’s Climate Change and Development Authority (CCDA). I not only learned a lot about climate adaptation and how climate information systems can inform disaster planning (the subject of my capstone), I forged close connections with those who actually make policy. To join them in Bonn at the UNFCCC HQ was an important next step.

As part of the delegation, I was tasked with following all meetings related to adaptation and climate finance, particularly the Green Climate Fund (GCF). PNG’s leaders are particularly concerned with a lack of transparency on what funding mechanisms like GCF look for. While I was working with UNDP, we were developing a proposal, so it was very interesting to hear how other countries shared the frustrations I had encountered in the field. Without guidelines and a clear feedback mechanism, many countries with low capacity but an incredible need for action (mostly Small Island Developing States-SIDS- like PNG) are left unsure of how much funding to ask for and how to implement it. This came up again and again in meetings, with palpable tension between the big funders (EU, US) and the recipients (SIDS). While this was in many ways disheartening, it persuaded me of the legitimacy of the work people need to understand and speak our language, the language of the islands and the jungle.”

- MINISTER JOHN PUNDARI ON DIFFICULTIES ENGAGING WITH UNFCCC COUNTERPARTS

The whole PNG delegation, with me on the left and MP of Environment and Conservation John Pundari in the center.
at CCDA are doing and churned up a lot more questions I addressed in my capstone.

I gained deeper insight by attending meetings alongside Jonah Auka, the GCF focal point for PNG and Rensie Panda, UNFCCC lead. They were both very open about their extensive experience traveling to various COPs and UNFCCC events in Bonn throughout the year, sharing internal power struggles and surprising country alliances. Attending in this capacity also allowed me to observe US negotiators, and has led me to strongly consider a career in climate negotiations.