

CHALLENGES, LEARNINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN 2020

January

Too many things happened in January of 2020: Bushfire in Australia, tension between Iran and the United States of America, volcano eruption in the Philippines and the scare of Corona virus spreading. It was in the first week of the month (January 4 to be exact) when I came across a report regarding this “mystery, an unknown virus”, causing the close down of the market in Wuhan, China on New Year’s Day. During that time, there were only forty-four (44) people infected with the virus but after two (2) days, the cases jumped to fifty-nine (59). On January 9, 2020, China identified the cause of the mystery illness, which was the new strain of corona virus, now known as COVID 19. According to the mainstream media, COVID 19 came from the same family of viruses where the deadly SARS came from. The media at the time were reporting that it would take more than a year to produce a vaccine against this virus. On January 13, 2020, the first recorded case outside of China was confirmed in Thailand. Since then, the reported cases outside of China were beginning to rise, reported deaths (in China) were rising and Wuhan was in lockdown to contain the spread of the virus. On January 28, 2020, Hongkong medical expert urges draconian measures which included banning public gatherings and population mobility to **prevent global pandemic**. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the corona virus as global emergency on January 30, 2020. It was also during this time the US-Iran tension kept escalating, Australia bush fire was spreading, and three (3) days later Taal volcano in the Philippine erupted.



Entrance Conference at Department of Health



Monthly Staff Meeting

With so many things going on, it was business as usual for POPA. In January, POPA had a staff meeting and conducted an audit entrance

conference for one of its audit projects with the management and staff of the Department of Health and Social Affairs.

Were we not afraid of the virus? Definitely, we were. But with the mercy and grace of God, **courage** is the first blessing we received this year. After all, courage is not the absence of fear, but doing the right thing in spite of fear. We are committed and will continue serving the people by performing our mandated duties and responsibilities and providing timely reports.

Bright Sides of January



Time to be physically and mentally healthy.



*Birthday celebrant of the month:
Auditor III, Pehres Pedrus*



*Distribution of FY 2019
annual report to legislators*

February

Despite the further spread of COVID-19, there were reasons to celebrate in February. First, we would like to highlight a major accomplishment of a female NASA Astronaut, Christina Koch and two (2) other Astronauts for a record breaking stay on International Space stations before returning to Earth. Ms. Koch did investigations for future missions in Mars and moon. A great contribution by a woman to space exploration.



*Distributions of Year in the Life (2019) to
different stakeholders*

We smile even for the smallest things that life has to offer. After a little delay, POPA was able to distribute its “Year in the Life of POPA” (for 2019).



Management of Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) met with a European Union (EU) representative, Ms. Marga Peeters on February 4, 2020. The meeting was about the possibility of inclusion of POPA for the technical assistance under the European Development Fund assistance to the FSM government, designated for the FSM Finance Department and Public Auditors’ Offices located in Pohnpei, FSM. The technical assistance is part of the EUR 14.2 million grant under the European Development Fund (EDF 11) that FSM congress

recently approved.



Ms. Marga Peeters with POPA team

In the meeting, Ms. Peeters discussed about the possible assistance that EU can provide to Public Auditors' offices in the FSM. POPA is exploring the possibility of getting a consultant to train and/or work with POPA's staff for not more than one (1) year. POPA is currently working in collaboration with the Office of the National Public Auditor (ONPA) on the proposal for possible Technical Assistance grant under this program.

Bright Sides of February

Celebrate every little things life has to offer: Alice birthday coincide with ONPA CID birthday



Audit Manager, Alice Etse



March

WHO declared the corona virus pandemic, and countries around the world started declaring "state of emergency" and lock down. Major events and plans were either cancelled or postponed.



Sophia Pretrick at International Womens Day

Similar to the rest of the world, Pohnpei State celebrated the Womens' Day on March 8, 2020. As such, POPA women employees joined in the **celebration** even in simple ways. In the picture, Sophia Pretrick, danced with the women in her village during the celebration.

Bright Sides of March



Ladies of POPA (Elaine, Cardinia and Vellisa) joined the celebration of International Women's Day



Birthday celebrant of the month: Investigative Advisor Sophia Pretrick

April



Watching and reading all the bad and heartbreaking news around the world brought by the pandemic, increased our **empathy** to all who suffered in the world. In our monthly



staff meeting, we offered prayers to all who suffered from pain, health, lose of jobs and lives. We also talked about ways on how to continue serving the public in case of possible lockdown in Pohnpei. We also started planning our audit of the funds contributed or dedicated to Pohnpei State in its response to COVID-19 pandemic.

May



APIPA's principal meeting

Black Lives Matter (BLM) aside from COVID-19 is a big news this month. It created chaos and divisions among Americans. We are grateful for not having that kind of chaos in Pohnpei. In this unprecedented time, we found **innovative** ways to continue working and learning, at the same time, sharing our knowledge with other government agencies. The first virtual APIPA principal's meeting was also held this month. The meeting was attended by Public Auditors of Marshall Islands, Pohnpei State, Chuuk State, Yap State, Kosrae, National Public Auditor, Fiji, American Samoa, Guam, Palau, and Commonwealth of Northern

Mariana Islands. During the meeting, the US Graduate School discussed the updates on APIPA peer review, US Graduate School Training for 2020 and the status of APIPA registration as a non-profit organization.



Workshop conducted by POPA

The Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) conducted a workshop on government ethics and payroll processing and accountability for employees of the Department of Treasury and Administration (DoT&A) and the Administrative Officers of various departments, offices and agencies of the Pohnpei State Government. The workshop was delivered at the invitation of the new Director of DoT&A as part of POPA's ongoing public awareness and proactive efforts to promote and improve transparency, accountability and good governance in the Pohnpei State Government.

In summary, the basic principles of ethical conduct expected of each individual Pohnpei Government employee were stressed during the discussions in line with the guidelines provided in the Codes of Ethics law enshrined in the 9 PC 8-101 to 8-132 of the Code of the State of Pohnpei. POPA also shared with the participants copies of its own Employees' Code of Conduct statement and encouraged those that do not have one yet to develop and implement something similar but in conformity with their mission statement, work ethics, integrity and core values.

Payroll is the largest single expenditure category item of the Pohnpei State Government. The government spends an average of approximately \$17.5 million or nearly 50% of its budget annually to compensate for the services of its employees or workforce members in recent years. Participants were encouraged to improve monitoring and strengthening of the payroll processing system to ensure compliance with all payroll relevant laws and procedures. Those who facilitated the workshop from the Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) included Ms. Alice Etse, Audit Manager, Ms. Sophia Pretrick, CID Advisor and Mr. Pehres Pedrus, Staff Auditor III.

Bright sides of May



Birthday Celebrants of the month: Auditor II, Cardinia Joel and Derek Dainard

June



Exit Conference at Department of Land



Entrance Conference for COVID-19 audit

As death counts caused by COVID-19 continued to rise, the Black Lives Matter protest also continued worldwide. POPA also continued to **build strong relationship** with different stakeholders through entrance and exit conferences and collaboration with the youth sector.

POPA held an exit conference with the Department of Land, attended by the following: all POPA employees, Director, staff and employees of the Department of Land, and the Speaker of the Pohnpei Legislature.

On June 26, 2020 Youth 4 Change, Inc (Y4C) held the closing ceremony for the 1st phase of their Anti-Corruption project at the Youth Center in Kolonia. The Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) was invited as the partner in the project. The project turned out to be a great success among the community and the youth. POPA's role is to collaborate and join with civil societies on anti-corruption measures and on their Fraud Awareness and Prevention program.



The ceremony was graced by Senator Shelten Neth, the Chairman of Health focusing on youth affairs, Tadasy Shelten, (Iso Nahlain of Madolenihmw), Y4C Board Member, George Isom, SPC Country Focal Officer, Diaz Joseph, President of the Y4C Board, and Sophia Pretrick, POPA Investigative Advisor, along with two other POPA staff.

It started out when Y4C received their grants to implement their Anti-Corruption project. Y4C Director Sylvia Elias approached POPA's Investigative Advisor, Sophia Pretrick to assist in their project. POPA's part was mainly focusing on training and awareness activities, mentoring and advocacy work on anti-corruption. It includes training and bringing awareness to the youth on the impacts of corruption and POPA's role in fighting and reducing corruption in government. During the 1st phase, the following are some of their joint activities:

1. Advisory work on training the trainers
2. Education against corruption-visiting all the public schools including the private schools to conduct advocacy and anti-corruption awareness. This is also part of building ethics and integrity in the next generation.
3. Team up at the FSM Government Conferences- this is part of empowering youth participation in Government
4. Join other youth groups in commemorating the International Anti-Corruption Day, where they raised awareness through talent competitions i.e. songs, skits, video clips, etc.
5. Promotional materials- Y4C assisted POPA in updating their hotline flyer- POPA has an existing Fraud Hotline where citizens can call suspicious activities of fraud, waste and mismanagement in the Pohnpei State Government.

The world needs young leaders. The passion in their hearts to continue the fight against corruption is very evident on how they speak. Engaging youth's awareness on corruption issues create community responsibility among the young people. As stated by Sophia Pretrick, "Partnering with Y4C was a great experience working with the leaders of tomorrow. The greatest impact of the joint work was being able to observe the members implement what they learned in real life. The moral attitudes and capabilities they acquire from the program will enable them to succeed." Majority of the Anti-Corruption Champions are now pursuing higher education abroad.

July

Half of the year has passed; scientists are still studying and researching on possible vaccine for COVID-19. By this time, a lot of people were suffering from financial, mental and emotional burdens brought by the pandemic. Pohnpei remained COVID free, however some of its citizens were not exempt from these hardships.



Despite the fear and worry for their families and friends residing outside of Pohnpei, the auditors put forth their best to continue doing their work. A **commitment** not only for the sake of money but because it is the right thing to do.

Pehres Pedrus distributing audit reports to Legislature



POPA employees show their support to Public Auditor during the burial of his sister.

August

President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia has become the 1st country to grant regulatory approval of a Covid-19 vaccine, called "Sputnik V", despite no scientific data to back up the announcement.

Life goes on for all the public auditors here in Pohnpei. **Enjoying the gift of life** and the opportunity to learn in a **new normal** are the blessings brought by the pandemic.



Plenary session at Central Facility Building at Palikir

The Association of Pacific Islands Public Auditors (APIPA) has completed its 31st annual conference. This is the first virtual conference due to the lockdown brought on by COVID-19 pandemic. The conference which was held in virtual setting ran from August 3 to 14, 2020. The APIPA conference provided the auditors four (4) hours a day of learning for a total of forty (40) continuing professional education credits (CPE). The virtual conference is an innovative approach by the US Graduate School to provide meaningful conference even in the midst of the pandemic. There were over eight hundred (800) participants registered in this annual conference; 12% from private sectors and 88% from the government sectors of Guam, US Virgin



Island, Palau, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Island (CNMI), Republic of Marshall Island, Fiji, Samoa and American Samoa, and Federated States of Micronesia (Yap, Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk). This year’s annual conference was chaired and virtually hosted by the CNMI Public Auditor. There were fourteen (14) instructors in this year’s annual conference.



The virtual conference was graced by welcoming remarks by Honorable Douglas Domenech, Assistant Secretary for Insular and International Affairs, US Department of Interior and key note speaker, Honorable Mark Lee Greenblatt, Inspector General, US Department of Interior. Due to limited bandwidth, auditors from Office of the National Public Auditors (ONPA) and Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) joined for the opening plenary session at the Central Building at Palikir. Breakout sessions were held at the central building and at the conference room of ONPA.

Breakout sessions (at ONPA conference room and Central Facility Building

Some of the most striking lessons that auditors from ONPA and POPA shared was from Honorable Greenblatt r: “Treat

the organizations and our job as our own, not like we are just renting it.” And from Honorable Domenech: “Despite the challenges of the pandemic brought to the world, accountability does not have borders, no distance or time can separate public auditors from doing what is right”.

Bright Sides of August



Auditors from the Federated States of Micronesia adapted to the “new normal” and were able to learn despite the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. A commitment not only because of the auditing standards requirements but also because of their commitment to enhance their knowledge and skills to better serve the public.

APIPA tradition of photo op of each Supreme Audit Institution (SAI)



Of Course, refreshments (courtesy of ONPA)



Birthday Celebrant of the month: Auditor II, Vellisa Edgar

September



Human Resources Workshop courtesy of PASAI

We cannot control what happens to us, but we can control our attitude towards what is happening around us. Our small gestures can have a huge impact in one’s life. We have to be **kind** to one another.

This month kicked off a workshop on “Strengthening SAI Human Resource Management Capacity” provided by Pacific Association of Supreme Audit Institution (PASAI). The workshop was provided due the request of eight (8) SAI to strengthen their organizational capability in managing and handling matters related to human resources. Pohnpei SAI has already drafted the Human Resources Strategy for the review of the Public Auditor.



CID with Police Academy Trainees and Policemen

The Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA), Compliance Investigation Division (CID) conducted workshops on integrity, fraud and corruption for the 2020 Pohnpei Police Academy at the Pohnpei State Department of Public Safety (DPS). The Director of DPS, Patrick Carl requested POPA to conduct a class instruction on corruption and fraud to the police academy trainees so they may have a better understanding and knowledge in the subject when they are conducting their duties on a daily basis.

Since majority of the police officers are entry level trainees, the workshop was geared in two phases: The first part was for them to learn the impacts of fraud and how to prevent it by leading and instilling integrity, accountability and ethical conduct in their daily work activities. The other phase was focusing on how to detect and investigate fraud.



The law enforcement and police agencies had been commonly viewed as one of the most vulnerable and exposed public agencies to the risk of fraud and corruption. Police Officers are the first responders to crimes occurring in the Pohnpei State jurisdiction. They should be upholding the law and ensuring that they strive to do the right thing in all situations to keep the public a safer place which also include discouragement of fraud. They should be leading by example to increase the public confidence and trust in their work. The training went well with active participation from the attendees.



Photo from ACFE insight

POPA and DPS along with the Office of the Attorney General currently has a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place to collaborate and join forces in combating fraud and corruption. POPA Investigative Advisor, Sophia Pretrick and staff investigators Trinia Eliou and Derek Dainard of the CID conducted the workshop.

In September 2020, Sophia Pretrick was featured in ACFE insights, a website for news and analysis on the global fight against fraud. The blog highlighted her passion of fighting fraud and corruption. To read the full article please visit <https://www.acfeinsights.com/acfe-insights/member-spotlight-sophia-pretrick-cfe>

Bright Sides of September



Team Building

A day full of fun, activities, creativity, and learning from each other. Along with the fun activities, POPA staff and employees learned how to motivate each other, made inventories of the strengths and weaknesses of the office and how to work as a team to improve. Before the pandemic, people were always

in a hurry and wanted to be more productive. This pandemic taught us to **slow down** and live one day at a time. We need to prioritize our relationship with our family and friends. They deserve our time and attention.

October

President Trump and his wife, First Lady Melania, both tested positive for COVID. Our money, fame and status cannot protect us from illness. At the end of the day, **we are equal**, we are susceptible to illness like COVID-19.



Communication Strategy courtesy of PASAI



Compliance Investigation Division participated in the United Nation Day

POPA participated in the workshop provided by PASAI for communication strategy. Our office acknowledges the importance of Communication strategy in the promotion of the value and benefits of our office to different stakeholders. We are in the process of updating our current strategy to respond to current situation we are facing based on the available resources the office currently have.

Bright Sides of October

Birthday Celebrants of the Month



Admin Officer: Elaine Carl



Public Auditor: Ihlen Joseph



Investigator: Trinia Eliou

November

Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump and became the 46th president-elect of the United States of America.

We just completed the renovation of our POPA “kitchen” turning it into a conference/training room. We plan to have more interaction face to face with our stakeholders using our new conference room. We held the exit conference with Pohnpei Transportation Authority in our new conference room this month.

For the meantime, and while we are still under travel restrictions, our conference room will be our venue for learning together.



Pohnpei Transportation Authority (PTA) exit conference



Virtual workshop on Auditing grants provided by PITI-VITI

Bright Sides of November



Public Auditor receiving certificate of appreciation from UN and Police Academy



Birthday celebrant of the month: Auditor III, Jackleen Route

December



Youth 4 Change

The 2020 Annual Report is currently finalized by the Public Auditor to be published and distributed to different stakeholders. We are also proud to announce that we are in the 3rd year of publishing “Year in the Life of POPA”. PASAI helped us with the initial publication and we are thankful for their support. We continued the project to share with our stakeholders about our work (value and benefits) and other activities we undertake during the year.



Keynote Speaker: Sophia Pretrick



Although we are in an emergency crisis, people are taking advantage of the system.

We should always do the right thing, the truthful way in everything we do regardless of who we are, where we are, what we do, we have the responsibility to be vigilant and on the look-out for fraud and corruption.

The US Embassy and Youth-4-Change did essay competitions and poetry contest for the youth members in their perception of what can you do to stop corruption?

Also present on that day was US Acting Chief of Missions, Somer Bessire-Brier, UN representative, Suzanne Lowe Gallen, Youth-4-Change President Diaz Joseph, Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor staff and Youth-4-Change youth members.

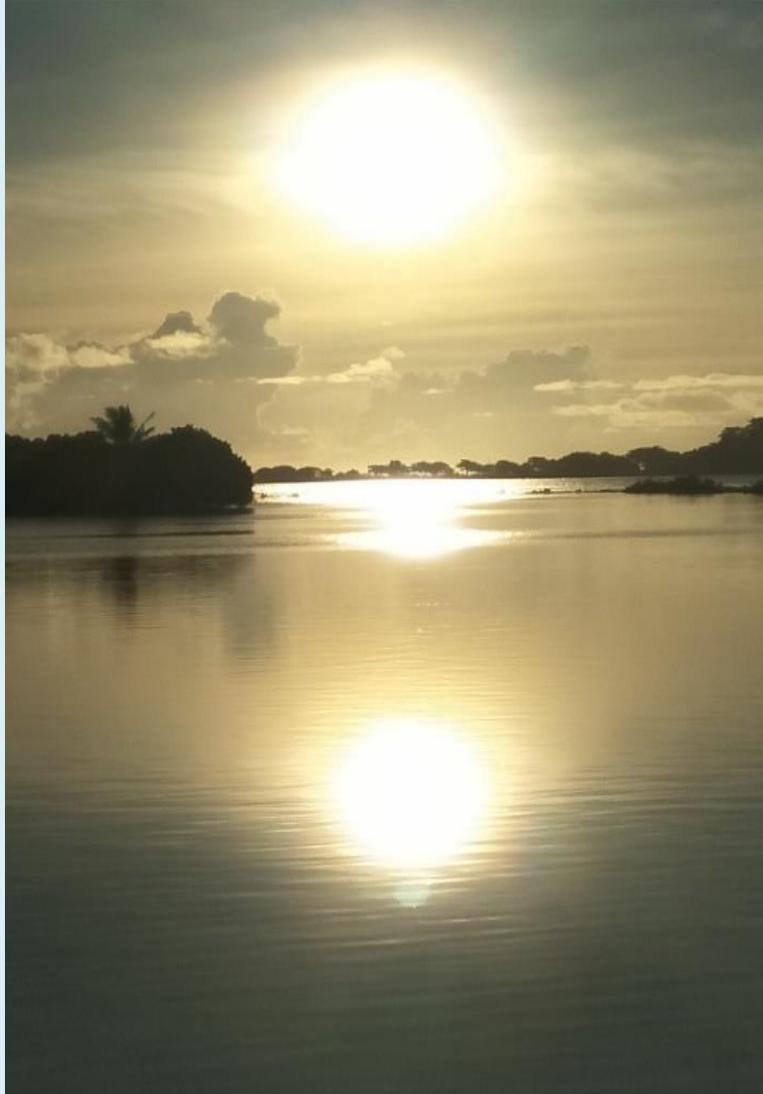


Sunset in Pohnpei

On December 9, 2020, Pohnpei joined the rest of the world in the celebration of the International Anti-Corruption Day at the Youth-4-Change center. The event was jointly coordinated by the US Embassy, Youth-4-Change and the UN Joint Presence Office. This year's theme is, "Recover with Integrity." This is inclusive to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis we're facing today.

Ms. Sophia Pretrick who delivered the keynote message emphasized that integrity is the key to rapid response and recovery. Sophia is currently on detail assignment at the FSM Office of the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (OPUA) under the Department of Finance and Administration, to assist in creating and maintaining integrity within OPUA through prevention, detection investigation and recovery of unemployment overpayment. Sophia further highlighted the importance of the government to work together with civil society, NGO's, private entities, youth groups, church and traditional groups including the public in anti-corruption activities. Working together in maintaining integrity is very important even in this unprecedented and difficult

time. Although we are in an emergency crisis, people are taking advantage of the system. We should always do the right thing, the truthful way in everything we do regardless of who we are, where we are, what we do, we have the responsibility to be vigilant and on the look-out for fraud and corruption. The US Embassy and Youth-4-Change did essay competitions and poetry contest for the youth members in their perception of what can you do to stop corruption? Also present on that day was US Acting Chief of Missions, Somer Bessire-Brier, UN representative, Suzanne Lowe Gallen, Youth-4-Change President Diaz Joseph, Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor staff and Youth-4-Change youth members. Who knows what will happen in the future. Will Pohnpei continue to remain COVID-19 free or will we have case(s) in the future? (hopefully not). Nobody knows what the future holds. But one thing is for sure, the sunset is inevitable and every day the sun will rise to signify a **fresh start** and we will continue to create beautiful stories in the coming years. We might be suffering today but we will **thrive** tomorrow.



Sunrise at causeway Pohnpei

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