

Local Action, Integrated Region

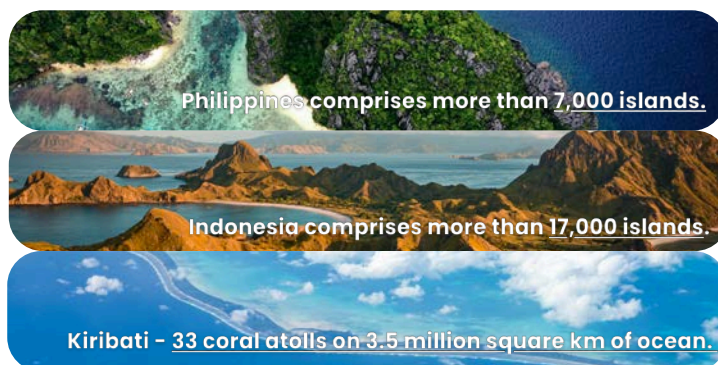
A regional framework addressing stakeholder coordination challenges in Community-Based Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) for the Indo-Pacific

BACKGROUND: The Coral Triangle is rich in **biodiversity**: 5.7 million square kilometers, spanning parts of Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia. It contains:



However, the geography of the Coral Triangle poses significant conservation issues for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). MPAs are defined as clearly delineated marine-managed areas that contribute to the protection of marine resources.

In the Indo-Pacific, MPAs must contend with huge land masses, isolated ecosystems, spread-out geographies and demographics, and large marine ecosystems. Notably, the Coral Triangle is part of the enormous 60-million-square-mile Pacific Ocean.



Therefore, **relying on a top-down central government management to address this issue will inevitably face resource constraints**, necessitating the need for local communities to be involved.

ADDRESSING ISSUES: Both the Indo-Pacific have utilized community-based MPAs that have addressed environmental, food, and economic security.

Community-based MPAs are MPAs in which their management is partially or fully allocated to local communities, such as private entities, NGOs, or communities that typically depend on the MPA. In the Indo-Pacific region, community-based MPAs have provided considerable benefits to human security:



Economic: Waivunia Marine Conservation Area on Vanua Balavu, Fiji employ local village members as snorkel guides. The Waitabu village on Taveuni runs its own snorkel business within a marine park for over 15 years.



Food: The Mabuwaya Foundation, in collaboration with communities in northern Luzon, Philippines, coordinated with barangay (village) councils, leading to high awareness of rules with a survey report indicating fish stocks were increasing.



Environmental: Traditional marine resource management practices from local indigenous communities, referred to as Sasi, in the Raja Ampat MPA, Indonesia led to a biomass increase of 250% over just 6 years and 25 times more sharks inside protected areas than outside.



POLICY RESPONSE: Indo-Pacific States have adopted agreements and set out strategies that, to varying degrees, recognize and facilitate support for community-based MPAs in their respective regions.



PACIFIC

- 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2002)
- The 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALMI0) Japan
- Taraho'i Declaration
- The Vemööre Declaration
- The Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas (2021-2025)



ASIA/ASEAN

- ASEAN Agreement on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
- The ASEAN Marine Water Quality Management Guidelines and Monitoring Manual
- The ASEAN Blue Economy Framework
- The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint
- Regional Plan of Action to Combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing
- ASEAN Declaration on Environmental Sustainability



REGIONAL BODIES

- Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC).
- Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security (CTI-CFF).
- The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

SIMILARITIES

- Community-based MPAs recognized as powerful sustainable and economically viable conservation tools.
- Regional bodies exist in the respective regions that support conservation efforts.
- Shared efforts across both regions exist through CTI-CFF.

DIFFERENCES

- Despite extensive presence of MPAs in both regions, the Pacific has set out a more comprehensive strategy for community-based MPAs.
- The Pacific has a renewable strategic document (Pacific Islands Framework).
- References to community-based MPAs are far more direct and concerted in the Pacific while ASEAN focuses more on IUU fishing.

GAPS: Regional policies in the Indo-Pacific are not equipped to facilitate the struggles of long-term growth challenges faced by MPAs, particularly due to stakeholder coordination management issues.

In a study of 27 MPAs across the world, the number one most important factor affecting MPA success was **stakeholder engagement**. In the Indo-Pacific, there are also MPAs in the region that failed because of gradual declining involvement of stakeholders that are often only involved via donors* at the very start, thus failing to provide viable commercial alternatives in later stages. The following are examples of failed MPAs in the region due to stakeholder issues:

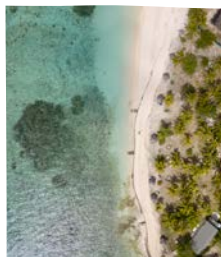
The Kapatan MPA in the Philippines failed because of conflict between key stakeholders; the Barangay Council and Cabug Fishermen and Farmers Cooperative (CAFIMFACO). The council accused CAFIMFACO of failing to provide financial support while the council was accused of failing to enforce effectively.



In the Philippines, **MPA integration can cause overlapping management among stakeholders**. Once MPAs in municipal waters become part of the Philippines' Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System (E-NIPAS), clashes occur between national and local policies, leading to management confusion.



In Fiji, commitments by stakeholders gradually weakened due to perceived **inequitable or insufficient benefits**. One project was terminated by a local chief, perceiving that payments were causing community conflicts. In other projects, lower-than-expected income led to weakened commitments and regular poaching.



Gaps in Regional Policies

1. **Inadequate support for local community-based MPAs.**
2. **Lack of capacity building and technical support** for locally managed MPAs to be effective.
3. **Lacking frameworks for sustained long-term growth and management.**
4. **Lacking oversight and accountability frameworks** to ensure fair, equitable, coordinated and integrated management of MPAs by all stakeholders.

Implementation Challenges faced by MPAs

1. **Ineffective efforts to illustrate what MPAs protect** can cause lack of community engagement.
2. **Lack of equitable distribution of benefits** to communities can cause conservation challenges.
3. **Inconsistent or contradicting governance** can hinder integration of conservation efforts.
4. **Lackluster initial outreach approaches** can jeopardize community engagement in MPAs.
5. **Narrowed outreach approaches** neglect communities that may work against MPA efforts.

CRITICAL CONSEQUENCES

- Only 8.3%** of world's marine areas are currently protected.
- Only 2.8%** percent are effectively managed & protected.
- Only 10%** of the world's oceans will be protected by 2030 at current rate of MPA growth.

Bloomberg Ocean Fund Report (2024)

*Information obtained from interview of Laitia Tamata, Interim Coordinator for Fiji LMMAs networks by co-author Jona Baro on 3rd February 2025.



ACTION PLAN

Leverage existing regional platforms and bodies to create a comprehensive framework addressing long-term stakeholder coordination challenges.

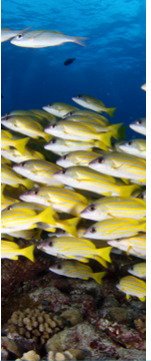
FRAMEWORK OUTCOME: A joint Indo-Pacific committee can be created to bring in MPA experts across the region, providing best practices on stakeholder coordination management.



The joint committee could facilitate the creation of a framework that supports and enhances MPAs to achieve the following outcomes:

- 1. Clearly delineated and communicated roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved.** Effective communication should be fostered to ensure all stakeholders have a full understanding of the allocated responsibilities of each other. In particular, the joint committee can facilitate MPAs to have **clear allocation of a stakeholder responsible for oversight and governance**, ensuring all other stakeholders are responsibly performing allocated roles.
- 2. Equitable and fair distribution of responsibilities with focus on incorporating GESI principles.** The management responsibilities of MPAs should be equitably distributed to ensure that local indigenous communities are not disproportionately burdened. Minorities and women should also be recognized for their contributions to MPAs and efforts should be made so that they are not excluded.
- 3. Equitable and fair distribution of benefits which are communicated transparently.** MPA benefits such as restored fish catch, employment opportunities, restored environmental benefits or payments for hiring enforcers from local communities should be communicated and provided equitably. Approaches should also be aligned with **The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing**, which is an international agreement at sharing the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way.
- 4. Effective transition frameworks facilitating expansion plans, transition plans and MPA networking.** MPAs can grow and become networked with other MPAs and include more stakeholders at higher levels of government or have changes in ownership. MPA policy planners should be encouraged to prepare plans for such transitions, such as ensuring allocated stakeholder responsibilities are effectively adjusted to match the needs of the growth.
- 5. Effective conflict resolution mechanisms for involved stakeholders.** Conflict resolution mechanisms should account for potential miscommunication, conflict from financial management or clashes in policies.
- 6. Sustainable financing models.** Ensure that the MPA has a viable long-term financing and revenue plan that is sustained and stable.

MECHANISM: Regional entities that can be leveraged into a joint committee for MPA managers from LMMA networks to gather in a workshop and share best-practices to produce the framework.



Potential workshop participants can include Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) networks:

- **PhiLMMA (NGO):** Supports 26 official LMMA sites largely across Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao provinces and has reached 100+ communities across the country. Estimated that 540km² of marine area is under protection.
- **The Fiji LMMA:** Grew from the Ucunivanua LMMA. By 2009, the network had increased to include some 250 LMMAs, covering around 10,745 square kilometers of coastal fisheries, more than 25% of Fiji's inshore area.

Implementing entities that can combine into a regional joint committee:

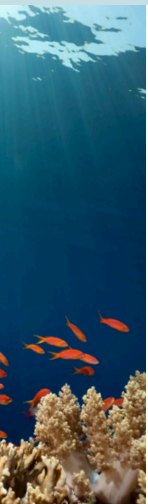
- Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (**SEAFDEC**)
- Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security (**CTI-CFF**)
- The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (**SPREP**)
- The 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (**PALMIO**) Japan

PROPOSED TIMELINE: Recommended to take 24 months to create the framework.





ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONS: The joint committee can also play a vital role in harmonizing policy, platform for data, as a conservation fund and as a learning network.



KNOWLEDGE & POLICY HUB

Create and manage an MPA Knowledge and Policy Hub to harmonize and track implementation of cross-regional, regional, and national policies, frameworks, plans, and regulations, monitor participation and impact of underrepresented groups in MPA governance and management, and facilitate sharing of successful MPA governance and management models.

CONSERVATION FUND

Create an ASEAN-Pacific Community Conservation Fund to support community-managed MPAs through various mechanisms such as grants, microfinancing, and climate adaptation funding.

OPEN-ACCESS DATA PLATFORM

Establish an Open-Access Data Platform to improve cross-regional MPA monitoring and research collaboration and that disaggregates data by gender, disability status, and socioeconomic background to track progress in GESI integration and responsiveness.

LEARNING NETWORK

Create and manage an MPA Learning Network for community leaders to share best practices and experiences, featuring a specific platform for women's and youth leadership, indigenous knowledge exchange, and social inclusion in MPAs.

CONCLUSION: The Indo-Pacific is home to hundreds of MPAs, each with their own unique best practices and successes, worth sharing for a harmonized regional approach.

MPAs in the Indo-Pacific region cover 19.65% of the total marine and coastal area, amounting more than 11 million km²



- **Local leadership brings forth best practices worth sharing.** Each with their effective unique traditions and locally-based strategies.
- **Asia stands to learn greatly from the Pacific,** which has set out comprehensive strategies and frameworks.
- **Immediate action is needed for long-term planning.** Strong local action should be complemented with **long-term sustainable plans** that account for financial needs and sustained **stakeholder involvement**.
- An **integrated, cross-regional strategy on MPAs, will fill the gaps of policies in each respective region.**
- Creating **a regional strategy that is rooted in local leadership, will bolster sea and human security across the Indo-Pacific.** Ultimately, this policy brief calls for...



Local Action Integrated Region

FURTHER READING

- Gender equality and social inclusion assessment and action plan for Sustainable Development Strategies for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA) - Implementation [Plan](#) 2023-2027
- [Why local people do not support conservation:](#) Community perceptions of marine protected area livelihood impacts, governance and management in Thailand.
- MPAs and fisheries in the context of food security and sustainable livelihoods in Indonesia: case study of MPAs in [Karimunjawa and Mayalibit Papua](#), Indonesia.
- [A private management approach](#) to coral reef conservation in Sabah, Malaysia.
- [The blue paradox:](#) Preemptive overfishing in marine reserves.
- [Site unseen:](#) Engaging communities on marine protected areas

AUTHORED for: Phase 3 of 2024 UNITAR Leaders for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Sea and Human Security Training Programme by:

- Nasri Tahir, Research Associate, Brunei Darussalam.
 - Peter Paul Quibranza, Senior Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, Learning, and Reporting (MEALR) Coordinator, Relief International, Philippines.
 - Jona Baro, Dive Operations Manager, Aqua Trek Beqa, Pacific Harbour, Fiji.
 - Natinee Na Chiangmai, Researcher, Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), Thailand.
 - Nur Rochma Amaliah, Mid-Career Diplomat, Directorate of East Asian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.
- Queries direct to md.nasri.tahir@gmail.com / +6737154321

Disclaimer: This document was developed by participants of the UNITAR 2024 Leaders for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Sea and Human Security Training Programme. The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views neither of their organizations nor of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). This document is published for information purposes only.