

Sustainable landscape management approaches

The role of community participation in
Mbeliling, Flores Indonesia

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Key Points

The sustainable management of landscapes in Indonesia faces many and varied challenges. Rising populations, intensive farming practices and deforestation place pressures on the flora, fauna and communities that exist there.

However through the adoption of innovative approaches and new systems of thought, it is possible to find creative solutions that account for people and species in sustainable and equitable ways.

Burung Indonesia (BirdLife in Indonesia) uses participatory engagement with local communities to develop and implement village resource management agreements in priority conservation areas.

- Burung works with the villages to identify specific threats linked to conservation and their livelihoods
- Stakeholder agreements are then designed to mitigate against these threats
- Every state and non-state actor is consulted to foster ownership and buy-in
- Sustainability is viewed as an outcome and a process as future planning is central to village agreements

This report aims to outline how Burung Indonesia facilitates community engagement for sustainable management of landscapes in priority sites.

225

KBAs / IBAs in
Indonesia

179

Globally threatened bird
species in Indonesia

10%

National poverty rate
in Indonesia

Background

Indonesia is a biodiversity-rich country with 225 KBAs/IBAs and known to host approx. 12% of all the world's mammals, 16% reptiles and amphibians, 17% birds, 10% flowering plants, and 25% fish species. A recent status report indicated that Indonesia has a total of 1812 bird species, of which 179 are categorized as globally threatened species (CR, EN, VU).

Burung Indonesia (the BirdLife Partner in Indonesia) works with other stakeholders including local communities towards the effective management of protected areas and KBAs/IBAs to ensure ecosystem restoration and sustainable management of natural resources at site level.

One of the site programmes of Burung Indonesia is the Mbeliling Landscape in Flores. The Mbeliling Landscape is a priority area for global conservation due to its richness of biodiversity and its importance for local livelihoods.

The Mbeliling landscape covers an area of 94,000 hectares (30% is state forest area and 70% is other land use), and consists of 36 villages with a total population of about 40,000 people. For this reason, the key to the implementation of sustainable management of Mbeliling landscape, is ensuring that village resources are managed in a sustainable way.

"poverty has been a driver of unsustainable use of natural resources"

However, Indonesia experiences continuous biodiversity loss with the main factors causing the decline being conversion of land to residential areas, deforestation, poaching, illegal wildlife trade, and forest fires. These causes are mainly because of high levels of poverty locally and nationally.

In 2021, the poverty rate in Indonesia at national level stood at approximately 10% of the total population. While at the local level in West Manggarai Regency, the poverty rate is approximately 17% of the total population.

Poverty has been a driver of unsustainable use of nature resources by communities, as they prioritise quick income generating activities and neglect the sustainability aspects for the long term.

Finding agreement

To address the threats to biodiversity, Burung is supporting various initiatives at key sites and works with a network of local stakeholders including; government representatives from different levels, local communities and indigenous people both as part of Local Conservation Groups or villages and other civil society organisations.

For example, they supported Mbeliling communities to formulate the Village Resource Management Agreement (VRMA) as a village level resource management plan. Developing the village agreements takes a participatory approach where villagers identify specific threats linked to conservation and their livelihoods then come up with an agreed solution.

The communities then select a committee to oversee the implementation of the agreement. The agreements are recognized by policy makers both at local level and district level. By working with existing local communities' groups/Local Conservation Groups within the Mbeliling landscape, Burung has been able to reach out to other villagers and engage them in activities related to advocacy, capacity building, conservation and economic development.



Image: Burung Indonesia - Head Regency and Head of Forestry Agency signing an agreement.

According to Bone Haryanto, chairs of Mbeliling Community Forum “to engage community in nature conservation, two things are necessary namely, increased awareness and enforcement of regulation or community agreement on nature management. VRMA is an appropriate tool to ensure their participation”.

36

Total number of villages
that comprise Mbeliling

94,000ha

Size of the Mbeliling landscape



Image: Burung Indonesia,
VRMA Council Meeting

A step-by-step approach

1

Share basic concept of agreement to main village stakeholders

This first step is to make sure that representatives of key stakeholders in the village understand the idea or concept that will be developed together with the community. This is also to gain support from key village stakeholders for conducting meetings and discussion sessions within the community.

2

Participatory appraisal

Secondly, identify potential problems and challenges in terms of village resources management. This appraisal is conducted using participatory principles and approaches using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools. These comprise mapping, a trends and changes matrix, village history, activities of both men and women and sources of income.

3

Formulation of draft agreement

A task team is chosen to prepare the draft of agreement. This draft is developed based on the appraisal results from prior steps. Content of the agreement consists of some main points namely background of the agreement, purpose of the agreement, points of the agreement, and wider community aspirations.

4

Community discussion on draft of agreement

This is a chance for the community to give initial input to the wider draft of the agreement and confirm a draft that is ready to be disseminated more widely and further consulted with all villagers through various meeting sessions at different stages.

5

Conduct consultation meeting

After receiving input from the community in the previous step, there is further consultation with smaller community groups, certain stakeholders, and other parties both formally and informally. The result of this consultation session is a final draft of an agreement which includes all inputs from the consultation process.

6

Involve Government agencies

Conducted to synchronize the agreement with the agencies' program and the existing regulation at both district and national regulation to discover commonality and navigate differences. Negotiations will be a necessary component of this step.

7

Legalization of Agreement

Following the participatory method this step enables key stakeholders to attend a village meeting to legalize the prepared agreement inline with the due legislative procedures. The agreement is then ready to be implemented.

8

Regular and routine monitoring

The implementation of the agreement is conducted annually and carried out by a task team. The results from the monitoring are then reported to the village government and to Burung Indonesia.

Making an impact

With the outline of the process for engaging the community for sustainable landscape management a central question arises: is it effective?

From annual biodiversity monitoring some of the conservation impacts observed include reduced threats to wildlife especially birds, natural reforestation and increased tree planting activities where needed. Furthermore, while going through the above process and engaging the community, Burung Indonesia increased the understanding of the community regarding potential problems, and challenges for village development.

In addition the understanding of the community increased, in terms of ecosystem services required by the community for sustainable environment management. Too, the knowledge and skills of communities in the negotiation processes, conducting participatory rural appraisals, and conducting community need assessment increased.

The process also presented an opportunity for the community/village and local policy makers to have an indication of which village regulations are needed to be developed. For example, village regulation on livestock management, and on water spring conservation.



Image: Burung Indonesia - Changeable Hawk Eagle, Mbeliling, Flores Indonesia - an endangered species

Sustain processes

Burung Indonesia plans to maximize the implementation of the agreements by the community and assist them to find ways to monitor the implementation of agreement. They will also work with the village government to integrate the village resources management agreement (VRMA) process into wider legislative policy making. This creative and inclusive process demonstrates that it is possible to marry the needs of communities and species in a way that benefits people and the planet.



Image: Getty Images

Lessons Learnt

It is more effective if village land use plans are agreed before formulating or developing agreement on village nature resources management. Agreements have to be constructed based on a land use plan.

Ensure that community is aware about the relationship between conservation and development issues. Conservation should be considered as a development issue at every stage of the consultation process.

The community's understanding of ecosystem services is a key aspect for community engagement for conservation issues. Ecosystem services is considered as a modality for poverty eradication at local livelihood.

To increase participation of the community in implementation of agreement, it is necessary to conduct more dissemination sessions across key stakeholders.



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