

# **Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation Areas and Lessons Learned**

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## **Introduction**

In 1994 with the support of ITTO, Indonesia and Sarawak made history by establishing the first transboundary biodiversity conservation area (TBCA) in the humid tropics, comprising Betung Kerihun National Park (BKNP, West Kalimantan) and Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary (LEWS, southern Sarawak). Joint inauguration of the TBCA took place at Batang Ai Hilton Hotel in Sarawak on 10 July 1994. Of the some 1.1 million ha total, 800,000 ha belongs to BKNP, while the rest is made up of LEWS and Batang Ai National Park (BANP) (24,000 ha), the latter included by the Sarawak government in 2003. BANP is connected to both LEWS and BKNP along some parts of its boundary, and is also a well known habitat for orangutan.

TBCA is an effort of ITTO to support its tropical member countries to set aside primary forests for sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. To-date, the network of TBCAs established by ITTO has reached 10 million ha, in which two or more countries are encouraged to cooperate in the management of totally protected areas (TPAs). The TBCAs are located in three regions, in Asia (e.g. Indonesia-Sarawak, Thailand-Cambodia-Laos PDR), Africa (Cameroon-D.R. Congo-Gabon) and Latin America (Peru-Ecuador).

## **Indonesia-Sarawak Transboundary Cooperation**

Three years after establishment of the BKNP–LEWS TBCA, ITTO funded a joint Borneo biodiversity scientific expedition in 1997, spending four weeks in BKNP and two weeks in LEWS. The expedition came to be known as IBBE (1997). Due to the great haze in 1997, the LEWS part of the expedition was delayed until 1998. Forty scientists from both countries participated in studies on socio-economic, forest ecology, flora and fauna. The results were published in a scientific report in 1999. The expedition recommended collaborative research and management as the best option for cross-border cooperation. A second expedition to KMNP lasting four weeks was organized in April 2004, and the results presented in a workshop in Samarinda three months after that.

After the IBBE (1997), a Joint Task Force (JTF) was formed to coordinate planning and organizing cross-border activities, which both sides have actively participated. The JTF also discussed issues and problems relating to cross-border cooperation, such as illegal encroachment to hunt and collect gaharu, and wildlife trade. The JTF was expanded to include KMNP-PTNP TBCA in 2005. The focus areas were collaborative research, information exchange, cross-visits and community development for sustainable livelihoods.

## Lessons Learned

ITTO have supported six TBCA projects in Sarawak and three in Indonesia. Many lessons have been learned from this long experience, some good, some not so good. Transboundary partnership makes it possible to protect a larger area of undisturbed primary forest for biodiversity conservation straddling international boundaries. This is especially significant in the humid tropics where the rain forest which occupies only 5% of the earth's forest cover continues to be deforested and degraded. For BKNP-LEWS TBCA, this also means securing more than one million ha of natural habitats for the survival of the Bornean orangutan sub-species *Pongo pygmaeus pygmaeus*, numbering only some 4,000 individuals, as well a host of other threatened species such as hornbills, Bornean gibbons and two species of langurs.

Sarawak and Indonesia have been supporting each other in maintaining transboundary cooperation. At first, the LEWS Project undertook to organize cross-border programmes and invited Indonesian counterparts and community representatives to come over for workshops, study tours and training. In 2009, the PTNP Project organized joint training courses on flora and fauna research (held in PTNP) and handicrafts (held at Long Bawan on the Indonesian side). Then in 2014, it was Indonesia's turn to do the same under the current BKNP Project Phase III. Information is shared through JTF meetings, workshops, study tours, and exchanging technical reports and management plans.

The JTF was also confronted with various issues and challenges that could weaken collaboration, like (i) differing political, legal, social and administrative characteristics and practices; (ii) unlawful cross-border activities, (iii) inadequate on-ground facilities and management capacity, and (iv) sustaining TBCA cooperation after ITTO.

BKNP has a much higher local population with many living inside the TPA, and have greater demand for forest resources. In LEWS, the total Iban population is only about 12,000, all living outside the TPA boundary. Communities from both sides can make easy cross-over since the TBCA boundaries are not cut and marked, and there is no enforcement. Many are probably also unaware of the TBCAs and the law. Reported activities are mostly hunting, gaharu collecting and wildlife trade. Along the KMNP-PTNP boundary, the main problems are hunting and tree felling for timber.

These activities reflect continuing community dependence on the forest, and may be controlled or minimized if sustainable self sufficiency of the people is enhanced. This makes a case for the respective governments and TBCA managements to intensify efforts in community development initiatives and poverty eradication. Enforcement alone may not be the answer, as JTF's attempt to organize joint border patrol did not succeed.

Improving TBCA management presence on the ground is made harder by the remote locations with no road access, inadequate management capacity and funding, and concerns for safety. Sarawak's (LEWS) idea of engaging local communities in co-management and making them the 'eyes and ears' of the government is good, but needs official recognition and endorsement to put into action.

Results are produced when action plans are translated into actions. Very often, we hear of 'not enough staff' being mentioned as a reason or excuse for failure to deliver. In reality, it is often the quality and not quantity that makes the difference. A good leader will have the necessary knowledge and experience, interest and passion, and the ability to inspire his team to work with diligence. Success in community development is similarly attributed to strong leadership of village or longhouse headmen to turn the entire communities into a united force, which is very important for activities like the tagang fishery to become successful. Communities and households that are unable to do this or reluctant to accept change will expect things to be done for them.

In fact, many rural communities in Sarawak still live a cashless life and desire change, but can only do so with outside help. In 2001, Forest Department Sarawak (FDS) decided to form the Community Service Initiative Unit to provide some help. The Unit was upgraded to Social Forestry Division in 2016, allowing the work of ITTO to be continued and replicated.

Management capacity determines effectiveness in management and deliveries at different levels. In the JTF experience, indecision among the higher management can cause delays in programme implementation, and this happens, for example, when a new officer-in-charge or director takes over. One way to avoid this is to empower JTF to make decision on implementation, as they in direct contact with the management teams on the ground. Lack of manpower for field work is often seen to be caused by uneven staff distribution, ending up with more being retained to work in air-conditioned offices.

Weak management presence on the ground could be resolved by engaging local communities as co-partners in conservation management. In Sarawak, honorary park rangers or wildlife rangers are appointed from among the communities, but effectiveness may be in doubt, as they are often left to work alone as volunteers without supervision and little training.

Completed ITTO projects may or may not be continued by host governments, depending on the nature and objectives of the projects and availability of funding. TBCAs are, however, an integral part of the ITTO TBCA global network, which involved member countries have committed to sustain and promote. In this, FDS has, since 2009 applied for annual budgets for TBCA projects, and separately also for LEWS and PTNP.

To the local communities, biodiversity conservation and environmental protection will become more meaningful and be better appreciated if their livelihood problems and worries are taken care of. In LEWS, community development has increased food production and cash income to make it less necessary to hunt and fish in the forest. Anyone who wishes to hunt may just go to his farm where wild boar comes out from the Sanctuary to feed, as reduced hunting has caused the pig population to go up. A longhouse community that has adopted tagang fishery system only needs to harvest 10 kg of fish (ikan semah, *Tor durenensis*) each time, worth up to RM 1,000.00 (US\$ 240.00).

Similarly in the Pulong Tau buffer zone forest, the Penan can look forward to a better life when their fruits and tagang fishery are ready to be harvested. In addition, the just-ended ITTO buffer

zone project (PD635/12) has recommended to the government for their forest resource base to be secured as communal reserves.

## **Conclusion**

The BKNP-LEWS and KMNP-PTNP TBCAs contain some of the last remaining oldest rain forest on the Island of Borneo. Transboundary partners have the obligation to ensure that these valuable assets are safeguarded at all cost. Then only, collaborative programmes on biodiversity research and sustainable development can follow.

Cross-border issues linked to illegal activities can be resolved if both sides are determined to do so, not by arrests and penalties, but by working closely with local communities to promote good will, understanding and friendship.

To-date, collaboration by Indonesia and Sarawak has yielded many significant achievements in the areas of biodiversity conservation, research and community development, providing a strong foundation for the future. The JTF should be strengthened to play a more active role in promotion and publicity to gain greater political recognition and support for TBCAs.

TBCAs can further contribute to addressing environmental issues that the world is facing today, like deforestation, biodiversity loss and global warming, by acting as a global carbon sink, and with ITTO continuing to play the leading role.