# EXPLORING THE GOVERNANCE OF RESOURCES IN THE LOWER KINABATANGAN-SEGAMA WETLANDS RAMSAR SITE

A Case Study for the Natural Resource Governance Framework

HARRY JONAS AND NEVILLE TAYLOR YAPP

December 2016

## EXPLORING THE GOVERNANCE OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE LOWER KINABATANGAN-SEGAMA WETLANDS RAMSAR SITE

## OVERVIEW

Recognition and respect for tenure rights has long been recognized as an important concern for development, conserva The 'Ramsar Community Group 8 Project' (RCG8) – as it is locally known – aims to increase community-based governance and management of natural resources in the Lower Kinabatangan-Segama Wetlands Ramsar Site (Ramsar site) and to communicate lessons learnt to the team within IUCN working on the Natural Resource Governance Framework (NRGF).

For the purposes of this project, 'natural resource governance' is defined as the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens or other stakeholders have their say in the management of natural resources – including biodiversity conservation (IUCN WCC-RES 3.012).

Key outputs are:

1. The development of joint-governance and co-management plans and agreements as part of the revised Ramsar Site Management Plan, and

2. This case study, which provides an overview of the work thus far and presents it in the context of the NRGF. It is intended to feed into the development of the NRGF Assessment Guide.

This case study contains the following three parts and sections:

Part I: Overview of the LKSW Ramsar Site

Part II: Working Towards the Recognition of Community-based Governance Systems

Part III: Reflections on the project relevant for the NRGF Assessment Guide Working Draft

**PART I**
## OVERVIEW OF THE LOWER KINABATANGAN-SEGAMA WETLANDS RAMSAR SITE

### Problem Statement

This section presents a summary of the interplay between the issues with which the communities are grappling.

### 1. Direct Impacts on the Aquatic Ecosystem and related issues

- **Pollution:** The main negative influence on the Ramsar site's water quality is pollution from the upstream oil palm estates. There is a sense in each village that runoff from the land and mills is adversely impacting the aquatic ecosystem, but the community members are not sure of the exact level of causation.

- **Outsiders:** Outsiders are a grave concern, due to their numbers, aggression and unsustainable and unmonitored fishing practices. Community members argue that they are often acting against the law and in ways that intimidate the locals into inaction.

- **Fish numbers:** Fish numbers are dropping within the Ramsar site, though the exact causes of this are not known. Suggested reasons include overfishing (including by community members and outsiders) and pollution from the estates/mills.

- **Fish prices:** People are aware that the fish they sell are worth more up the value chain, but not sure how to maximize their selling price to the middlemen.

### 2. Terrestrial Challenges

- **Forest resources:** Many of the communities expressed concern at their inability to use wood and other forest products (including to fish) due to the rules relating to forest and wildlife reserves.

- **Human-wildlife conflict:** Some villages reported more damage to their assets from monkeys, others from wild boars.

### 3. Common and Broader Challenges

- **Common general concerns:** The villages shared core concerns such as: lower catches, oil palm's negative influences on the aquatic ecosystem, intrusions and intimidation by outsiders, lack of amenities/public services, and related frustrations with authorities - including Sabah Forestry Department, Department of Fisheries and the security services.

- **Water, electricity, communications and transport:**

Each of these is at low levels and relatively expensive in each village.

### 4. Knowledge of Law and Policy

- **Ramsar awareness:** The level of knowledge about the Ramsar site was very low, epitomized by the fact that communities at Tundun Bohangin did not know what it is despite living across from SFD's Ramsar HQ.

- Law and policy: Knowledge about law and policy is low, and largely based on hearsay.

### 5. Effects on the community and aspirations

- **Outmigration:** These dynamics are causing many people to leave the villages for education and work elsewhere.

- **Quandary over approach:** There is a general dissatisfaction about the current situation in each village, but few ideas about how to improve the local life without outside help.

- **Positivity:** Particular individuals in each village felt emboldened by hearing the fact that others are in similar situations, that their numbers are 2,500 and that a united front could make a difference.
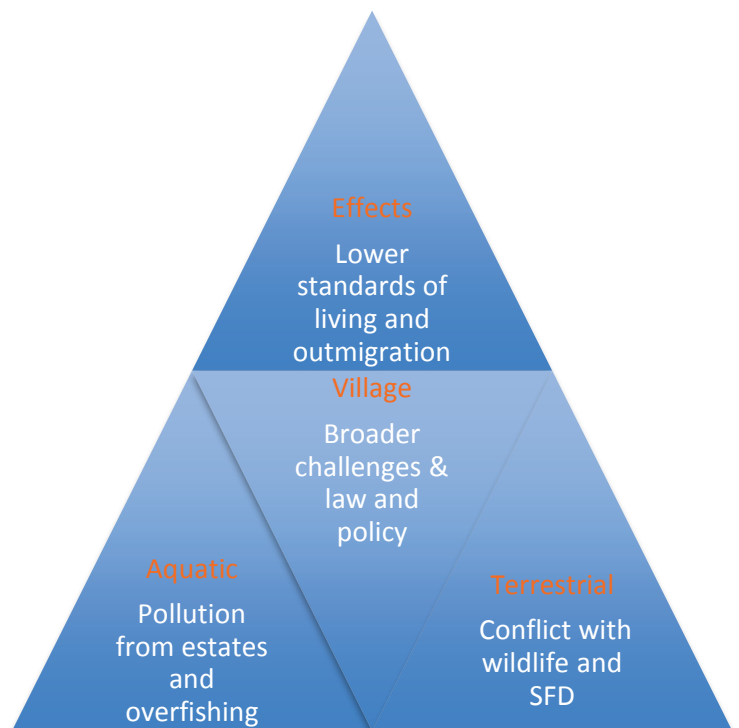
In a simplified version of the above, we see the two rivers' social-ecological systems as being in decline due to two main processes that are depleting the area's natural capital, exacerbated by a third factor.

1. Oil palm estates use the rivers they adjoin as cost-neutral means of dealing with runoff and palm oil mill effluent (POME). This is harming marine life and lowering stocks of aquatic life depended on by the local communities.

2. Some locals as well as a large number of outsiders are overharvesting the remaining aquatic resources (primarily fish, prawns, crabs, shellfish).

3. The lack of access to forest resources is exacerbating the above two issues.



**These effects are negatively impacting the riverine system's resilience and communities' ability to make a living from the Ramsar site's marine resources.**

## Overall Approach

Within the context of the emerging IUCN Natural Resource Governance Framework and Forever Sabah's guiding principles - being to shift Sabah's development trajectory towards an diversified governance, equitable benefit sharing, and a circular local economy (www.foreversabah.org) - the project is working in the buffer and core areas to:

• Develop joint-governance and co-management plans and agreements as part of the revised management plan,

• Reduce the pollution entering the Kinabatangan and Segama rivers, address illegal, unreported and unsustainable fishing along the rivers, and

• Ensure that communities receive more of the benefits being generated from the area, such as clean water, food, and monies from ecotourism and the sale of sustainably harvested natural resources.

## Ramsar Site And Management Plan

### Ramsar Site

The Ramsar site was officially designated as Sabah's first Ramsar site at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in Korea in October 2008. It is situated in the east of the state of Sabah and includes three Forest Reserves: Trusan Kinabatangan Forest Reserve (40,471 ha), Kulamba Wildlife Reserve (20,682 ha), and Kuala Maruap and Kuala Segama Forest Reserve (17,650 ha). The Ramsar site covers 78,803 hectares and comprises the largest forest-covered floodplain in Malaysia, and possibly in Southeast Asia. This makes it Malaysia's largest Ramsar site, and it represents an area larger than the total area of the previously designated five Ramsar sites in Malaysia, which together amount to 55,355 hectares.

The site is recognized as an internationally important wetland for its relatively undisturbed ecosystem that supports populations of rare, endangered and threatened species such as the orangutan, proboscis monkey, Borneo pygmy elephant, Storm's stork, rhinoceros hornbill, Oriental darter, and dipterocarp species. The site is also recognized as ecologically important as spawning and nursery grounds for fish and prawns. As an area of mangrove and peat swamp, it is gaining in global significance due to the importance of mangroves to climate mitigation (blue carbon) and for communities' involvement in climate change adaptation.

### Management Plan

The Ramsar site's management plan (MP) is intended to be effective from 2011-2020 with an option to review the plan in 2015. The Ramsar site's overarching goal is to "Maintain biodiversity and ecological functions, including hydrological regimes, while promoting wise use of the Ramsar wetland." Under this goal, three management objectives have been defined, namely:

1. To protect, restore and enhance key ecosystem services and environmental values of the Ramsar site; particularly those of regional and global significance;

2. To develop appropriate and wise use of the wetlands for the betterment of local communities and Sabah; and

3. To strengthen linkages between government agencies, the community and industry in achieving environmental conservation, connectivity, and protection in the Kinabatangan and Segama river basins.

The Core Area is 78,803 hectares and the Buffer Area is 2,200,847 hectares (2,279,650), formed of the following areas (working west to east):

- Forestry Liaison Zone: 1,464,655
- Oil Palm Liaison Zone: 650,545
- Community Liaison Zone: 85,647
- Artisanal Fishing Zone: 57,953

The first of the two images below shows the core and buffer area zones. Beside it is an image showing the geology of the two river basins, illustrating the overlap.

The Kinabatangan River basin covers 1,686,822 hectares (23% of Sabah's land area) while the Segama River basin covers 529,617 hectares (7% of Sabah). In addition, the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion into which the two rivers flow is an area of over one million square kilometers.
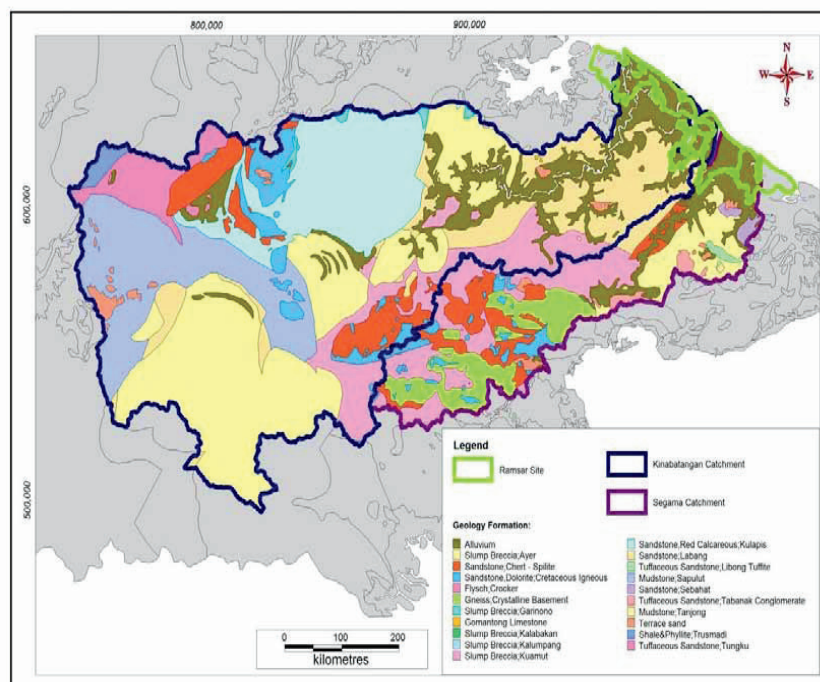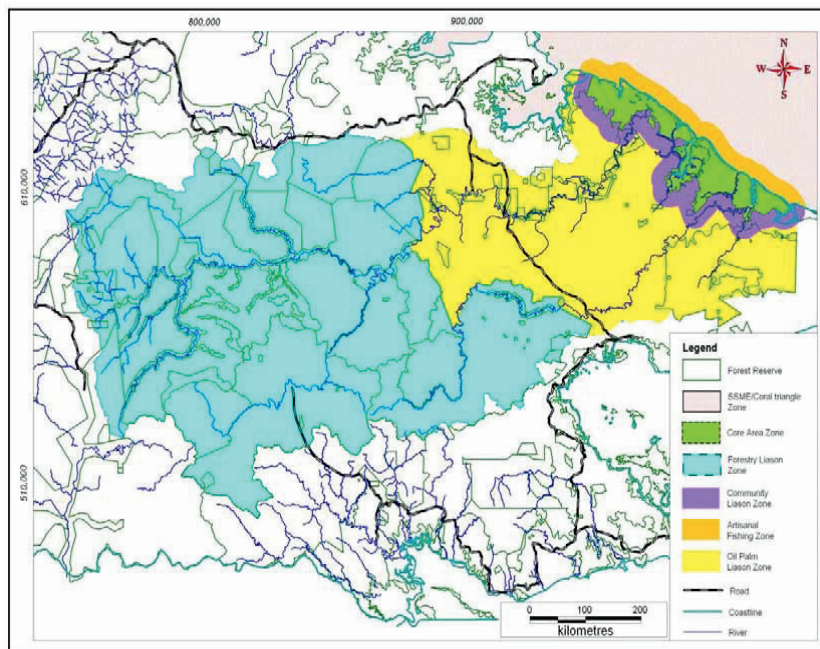
## Official Governance And Management

The overall management of the Ramsar Site was initially situated with Sabah Biodiversity Centre, but has recently moved to the Natural Resources Office. Under NRO's overarching responsibility, SFD heads the Core Advisory Team and the NRO heads the Buffer Area Management Team.

Within the core area, The Kinabatangan District Forestry Office currently manages the forest reserves. The Site Manager is (Haji Hussin Tukiman) - the District Forestry Officer (DFO), and one of the Assistant DFOs is the Assistant Site Manager (Haji Abdul Samah Sapni).

In terms of the current protection status:

1. Trusan Kinabatangan Mangrove Forest Reserve: Mangrove forest reserves are officially considered to be commercial forest reserves, but are currently managed without large-scale extractive activities.

2. Kulamba Wildlife Forest Reserve: Protected forest.

3. Kuala Maruap and Kuala Segama Forest Reserve: See Trusan.

## Community Use

The following figure illustrates the location of the villages.

While the Ramsar site is officially managed according to the above structure, there are eight villages and c. 3,500 people living in the area. Many of the families in the communities are dependent on the natural resources from the area, particularly the aquatic resources. It is therefore fair to say that while there is de jure governmental governance of the Ramsar site, the area is de facto a community-managed area, with zones of de facto community governance (mostly along the rivers as opposed to within the forest reserves).

Official community zones, as stated by the Management Plan, include:

1. **The Artisanal Fishing Zone** is the marine area from shore to 3n nautical miles offshore. This area is a no-trawling zone as declared by the Fisheries Department.

2. **The Community Liaison Zone** is an area of 5km radius of the inland Ramsar site boundary. Within this zone the primary stated consideration is for community use and liaison.

3. **Community Use Precincts** are areas within close vicinity of the villages in which the following activities are prescribed:

   • Local residents can continue their traditional activities in a low impact manner, as long as such activi-

ties are shown to be sustainable and can be monitored and controlled.
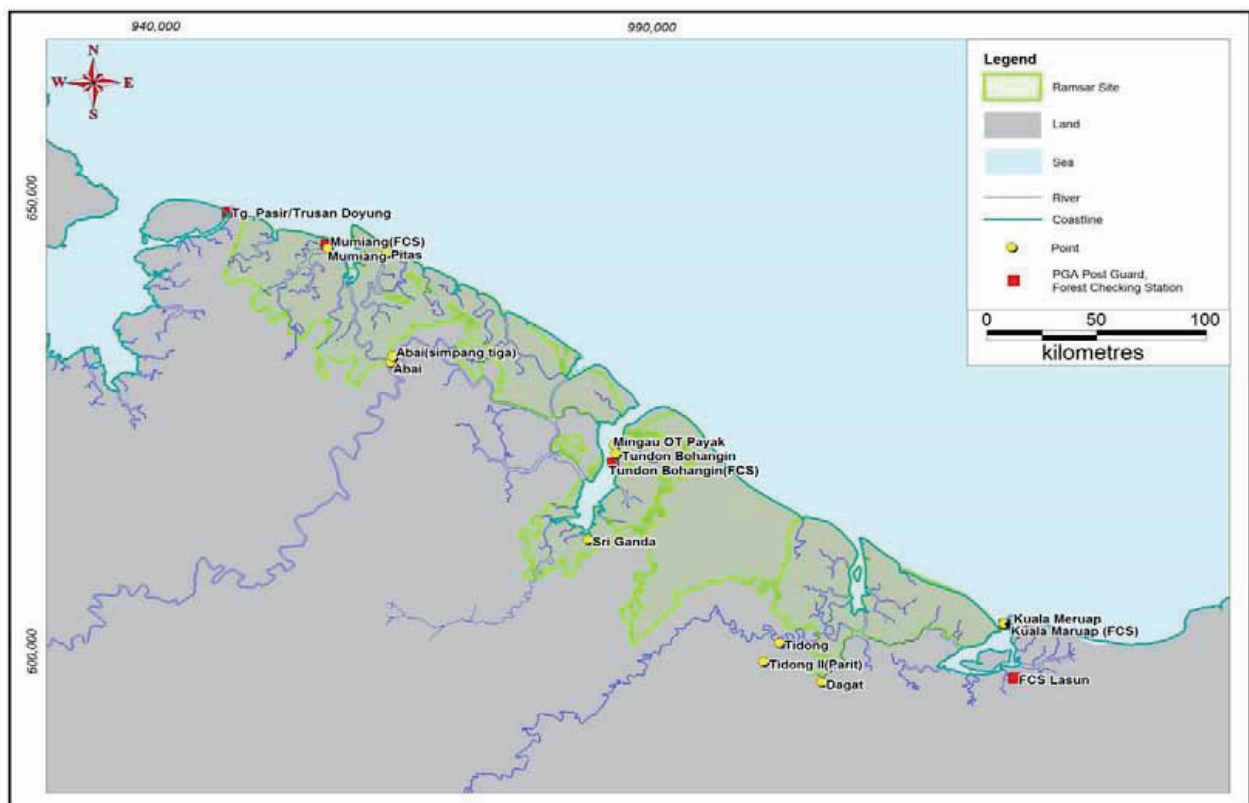
- Collection of NTFPs such as medicinal plants and roofing materials will be allowed under a collaborative NTFP harvesting plan.
- Fishing activities for finfish and crustaceans will be permitted within the confines of a sustainable fisheries management plan that takes account of local productivity, seasonality, minimum sizes, appropriate fishing gear, etc.
- Collection of mangroves for charcoal production may be permitted if the sustainable mangrove harvesting plan shows that sufficient volume of timber can be taken each year to support a viable industry.

The Management Plan suggests the formation of a **Village Committee** to facilitate sharing of information and better engage other Ramsar stakeholders, including the Department of Environment.

The Management Plan also clearly references communities and their traditional ecological knowledge. It states (p. 109):

It is recognized at the time of formulating the MP, there was limited capacity within the local communities to actively participate in the planning of the Ramsar Site. However, involvement of local communities is a long term aim of the MP. Therefore Capacity Development of the local communities is proposed to raise awareness among community leaders of the issues under discussion, the focus of the MP, and how to effectively interact in meetings and workshops.

> The Capacity Development of local communities is considered to be a part of CEPA, then it could be planned as part of the Action Plan for Ramsar CEPA by the CEPA Committee. One of the options is to have an independent part such as a social NGO assisting the Capacity Building. Yet retaining an independent position on controversial issues to allow the community to develop fair and reasoned positions on discussion topics.

> It is expected that this process will be ongoing for the entire duration of the MP as the community gradually becomes more involved with the management implementation and planning process.

It also suggests that "incorporating cultural aspects into the Management Plan will take several years to achieve, but may encourage retention of traditions and cultures."

## PART II
## WORKING TOWARDS THE RECOGNITION OF COMMUNITY-BASED GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

Part II draws on Part I to provide an overview of the local activities undertaken in late-2015 to late-2016 towards the official recognition of the local communities' natural resource governance systems. The final section provided an analysis of the activities' impact.

### Local Activities

### Sumuku Process

From 15-25 October 2015, the project facilitator and LEAP Spiral team spent ten days visiting all villages in the Ramsar site to convey preparatory workshop outcomes and meetings to the larger group. The intention was to create meaningful exchanges and relationships between LEAP Spiral and villagers, as well as to communicate and obtain feedback on what has taken place in previous processes with community leaders, representative of the Sabah Forestry Department and other key government agencies. The community meetings helped community members to assess the issues affecting their communities and better understand that while they actively manage the natural resources in the Ramsar site they are yet to be formally included in the area's governance.

The process was undertaken in the spirit of Sumuku. Sumuku is a Kadazan-Dusun word that describes the way indigenous peoples engage one another in everyday life. It represents a set of FPIC protocols that were developed together by indigenous communities and other agencies in Sabah and has been adopted and recognized by many agencies across the state. The visit to all of the villages represents the start of collaboration and the building of long-term relationships with these villages.

### Heart Of Borneo And Ramsar Conference (2015)

The project was selected as one of the projects to be shared with the audience during the International Heart of Borneo Conference (11-12 November 2015). Representatives from six villages came to the conference. Their participation was made possible with the logistical support from the Sabah Forestry Department and University Malaysia Sabah. As one of the eight villages in the Ramsar site, Abai's work was featured in the event, the leaders of Abai set up an exhibition booth and showed a video documentary of the work they have been doing over the last five years, including regarding forest restoration and community-based tourism.

The event has helped the conservation and scientific community to appreciate the (biological and) cultural diversity of the Ramsar site, and to promote particular knowledge about each villages. The event helped communicate the

aim of the IUCN NRGF and the local process to participants including government agencies.

## Community Organizing And Mapping Training

From 4-7 December 2015, the leaders of Sri Ganda, LEAP Spiral and Sabah Forestry Department co-organized a four-day training workshop located at the Kulamba Field Centre (Ramsar site). The training workshop aimed to expose to the community in the Ramsar site the power of community organizing and the great advantage of community-based participatory mapping. Community mapping experts from PACOS Trust were invited to conduct the training. Twenty-seven participants attended, representing seven villages (representatives of one village did not make it due to logistical issues).

Travel, food & catering was organized by volunteers from Sri Ganda. During the training all seven villages learnt the principles behind community organizing and community mapping, the technical aspects of using a GPS, how to run their own community workshop, and develop their own timeline of action. They ran a one-day practice workshop in Kampung Tundun Bohangin.

This workshop was followed up to ensure that knowledge was passed from a community that did attend the meeting (Dagat) to the one that did not (Tidung).

## Community Mapping

From March-May 2016, all eight communities organized their own workshop and started the mapping process. The village of Pitas Laut was the first one to organize their workshop on 19th December, followed by the village of Abai, Dagat & Tidung, Sri Ganda, Kampung Mumiang, Tundun Bohangin and lastly Bongun in March.

The progress each village made varies. Dagat, Sri Ganda, Pitas Laut and Abai have a combined mapped area of 230 km2 of village area, showing: mangroves, the tributaries, illegal trawler routes, outsider fishing vessels, areas where destructive fishing occurs, proposed areas for community patrolling programme, areas for restoration and protection, the many types of aquatic and terrestrial resources available in their area, key spawning sites for giant freshwater prawns, key habitat for saltwater prawns, hotspots for the migration of Black Snapper (Lutjanus Goldiei), areas for current and future eco-tourism activities, proposed area for sustainable use of Bakau Puith (a kind of mangrove - Brugeira Cylindrica) and other mangroves, as well as the many traditional herbs and medicines and sources for craft-making in the area. All of this is done based on their collective traditional ecological knowledge. The mapping activity was produced by marking waypoints, documenting them with GPS cameras and filling up data on paper forms.

The village of Sri Ganda has developed and enforced a protocol of fishing gears unilaterally decided on the banning of the use of drift nets, mangrove reef nets (pukat renggas) and trawling activities. The motivation for outsiders to trawl in these areas - especially during the monsoon season - is very high given the spike in prawn stocks in the upper reaches of Kuala Kinabatangan (Sungai Badukang Besar, Sungai Badukang Kecil, Sg Mumuyu and Sungai Merah). However, these rules have yet to be formally documented but are being increasingly practiced for the past six months.

The village of Tidung, Tundun Bohangin, Mumiang and Bongun have only collected on average 30% of GPS data in their area due to lack of community participation, leadership issues and lack of interest among the young people to participate. The frequency of workshops held is also very low and it has been difficult to coordinate and communicate effectively with these villagers. The LEAP Spiral team is bridging the gap with these communities by organizing small gatherings to better understand the barriers to participating among the people and develop a different approach with these villages. A first draft of the community maps was produced using Arcmap 10.3 and is currently being managed by the project lead and the community coordinators using the same projection system used by the Forestry Department. These maps will be reviewed, verified and interpreted through a series of community workshops next year.

## Knowledge Sharing

To support the work, Laura Dunstan, a programme coordinator for the North Queensland Dry Tropics, volunteered on the project for over a month. She travelled with the team to all the villagers in the Ramsar site to share about the work that she does in an Australian Ramsar site, known as Bowling Green Bay. In addition, her key input was sharing with the communities efforts undertaken in other countries with regards to regulating and managing fish stocks and especially reviving an iconic species to Australia - the barramundi - and helping community members to relate to the current situation they are facing. During her time she shared the importance of conducting participatory research to enhance the knowledge base for better decision-making on introducing fishing bans, regulating fish gears, zoning, bag limits and size limits. She also provided important inputs to LEAP on the ways forwards for the process.

## Making Of A Short Film

With the assistance of a key resource person and a few volunteers, LEAP has conducted video interviews in all eight villages, taken stock footage, and undertaken script writing to produce a video documentary of the process. This video documentary covers voices from all sides, wisdom from the elders and collective hope and aspirations of the community. The team traveled to the villages, completed the filming

and finalized the video. A first introductory video was released and it currently being use to help other stakeholders understand the process and to seek more partnerships. The LEAP team will produced a few more films next year on fishing conflict, water quality, community-based sports fishing, and citizen science.

### Google Earth Pro

The community of Sri Ganda and Dagat are the only villages that have people with relevant computer equipment. They are familiarizing themselves with the use of Google Earth Pro for the mapping work and are making draft zoning plans of their own areas. The other communities are not yet able to do so and have requested for laptops to be purchased for this purpose. The community coordinators have contributed their time voluntarily on this project thus making savings from the project funds. These funds, upon receiving approval will be used to purchase equipment to support the communities own documentation work.

### Water Quality Assessment

LEAP conducted preliminary water quality assessment with the people in Mumiang to help them identify the sources of pollution that causes several fish deaths since 2011 and identify the water quality parameters suitable for the implementation of a water quality survey, as well as setting up a community-based a water quality monitoring programme. The area upstream of the village consist of disturbed peat land and small plots of failed palm oil and the gradually expansive palm oil estate. A further 30km upstream is the existence of a palm oil processing mill. Several sampling points are being identified around the area together with the people of Mumiang. Water samples were taken back in the months of Nov-15, Dec -15 and Jan 2016 and September 2016 to help the people of Mumiang understand what factors are affecting their fishing ground and develop a strong data for them to leverage with enforcement authorities, advocate for respect towards riparian reserves among plantation owners and improve their practices. Preliminary water quality assessment and focused group discussions also took place in Dagat and Sri Ganda to identify the future needs of the monitoring programme. The village of Abai has been running their own water quality survey for the last 3 years, the experience they have will benefit other communities in the Ramsar site. The Forestry department and the LEAP team have developed a joint proposal to secure funding to start this monitoring programme next year.

### Rapid Area Assessments

Over the period of 6 months, the LEAP team initiated a rapid area assessment process with the people in each village to look at their villages landscape, their cultural diversity,

their natural ecosystem surrounding them and for them to really see their strength, weakness, and opportunities that lies in them. Two community tourism and nature conservation development plan workshop were held respectively in Dagat and Sri Ganda focusing on the potential for community based tourism, sustainable fisheries and environmental conservation development in August and September. This was supported by KOPEL. More workshops will be held for the other communities once they are ready to do so.

### Organizational Visioning Workshop

A workshop was held in July 2016 to develop a vision, mission and objectives for the group of communities and to workshop the IUCN NRGF. The main outcome from the workshop was an agreement to name the collective as "Persatuan Masyarakat Ramsar" (Ramsar Community Association) and register as an association under the Registrar of Societies (ROS). The roles and structure of the association was also discussed. The future function of the association will cover areas of capacity building, advancing governance of terrestrial and aquatic resources in collaboration with the Forestry Department and develop sustainable economies in the area. A follow up workshop will be held next year to include other communities who were not able to attend.

### Heart Of Borneo And Ramsar Conference (2016)

On 8-10 November 2016, the LEAP team was invited to speak on the first day of the conference about community engagement based on the work being done for the last one year titled; Creating Mutually Empowering Process in Alternative Livelihoods and Biodiversity Conservation. The representative from Dagat and Sri Ganda presented their paper at the Ramsar conference the following day covering RCG8 work in with their community. An article on Mongabay about the conference and the work was published recently:

- https://news.mongabay.com/wildtech/2016/11/how-citizen-science-is-transforming-river-management-in-borneo/

### Next Steps

GEF-SGP has provided a grant to continue the process. And a major fundraising effort is being undertaken for 2017, this will include:

#### a. Developing a final GIS map for all villages

The GPS data gathered by the community upon interpreted and validated by them will be used to process a series of maps that articulates the village traditional ecological knowledge, their resource use, and their plans for the future.

#### b. Intra- and inter-community process

The ongoing community processes will focus on bringing

people together to discuss core findings and reach consensus on a set of protocols and zoning, address existing disputes and build an agreement with the other communities relating the proposed protocols and zoning. A cultural event - organized by the communities - is planned for the completion of the community mapping and dialogues, to celebrate the oneness and diversity of life and culture among the Kinabatangan-Segama wetlands.

### c. Community - Government process.

The communities will be engaged in the upcoming Ramsar conference taking place in Sabah this October. In addition, a forward going joint-programme of work, and the obtaining of consensus between government agencies and villages including on joint-governance and co-management of aquatic and terrestrial resources.

### d. Training workshop on community protocols and environmental monitoring programme

A workshop on community protocols and environmental monitoring training will be held next year to build on the mapping work that has been done. The training provided basic skills in facilitation, documentation, and learning about the tools for environmental monitoring.

### e. Community-based water quality monitoring

The Forestry Department and the LEAP team have come up with a joint proposal to the Ministry of Natural Resources of Malaysia for a grant known as the National Conservation Trust Fund for the water quality monitoring work. Data from preliminary findings is being used to guide the monitoring plan, methodology for the participatory research work.

### Analysis

**Community-government Working Relations:** While community-government relations have not always been positive, the facilitators assumed from the start of the project that both groups could work together and forged ahead in that spirit. There may be instances where it would be beneficial not to include government agencies in every activity, but we have found that wherever it is possible, positive collaboration provides a means for (at times) unaligned groups to develop positive relationships.

**Community Organizing:** The facilitators have ensured that the communities have undertaken the all the local activities, after receiving training. The 'mapping training', therefore, included training on mapping as well as how to organize themselves and other community members. This focus on endogenous development has led to the emergence of more independent community facilitators. It has, however, meant that some villages have moved more/less quickly than others. The facilitators think this is not inherently bad

and motivates the less-focused villages to 'catch up' with the high achievers.

**Community Mapping – internal:** The mapping work has provided the communities the opportunity to set out for themselves the natural and cultural resources they feel are important in their areas and to document how they are governing and managing them. This has supported robust conversations within the communities about the resources' relative abundance over time, the factors affecting them, their agency and how they want to improve their governance and management. Even though community mapping is time consuming, the facilitators feel that the investment is worthwhile and important if the process is to have a long-term effect.

**Community Mapping – between communities:** The mapping process is also supporting informed dialogue between communities about both the effects each has on the resources in other areas as well as joint strategies required to deal with common threats. While these conversations are still in their early stages, it is clear that the maps are helping to move sometimes animated/emotional conversations towards ones that will deliver well-respected and sustainable outcomes.

**Community Mapping – government:** Government officials have been present at the key moments in the mapping process and are continually updated via whatsapp (below). While the more official community-government dialogues have not yet begun (this will occur when the maps are finalized and a community governance framework has been developed by the villagers), it is clear that the officers are invested in the process. The aspiration is that their continued involvement will make them more receptive to the results because they can be certain that any maps or proposed new forms of governance have been developed though comprehensive consultation and with their views taken on board.

**Film:** The film made about the mapping process provides a highly accessible overview of the work and has been shown at the Ramsar Conference to at least 300 people. The communities are proud of it and it is helping people who have not been a part of the process to appreciate the importance of the process to the local communities – especially more senior government officers.

**Citizen Science and Water Quality:** This work is in its infancy, but it has received highly favourable reviews from government officials when presented at the Heart of Borneo Conference (2016). Government officials are interested to see communities as net contributors of information and their 'usefulness' in the eyes of government officials will likely help to generate support for the greater official recognition of their natural resource governance. This is a related Mongabay article.

**Communication:** To facilitate dialogue between the villages the facilitators established a whatsapp group. The government officers are also included in the group which has led to a very honest dialogue about the issues that perhaps might not have happened had the engagement been confined to more formal training and workshops sessions. It is difficult to assess the impact of this engagement but it has forged a familiarity between the villagers and the government officers that might not otherwise have happened.

**Attending Conferences:** From the start of the project, the facilitators have made a strong effort to expose the community members to spaces to which they are not normally invited, such as the annual Heart of Borneo and Ramsar Conference. Promoting their biological and cultural diversity, they state, has made an impact on how they see themselves and it has impressed upon them the global importance of their livelihoods and traditional knowledge.

**External Experts:** Notwithstanding the focus on community members doing the work themselves, external experts are useful when their approach to the communities and expertise is presented in the right way. Like the conferences, the Australian expert brought a sense to the community that their natural resources were globally important and provided some good ideas on how to protect them.

## PART III
## FEEDBACK ON THE NRGF ASSESSMENT GUIDE WORKING DRAFT

### Being honest about the reasons for the process

Governance assessments are unlikely to be undertaken without a context and reasons. In the case of the Ramsar site, the process was initiated due to comments from community members in Abai Village, whom LEAP was supporting to develop homestay programs and to reforest local riparian areas. They complained of a range of local issues, as described in Part I. After workshopping the issues – and it becoming clear that all villages in the Ramsar site would likely have similar concerns – the head of the village decided to invite other leaders to agree a way forwards. LEAP facilitated the session, and the outcome was a decision to initiate a governance-related process to involve all the villages and, at appropriate levels and times, the relevant government agencies. Notably, the process has a very clear stated outcome: greater official recognition of the governance and management systems of the local communities within the Ramsar site.

Based on this experience, it would be useful for the guidance on conducting governance assessments to call on assessors to be explicit about the reasons for which assessments are undertaken.

### Forming a diverse team

As stated in Part I, the official governance and management of the site is government led, with *de facto* management (and governance in some areas) being carried out by community members. It was clear from the outset that one of the major challenges was to convince the government agencies that communities could be 'trusted' to have their systems recognized and supported. Thus, a major component of the assessment is in the preparation of the assessment, and involves helping the communities to articulate their natural resource governance and management practices, aspirations and challenges.

LEAP facilitated a workshop that included representatives from all communities (leaders and youth – all with a relatively strong gender balance) and government agencies to develop a participatory map of the area. It helped all rights- and stakeholders to 'see' the issues as they unfolded, including the small number of official staff in the area versus the large number of community members. It provided a mandate to the communities to undertake a major mapping process with which to engage government officials. In terms of developing a 'team', it was agreed that the wider group was needed to take decision, but that the communities should work by themselves (with some governmental engagement as their time permitted). This focused approach issued from the clarity all parties had about the reason for the assessment. That workshop was then built on by the LEAP team holding larger workshops in each village to ensure the participation of those who could not travel to the multi-stakeholder meeting.

Drawing on this experience, the NRGF assessment guidance should recognize and communicate the nuances of the dynamics involved in forming diverse teams for such assessments.

### Conducting versus facilitating the process

LEAP is facilitating the process but would not consider itself to be 'undertaking a governance assessment.' From our experience, the formation of ideas and insights must occur at the personal and group level as opposed to being explained or taught. Thus LEAP considers itself to be running a process that is supporting the communities and government groups to articulate what they already feel and know, help organize those ideas, and develop new knowledge and understanding.

External assessments have their place, and may be acutely needed where major conflict has arisen and a funder/UN agency/other body needs to understand he dynamics. But as a means to generate local change, externally driven and run assessments will only have a limited impact versus processes that are locally led.

Drawing on this experience, the guide should place strong emphasis on endogenous development of assessment processes.

### Indicators

The work in the Ramsar site has not explicitly created specific indicators and this is something to consider. As stated in Part I, it has created a clear problem statement, which in itself sets out the core changes the community wants to see, as per the 'most significant change' methodology for monitoring and evaluating a project. While the project could learn from the Assessment Guide in this regard, the Assessment Guide should help the reader understand that even very simple indicators are useful and not difficult to generate.

It may be helpful for the guidance to provide the reader a scenario at the top of the document that is developed in each section. This would benefit the reader by 'grounding' the guidance through a well thought out and evolving scenario.

### Distinct rights-holder and stakeholder groups

The guide is right to argue that distinct rights-holder and stakeholder groups should have the opportunity, if they want it, to assess governance amongst themselves before results are aggregated (e.g., in small groups). In the case of the Ramsar work, the communities have been mapping their areas and articulating their governance and management arrangements, aspirations and challenges for a year. For some communities or peoples this may take longer. Being prepared to engage and negotiate with government agencies is a critical determinant is successfully evolving the local governance arrangements.

The NRGF Assessment Guide should underscore that this step is a critical one and can take a fair amount of time.

### Independent facilitation

The guidance should avoid language that privileges 'independent facilitators.' LEAP is an 'independent facilitator' but is placing great emphasis on supporting the communities to run the activities and manage the process. The guide should be nuanced to guard against the impression that it favours 'outsiders' running the process.

### Planning for improvements

When the assessment is considered, the process is likely to be a negotiation and one in which communities will be disadvantaged unless their preparation is well done and government officials have been engaged and have become open minded about (otherwise potentially threatening) changes to the local governance arrangements. The development of new governance plans is **a major step** in and of itself, and will be – in the majority of cases – the very reason the assessment was carried out in the first place. NRGF should provide nuanced guidance to help practitioners with this important step.

IUCN is a membership Union composed of both government and civil society organisations. It harnesses the experience, resources and reach of its 1,300 Member organisations and the input of some 15,000 experts. IUCN is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

CEESP, the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy, is an inter-disciplinary network of professionals whose mission is to act as a source of advice on the environmental, economic, social and cultural factors that affect natural resources and biological diversity and to provide guidance and support towards effective policies and practices in environmental conservation and sustainable development.

The Natural Resource Governance Framework (NRGF) is an IUCN initiative created for the purpose of providing a robust, inclusive, and credible approach to assessing and strengthening natural resource governance, at multiple levels and in diverse contexts. The NRGF is hosted by the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), working in close collaboration with the IUCN Secretariat and partners across the Union.