

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABLE OCEANS

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SESSION SEVEN: GLOBAL & REGIONAL MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Photo credit: Nick Hall

Women's Association of Omadal Island Coral Triangle Initiative Women Leaders' Forum Sabah, Malaysia

1) What is the focus of this project?

The Women's Association of Omadal Island (Persatuan Wanita Pulau Omadal, also known as WAPO) is a community-based organization that focusses on addressing threats to the marine environment (such as destructive fishing practices, turtle egg poaching and pollution), and improving income security for women in Omadal island, through environment awareness activities and campaigns on sustainable natural resource management. Omadal Island is just over 100 hectares in size, and is located just off the coast of Semporna district. The island comprises three villages (Omadal Hujung, Omadal Utara and Omadal Selatan) and is home to a nesting site for green turtles.

Ms Roziah Binti Jalalid is the Chairperson of WAPO in Sabah, Malaysia. In her role as Chairperson for WAPO, she has been involved with the Women Leaders' Forum (WLF) of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF). The WLF spans the six countries of the Coral Triangle (Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste), and has held national-level events in each of them.

The aim of the CTI-CFF WLF is to highlight women's leadership in marine conservation, particularly the important contribution that women are making towards the goals of the CTI-CFF. It is envisioned as a peer learning network for the Coral Triangle, to support capacity building amongst Coral Triangle women and to encourage and support them to take leadership roles in sustainably managing the region's unique marine and coastal resources. The WLF seeks to connect grassroots organizations like WAPO, in order to raise community awareness of the importance of protecting and conserving marine habitat and resources, and provide networking and capacity building opportunities to which they might not otherwise have access. WLF's vision is that coastal and marine resources are more effectively managed due to increased engagement and empowerment of women in decision-making processes at all levels in the CT region.

2) Which organizations and other partners are involved?

WAPO was established by women in Omadal Island in 2010, with support from WWF-Malaysia. The WLF is supported by a range of CTI-CFF Development Partners, including The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Coral Triangle Center (CTC), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Conservation International. WAPO is supported primarily by WWF-Malaysia and subnational government.

The CTI-CFF was created when the six Coral Triangle (CT) countries came together in 2007 to form a multilateral partnership and adopt a Regional Plan of Action to safeguard the marine and coastal resources of the region, which contains the world's most significant marine biodiversity. The CTI-CFF WLF was launched in 2014, based on growing recognition that threats to the CT, and efforts to address these threats, may impact men and women differently, and that men and women have different skills and perspectives to contribute in

addressing these threats. Moreover, programs and projects that don't factor in gender risk being inappropriate or inaccessible for a large proportion of target communities, and even amplifying existing social inequalities within these communities.

3) What activities or tools have proven successful in building capacity?

The WLF has held a range of regional and national-level events focused on providing CT women with networking and capacity building opportunities. Activities include profiling women leaders' achievements, and providing training in communication, project design/management, policy development, and income generating initiatives.

Regional: In 2014, immediately prior to the launch of the WLF, 13 women leaders from each of the six CT countries participated in a study tour to the U.S. This study tour, supported by USAID and the CTC, involved leadership training and field-based learning opportunities. At the launch of the WLF, six grassroots women leaders from the CT were recognized for their work to advance marine and coastal conservation, and provided with a small grant, supported by the US Government, ADB, TNC and CTC, to expand their work.

National: National-level WLF activities have also been held across the CT. For example, in Papua New Guinea, a WLF roundtable was held in Milne Bay in March 2015, followed by an event in Manus in June 2016. These events brought together women leaders from coastal communities around the country, in order to share lessons on marine and coastal resource conservation projects, and elect WLF focal points. These events were supported by TNC, PNG National and Provincial Government and other WLF partners including the US Government/CTC.

A WLF event was also held in Kudat, Sabah, in Malaysia to celebrate Earth Hour in March 2015. The event was supported by the US Government, WWF Malaysia and the CTC, and featured four women leaders from the proposed Tun Mustapha Park in Sabah, a globally significant priority conservation area in the CT. Ms Jalalid from WAPO participated in this event, and was able to benefit from lessons shared by other women champions of conservation, particularly in relation to turtle monitoring and patrols.

Subnational: Such exposure to grassroots conservation champions from elsewhere in Malaysia in turn supports organizations like WAPO to become more effective in their own efforts. WAPO conducts campaigns on Omdal Island to increase awareness amongst local communities regarding the importance of sustainably managing marine resources, including threatened species like green turtles. With support from local and provincial government agencies, WAPO has also gone on to conduct sessions with neighboring communities in order to share lessons on handicraft making (so that a percentage of profits from handicrafts sold can go back into conservation activities), best practice in turtle hatchery management, as well as photography and video making. WAPO has convened regular meetings to enable sharing of lessons learned with other women's groups across Malaysia (mainly Kudat and Terengganu), which have helped address local practices of fish bombing and turtle egg poaching.

4) What challenges have been experienced, specifically related to maintaining a focus on capacity building and/or replicating the project in other areas?

The strength of the CTI-CFF WLF is that it acts as a peer-learning network which can build capacity at a range of levels – regional, national and subnational. The fact that it relies upon support from CTI-CFF partners in several CT countries means that it can be rolled out in a locally appropriate way in each place. The primary challenge for the WLF relates to funding; although funding has been secured for each of the past events on a case by case basis, a more strategic and long-term approach will only be possible with longer-term, programmatic funding.

Other challenges for WAPO relate to grassroots management, including how to communicate the benefits of sustainable resource management without inadvertently fostering conflict within or between communities, and managing expectations about their role. In addition, sometimes the fact that WAPO members are women itself creates challenges – for example, for security reasons, the women need to be accompanied by men or enforcement authorities while conducting patrols. Dealing with these sorts of issues is a common challenge for grassroots conservation activities led by women, which again points to the benefits of platforms like the WLF that enable the sharing of approaches and problem solving strategies across different locations.

5) What are the next steps for the project?

The WLF continues to meet on a monthly basis to discuss progress and future opportunities to profile and support its work. Currently, WLF events at both the regional and national level are made possible with support from CTI-CFF Development Partners. A more strategic, longer-term approach will only be possible with broader, programmatic resourcing.

For WAPO, after consulting villagers across Omodal Island, the group is now supporting the communities to develop a vision for the island, based on community priorities in relation to fisheries, tourism, environment, infrastructure and security. Moving forward, it would be fantastic to pair up WAPO with another group that has already facilitated such a process elsewhere in the CT, through the WLF. Conversely, once WAPO has completed this process, they could also support other women’s conservation groups.

WLF: <https://www.facebook.com/ctiwomenleaders/>

WLF launch on official CTI-CFF website: <http://www.coraltriangleinitiative.org/news/cti-cff-women-leaders%E2%80%99-forum-launched-honors-six-women-leaders-marine-conservation>

Short film about the WLF: <https://vimeo.com/159909480>

The CTI-CFF Regional Plan of Action: <http://www.coraltriangleinitiative.org/library/cti-regional-plan-action>

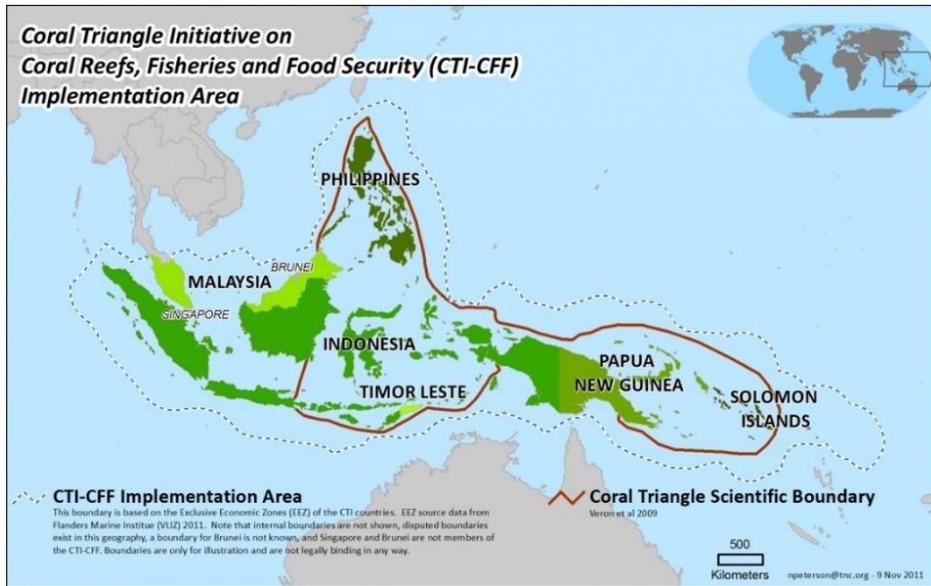


Award winners from each of the CT countries at the WLF Launch – Manado, Indonesia, May 2014. Photo: Coral Triangle



WLF event in Malaysia – Kudat, Sabah, Mar 2015. Photo: WWF Malaysia

Coral Triangle boundary:



WAPO area:

