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A case study for Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary and Betung Kerihun National Park

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The Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation Area (TBCA) of Betung Kerihun National Park (BKNP) in West Kalimantan and Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary (LEWS) in Sarawak, Malaysia, share many common values in landscapes, watersheds, ethnographic history, culture, and plant and animal resources. Batang Ai National Park (BANP) adjacent to LEWS became a part of the TBCA following recent approval by the Sarawak Government.

With a combined area of one million hectares the TBCA forms the most important sanctuary for the remaining orangutan populations and other rare and threatened species in Borneo. These resources are shared and are best promoted and managed through parallel conservation efforts.

Sharing and benefiting from the resources requires a common vision. The orangutan will be the most important objective for sustaining the TBCA, and in providing a unifying force for action. As suggested in the IUCN Good Practice Guidelines for promoting Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Cooperation, a common logo can be adopted using this threatened species to become a visible symbol for co-operation.

Another co-operative effort by Malaysia and Indonesia is to agree to the establishment of a second TBCA covering Pulong Tau National Park in North-east Sarawak and Kayan Mentarang National Park in North Kalimantan.

Further collaboration has also recently been initiated to nominate BKNP and LEWS as Clustered World Heritage Sites under UNESCO.

The mechanisms to promote common values will involve stakeholders from all levels: governments (national, regional and district), private sector and local communities.

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In 2001, a Task Force was formed to plan and determine short and medium-term goals for protection, exchange of information, cross-visits of management staff and community representatives, and bilateral research. The ITTO Borneo Biodiversity Expedition to the TBCA in 1997 (IBBE 1997) marked the first collaborative effort between the two host countries.

At the government level, protection of the TBCA as a joint watershed and catchment area can form another common bond to ensure that the populations in both countries will continue to enjoy good quality of life and healthy living.

The local people are the direct users of the natural resources as they have done so for generations, and are recognized as an integral part of the forest ecosystems. They will continue to have a long-term impact on the protected areas, being heavily dependant on the forest as the main source of protein. Hunting and fishing must be controlled.

In BKNP, as in the Kayan Mentarang National Park, North Kalimantan, forest areas traditionally belonging to the natives are included in the park under a co-management system. In Sarawak, special privileges are granted to the traditional users to hunt and collect jungle produce from the sanctuary and national parks for domestic consumption. In management, representatives of the local communities are appointed Honorary Rangers and members of Special Wildlife Committee (for LEWS) and Special Park Committee (for BANP). They will contribute knowledge, views and ideas in co-management and sustainable utilization.

Experience in Sarawak shows that while the communities residing immediately outside the TPAs are co-operating well, it is not always the case with those living further away and having no privilege to use the resources. The actions and needs of this group of people will have to be addressed. Protected areas have a greater concentration of game animals and timber trees that can potentially lead to increasing illegal activities. Nature education and conservation awareness need to be extended to areas beyond the TPAs and their buffer zones.

Promoting joint social and economic activities between the local communities of BKNP, LEWS and BANP for shared benefits is feasible, as these people have a similar way of life, share a common or similar cultural background and beliefs, and a great respect for nature. Their knowledge and awareness on the concept of joint protected area management, biodiversity conservation and sustainable utilization need to be enhanced.

Shared benefits can come from joint eco-tourism activities to promote culture, adventure and nature (between BKNP and BANP); and developing selected resources through community-related projects in the buffer zones to supplement their cash income*.

* Under the LEWS project, indigenous fruit crops and ponds for high-value fish were established for the local communities in the buffer zones.

Active participation of the local communities in management will give them a sense of belonging, promote friendly relations and enhance co-operation at the protected area level.

With time, resistance of the local communities towards conservation can be changed. In Sarawak, following successful implementation of the ITTO project, some members of the communities have requested the authorities to include forest areas under their customary rights in future extensions of the sanctuary and the park.

Those involved in eco-tourism at BANP have also become aware of the need to protect the orangutan in order to attract tourists to the park.

Formulation of common policies and plans of actions to suit the situation can be achieved without much difficulty. Getting these policies and action plans implemented fully requires greater attention and commitment to make available the necessary resources, both financial and human.

Political and social problems, where they occur, can cause difficulties and delays.

The governments of Malaysia and Indonesia recognize the vital role of ITTO in financing the two conservation projects that led to the formation of the TBCA in 1994. ITTO also supported the 1997 joint Borneo Biodiversity Expedition where scientists and local communities from both sides were able to work together for the first time.

Continued support from ITTO towards biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest management is essential and welcomed.

At the government level, support from the decision-makers must be enhanced, especially after the establishment of a second TBCA and Clustered World Heritage Sites.

Stakeholders and participants at all levels need to be made aware of the government's intentions and commitments to ensure the success of this network.

In Sarawak, one possible venue through which to promote and coordinate these decisions and seek co-operation at the ground level will be the Rural Growth Centers soon to be developed by the Government in the various districts.

Developing friendship, trust and mutual respect between the two sides at the protected area level can be achieved through exchange of ideas and information, cross-visits between administrative and management staff and community representatives, joint enforcement duties, training programmes and workshops, and bilateral research.

One field center with offices and visitor information on each side near the common boundary should be made available for free use by park managers, scientists and researchers from both countries. Sub-camps can be erected close to the common boundary for use by rangers doing joint patrolling and other field duties.

The Task Force is the existing coordinating body to implement short and medium-term activities. Its structure may have to be reviewed following the recent de-centralization of the Government of Indonesia.

For long-term co-operation, it will be necessary to consider a more permanent coordinating committee to draw up co-operative agreements for planning and development.

The importance of such an agreement is stated in the IUCN Good Practice Guidelines for Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Co-operation:

Both formal and informal agreements can be used to declare common interests, agree on objectives, state guiding principles, and plan and implement management programmes. They are essential to sustain co-operation in the transboundary context. They are needed to secure the endorsement of relevant authorities and accountability among the stakeholders.

These agreements can be extended to include the second TBCA and the Clustered World Heritage Sites in due course.

To be effective, coordinating committees must have the full support of the relevant authorities and the mandate to make quick decisions on planning and implementation.

At the protected area level, it is essential to have the support of a team of permanent and full-time managers, scientific personnel, field assistants and rangers who are committed to biodiversity conservation, and are willing to be posted to the rural areas.

Promoting biodiversity conservation at the landscape level is considered to be beneficial, more so for Sarawak in view of the relatively small size of its TPAs, surrounded by timber concessions and oil palm estates.

It is the intention of the Government to designate suitable sites in each timber concession area within the Permanent Forest Estates (PFEs) for biodiversity. These reserves, together with Native Customary Rights forest areas adjacent to the TPAs, where available, can be linked and managed co-operatively.

This will further promote understanding and friendship between TPAs and the timber industry.

For both countries, biodiversity conservation and transboundary co-operation need to be given greater priorities and attention by the relevant authorities. So far, there is still a lack of interested and dedicated managers, researchers and assistants to provide continuous service. These people can make the difference between success and failure.

Biodiversity and existing facilities must be put to full use. The new LEWS headquarters complex is an ideal site for a field research station to promote research (national and international), nature conservation and education. Bilateral research must be continued**.

The TBCA is a rich gene bank for timber trees. Animal and plant products of economic potential can be developed for food, pharmaceuticals and ornamentals. Indigenous fruit orchards, herb gardens and handicrafts are potential tourist attractions.

TBCAs and other TPAs in Borneo represent but a small fraction of the total forest cover which is fast diminishing, and will continue to give way for development and industrialization. Priorities and long-term policies may not ensure their continued existence without a conscious and practical effort to protect and manage them sustainably for the benefits of the future generations.

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** A second joint expedition to the Kayang Mentarang National Park with participants from Sabah and Sarawak was successfully organized in April.