



Knowledge exchange as a tool for transboundary and coastal management of the Arafura and Timor Seas



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ABSTRACT

The exchange of knowledge, skills and experience can improve management in transboundary regions through improved understanding of issues, development of partnerships, and acquisition of new skills amongst regional groups and stakeholders. A structured knowledge exchange in the form of a week-long study tour was piloted involving representatives of coastal communities from Indonesia and Timor-Leste travelling to the Northern Territory in Australia. The exchange was conducted as part of the Arafura Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Program and facilitated by two Australian organisations. The tour involved a series of activities, workshop sessions and field visits with a range of government, non-government and Indigenous (Australian) organisations to generate ideas, innovations, partnerships and shared understanding of community-based marine and coastal management and livelihoods between the three countries. The development, design, implementation and evaluation results of the study tour are evaluated. The results show that participants gained broad capacity benefits in four areas: raised awareness about different community and co-management approaches to marine conservation and management and livelihoods improvement, enhanced knowledge of tools for implementation of marine conservation and management, improved consensus and teamwork amongst participants, and increased potential for developing networks among the three countries. The results also highlight areas for potential improvement in study tour preparation, format and capacity outcomes that provide valuable lessons for others looking to embark on similar knowledge exchange activities.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Indigenous and community conservation and resource management knowledge exchanges

Indigenous and local community-based co-management approaches are increasingly seen as important to achieving sustainable management of coastal and marine areas, biodiversity and fisheries (Andrade and Rhodes, 2012; Cohen and Steenbergen, 2015; Evans et al., 2011; Govan, 2009; Pomeroy, 1995). In the Arafura and Timor Seas (ATS) region, including in Australia, Indonesia and Timor Leste, Indigenous and local communities have

implemented a range of mechanisms to assert their coastal management rights and responsibilities, and to achieve sustainable resource use. Examples include Indigenous Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs), Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) and periodically closed areas (for example customary practices of *sasi* in eastern Indonesia and *tara bandu* in Timor Leste) (see Cohen and Steenbergen, 2015; Corrigan and Hay-Edie, 2013; Govan, 2009; Rocliffe et al., 2014; Ross et al., 2009; Smyth and Grant, 2012). Key to building this community-led momentum is ensuring that local actors (leaders, managers, owners and users) gain a wider knowledge of community-based natural resource management approaches and experiences through peer-to-peer and social learning, both within and outside their regions (Armitage et al., 2009; Berkes, 2009).

Recognising this, reports have documented the positive value of such exchange visits globally and in the Asia–Pacific region for

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participants and the wider sphere of influence that they operate in, and the wide range of benefits involved. These include the new knowledge gained by participants through 'learning by doing' – for example completing field visits, receiving training in using new tools or simply through direct observation (for example see [NAILSMA, 2008](#)). Subsequent sharing of new knowledge with participants' home communities or organisations can have a 'ripple effect' ([Piras nd a:9](#)) on a wider group of people to create change; and lead to expansion of networks to create new partnerships ([Piras nd a](#)). Finally, exchanges provide the opportunity for people who have never worked together to allow for 'fresh perspectives', open discussion and alternative ways of doing ([Piras nd a:12](#)).

In recent times, Indigenous communities in northern Australia have initiated or participated in numerous knowledge exchanges with Indigenous communities from other parts of the world (for example see [CFNGBI, 2011; 2014; NAILSMA, 2008; 2009; TNC, 2013](#) documenting exchanges from Papua New Guinea, Canada, Mexico, Africa, and Alaska (USA)). The World Indigenous Network of Indigenous and Local Community land and Sea Managers (WIN) was launched to at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 2012 and many of these exchanges showcased at the WIN Conference in May 2013 ([WIN, 2015](#)).

Participants in these exchanges report learnings and positive outcomes consistent with those reported by [Piras \(nd a, b\)](#). For example, [NAILSMA \(2008\)](#) describes an exchange where a group of Seri people Indigenous to Mexico participated in a scientific and cultural exchange program to Indigenous Australian communities. Participants reported on the capacity gained by young ambassadors who were guided by elders on the trip to articulate and communicate issues into the future, essentially referring to a 'ripple effect'. The exchange also provided a fresh perspective to Indigenous Australians on their large and abundant populations of turtles and dugongs, whose populations are in serious decline elsewhere in the world, which led to discussions of regulatory frameworks for management. Participants also referred to technical skills gained through learning by doing, including creating their own digital data tool for turtle monitoring based on the I-Tracker application demonstrated by [NAILSMA](#), and a sense of camaraderie fostered through the exchange. The LMMA Network also reports on undertaking exchange visits between members of their network in the Asia–Pacific region ([LMMA Network, 2011](#)). The aim of these visits are to function 'as a platform where communities come together to share issues and solutions by inviting key government agencies and non-government organizations to assist' in development of conservation action plans ([CSP, 2013:1](#)).

Recognising the benefits of international exchanges, international development agencies such as the World Bank ([Kumar and Leonard, 2012; Oettlé and Koelle, 2003](#)) and the International Labour Organisation ([Steinmann, 2010](#)) and NRM Organisations ([Piras nd a, b](#)) have released publications giving guidance on how to plan, prepare, conduct and evaluate such exchanges. The production of numerous toolkits and manuals on knowledge exchanges reflects growing recognition by conservation agencies and funding bodies of the value of such events in developing shared perspectives and new knowledge to address natural resource management problems. Several kinds of exchange activities are recognized, depending on particular circumstances and desired outcomes, including exchange visits, communities of practice, twinning arrangements, dialogues, expert visits and study tours, among others (see [Kumar and Leonard, 2012; Oettlé and Koelle, 2003; Piras nd, a & b](#)). A study tour is characterised as 'a visit by an individual or group to one or more countries/areas for knowledge exchange. Study Tours provide an opportunity for key stakeholders to learn relevant, good development practice from their peers. Study tours allow for a high

level of interaction among participants and exposure to the topic of study' ([Kumar and Leonard, 2012:36](#)).

However, despite the increasing recognition of the benefits such exchanges can make to community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) there is little peer-reviewed literature discussing the merits and value of international exchanges or study tours as a development tool (e.g. [Oettlé et al., 2004](#)). Also lacking is an assessment of the effectiveness or otherwise of the models or methods prescribed, and of longer term outcomes of international exchange visits as tools for improving development outcomes in the CBNRM context. While most (if not all) projects have evaluation reporting requirements as a criterion for receiving funding, such reports are often not widely accessible. It is therefore likely that many lessons that have been learned are lost to the development sector.

1.2. Background to this exchange and paper

The warm, tropical waters of the ATS are shared by Australia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Timor-Leste and are adjacent to the Coral Triangle region - recognized as one of the most marine biodiverse regions in the world ([Alongi et al., 2011](#)) ([Fig. 1](#)). Marine resources and both small and large-scale fisheries and associated habitats in the ATS region provide food, nutritional value, income, employment and cultural values for millions of people. Approximately 4.1 million people live in the ATS region and the level of development and social and economic status of people varies considerably between countries. Notwithstanding, there are high levels of poverty in the region including in rural and coastal communities ([Stacey et al., 2011](#)). Diverse forms of local ownership and land and sea rights exist in the region.

The northern Australian coastline is sparsely populated outside of the major regional centres with many remote Indigenous populations who have a significant stake in much of the Australian area of the ATS. For example, approximately 85% of the Northern Territory coastline bordering the ATS is Aboriginal owned through the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* ([Altman and Kerins, 2012](#)), and Indigenous people have significant rights based on traditional laws and customs to land and resource use in Queensland and Western Australian through national Native Title legislation, ([Commonwealth of Australia, 2013](#)). Across the whole northern Australian coast, substantial areas are included in protected areas declared and managed by Indigenous community-based organisations ([Department of Environment, 2012](#)). Timor Leste is a newly developing island nation with respect to community-based coastal and marine management, but some existing forms of customary marine tenure and symbolic and ritual practices associated with seascapes exist in some areas ([AMSAT International, 2011; McWilliam, 2003](#)). In parts of eastern Indonesia which border the ATS region, highly diverse forms of customary ownership exist, with the most well documented being *sasi* practices (broadly defined as locally rules and regulations for use and management of natural resources) from parts of southern Maluku region ([Pannell, 1997](#)). In coastal regions of Papua New Guinea, various forms of individual and collective forms of customary marine tenure exist ([Hyndman, 1993](#)).

The ATS are considered to be semi-enclosed seas under Part IX of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982), which places an obligation on countries bordering enclosed and semi-enclosed seas to cooperate in resource management, in the protection of the marine environment and in marine scientific research.

In order to promote international cooperation in the ATS, the Arafura and Timor Seas Expert Forum (ATSEF) was established in 2003 to foster transboundary collaboration between government,

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