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UNOC3 Conference Side Event

Community-based marine resource management in Southeast Asia:
Benefits, Challenges and Lessons From 4 Countries

Wednesday 11th June 2025, 5pm Malaysia & Thailand, 4pm Vietnam & Philippines

(Online) Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Hanoi & Manila

Organised by:
Reef Check Malaysia
Ramkhamhaeng University
Pacific Environment
UP Marine Science Institute

Background on the event (one paragraph)

The goal of the event was to examine the topic (community-based marine resource management) from the following perspectives:

- Community (role, needs, capacity, funding, legal recognition, protected areas)
- Policy/legal (legislation, regulations, policies, conflicts, gaps)
- Science (relevant research and what it says, information gaps).

The objective was to develop consensus on some best practices in community-based resource management.

Key Issues discussed (5-8 bullet points)

Scientific Perspectives

- In Thailand, **Community-Based Management** has evolved over 20 years in response to overexploitation and degradation. Strong emphasis on **stakeholder analysis and engagement**, involving resource users and local administrators. **Challenges** include low environmental awareness, limited knowledge, and financial constraints.
- In Vietnam, **Coastal communities** are vital due to their close interaction with marine resources (fishing, aquaculture) and have **deep understanding** of marine ecosystems. **Challenges** include limited conservation knowledge, conflict with other interests, and funding shortages.
- In Philippines, centralized management is often **inefficient**; community involvement leads to better outcomes. **Community mobilization** includes education, capacity building, and participatory research. A **support network** has been formed for collaboration between MPAs.
- In Malaysia, **inclusive decision-making** fosters community ownership and responsibility. Recognizing **traditional rights** is key: access, knowledge, and cultural practices. There's concern for preserving **fishermen's identities**, deeply tied to local heritage.

Policy and Legal Perspectives

- Vietnam has a strong legal framework with laws like the **Law on Fishery**, **Law on Biodiversity**, and international agreements. Government supports community involvement through **directives and national programs**.
- Thailand is influenced by **international frameworks** (e.g., SDGs, Kunming-Montreal Framework). **Decentralization acts** empower local administrative bodies. Emphasis on improving **public participation** and local regulation-making.
- While Malaysia adopts **international frameworks**, it lacks **specific laws** for community-managed MPAs. Initiatives like **Reef Care Programme** and **Honorary Park Rangers** promote participation informally.
- Philippines Operates on a **decentralized, democratic** approach. **Local government units (LGUs)** are legally mandated to lead marine conservation. Strong legal support for **community involvement** in MPAs.

Community Perspectives

- In Malaysia there is a shift toward **participatory management**, e.g., Tun Mustafa Park and community groups. Challenges: **Formal recognition** of community groups and **sustainable funding** sources.
- In Vietnam, communities are essential for MPA success but need **training, financial backing**, and development of **sustainable ecotourism** to maintain long-term conservation.
- In Thailand, local administrative bodies enable community involvement, but **financial limitations** and **low environmental awareness** hinder effectiveness.
- The Philippines boasts an extensive **network of locally managed MPAs**. Supported by LGUs and external donors. Challenges include **leadership development, law enforcement**, and **financial sustainability**.

Key recommendations for action / voluntary commitments (5-6 bullet points)

1. **Community Involvement is Essential:** It leads to more efficient planning, higher compliance, and sustainable conservation.
2. **Capacity Building is Needed:** Training, education, and resources are necessary for communities to manage MPAs effectively.
3. **Legal Frameworks Vary:** Some countries have strong support through national laws (Philippines, Vietnam), while others (Malaysia) rely on informal programs.
4. **Decentralization Works:** Empowering local governments and administrative bodies enhances community participation.
5. **Cultural & Identity Considerations Matter:** Recognizing traditional rights and preserving community identity strengthens trust and cooperation.
6. **Challenges are Shared:** Across all regions, issues like low environmental awareness, lack of funding, and weak enforcement recur.