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# TURNING INDONESIA'S ISLANDS INTO ECONOMIC ASSETS

*A huge undertaking but a necessary one*

 Diana M  September 22, 2021



For the sake of future generations, it is necessary to implement characteristic-based management for Indonesia's thousands of islands.

*By Diana M, Indonesia correspondent, Maritime Fairtrade*

As an archipelagic state, Indonesia has 17,000 islands, which offer a significant number of natural resources like fishery, coral reefs, seagrass and mangrove, all vital elements to maintaining the balance of the ocean ecosystem. In order to harvest the vast potential of the ocean, it is important to customize the management of these islands based on their unique social (e.g., islanders' profiles, population, etc.), geographical and environmental characteristics to ensure sustainability.

According to the director of Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Tropical Biology (SEAMEO BIOTROP) Dr. Zulhamsyah Imran, an expert in small island and coastal management, the authority should use characteristic-based management to ensure an optimal and sustainable utilization of natural resources. He said it is no good to just possess the thousands of islands and leave them be or even worse, to engage in harmful activities like mining.

Imran sounded a caution against mining as although it is profitable, it is also a destructive activity with only a short-term gain but resulting in irreversible harm to the environment.

Therefore, characteristic-based management is a win-win solution for stakeholders as well as for the environment.

## Each island is unique

"Managing small islands must be done in accordance to each island's characteristics. For example, islands in Kepulauan Seribu in Jakarta are mainly consist of sand. They will be more costly to manage because they don't naturally have freshwater," Imran told Maritime Fairtrade. "The islanders on the inhabited ones rely heavily on rain for their water supply."

What can be done, he continued, is to build the necessary infrastructure to transport freshwater supply from the mainland to the islands and thereafter ensure that the infrastructure is well-maintained and running efficiently. This will in turn help the islands' tourism industry to grow. He added that for the more remote islands, besides needing a constant supply of freshwater for the locals, a well-developed transport system is also needed to make them more accessible to tourists.

Meanwhile, for the management of islands in the eastern regions of Indonesia, the following characteristics may be taken into consideration.

- Because of the many fishing communities in the eastern islands, it is a viable option to tap on this knowledge to establish fish farms to complement the income of the fishermen during rough weather where it is dangerous to fish in the ocean.
- Many small islands are part of underwater volcanoes and because of the rich minerals present, they are good fishing grounds for tourists.
- For land-based attraction, the hills and cliffs, which are the natural features of this type of island, make for good exploration and photo spots.

## Conservation and development can exist together

"First and foremost, helping the community and getting their consensus is important. After that, the government can then start managing the sustainable economic development," Imran explained.

For human activities and the environment to co-exist sustainably, it is important to raise awareness of conservation and sustainable growth through public campaigns for the island community, especially those at the outer regions of the country where education level may not be high. Also, it is prudent and productive to get the local community involved in the decision making

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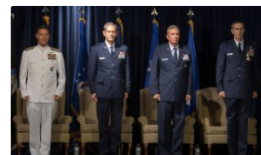
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and implementation of the development plans.

For tourists, besides enjoying their stay in the islands, it is also important to educate them on the local environment, natural surrounding and ways on how they can help in the conservation effort. Potential activities like recreational fishing, diving, snorkeling and surfing can be complemented by conservation talks by local guides, who can be trained and given employment by the local government.

Imran mentioned a spot near Padang, West Sumatra, which is usually along the migratory route of marlin from Aceh. During certain periods, it is easy to catch the fish, and thus it is feasible to develop this spot for recreational fishing purposes.

"We can train our traditional fishermen to be guides in these fishing spots. They may earn a decent income from this potential development project," Imran said.

Therefore, with an overarching holistic plan taking into account the perspectives and needs of all stakeholders, the concept of the characteristic-based management is thus able to leverage on the unique traits of each island, avoid overdevelopment and to direct the financial benefits of economic development to the local communities in a sustainable way. Eventually, these thousands of islands can become valuable economic assets of the country.



Diana M

Diana M, our Indonesia correspondent, is based in Jakarta. She is a former reporter from The Jakarta Globe. Through her writings, she hopes to bring awareness to important maritime security and trade issues.

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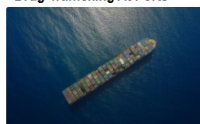
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