



OCEAN DEPENDENT COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA'S MARITIME SECURITY GOVERNANCE

Reflections and Actionable Pathways



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About the Report

A collaboration between the Yokosuka Council on Asia-Pacific Studies and Segara Nusa Nawasena, this report is based on a series of discussions aimed at strengthening the region's maritime security domain – particularly by guiding the existing defence relationship between the US and regional states to more strongly recognize and engage with ocean dependent communities. We thank all participants who gave their time and energy to these discussions.

Executive Summary

In Southeast Asia, there is an ongoing tendency to focus on state-centric ideas of maritime security. This focus permeates into maritime security interventions across the domestic, regional, and international scales. This report highlights that such a focus – as well as the resultant interventions – are extremely problematic in a context where ocean dependent communities have distinct vulnerabilities that often go unrecognized or are in direct tension with the state-centric focus.

This report centers the vulnerabilities different ocean dependent communities face, suggesting the need to refocus what maritime security should be to account for these complex and intersecting vulnerabilities. It suggests that a more community-sensitive and holistic approach to maritime security would not only address such vulnerabilities, but also make maritime security provision – as well as maritime security cooperation - more effective by providing a deeper knowledge base on community needs and interests, expanding the tools that can be exploited, facilitating trust-building between varied and relevant stakeholders, and ultimately legitimizing interventions.

With such a recommendation in mind, the report goes on to demonstrate the ways in which these community-centred approach to maritime security could be more effectively implemented in the region. It focuses on examining the interconnectedness of ocean interests, the multiple threats that ocean-dependent community face, and strategies to address these challenges that have historically characterized by the silo mentality and disconnected approach across sectors and scales of governance.

Ultimately, ocean dependent communities in Southeast Asia tackle diverse challenges in maritime security governance. Government interventions, whether direct or indirect, may hopefully lead to stable and enduring partnerships. The Whole of Government framework may present interesting solutions and workable measures to address maritime security provision and cooperation. Meaningful and effective avenues to ensure the collaborative participation of marginalized groups and Indigenous Peoples are essential to make a serious impact on local communities. The fundamental goal of the interconnected roles of the public and private sectors as well as civil society in maritime security governance, is to affirm that each and every maritime stakeholder is heard, affirmed and valued.

Policy Recommendations

- Regional states and their international partners – especially the United States of America (USA) – need to more strongly recognise the distinct vulnerabilities different ocean dependent communities face in Southeast Asia.
- This includes a shift in thinking away from only considering harms to tangible or material things (livelihoods, food, and physical harm), but also more intangible harms to things like identity and cultural practice.
- Regional states and the USA should create more avenues for meaningful participation from ocean dependent communities. This includes ensuring easy and affordable access to information, establishing formal institutional mechanisms for consultation and engagement, or through the leveraging of other actors such as Non-Governmental Organizations to act as a bridge.
- Relationships cannot be merely extractive and consider how ocean dependent communities can help in isolation, but need to strongly reflect on how maritime security practices create further vulnerabilities for ocean dependent communities, ultimately undermining maritime security.
- Ocean dependent communities cannot just be an afterthought or addition to conventional thinking, but should be mainstreamed into all levels of threat assessment and response planning. Thinking through these considerations should more strongly underpin risk assessments in maritime security provision and cooperation.
- Creating meaningful avenues for participation requires greater reflection on how to ensure this is effective. Given the vulnerabilities of ocean dependent communities are often exacerbated by a lack of access to education, this means thinking creatively about how to empower ocean dependent communities within these spaces.
- Eliciting engagement creatively or through the use of innovative and participatory methodologies gives communities a tool to document their own experience with maritime security and the insecurities that they have encountered.

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Introduction & Background

Southeast Asia is one of the busiest maritime areas in the world in terms of global trade, economic exploitation, food security, and environmental biodiversity. While opportunity abounds, Southeast Asian nations are facing significant threats to all of these interests. As a result, maritime security has been elevated as the vital concern for Southeast Asia. Threats include traditional concerns of geopolitical tensions in the South China Sea, and terrorism and piracy on regional connectivity. With the broadening of the maritime security concept, issues such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, the illicit movement of goods and people, and marine environmental sustainability have taken centre-stage. Each of these issues impact sea users and interested parties in different ways, including industries dependent on them for profit, coastal communities dependent on them for nutrition, livelihoods, and cultural practices, and nation states that require secure oceans for broader national goals such as peace and prosperity.¹

In response to these inter-connected threats, regional governments are continuously reforming governance and international partners are actioning significant levels of programming towards this goal. One of the main drivers of reform and cooperation is managing the different stakeholders involved in maritime security provision. Indeed, securing Southeast Asia's seas implicates a range of governmental institutions and departments in the multi-agency, whole-of-government response required to tackle the breadth of issues.² These include traditional maritime security actors such as navies, coastguards, and port authorities, but also those terrestrially focused such as police services, labour agencies, and environmental agencies. What has resulted is the need to break down silos, address disconnect across sectors and scales of governance (local, national, regional and international), and organise different actors (some of whom have different understandings and priorities) towards the complex goal of securing diverse stakeholders from a host of inter-connected threats.

Some reforms - such as the establishment of coordination bodies and structures, more synergized Maritime Domain Awareness,³ the enactment of increasingly complex exercises,⁴ or capacity building⁵ - are focused on operational effectiveness. Others are focused more on realizing policy

¹ Edwards, S., & Edmunds, T. (2023) Maritime Security Sector Governance and Reform (Geneva: DCAF)

² Socquet-Clerc, K., Khoo, S-Y, Edwards, S., Kembara, G., Salleh, A., and Tariella, J. (2023) Maritime Security Sector Governance and Reform in Southeast Asia (Geneva: DCAF); Agastia, D., Cheeppensook, K., Edwards, S., & Fabe, A. P. (2024). Coordinating for maritime security: Southeast Asia's evolving institutions. Blue Security, Issue 6; Bradford, J., & Edwards, S., (2022) Evolving Stakeholder Roles in Southeast Asian Maritime Security, RSIS IDSS Papers, IP22058

³ Bueger, C. (2015). From Dusk to Dawn? Maritime Domain Awareness in Southeast Asia. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 37(2), 157–182. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24916578>; Bueger, C., & Chan, J., (eds.) (2019) Paving the way for Regional Maritime Domain Awareness (Singapore: RSIS); Agastia, D., & Perwita, A. A. B. (2017). Building Maritime Domain Awareness as an Essential Element of the Global Maritime Fulcrum: Challenges and Prospects for Indonesia's Maritime Security. *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional*, Vol. 6(1) <https://doi.org/10.18196/hi.61109>

⁴ Bradford, J., & Adams, G., (2016). Beyond Bilateralism: Exercising a Maritime Security Network in Southeast Asia. *Pacific Forum Issues & Insights*, Vol. 16(11); Dombrowski, P., Reich, S., (2024) Multilateral Maritime Exercises, Grand Strategy, and Strategic Change: The American Case and Beyond, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 9(3), ogae017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogae017>

⁵ Bueger, C., Edmunds, T., & McCabe, R. (2019). Into the sea: capacity-building innovations and the maritime security challenge. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(2), 228–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1660632>; Bradford, J., Bradford, A., Edwards, S., (2024) Maritime Security Capacity-Building Activities in the Indo-Pacific: Objectives, Challenges and Best Practices (Yokosuka, YCAPS); Bradford, J., Koga, K., Edwards, S., (2023) Prospects For The Quad Coast Guards To Cooperate Toward Implementation Of The Free And Open Indo-Pacific Vision (Yokosuka, YCAPS)

coherence and strategic alignment, including the practice of producing distinct maritime security strategies or legislative reform.⁶

Despite the promising activity in this regard, these regional maritime security interventions have a commonality in that they all – in various ways – are limited in the amount they consult with non-governmental actors.⁷ While some states are more aligned with good governance values than others, decision-making is undertaken by states with few avenues for involvement of non-state actors – particularly in the security domain.

This is problematic, because as we aim to demonstrate here, communities who rely on the ocean including women, Indigenous Peoples and other minority ethnic/religious groups, youth, and low-income groups are disproportionately impacted by maritime insecurities and play critical roles in ocean and coastal development and security, but are often marginalized from decision-making processes and the implementation of policy. This applies across the domestic and regional scales, where maritime security provision follows state-centric and traditional understandings of maritime security: “focusing on safety, economic security, borders and the role of the state”.⁸

Domestically, striving for more operational effectiveness is highlighted by the empowerment of coordinative agencies like Indonesia’s Badan Keamanan Laut (BAKAMLA) and the Philippines’s National Maritime Council (previously National Coast Watch Center). They bring together a range of governmental agencies, but they are only making slow progress in terms of outreach and have few formalized channels to engage with the communities that they are meant to protect from a range of harms.⁹

At a policy level, the Whole-of-Government strategies are also often exclusive and primarily focused on the state apparatus or are limited to recognition without pathways to actual engagement in both the process of creating policy and its implementation. While Thailand is outside of the scope of this report, its maritime security strategy is the most comprehensive in the region. With a limited consultative phase with the public sector, including seminars and conferences that were considered by the National Maritime Interests Policy Committee (NPC), it does recognize coastal communities and calls for ‘public participation’ to realize its goal of ‘strengthening security and safety for people and communities that use the sea’.¹⁰ It explicitly recognizes that ‘vulnerable population groups in marine and coastal areas, such as coastal communities, ethnic groups living in coastal and marine areas, and marine fisheries workers are also at risk of being affected by maritime accidents, statelessness, lack of access to government services, and the risk of being brought into the human

⁶ Bueger, C., Edmunds, T., & Edwards, S. (2021). Innovation and New Strategic Choices: Refreshing the UK’s National Strategy for Maritime Security. *The RUSI Journal*, 166(4), 66–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2021.1981777>; Edwards, S., Bradford, J., Nguyen, H., (2025). National Maritime Security in Vietnam – Towards an Integrated Approach to Realise Sustained Development Benefits (London: FCDO)

⁷ Socquet-Clerc, K., Khoo, S-Y., Edwards, S., Kembara, G., Salleh, A., and Tariella, J. (2023) Maritime Security Sector Governance and Reform in Southeast Asia (Geneva: DCAF)

⁸ Fabinyi, M., Cvitanovic, C., Barclay, K., Bennett, N., Chan, E., Nguyen, H., Partelow, S., Song, A. Y., Stacey, N., Steenbergen, D., Suarez, B., and Tanyag, M. (2025) Rethinking maritime security from the bottom up: Four principles to broaden perspectives and centre humans and ecosystems. *NPJ Ocean Sustainability*. Vol. 4, No. 29

⁹ Agastia, D., Cheeppensook, K., Edwards, S., & Fabe, A. P. (2024). Coordinating for maritime security: Southeast Asia’s evolving institutions. *Blue Security*, Issue 6.

¹⁰ National Security Council (2023) National Maritime Security Plan [online] <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/tha220782.pdf> (accessed 7th June 2025)

trafficking process and forced labor’.¹¹ While the recognition of ‘human security’ and the ‘empowerment’ of communities is extremely progressive for the region, its calls for more Marine Spatial Planning reflect limitations to actual steps to meaningfully integrate coastal communities into decision-making. Such problems are of greater concern for the states under study in this report, given they lack strategies and do not set out the intention nor means to ensure such engagement.

The regional scale also reflects such limitations. The movement within ASEAN towards “people-centered, people-oriented communities” in the 2007 ASEAN charter, while sometimes criticized for its lack of action, has documented a shared recognition that people need to be protected. Extra-regional pressure is also adding to this process, as the norm of human security proliferated throughout the world (albeit in a contested manner).¹² But the above pathologies are also seen here. ASEAN’s Maritime Outlook – a benchmark stocktaking document – is interesting because it is almost wholly absent of any non-governmental interaction or consideration. It recognizes that “the management and safeguarding of the maritime domain in the region require a whole-of-Community response” but instead moves to address this through the “the broadening of cooperation with ASEAN’s external partners...involving ASEAN Member States, ASEAN’s external partners and the ASEAN Secretariat”.¹³ When turning to the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint, this tendency for state-to-state cooperation – without pathways for community engagement – are reinforced, through the focus on the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Inter-sessional Meeting on Maritime Security (ISM), the ASEAN Defense Ministry Meeting (ADMM/ADMM-Plus) and the negotiation of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) with China. This reinforces long-held perspectives that ASEAN is an elitist organization in that it facilitates interaction of governmental bodies but does little to integrate the perspectives of those that stand outside of the governments.¹⁴

As this report demonstrates below, these limited recognitions of ocean-dependent communities are correct in their assertions that decision-making needs to be more ‘whole-of-community’.

Unexpected outcomes of top-down maritime governance, such as enclosure of the oceans, can create further insecurities, especially if an issue is not understood fully by leveraging the knowledge of those impacted. Even more problematic is when such limitations may be anticipated but ignored due to the inability of these communities to advocate for more justice-centric approaches. But these issues stem from the fact that community voices are still not sufficiently represented in policymaking or implementation, despite their importance to it. Many ocean-dependent communities are also beset by uneven power dynamics in relation to government actors, but also other non-state actors such as larger private interests. There is therefore a need to bring in ocean-dependent communities in decision making. Beyond providing more understanding and a justice-cantered approach, processes such as trust-building and shared ownerships of projects could have significant benefits on tangible outcomes, especially as community stakeholders are more likely to accept decisions if they have input into them.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Acharya, A., (2001) Human Security: East Versus West? IDSS Paper

¹³ ASEAN Secretariat (2023) ASEAN Maritime Outlook (Jakarta: ASEAN)

¹⁴ Collins, A., (2008) A People-Oriented ASEAN: A Door Ajar or Closed for Civil Society Organizations? *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 30(2): 313-331

Rationale: Why focus on ocean dependent communities and maritime security in Southeast Asia?

Recognising Local Communities

The recognized importance of the involvement of local communities in security governance is not a new one. The UN has long promoted community security by addressing the root causes of conflict and violence and fostering collaboration between state and civil society actors, reflecting the broader movement towards such norms. Peacebuilding and peacekeeping in particular are security activities which have seen the most discussion and implementation of this, but the movement to concerns about environmental threats have further embedded the idea. This can be seen in the enunciation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), arising from the Rio declaration (1992).¹⁵ The UN set out a pathway to do this via the Sustainable Development Goals, but they have still been limited in their influence.¹⁶

Other actions include the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development that prioritises the co-design and co-delivery of solution-oriented research and recommends co-design of “transformative science carried out by diverse actors will contribute to sustainable development” and promotes a spirit of inclusivity and openness for transformation through knowledge production and use.¹⁷ In support of this transformation, the Ocean Decade has a cultural framework programme that recognises Indigenous knowledge as important to transform ocean sciences and conservation, and encourages support for action. The recent Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, the BBNJ Agreement or High Sea Treaty includes a mandate to respect, promote and consider the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities “when taking action to address the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction”.¹⁸

This recognition translates to numerous interventions concerning maritime governance more broadly. Numerous reports centre on the need to bring different local communities into maritime decision-making.¹⁹ These are often focused, however, on the blue economy or developmental

¹⁵ Niner et al. (2024). Reflections on the past, present, and potential futures of knowledge hierarchies in ocean biodiversity governance research. *Frontiers in Marine Science*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2024.1347494>

¹⁶ Biermann et al., 2022 as cited in Niner et. Al. (2024). Reflections on the past, present, and potential futures of knowledge hierarchies in ocean biodiversity governance research. *Frontier in Marine Science*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2024.1347494>

¹⁷ IOC-UNESCO. (2021). Co-designing the Science We Need for the Ocean We Want:

Guidance and Recommendations for Collaborative Approaches to Designing &

Implementing Decade Actions (Paris: UNESCO); Febrica, S. (2023). Mainstreaming ocean art and culture in ocean management (One Ocean Hub). Available online at: <https://oneoceanhub.org/mainstreaming-ocean-artand-culture-in-ocean-management/> (Accessed November 16, 2023).as cited in Niner et. al. (2024).

¹⁸ Article 7 of the BBNJ Agreement as cited in Niner et. al. (2024).

¹⁹ Dewan Maritim Indonesia. (2007b).Laporan Perumusan Kebijakan Kelembagaan Tata

Pemerintahan di Laut. Jakarta: Departemen Kelautan dan Perikanan, pp.60-61; ; Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

(2005). Diskusi Panel tentang Studi Kebijakan Kelautan Indonesia dalam Rangka Mendukung pembangunan dan Integritas Nasional, Surabaya, 7-8 April 2005. Jakarta: Departemen Luar Negeri.Indonesian, p.47; Indonesian

Coordinating Ministry for Political and Security Affairs. (2006). Penetapan Rencana Kinerja Tahun 2006. Jakarta: Kemenkopolhukam. p. 40, 57 as cited in Febrica. (2023). Port security and preman organizations in Indonesia.

Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.

domain. The finding is often that more equitable decision-making would bring significant developmental benefits. There has been less attention on the maritime security domain specifically.

Such a long-lasting recognition (some of which is specific to the maritime domain), then, forces the question of why the need to focus on ocean dependent communities in maritime security governance in Southeast Asia? This report now turns to several reasons why this is especially pertinent; namely the complexity of the maritime security issue, the complexity of the communities in the region, and the importance of maritime security to the Southeast Asia-US relationship. When combined with the ongoing limitations in governance laid out above, such explicit recognition and analysis this report provides becomes even more important for holistic recommendations.

Maritime security as a ‘wicked problem’ in Southeast Asia

Maritime security is a vital concern for Southeast Asia, but it is an extremely complex issue area. The extra-regional focus on the South China Sea belies the complex risk environment and the myriad of threats that pose dangers to a wide array of maritime stakeholder communities.²⁰

Southeast Asia is particularly interesting because as Bradford and Edwards highlight, “maritime security in the region has long been at odds with the definitional divisions between traditional and non-traditional security found in Western perspectives”. As states grappled with the nation-building required after experiencing colonialism, security policy was instead oriented towards anything that undermined national resilience. This essentially meant that any threats that could undermine the building of strong, centralized, and developed nations were considered by the state itself to be a security problem.

Refocusing away from the threats posed by states, illicit actors have a long history of undermining this resilience, whether for profit or for political goals. The region has become a one of the few ‘hotspots’ for piracy, for example, especially in the Malacca Straits and Sulu/Celebes Seas. While national and international efforts to combat piracy and armed robbery sea have become well-institutionalized,²¹ and piracy relatively suppressed, the past six months has seen a resurgence of armed robbery in the Malacca straits. In the Sulu Celebes Seas, this problem is exacerbated by the fact that illicit actors also have complex political goals, causing insecurity by attacking passenger shipping or kidnapping crew for ransom to fund further terrorist activities.

IUU fishing continues to pose a significant issue for the region and is increasingly recognised as a transnational and organized crime. Considering it as only an issue of enforcement, however, undermines the rights-based approaches that are sometimes required because of the interlinkages between threats. Forced labour, for example, has become an important facilitating crime for those engaged in IUU fishing, intersecting with problems of human trafficking and people smuggling in complex ways, while IUU fishing also intersects with the trafficking of illicit goods.

²⁰ Edwards, S., & Bradford, J., (2023) Southeast Asia’s Maritime Security Challenges: An Evolving Tapestry. Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative [online] <https://amti.csis.org/southeast-asias-maritime-security-challenges-an-evolving-tapestry/> (accessed 15th June 2025)

²¹ Febrica. (2017). *Maritime Security and Indonesia: Cooperation, Interests and Strategies*. London: Routledge, pp.9-10; Febrica. (2023). *Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific*, pp. 9-10.

The complex nuances between people smuggling and human trafficking is a further complexity, especially as the coercion (not always physical) can newly emerge at different stages of the movement of people. Indo-Chinese refugees have been replaced by the Rohingya escaping conflict and persecution in Myanmar. Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand are among the top 15 United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees Refugee Status Determination (UNHCR RSD) operation in the world in terms of applications received and decisions given (UNHCR, 2010, p.39).²² Rohingya is the largest group registered in recent years (56 per cent), followed by Afghanistan (12 per cent), Somalia (6 per cent), and Sri Lanka (5 per cent), highlighting the vulnerability of people moving illicitly at sea²³

There are also emerging threats to the health of the oceans themselves, undermining their ability to provide communities with their basic requirements and states with their prosperity through the exploitation of resources and energy. The ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on the Blue Economy, for example, acknowledged that "that the ocean and seas are key drivers of economic growth and innovation". Now that Malaysia is finalizing its National Blue Economy Blueprint, most regional states now have some sort of blue economy framework that sets out a vision for how the maritime economy will bolster state prosperity. With the mainstreaming of sustainable development, however, there is a stated commitment that such usage should need to be sustainable: environmental protection featured in Indonesia's global maritime fulcrum, for example, while the ASEAN declaration pointed to a "sustainable, resilient and inclusive use". Anthropogenic activities that threaten the oceans occupy a difficult space, given some such as dynamite fishing are illicit but others such as mining are technically legal albeit damaging, raising further questions on what threats to the environment should be focused upon.

Given this extreme complexity, there is a greater need to not only understand the threats, but also the complex ways in which communities factor in them.

A community of communities

It is not just maritime security that remains complex, but also what it means to talk about ocean-dependent communities in the regional context. Many of the above interventions speak of them as a homogenous and coherent group, but this belies the complexity of their makeup, their intersections, and the resultant impact on the diversity of their interests and concerns. In this report, we largely focus on women, Indigenous Peoples and other minority ethnic/religious groups, youth, and low-income groups as organizing categories, but recognize that there is also heterogeneity within these and such categories can also be problematic.

Women are the first of the communities under study in this report. ASEAN has placed increased focus on Women, Peace and Security particularly since the adoption of the Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN in November 2017. The publication of the joint statement led to a series of dialogues and high-level document on the role of women in maritime security. These include the organization of the first regional symposium on women, peace and

²² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2010). UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2009. Available from <http://www.unhcr.org/4ce531e09.html>. Last accessed 20 March 2011 as cited in Febrica. (2023). Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific, p. 11.

²³ UNHCR, 2020 as cited in Febrica. (2023). Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific, p. 12.

security in August 2019 and the ASEAN Ministerial Dialogue on Strengthening Women's Role for Sustainable Peace and Security in September 2020, the launch of the ASEAN Regional Study on Women in March 2021, and the introduction of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security in November 2022. Despite much progress on the recognition of women role in security key maritime security document such as the ASEAN Regional Forum Work Plan for Maritime Security 2018-2020 makes no reference to gender equality or to women.²⁴

Across the Global South, women are recognized as ocean-dependent because they often work as processors and sellers of fishery products – especially at the small-scale fishery (SSF) level.²⁵ An estimate from nine major fish-producing countries reveals that 46 % of the labour force in small-scale fisheries-related activities, including pre-and post-harvesting work are women.²⁶ The gendered nature of the fisheries sector contributed to the exclusion of women from decision- making and consultation processes, capacity- building initiatives, and financial support.²⁷ The lack of access to financial instruments such as savings and micro- credit also reduce small-scale fishers and women from small-scale fishing community opportunity to move into other livelihoods during the lean fishing season.²⁸

SSF is mired by gender inequalities, furthermore, through which contributions made by women are “invisibilised”. This is especially true in Southeast Asia, where much of the existing focus has been on women in the fishery sector but they remain undervalued and unrecognized.²⁹ This is because women may not be involved in the direct activity of fishing itself, but provide supportive roles for the fishers. Across Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, women work to supplement the family income by marketing the catch, mending nets, or preparing the feed. Women are also involved in activities such as the traditional processing of dried, salted or smoked fish. But it is not just in SSF where women are found in the supply chain. In Malaysia, for example, more than 80% of the workforce in the canning and prawn processing factories are women working mainly as operators in the processing lines. They are strongly integrated then into the fisheries supply chain, despite their relative invisibility. In the Philippine fisheries sector, women are involved in post-harvest activities

²⁴ Pappa. (2021). Maritime Security: Advancing Women's Empowerment at Sea. Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law Online, 24(1), pp.137-169. https://brill.com/downloadpdf/journals/mpyo/24/1/article-p137_6.pdf

²⁵ Okafor-Yarwood, I. B., van den Berg, S., Collins, Y. A., Sefa Nyarko, C., (2022) “Ocean Optimism” and Resilience: Learning From Women's Responses to Disruptions Caused by COVID-19 to Small-Scale Fisheries in the Gulf of Guinea. *Frontiers in Marine Science*. Vol. 9

²⁶ World Bank, 2009 as cited in Golo and Erinosho (2023). Tackling the challenges confronting women in the Elmina fishing community of Ghana: A human rights framework, *Marine Policy*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105349>

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid, Febrica, S., Snow, B., Francis, B., Oduro, GY., Boateng, KA., Erinosho, B. (2022). One Ocean Hub's Written evidence to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Report on the adverse impacts of climate change on the right to food: Call for inputs – Report on the adverse impact of climate change on the right to food available from <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/climatechange/food/submissions/csos/submission-climate-change-food-one-ocean-hub.pdf>; Francis, B and McGarry, D. (2023). “Grandmothers of the sea: Stories and lessons from five Xhosa ocean elders,” in *Hydrofeminist Thinking With Oceans*. London: Routledge, pp. 173-186; Febrica et al. (2025). Small-scale fishers' perception of risks in Indonesia's cross-border region of North Maluku. *Marine Policy*. Vol. 175, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2025.106624>.

²⁹ Siason, I. et al. (2002). Women in fisheries in Asia. Global Symposium on Women in Fisheries: Sixth Asian Fisheries Forum, 29 November 2001, Kaohsiung, Taiwan

such as fish processing, marketing, and gleaning. Over 1.5 million women rely on fisheries for their basic livelihood.³⁰ In 2024, of the total 2.8 million registered Filipino fisherfolk, 30% were women, highlighting their support in the supply chain and food security.³¹ In Indonesia, women make up 42 percent of the labor force in fisheries are women and 72 per cent of fish sellers, including in ports.³²

Women are also increasingly involved in the governance of fisheries. A recent Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center IUU workshop, for example, aimed to establish a voluntary regional network of women fisheries officers, and identify challenges and barriers faced by women fisheries officers in the region and practical opportunities for shifting gender norms.³³

But it is not just the fishery sector where women have maritime interests. According to the IMO WISTA Women in Maritime Survey 2021, women make up less than two per cent of workers at sea (mostly in the cruise industry), and 29 per cent across all sub-sectors of the maritime industry, including, for instance, marketing, recruitment and port operations. This, however, represents a positive trend in gender balance, with the report estimating 24,059 women serving as seafarers, which is a 45.8% increase compared with the 2015 report. Maritime Education and Training Institutions are increasingly recruitment women in the region who go on to serve onboard vessels.

Furthermore, women are increasingly involved in the maritime security sector itself. In the Philippines, the United Nations Development Program and the Bangsamoro Women's Commission launched the Bangsamoro Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (RAP-WPS) 2020-2022, which aimed to highlight the role of Bangsamoro women in the implementation of the peace agreement, in conflict transformation and in the protection of their human rights in conflict and post-conflict settings.³⁴ Underpinned by the Women, Peace, and Security framework, the Philippine Coast Guard implemented the provisions stipulated under the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which promoted women's role in maritime law enforcement.³⁵

Indigenous Peoples are the second community of interest in this report, and perhaps the most complex. Somiah, for example, highlights there is a 'problematic politics of indigeneity', whereby overly simplified categorisations bely the complexity of individually and collectively held identities.³⁶ We recognise this complexity and are cautious concerning the 'vague categorizations', though it remains clear that indigenous peoples across the region are dependent on the oceans for their livelihoods, identity, and cultural practices.

³⁰ Factsasia.org. "Kababaihan at Karagatan: Filipino Women Fisherfolk's Vulnerability to Climate Change." <https://www.factsasia.org/blog/kababaihan-at-karagatan-filipino-women-fisherfolks-vulnerability-to-climate-change#>.

³¹ Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources. (2024). Philippine Fisheries Report 2024. Quezon City, Philippines: Department of Agriculture Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

³² Napitupulu and Tanaya, 3 Reasons Why Women In Fisheries Matter For An Inclusive Economic Recovery, WRI Indonesia, 20 November 2020, <https://wri-indonesia.org/en/insights/3-reasons-why-women-fisheries-matter-inclusive-economic-recovery>

³³ SEAFDEC (2025) Women in Fisheries Workshop [online] <https://www.seafdec.or.th/news/women-in-fisheries-workshop/> (accessed 8th August 2015)

³⁴ UNDP Philippines. (2022). "Bangsamoro Women at the Helm of Peacebuilding and Community Resilience in BARMM." <https://www.undp.org/philippines/news/bangsamoro-women-helm-peacebuilding-and-community-resilience-barmm>.

³⁵ Philippine Coast Guard. (2022). Women, Peace and Security Framework. Manila, Philippines: Coast Guard Strategic Studies Center. <https://cgssiac.coastguard.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/PCG-WPS-FRAMEWORK-1.pdf.pdf>

³⁶ Somiah, V., (2022) The Sea is Indigenous 'Land' Too, *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 37(1)

The Orang Asli (indigenous peoples) of peninsular Malaysia have many distinct communities that exploit the oceans for their livelihoods. The Seletar Orang Asli in Johor, for example, work as mussel fishers on the Peninsula. Across the sea in East Malaysia, there is a complex mix of indigenous ethnicities (Orang Asal) – many of which also stretch across the borders into Indonesia and the Philippines. Key indigenous groups include the Iban, Bidayuh, and Orang Ulu in Sarawak, and the Kadazan-Dusun, Bajau, Suluk and Murut in Sabah.

In the Philippines, in addition to the Bajau Laut (discussed below), the Manobo and the Maranao tribes constitute the Indigenous People's groups who live along lakes, rivers, streams and inland waters in the Philippines. The Manobo communities live in forest patches along valleys and river banks which are rich in wildlife. The settlement areas are near agricultural lands and are within the vicinity of protected areas and biodiversity hotspots.³⁷ The Maranaos live along Lake Lanao in Lanao del Sur and speak the Maranao language. The Maranao fishermen rely on the lake for their food and sustenance. This lake in North Central Mindanao and is also considered as one of the most beautiful tourist destinations in Mindanao.³⁸

In Indonesia, after Jokowi came to power, the National Medium-Term Development Plan Phase III for 2014–2019 indicated that maritime culture of the Indigenous Peoples and local communities would receive important attention and priority in the policy direction of the national development program. The plan highlighted the importance to “build Indonesia from the periphery by strengthening regions and villages ... and developing [the capacity of] farmers and fishers in the periphery” (Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, 2017, Appendix I).³⁹ The Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries further noted that “local communities with their traditional fishing practices and local wisdom in fisheries management are important aspects of government policies that are increasingly accommodating to local institutions” (Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, 2017, p.7).⁴⁰ As of August 2021, the Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries announced that the government has identified 32 ocean-dependent communities across five provinces as *masyarakat hukum adat* (customary law community, a preferable term in comparison to Indigenous Peoples)⁴¹ These communities are listed in the table below.

³⁷ Salvana, Florence & Shane Arnibal. (2019). “Importance of indigenous communities’ knowledge and perception in achieving biodiversity conservation: A case study from Manobo tribe of Southern Mindanao, Philippines.” *ASIAN Journal of Ethnobiology* Volume 2, Number 2, E-ISSN: 2580-4510 Pages: 84-91.

³⁸ Racman, Sohale and Reem Adib Lulu. (2021). Identifying and Categorizing Maranao Words with Arabic Roots: A Case Study of the Maranao Language Spoken in the Philippines. *Journal of Communication and Cultural Trends*, Volume 3, Number 2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jcct.32.01>

³⁹ Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (2017). “Peraturan Menteri Kelautan dan Perikanan Republik Indonesia Nomor 63/PERMEN-KP/2017 tentang Rencana Strategis Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan Tahun 2015-2019”. Available from <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/158925/permen-kkp-no-63permen-kp2017-tahun-2017>. Last accessed 13 March 2023 as cited in Febrica. (2023). *Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific*. London: Routledge, p. 44

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, “Dalam 5 Tahun, KKP Tetapkan Pengakuan dan Perlindungan Bagi 22 Masyarakat Hukum Adat,” 15 August 2021. Available from <https://kkp.go.id/djprl/artikel/33320-dalam-5-tahun-kkp-tetapkan-pengakuan-dan-perlindungan-bagi-22-masyarakat-hukum-adat>. Last accessed 18 April 2022 as cited in Febrica. (2023). *Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific*. London: Routledge, p. 44

Coastal Communities in Indonesia that are recognised as *Masyarakat Hukum Adat* (Customary Community)

Province	Regent/Town	Name of Masyarakat Hukum Adat (Customary Community)	Regulation Issued by the Head of Regent	Customary system in ocean management
North Sulawesi	Kepulauan Talaud	MHA Kakoratan	No 36 of 2017	Mane'e
Sulawesi Tenggara	Buton	MHA Wabula	No 13 of 2018	Ombo
	Buton Selatan	MHA Pulau Siompu	No 24 of 2017	Kaombo
	Buton Selatan	MHA Wapulaka	No 65 of 2019	Sasi
	Wakatobi	MHA Kadie Liya	No 40 of 2017	Wehai
Maluku	Kota Ambon	MHA Negeri Hukurilla	No 21 of 2019	Sasi
	Kota Tual	MHA Pulau Manggur and Kaimer	No 43 of 2017	Arwer Waras and Alloa Waras
	Seram Bagian Timur	MHA Kataloka	No 26 of 2018	Ngam
	Seram Bagian Timur	MHA Amarsikaru	No 16 of 2021	Sasi/Ngam
	Kepulauan Tanimbar	MHA Desa Adaut	No 523-698 of 2019	Sasi
	Maluku Tengah	MHA Negeri Haruku	No 81 Tahun 2017	Sasi
	Maluku Tenggara	MHA Tanimbar Evav	No 166 Tahun 2018	Sasi
	Maluku Barat Daya	MHA Desa Nuwewang	No. 43 Tahun 2020	Sasi

Papua Barat	Sorong	MHA Malaumkarta	No 7 of 2017	Egek
	Fak-fak	MHA Arguni, Pik-Pik Sekar, dan Wertuar	No 4 of 2019	Kerakera
	Tambrau	MHA Werur	No. 12 of 2019	Sasi
	Tambrau	MHA Mpur Wot	No. 21 of 2020	Bato'op
Papua	Biak Numfor	MHA Pulau Owi	No 34 of 2018	Sasisen
		MHA Pulau Auki	No 34 of 2018	Sasisen

Source: Direktorat Pendayagunaan Pesisir dan Pulau-pulau Kecil, Indonesian Ministry Marine Affairs and Fisheries, 2021 as cited in Febrica. (2023). *Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific*. London: Routledge, p.60

In total, 23 coastal communities have gained legal recognition through the issuance of 18 regulations (*peraturan*) or decision letters (*surat keputusan*) from the head of regent (*bupati*) or mayor (*walikota*). Although progress has been made the recognition granted to coastal communities in managing and conserving the coastal and marine areas are still lagging behind those given to land-based communities. Coastal communities that have gained recognition as *masyarakat hukum adat* only accounted for less than 5 per cent of the total legally recognised *masyarakat hukum adat* (see Epistema, 30 January 2017).⁴²

⁴² Epistema, “538 Komunitas Masyarakat Hukum Adat telah Ditetapkan Pasca Putusan MK 35,” 30 January 2017. Available from <https://epistema.or.id/kabar/siaran-pers/komunitas-masyarakat-hukum-adat/>. Last accessed 18 April 2022 as cited in Febrica. (2023). *Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific*. London: Routledge, p. 45.

Recognising some of the intersections, it is often within these communities that you often find women and youth working within the maritime sector for sustenance.

The most complex of Indigenous Peoples in the region is the Bajau Laut, otherwise known as sea nomads. Even within this community, groups can be differentiated by their language and dialects, as well as livelihood, status in life, education, community structure and their general worldviews. They are recognized as particularly complex, however, because they are in many ways stateless. During the pre-British period, their mobility around this region was well established. However, the legal status of the Bajau Laut became problematic when citizenship and territories were formalized by the emergence of nation states.

They are still regarded as migrant groups and do not have customary territory or land-based ancestor domains. In Sabah, Malaysia, the Bajau Laut community is the target of governmental action and is invisible in terms of provision of social services and implementation of conservation initiatives. In the Philippines, the Bajau Laut community, which comprises a population of at least 450,000, is largely ignored by local government officials because they do not possess a National Identification Card, national passport and they are not registered voters. However, there is a need to remedy this situation since they are born in the country and they are domiciled in Philippine territorial waters. They also display music, customs and rituals that are reflective of Filipino ethnic practices.

The Bajau Laut community displays a strong affinity for the sea and a heavy reliance on fishing and fishery-related crafts as a means of livelihood. In Wakatobi, Southeast Sulawesi Province, Indonesia the Bajau communities continue to be marginalized in terms of policy recognition and development plans. An effective co-management system requires multi-sectoral agreement and socio-cultural consideration. For a marine management and conservation set-up to be successful, the Bajau – and their practices - should be acknowledged and accepted.

Youth is the third community under consideration in this report, and another that defies simple categorization given that it intersects with income group, gender, class, and ability.⁴³

Within the region, youth are recognized as a dependent ocean community due to their significance in the SSF sector.⁴⁴ A Coral Triangle Report notes, “With 60% of the world's youth residing in the region, the youth represent a crucial group that has the potential to contribute to the sustainability of small-scale fisheries and effect change. While reported statistics largely fail to capture youth engagement in the sector, the fieldwork findings revealed that in small-scale fisheries, youth are significant contributors to the sector”.⁴⁵ Youth face distinct challenges, however, because they do not

⁴³ WorldFish (2020) Youth in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture [online]
<https://digitalarchive.worldfishcenter.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/069f50f5-f91d-4f17-ac5c-dee937d86eb8/content>
(accessed 15th June 2025)

⁴⁴ USAID (2024) Unlocking the Potential of Women and Youth in Small-Scale Fisheries in the Indo-Pacific Region [online]
<https://coraltriangleinitiative.org/sites/default/files/resources/PA021M3T%20Women%20and%20Youth%20Fisheries%20Indo-Pacific.pdf> (accessed 14th June 2025)

⁴⁵ Ibid.

typically own the assets required for fishing, including boats and other fishery equipment. This restricts the access of youth to things such as finance and technical advice.

Often, taken together these groups are united in the fact that they are traditional, artisanal, or small-scale (SSF) fishers. Focusing in on ethnicity, gender, and age, however, does not necessarily capture the full complexity of marginalization as other **low-income groups** that engage with the maritime sector are not ethnic minorities nor indigenous peoples. Coastal fishers of all ethnicities -minor or major - in Indonesia and Malaysia practising traditional fisheries continue to rank among the poorest in society but also continue to be dependent on the oceans for sustenance and their livelihoods.

Seafarers also comprise ocean dependent communities. The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) Seafarer Workforce Report identified the Philippines as the largest supplier of seafarers for both officers and performance ratings.⁴⁶ With an estimated 1.15 million seafarers, the seafarer's remittances account for 1.7% of Gross Domestic Product in 2022. The remittances from seafarers is expected to register an upsurge with the passage in 2024 of the Magna Carta Act for Seafarers. The law imposes an 80 percent mandatory allotment of their salaries (basic wage plus guaranteed overtime) for remittance to their families in the Philippines through financial institution chosen by the shipping companies. The Magna Carta Act for Seafarers also erected rules, and procedures to ensure the fair, speedy, equitable, and just disposition and execution of decisions granting seafarers' salaries, wages, statutory benefits, and death and disability claims. The law mandated the establishment of specialized maritime units in all government agencies which will tackle problems related to resolution disputes involving seafarers.⁴⁷ Cognizant of the massive presence of Filipino seafarers in commercial shipping, the European Union has partnered with the Government of the Philippines to sustain maritime talent through the EU-ASEAN Sustainable Connectivity Package (SCOPE) with a total €4 million allocated.⁴⁸

Taken together, it is clear that the notion of ocean-dependent communities is a particularly complex one that belies the simple recognition to involve local communities in security provision. While it is true that many communities are interested in some way in fisheries, these are to different degrees, underscored by different practices, and they operate in slightly different political and social contexts. Furthermore, the current trajectory of homogenizing ocean dependent communities is a problematic one, that requires reflection and correction to ensure meaningful participation.

The maritime security relationship is a particularly important one

A final rationale for focusing on local communities in Southeast Asia's maritime security provision is that the maritime security relationship between the United States and Southeast Asia is a particularly important one. Yet these complexities need to be recognized to ensure that maritime security cooperation and capacity building are effective. This has been recognized in areas of lesser

⁴⁶ Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO) and International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) Seafarer Workforce Report. (2021). UK: BIMCO.

⁴⁷ Republic Act No. 12021. Manila: Philippine Congress.

⁴⁸ European Commission. "EU and Philippines team up to boost seafarers' training, certification and labor conditions." https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/eu-and-philippines-team-boost-seafarers-training-certification-and-labor-conditions-2024-11-11_en

complexity, including in the West Indian Ocean.⁴⁹ Current cooperation between Southeast Asia and the United States, however, follows the state-centric dynamics above with little in the way of reflection in this regard.

Although most notably involved in the South China Sea, the United States has a strong interest in supporting regional capacity to secure the sea, protect the freedom of navigation, and curtail both non-state illicit enterprises and state-sponsored threats to maritime security. Security cooperation ranks as a consistent dynamic of US-Southeast Asia relations, and advancing cooperation in the maritime domain is an important area of mutual interest.⁵⁰

The Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) exercise serves as a strong indicator of US involvement, and is worth exploring to demonstrate the priorities of the relationship. The 23rd annual exercise concluded in 2024, and was organized by USINDOPACOM. Now including 14 days of in-person and at-sea engagements, it is structured to enhance collaboration among 21 Indo-Pacific Allies and focused on the shared maritime security challenges of the region. In practice, this primarily focuses on Southeast Asian maritime law enforcement agencies (MLEA). There are two inter-linked components to SEACAT. First, is the shore phase. This is further segmented into four activity streams. The first, is an interactive table-top exercise with operational actors, usually related to Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR). The second, also targeted at operational actors, explores elements related to Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS), including the legality of using force, how to board, and equipment briefs. The third is focused on Maritime Domain Awareness, usually with more senior actors who deliver country briefs and industry actors who share their platform capabilities. The fourth is a new activity, a senior officials meeting and exercise aimed at more senior practitioners. Second, is the sea-phase, where everything is brought together in some sort of at sea activity involving MDA elements on land. Local communities have not been represented, nor are they discussed.

The US's regional interventions are numerous, and their trajectory is increasing. SEACAT is not the only exercise that the US is involved with in the region. The US is also involved in The Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT), Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo (MNEK), and in 2019 concluded the first ever ASEAN-US Maritime Exercise (AUMX).

The US Coast Guard (USCG) also operates frequently in the region. As the US pivoted its focus from its early twenty-first century wars in the Middle East and the global war on terror toward engaging the Indo-Pacific and competing with China, USCG similarly shifted. In 2020, then-National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien discussed the Indo-Pacific and pointed to how "efforts of the United States Government, including the United States Coast Guard are critical to countering these destabilizing and malign actions" and that "enhancing the presence of the USCG in the Indo-

⁴⁹ Safeseas (2018) Mastering Maritime Security: Reflexive Capacity Building and the Western Indian Ocean Experience [online] <https://www.safeseas.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Mastering-Maritime-Security-final.pdf> (accessed 13th June 2025); Bueger, C., Edmunds, T., and McCabe, R., (2021) Capacity Building for Maritime Security: The Western Indian Ocean Experience (London: Palgrave)

⁵⁰ Febrica and Myers. (2024). United States-Indonesia Maritime and Environmental Security in the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea. Policy Paper. Washington: the Hollings Center. <https://www.hollingscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Sulu-Sulawesi-Sea-Report.pdf>

Pacific ensures the United States will remain the maritime partner of choice in the region”.⁵¹ At the 2022 Shangri-La Dialogue, Secretary of Defense Austin expanded on the growing role the USCG would play in the Indo-Pacific.

This has seen the USCG underpin emerging activities undertaken under the umbrella of the Quad,⁵² and in September 2022 the Quad announced its first agreements specifically in the maritime-related domain: the creation of the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) in 2022. Seeking to “work with regional partners to respond to humanitarian and natural disasters and combat illegal fishing”, IPMDA centres public goods through providing “technology and training to support enhanced, shared, maritime domain awareness”.⁵³ This has often been held up as central to activities within the region and a significant contribution to Indo-Pacific security writ large, though it also has been criticised due to its lack of generation of new data.⁵⁴ Cooperation expanded in 2024, through the announcement of the “Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission” a 2025 activity that will “improve interoperability and advance maritime safety” through the joint deployment of coast guard assets.⁵⁵

United States support for Southeast Asian allies has been increasing. The United States, for example, funds and supports the Maritime Training Center in Batam. Part of a broader Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Cooperation in 2015, this is just one of many lines of activity in this sphere. In 2021, the US State Department also led the co-development of the Addendum to the New York Memorandum on Good Practices for Interdicting Terrorist Travel, which was designed enhance the applicability and effectiveness of counterterrorism and border security frameworks for maritime sector security, with the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea as one of its key focuses.⁵⁶

US-Philippine defense cooperation is intensive. Task Force-Ayungin, composed of American service members and named after the Philippine designation for Second Thomas Shoal, provides enhanced cooperation and interoperability for Philippine maritime operations. The task force assists in planning and training for the Armed Forces of the Philippines’ Western Command. Philippine naval and air forces within this command frequently encounter their Chinese counterparts in the West Philippine Sea, an area of the South China Sea that Manila claims as its exclusive economic zone. Task Force Ayungin’s efforts integrates U.S.-funded unmanned surface vessels and Maritime Tactical Systems

⁵¹ National Security Council (2025) Statement from National Security Advisor Robert C. O’Brien [online] <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-national-security-advisor-robert-c-obrien-102320/> (accessed 14th June 2025)

⁵² Edwards, S., and Bradford, J., (forthcoming) Quad Coast Guards in the Indo-Pacific: Informal networked regional governance through practice transfer. *Journal of Indian Ocean Region*. In press.

⁵³ The White House (2022) “Quad Joint Leaders’ Statement” [online] <https://2021-2025.state.gov/joint-statement-on-quad-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific/> (accessed 14th July 2024)

⁵⁴ Clayton, K., (2024) “Operationalising the Quad: Maritime security and climate change in the Indo-Pacific” *United States Study Centre* Brief 23rd October

⁵⁵ The White House (2024) “The Wilmington Declaration: Joint Statement from the Leaders of Australia, India, Japan, and the US” [online] <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/page/47/> (accessed 22nd September 2024)

⁵⁶ Febrica and Myers. (2024). “United States-Indonesia Maritime and Environmental Security in the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea” <https://www.hollingscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Sulu-Sulawesi-Sea-Report.pdf> (accessed 14 August 2025)

drones were provided under foreign military financing. The Philippine Navy's unmanned surface vessel unit has four MANTAS T-12s and one T-38 Devil Ray.⁵⁷

The US under the Biden Administration gave the Philippines US\$500 million of foreign military financing to help the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine Coast Guard improve their territorial defense missions.⁵⁸ The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) provided for US\$128 million for the building of airfield infrastructure and the development of the nine sites which hosts U.S. troops and American-funded projects. The Philippines and the United States designated four new Agreed Locations in strategic areas of the country in 2023 and completed projects in the existing five Agreed Locations.⁵⁹

This range of activity highlights the prioritization of the maritime security relationship between the US and Southeast Asia – given ongoing questions regarding US commitments to different areas of defense cooperation. While this is a broad and important relationship, however, what is notable is that current interventions are primarily focused on state-based institutions. There is little engagement with, or consideration of, local communities. Better and more inclusive maritime security governance in the region is therefore critically relevant to US policy goals and regional interest. The US is increasing its maritime security cooperation in the region, at a time when other states – both friendly and competitive – seek to extend their reach. These objectives could only be met with close cooperation with ocean dependent communities.

Summary

While there is an increased recognition that local communities matter in maritime governance, this has not necessarily been applied to maritime security governance. Such questions are especially pertinent in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia faces a particularly complex threat domain, its communities are heterogeneous and have complex relationships with their states, and the maritime security relationship is an important one. Both domestic, regional, and US-Southeast Asian interventions, however, have not sufficiently considered the role of ocean dependent communities in a manner that reflects on this complexity, and they continue to uphold traditional approaches to maritime security that prioritize state interests. This report now turns to this. It assesses three areas of primary interest: the impact of maritime insecurities on ocean-dependent communities; the role of ocean dependent communities in maritime security provision; the obstacles to and promising practices for the representation of marginalized communities in maritime security governance.

⁵⁷ USNI News. (November 21, 2024). "U.S. Supporting Philippine Operations in South China Sea with Forward-Deployed Task Force." <https://news.usni.org/2024/11/21/u-s-supporting-philippine-operations-in-south-china-sea-with-forward-deployed-task-force>

⁵⁸ USNI News. (July 21, 2024). "U.S. Commits \$500M to Modernize Philippine Military, Coast Guard Against External Threats." <https://news.usni.org/2024/07/31/u-s-commits-500m-to-modernize-philippine-military-coast-guard-against-external-threats>.

⁵⁹ US Department of Defense. (February 1, 2023). "Philippines, U.S. Announce Four New EDCA Sites." <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3285566/philippines-us-announce-four-new-edca-sites/>

The impact of maritime insecurities on ocean-dependent communities

Direct Impacts

The most immediate impact identified across all communities is the rapidly changing environment as exacerbated by climate change, and it is this impact that has gained the most academic attention as well. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has reported that small-scale fisheries livelihoods and jobs are the most vulnerable to climate-driven changes in marine resources and ecosystem services and that rebuilding overexploited or depleted fisheries reduces negative climate change impacts on fisheries and supports food security, biodiversity, human health and well-being.⁶⁰ Because the communities are mostly united by their dependence on fisheries resources, climate change's impact on fish stocks poses a direct threat to the sustenance and livelihoods of each of the communities, and these communities often have few alternatives to fishing. Youth are the population group hit hardest by climate change and environmental harm, all while contributing the least to environmental degradation.

Having surveyed 300 small-scale fishers in Tobelo and Morotai, North Maluku, for example, we found that the majority of fishers (over 55 per cent) pointed out the presence of high risks posed by climate change to their safety at work, food security, and livelihoods.⁶¹ These include over 15 per cent respondents that categorised the risk posed by climate change to be very high, and more than 40 per cent of respondents that noted high risks of climate change to their livelihood and well-being.⁶² More than 90 per cent of small-scale fishers noted that storm and cyclones are the most immediate impact of climate change and posed high risk to fishers and their communities. Others also observed sea level rise and flooding (5 per cent) and seawalls and beach erosion (1 per cent) as the main impacts of climate change that they felt.⁶³ This shows that although climate change is a global phenomenon, its impacts are both observed and felt directly at local level by small-scale fishers and their communities who are dependent to ocean.⁶⁴

Climate change is also creating more competition over resources, and ocean dependent communities are distinctly vulnerable as they often lack the resources to compete successfully. An example is with

⁶⁰ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Summary for Policymakers of the Synthesis Report of its 6th assessment cycle (IPCC AR6, SYR SPM),

https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf, 2023 (15 August 2023);

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), The Sixth Assessment Report (AR6).

<https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>, 2023 (accessed 15 August 2023) as cited in Febrica et al. (2025). Small-scale fishers' perception of risks in Indonesia's cross-border region of North Maluku. *Marine Policy*. Vol. 175,

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2025.106624>

⁶¹ Febrica et al. (2025). Small-scale fishers' perception of risks in Indonesia's cross-border region of North Maluku. *Marine Policy*. Vol. 175, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2025.106624>

⁶² Febrica et al. (2025). Small-scale fishers' perception of risks in Indonesia's cross-border region of North Maluku. *Marine Policy*. Vol. 175, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2025.106624>

⁶³ Febrica et al. (2025). Small-scale fishers' perception of risks in Indonesia's cross-border region of North Maluku. *Marine Policy*. Vol. 175, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2025.106624>

⁶⁴ M. Sowman, J. Sunde, A just transition? Navigating the process of policy implementation in small-scale fisheries in South Africa. *Marine Policy*. 132 (2021) 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104683>; M. Sowman, Presentation: Oceans and Climate Change: Impact and Adaptation webinar organised by the One Ocean Hub for the UN-Nippon Fellows and Alumni. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGqWCd9UR2Y>, 30 November 2020 (accessed 14 January 2023) as cited in Febrica et al. (2025). Small-scale fishers' perception of risks in Indonesia's cross-border region of North Maluku. *Marine Policy*. Vol. 175, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2025.106624>

the movement of fish stocks further from shore due to overexploitation, whereby Indonesian fishers have a difficult time competing because they lack the necessary funds for the fuel for longer journeys.⁶⁵ This is exacerbated with the prevalence of IUU fishing, often carried out and dominated by foreign, distant water fleets. Ultimately, such environmental changes directly threaten human, food and livelihood security

A further distinct vulnerability that climate change exacerbates, but does not necessarily cause, is the growing spread of forced labour within the region.⁶⁶ As SSF seek alternative forms of employment, they become vulnerable to predatory practices by larger fishery actors – including illicit actors. Within the region, there has therefore been a sharp increase in the reported cases of forced labour and labour abuses within the fishery sector.⁶⁷ The economic hardship that climate change exacerbates also pushes youth to work as support workers on fishing vessels. This deprives children of educational opportunities and exposes them to hazardous working condition, human trafficking risk and other forms of criminal exploitation. A further concern is that other maritime environmental challenges also creates and exacerbates such problems. Maritime pollution, including from plastics and oil spills from dark shipping, land reclamation, and illegal fishing both pose further threats to the biodiversity on which many of these communities rely.

Studies highlight that piracy and robbery at sea often occurs but goes unreported when it targets smaller-scale actors.⁶⁸ This is particularly problematic given the relative amounts of harm inflicted. While the absolute costs are lower than those on commercial shipping vessels, armed robbery through its accompanying violence and property deprivation threatens the ability of local communities to ensure their food security or enact their cultural practices.

Second Level Impacts

Recognising the distinct vulnerabilities these communities have is not only important for their own security, but because they can also undermine state resilience as well. When communities have little in the way of licit alternatives to provide for their own economic and food security, they may become involved in gangs and shadow economy activities – contributing to broader maritime insecurities.

Some of these activities are grey and supplemental. It has been noted in the case of the Sulu/Celebes seas, for example, that travelling merchants may turn to moving ‘grey’ goods to

⁶⁵ Malik, A (2019). Energy subsidies and their impact on fishing communities in Indonesia. PhD. Thesis. University of Birmingham.

⁶⁶ Tigchelaar, M. et al. (2025) Decent work in fishing in a changing climate. *Marine Policy*. Vol. 181

⁶⁷ ILO (2024) Ship to Shore Rights Project South-East Asia Factsheet [online] <https://indonesia.un.org/en/268576-ship-shore-rights-project-south-east-asia-factsheet> (accessed 15th June 2025); Malik, A., (2022) IUU Fishing as an Evolving Threat to Southeast Asia’s Maritime Security. *AMTI*. [online] <https://amti.csis.org/iuu-fishing-as-an-evolving-threat-to-southeast-asias-maritime-security/> (accessed 15th June 2025); IOM (2015) Report on Human Trafficking, Forced Labour and Fisheries Crime in the Indonesian Fishing Industry [online] <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/country/docs/indonesia/Human-Trafficking-Forced-Labour-and-Fisheries-Crime-in-the-Indonesian-Fishing-Industry-IOM.pdf> (accessed 14th June 2025)

⁶⁸ Peters, B & Paoli, L. (2025) Are Fishers the Forgotten Victims of Maritime Piracy? An Exploratory Global Analysis. *Fish and Fisheries*. Vol. 26(5); Farisin, M. S. 2025. “Exploring the Root Causes and Operational Tactics of Sea Piracy Against Fishermen in Indonesia.” *International Journal of Global Community* 8, no. 1: 21–34.

supplement their income.⁶⁹ Not reaching the threshold of narcotics and other extremely illicit substances, these goods – such as cigarettes or halal food – often instead undermine tax regimes and constitute an informal form of trade.

While we should be reflective about the excessive tendency to securitize local communities, it should be recognized that low economic opportunities is a driving factor for the root cause of numerous forms of criminality, including informal migration, IUU fishing, illicit mining, and armed robbery at sea. Evidence in Indonesia, for example, highlights that low-income groups are pushed into armed robbery at sea or illegal fishing, or at least collaborate with larger syndicates at times.⁷⁰ While questions remain about whether it is poverty or opportunity that drives such movements, there is widespread recognition that communities can assist perpetrators or become perpetrators themselves.

Going beyond this case, in the case of the Pacific Islands, environmental risk assessments demonstrate that insecurities that cause economic instability for local communities could lead to greater social or political unrest.⁷¹ With the climate harms discussed above, there has been a call from some actors for a need to better understand the ways in which future conditions on the Sunda shelf will impact on broader political and social structures.⁷²

Recognizing the problematic impacts of governance

Where ocean dependent communities are distinct is that there is a tension between state-led maritime security provision and the insecurity of these groups themselves. Effectively, state-led interventions can actually cause insecurities for ocean dependent communities – and often in less tangible forms than currently recognised in maritime security provision. Not recognizing this sufficiently means that such interventions may ultimately undermine security if they exacerbate ongoing trends discussed above.

First, there is the impact of passive bad governance. Local community groups, including the Indonesian artisanal fishers' association, *Kesatuan Nelayan Tradisional Indonesia* (KNTI), for example, often argue that the governmental commitments are not sufficient to address the insecurity they are facing. A lack of political will means that the vulnerabilities often go completely unaddressed in the first place. Some suggest this results from an overwhelming focus on land-based issues due to a poor understanding of oceanic spaces, often labelled 'seablindness'.⁷³ Correspondingly, despite the large population of Indigenous Peoples in the Philippine fisheries sector, the National Commission of

⁶⁹ The Asia Foundation (2019) *Trade in the Sulu Archipelago: Informal Economies Amidst Maritime Security Challenges* (San Francisco: The Asia Foundation); Franco, J. (2021) *CROSS-BORDER TRADE IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES AMIDST COVID-19* [online] <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/X-Border-Cross-Border-Trade-in-the-Southern-Philippines-Amidst-Covid-19.pdf> (accessed 13th June 2025)

⁷⁰ Daxecker, U., Prins, B., (2021) *Pirate lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

⁷¹ The Pacific Island Forum (2023) *Pacific Climate Security Assessment Guide* [online] <https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/Pacific-Climate-Security-Assessment-Guide.pdf> (accessed 14th June 2025)

⁷² FCDO (2024) *Southeast Asia Maritime Security Annual Review Summary* [online] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/679a02ecd4f0d327e77071f5/Southeast_Asia_Maritime_Security_Annual_Review_Summary_2023_to_2024.odt (accessed 14th June 2025)

⁷³ Socquet-Clerc, K., Khoo, S-Y., Edwards, S., Kembara, G., Salleh, A., and Tariella, J. (2023) *Maritime Security Sector Governance and Reform in Southeast Asia* (Geneva: DCAF)

Indigenous Peoples have no policy and intervention for ocean dependent communities.⁷⁴ In Malaysia, it is highlighted that weak enforcement of illicit actors forces traditional maritime communities to abandon the maritime sector because it leads to unsustainable competition.⁷⁵ An absence of effective enforcement and governance, therefore, can exacerbate insecurities.

Second, there is an impact from actively bad governance that undermines local communities. This can be in the name of economic development, and it is highlighted that local communities are made more insecure by state-led developmental policies which can be environmentally destructive or prevent access for local communities. With unprecedented pressures from rapidly emerging and competing economic activities – including exploitative activities such as mining, aquaculture, reclamation, as well as tourism and shipping – state policy often preferences larger economic actors who ultimately contribute more in terms of tax or have the ability to lobby the government more effectively. This has resulted in various forms of ‘blue grabbing’ or a ‘coastal squeeze’. This is most commonly highlighted through the problematic construction of Marine Spatial Planning or Marine Protected Areas which often prevent access to local communities. In the Philippines case, the 57 locally managed Marine Protected Areas (established through the Republic Act 8550 or the Fisheries Code of 1998) are not effective enough for coral reef fisheries management due to this omission.⁷⁶ It can also take lower-level forms like making permits for fishing required, but difficult to apply for and obtain as is the case in Sabah, Malaysia.⁷⁷

Such problematic governance can also be undertaken in the name of security – and local communities are often overly securitized or impacted negatively by law enforcement activities. This has a long heritage in the region, not in the least that indigenous communities were often framed as challenges to a coherent nation-state building and implicated in support for Communists and other illicit actors such as terrorist groups.⁷⁸ SSF activities have been most prominently securitized despite having a more minimal impact on the decline of fisheries, and the increased surveillance and monitoring has intensified existing inequalities because often SSF are easier to enforce against than distant fishing fleets.⁷⁹ Somiah highlights enforcement is often undertaken against such actors due to the fact that their very presence in the maritime borderlands makes them seem ‘disloyal and dangerous’ at worst, or at the very least because local practices are misinterpreted as illegal activities leading to heavy handed enforcement.⁸⁰ Outside of fisheries explicitly, crackdowns on wildlife

⁷⁴ National Commission on Indigenous Peoples. (2022). Annual Audit Report. Manila, Philippines: NCIP Publications.

⁷⁵ Somiah, V., (2022) The Sea is Indigenous ‘Land’ Too, *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 37(1)

⁷⁶ Mualli, Robert, Melchor Deocadez, Renmar Martinez, Wilfredo Campos, Samuel Mamamuag, Nieto Nanola Jr., & Porfirio Alino. (2019). “Effectiveness of small locally-managed marine protected areas for coral reef fisheries management in the Philippines.” *Ocean and Coastal Management*, Vol 179, number 1, pp. 104-176.

⁷⁷ Somiah, V., (2022) The Sea is Indigenous ‘Land’ Too, *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 37(1)

⁷⁸ Idrus, R., (2011) The Discourse of Protection and the Orang Asli in Malaysia. *Kajian Malaysia*. Vol. 29(1); Edwards, S. (2020) The Orang Asli in GE14: Towards Meaningful Political Engagement? In Lemiere, S. (ed.) *Minorities Matter* (ISEAS: Singapore)

⁷⁹ Okafor-Yarwood, I. et al. (2022) Survival of the Richest, not the Fittest: How attempts to improve governance impact African small-scale marine fisheries. *Marine Policy*. Vol. 135

⁸⁰ Somiah, V., (2022) The Sea is Indigenous ‘Land’ Too, *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 37(1)

trafficking can pose problems for Indigenous communities reliant on wildlife for their cultural practices, for example.⁸¹

Migration is another area whereby Indigenous communities have become targeted or impacted by security practice. The more nomadic Indigenous communities such as the Bajau Laut have faced greater forms of securitization as well due to their stateless status. As concerns about terrorism and separatism grew around East Malaysia, for example, resulting in the creation of Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM), marginalized communities have found their everyday practices of movement curtailed despite not being actors in the violence. The curfew and enforcement also impacts on other communities in the region. Instead of providing security for those moving by sea, then, maritime law enforcement has instead exacerbated insecurities due to a lack of sensitivity.

One thing important to note is that realizing these impacts requires a shift in thinking about where harms lie when insecurities are fostered. Many state-based security interventions focus primarily on harms to some sort of tangible or material good – whether livelihoods, food, or physical harm. Restricting such activities in the name of security, however, harms a more intangible thing: that of identity, especially through the restriction of cultural practices. As Somiah highlights, for Indigenous maritime communities, the relationship to water defines their identity, and “the power of a community in having this independence and agency is tied to how they have access to a designated space”.⁸² Restricting access in the name of security, therefore, not only displaces peoples physically, but also exerts an external force on their very identities. The destabilization of collective maritime identities and the loss of traditional knowledge and local traditions emerges as a very real – yet intangible – harm that often goes unconsidered when planning maritime security responses.

What is the role of marginalized communities in maritime security governance?

More holistic maritime security provision could make maritime security interventions more effective through a number of benefits, including expertise and knowledge, prioritization of issues, facilitating trust-building between actors, and ultimately legitimizing interventions.

Expertise, knowledge, and awareness

There is a problem of expertise in maritime security provision, whereby claims to knowledge (i.e. what is the best way to understand and respond to an issue) is contested. For this reason, it has been recognised that local expertise and knowledge is required for context-specific and tailored capacity building and governance.⁸³ This is not only across different countries, but also within them, as different regions and local communities will have different priorities and understandings. In Indonesia, for example, some regions primarily face issues related to Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, whereas others suffer mainly from armed robbery. Moving away from

⁸¹ Lynch, M. J. et al. (2017) Blaming the poor for biodiversity loss: a political economic critique of the study of poaching and wildlife trafficking. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, Vol. 25(3); Osorio, C. P. & Bernaz, N., (2024) Addressing the international illegal wildlife trade through a human rights approach. *RECIEL* Vol. 33(3).

⁸² Somiah, V., (2022) The Sea is Indigenous ‘Land’ Too, *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 37(1)

⁸³ Safeseas (2018) Mastering Maritime Security: Reflexive Capacity Building and the Western Indian Ocean Experience [online] <https://www.safeseas.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Mastering-Maritime-Security-final.pdf> (accessed 13th June 2025); Socquet-Clerc, K., Khoo, S-Y., Edwards, S., Kembara, G., Salleh, A., and Tariella, J. (2023) Maritime Security Sector Governance and Reform in Southeast Asia (Geneva: DCAF)

understanding local communities as passive actors, understanding the problem requires engagement with the knowledge of local communities.

Indeed, valuing indigenous knowledge and worldviews has long been recognized across domains,⁸⁴ but with most explicit focus on the benefits it would bring to environmental security. Often, this is attributed to a more sustainable relationship with resources and a greater knowledge about the local context. Indigenous communities in particular are often framed as stewards of the environmental domain as a result, but SSF are also seen as key to promoting sustainable practice. In the Indonesia case, for example, Malik highlights that SSF “can implement local wisdom which allows fishing in a predetermined and agreed timeframe. In Raja Ampat, Indonesia, this is known as sasi. They use appropriate fishing gear and impose financial and cultural sanctions on actors who use destructive fishing gear or catch fish outside of the timeframe”.⁸⁵ As such, when groups such as SSF are provided with forms of autonomy that relies on this expertise and knowledge, especially through tenure and management rights, they are able to monitor and enforce their own rules and territorial boundaries in line with their own preferences, and in doing so, improve their own environmental and human security.

Local actors in Maritime Domain Awareness

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) refers to understanding what is occurring in the maritime domain, and especially those activities that could negatively impact on maritime security. Much of the current discussions are focused on the technological side of MDA, such as the use of satellites and drones to gather information or machine learning to interpret and analyse it. Other discussions centre on the importance of sharing such information between relevant stakeholders.

Ocean dependent communities also feature in discussions of MDA. Because they are engaging with the oceans on a daily basis and understand the patterns of activity in their local areas, their expertise is highlighted as something that should be exploited more often to contribute to state-based institutions about what is happening at sea. SSF in the Maldives, for example, have been given subsidized satellite phones so they can report foreign trawlers in their waters. In the Philippines, the SeaWatch app has been launched that allows actors to report illegal fishers.

At times, local communities are also engaging in their own MDA to create political willingness to target an issue. The civil society organisation Karagatan Patrol uses publicly available satellite data, for example, to track lights used by commercial fishing vessels in the Philippines to highlight their incursions into municipal waters that are meant to be for the usage of local communities.

MDA highlights the ways in which local communities can raise awareness and contribute their knowledge to create better-informed enforcement. There are some caveats, however. First, is that such practices are often only one way and extractive (see below discussions on challenges). Second, it should be considered how these practices may also invite harm such as violence to local communities if they are seen as informers but not sufficiently protected.

⁸⁴ Semali, L. M. et al. (1999) What is Indigenous Knowledge? Voices from the Academy (New York: Routledge)

⁸⁵ Malik, A., (2023) The Maritime Security Roles of the Fishing Industry in Southeast Asia. RSIS IDSS Paper No. 04 [online] <https://rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/IP23004.pdf> (accessed 13th June 2025)

One way such expertise and knowledge can be further leveraged is in addressing Sea blindness, if local communities are able to amplify their voices to highlight the problems that they are facing and draw attention to different issues occurring at sea.

Prioritization

Prioritization of maritime security issues is an ongoing challenge. Often a political process, and given the breadth of maritime security challenges, states can choose to direct resources towards a politicized issue that has lower levels of impact than something that goes unpoliticized. Indeed, in most regional states, the visions concerning interests, as well as the identification and prioritization of threats to these, are not without contestation.

The knowledge and worldviews discussed above, however, are indispensable to reframing the referent object, goals and means of security. Effectively, leveraging knowledge should not just be extractive and for governmental security demands. Indeed, there has been a tendency to ‘fetishize’ indigenous knowledge in reference to its environmental possibilities, without engaging with it in a broader sense to reflect on the implications of governance. Instead, local communities have a significant role to play in making states rethink the prioritization of threats themselves, and ultimately the way in which maritime security is conceptualized. This includes an explicit recognition that sometimes states themselves, or at least some of their practices, can be sources of insecurity and that this should be prioritized. It also includes a reprioritization of the ‘referent’ of security away from tangible physical entities and towards intangible referents such as cultural practices and identity.

Trust-building and co-production

In the maritime security domain, governance is currently marked by attempts to reduce the military’s power and re-balance civil-military relations. Some actors have found it difficult to emphasise their role, however, in contestation with military-dominated views of what maritime security should protect and from what insecurities. Including local communities sends a strong signal about the normativity of responses, and can facilitate trust building not only between local communities and state institutions, but also between these institutions as well. In essence, the reprioritizations (based on differing expertise and knowledge) opens spaces for interaction around what it is the ‘common good’ entails. Trust-building would allow for stronger coordination by creating more strategic alignment about the common purpose of maritime security provision, undermining institutional silos which are currently problematic.

At its best, this entails local communities co-producing and co-managing maritime security interventions. Co-management involves “various degrees of delegation of management responsibility and authority between the local-level (resource user, stakeholder, community) and the state-level (national, provincial, municipal, village government)”.⁸⁶ Both non-state and state actors have a role because non-state actors on their own cannot provide permanent solutions to fill gaps in

⁸⁶ Binobo, G., (2024) Scoping review of marine fisheries governance in the Philippines: Goals, instruments, actions, opportunities and challenges. *Regional Studies in Marine Science*. Vol. 80(30).

the capacities of national governments. Additionally, they may “lack the appropriate security clearance or protection to undertake certain maritime security functions”.⁸⁷

Legitimacy

Procedural justice through participation in governance is an important dimension for legitimacy. Broader security interventions are recognized as requiring legitimacy for the effectiveness. Greater agency for traditionally less powerful or marginalised maritime stakeholders can also confer legitimacy for governance. This could be through the signalling of normativity expressed above, but also by serving as accountability mechanisms.

Summary: Towards proactive prevention

All of the above are important for heading off concerns from traditional security actors that coastal communities, if unmanaged, can become perpetrators of insecurity. But as we are seeing in various areas of global governance, incorporating diverse perspectives enhances the provision of security and can lead to more ambitious political reforms that would prevent the insecurities that lead to this cycle. Through their expertise, knowledge, experiences, and embeddedness, local ocean dependent communities have a role to play in crafting more effective maritime security interventions by not only providing contextualised expertise (an extractive role), but also reconfiguring understandings and conferring legitimacy to ensure maritime security is co-produced and co-managed meaningfully.

What are the promising practices for the representation of marginalized communities in maritime security governance?

Realizing such a role, however, requires the meaningful engagement with local ocean dependent communities. This section addresses promising practices. While marred by limitations, there are numerous promising practices drawn from both the region and outside of it. These centre around fostering recognition, participation, and creative engagement. Many promising practices come about from the more embedded process of gender mainstreaming, but there are also examples from other local communities.

Recognition

As demonstrated above, across the world there is a growing recognition of the importance of local and ocean dependent communities for maritime governance more broadly. This has been reflected in the focus on indigenous knowledge, gender mainstreaming, and the inclusion of SSF in fishery policy. This is also the case in some sectors of maritime security policy making, particularly through the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and the recognition of rights of Indigenous Peoples in coastal communities.

Much of this recognition is encouraged by external and international actors, including United Nations (UN) bodies, who advocate for international norms of equality and inclusion. These have largely been well accepted and implemented in the region, with localization occurring through a number of guidelines. As an example, the contribution of women in the Philippine fisheries sector are recognized and affirmed through the Philippine Harmonized Gender and Development Guidelines for Project

⁸⁷ Socquet-Clerc, K., Khoo, S-Y., Edwards, S., Kembara, G., Salleh, A., and Tariella, J. (2023) Maritime Security Sector Governance and Reform in Southeast Asia (Geneva: DCAF)

Development, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation. The gender and development (GAD) checklists is utilized by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to address gender issues faced by women and men. The checklists encompass livelihood and food security, fisheries and coastal resource management and conservation, research, and training.⁸⁸

Recognition is also advocated for by growing networks within the region itself, demonstrating how communities are organizing themselves more collectively to encourage recognition. *Maritim Muda Nusantara* (Indonesia Maritime Youths) serves as an example of how youth across local communities are linking together and pooling their resources to elevate their problems and the action they can undertake. These networks often interact with other domestic actors, including national unions, and regional and international actors as well. The Indonesian Traditional Fishers Union (KNTI) is an example of this, as a branch of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), they are able to link into global advocacy networks who have their own experience and more resources, to elevate their voice and encourage recognition in their own countries.

Participation

Yet, recognition is only the first stage. For such recognition to be meaningful, it needs to be implemented by creating spaces for the participation of ocean dependent communities. This leads to a focus on the different spaces created for participation, as well as the actors who create and manage such spaces.

This is more limited, but there are some promising practices concerning the creation of spaces for participation. BAKAMLA's efforts to increase community participation in the implementation of security and law enforcement are an indication of progress. This has been implemented through the establishment of 'Maritime Villages'. Both the Indonesian Navy and BAKAMLA are now involved in this, launching it through the 'Nusantara Maritime Village of the Navy Ready to Support Inclusive and Sustainable Transformation Towards a Prosperous Maritime Society'.⁸⁹ These villages are local-development programmes that aim to foster economic benefits for local communities, but with an ecological focus that could contribute to marine tourism. Not alone in the Maritime Village implementation, the Navy is in tandem with others, including economic actors such as telecoms business XL Axiata, and local community leaders.

There are also promising practices of NGOs acting as brokers or boundary spanners, bringing the maritime security community and ocean dependent communities together. This could be seen in the work of NGOs such as the IOJI and Segara Nusa Nawasena, who routinely bring ocean dependent communities into conversation with traditional maritime security stakeholders.⁹⁰ Some are focused on

⁸⁸ Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Sector. (2022). GAD Checklist for the Fisheries Sector. <https://media.saltraceability.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/16154211/Pullouts21-GAD-Checklist-for-the-Fisheries-Sector.pdf>

⁸⁹ Edwards, S., & Malik, A., (2024) Maritime Security and the Governance of 'Sustainable' Fisheries: Aligning Stakeholders Around Ecological Protection, in Otto & Menzel (eds.) Global Challenges in Maritime Security Sustainability and the Sea (Springer)

⁹⁰ 'Raising awareness of environmental concerns in the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea at Indonesia-United States Ocean Dialogue', 28 June 2024, <https://www.segaranusanawasena.org/post/raising-awareness-of-environmental-concerns-in-the-sulu-sulawesi-sea-at-indonesia-united-states-ocea>; 'Prioritising ocean dependent communities in Southeast Asia maritime security, 9 February 2025, <https://www.segaranusanawasena.org/post/prioritising-ocean-dependent-communities-in-southeast-asia-maritime-security>

distinct communities, such as Maritim Muda Nusantara (MMN/ Young Maritime Archipelago), one of the largest youth-based organizations in Indonesia that focus on marine and fisheries issues.⁹¹

In the Philippines, the Indo-Pacific Alliance Corp, an ocean think tank, helps the Bajau Laut communities to recognize their rights to marine resources and traditional fishing grounds and implements health and hygiene projects in Zamboanga and Basilan. Correspondingly, the ASASI KITA, an NGO based in Sabah helps underprivileged youth acquire digital skills to prepare them for the digital economy, but with the knock-on impact of allowing them to access digital spaces of participation as well. It should be highlighted that participation needs to be a two-way process. One reason these promising practices are effective is because these NGOs do not assume a priori that central authorities will disregard their needs. As such, these initiatives largely work because they are proactively implemented by NGOs.

As with recognition, local communities are also proactively encouraging their participation from the bottom-up, leveraging broader networks to enable this. At times, this is also encouraged by external actors or regional bodies, but the proactivity of the local communities is an essential element to encourage meaningful participation.

Engagement and Empowerment

Creating spaces for communication and empowering ocean dependent communities are important steps, but the complexity of maritime security requires thinking through ways to engage communities in a meaningful manner. In the discussions and broader research, there are several promising practices identified for ensuring meaningful engagement.

First is the importance of transparency. For local communities to meaningfully engage in dialogue, they need to understand the decision-making and implementation process. It is often noted, for example, that for fisheries management, it is crucial that relevant data be available to inform decisions and that the process be inclusive. Arkienandia highlighted her work at the Indonesian Ocean Justice Institute is part of the Steering Committee of the Coalition on Fisheries Transparency and is involved in preparing the Online Transparency of Fisheries Management Information Report initiated by the Fisheries Transparency Initiative.⁹² US non-profit organization, the Global Park Defense which offers drone technology support to Marine Protected Areas is another example of transparency enabling the participation of ocean dependent communities. As such, ocean dependent communities should not just be sources and targets of Maritime Domain Awareness, but also an audience for it.

Second is the importance of equalizing dialogue structures. Beset by buzzwords, technical terms, and plentiful acronyms, the maritime security sector can be extremely opaque – especially for those communities that are often marred by poor access to education. A number of projects and discussions have highlighted how bringing in art and non-verbal communication can help to

⁹¹ USAID (2024) Unlocking the Potential of Women and Youth in Small-Scale Fisheries in the Indo-Pacific Region [online]

⁹² IOJI (2024) Advocacy for Fisheries Transparency. [online] <https://oceanjusticeinitiative.org/advocacy-for-fisheries-transparency/> (accessed 14th July 2025)

negotiate and cohere understandings of what maritime security is.⁹³ For example, ‘Ocean Justice and the Blue Economy’ project led by Lancaster University (UK) and is implemented in collaboration with Segara Nusa Nawasena (Indonesia) and Badan Riset & Inovasi Nasional (Indonesia) investigate how ocean justice is understood by coastal communities in three focus countries including Indonesia, Scotland and Seychelles using innovative and participatory methodologies, such as photovoice, which gives communities a tool to document their own experience with the topic to better understand the concept and practice of ocean justice. In Indonesia, through the use of sketches and photos that they took coastal communities including small-scale fishers, women, port labors and children who participated in a series of nine workshops in Bitung, Jakarta and Kupang were able to share their reflections and experiences of justice and injustice derived from blue economy that affect them and their community. By using inclusive methodologies to better understand the concept and practice of ocean justice, the project ensures that traditionally overlooked stakeholders, such as Indigenous Peoples and local communities, small-scale fishers, women and children, are at the centre of the process.⁹⁴

Dialogue remains important, however, and there are promising micro-practices that have – so far – helped to equalize these spaces. Returning to the example of the IOJI, they stressed the importance of thinking creatively about seating to equalize otherwise unequal power relations that may lead to a reluctance to speak. The framing of discussions is also important, ensuring that representatives from local communities know that they and their experiences are treated as equal, and that they are not inferior actors to traditional maritime security actors.

Networks facilitate the sharing of best practices concerning engagement and empowerment. The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), for example, is in the process of creating a voluntary regional network of women fisheries officers. The aim is to not only boost the confidence of these actors to advocate for their recognition and participation, but also share best practices and expertise concerning their experiences with engagement, empowering them further.

What are the obstacles to the representation of marginalized communities in maritime security governance?

There are many promising practices to ensure the meaningful engagement of these communities – and in the process both create a more holistic form of maritime security and enable more effective maritime security provision and cooperation. There are ongoing limitations and obstacles, however, that need to be addressed for these benefits to be fully realized.

Recognition

⁹³ Chapsos, I., and Malcolm, J. (2017) Maritime security in Indonesia: Towards a comprehensive agenda? *Marine Policy*. Vol. 76; Chapsos, I, Koning, J & Noortmann, M (2019), 'Involving Local Fishing Communities in Policy Making: Addressing Illegal Fishing in Indonesia' *Marine Policy*, vol. 109

⁹⁴ ‘Ocean Justice and the Blue Economy: Placing communities at the heart of the process’, <https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/blue-justice/>; see also Germond-Duret, Heidkamp, & Morrissey. (2022) (In)justice and the blue economy. *The Geographical Journal*, 00, 184–192. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12483>; Germond-Duret, Garland, Heidkamp and Morrissey. (2024). Blue Economy. In *International Encyclopedia of Geography* (eds D. Richardson, N. Castree, M.F. Goodchild, A. Kobayashi, W. Liu and R.A. Marston). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg2166>

Some ocean dependent communities are recognized more than others. Gender has largely been mainstreamed, as have indigenous rights. But when thinking of Indigenous groups, some have gained more attention. Discussions centred a lot around the Bajau Laut, for example, but there has been less attention on the Orang Seletar in Malaysia, who are beset by similar problems of encroachment, management, and declining opportunities. Other groups are recognized far less, whether because their involvement is more opaque such as youth, or because they do not necessarily fit into the neat categorisations used to think through ocean dependent communities.

Recognition is also limited because many communities are recognized as far as their ability to problem solve, particularly related to the environment. In this, the efforts (or potential efforts) of the community in contributing to provision are recognized, but less so the impacts on the community or the specific vulnerability that community faces. Recognition then, is often fairly instrumental: communities are verbally recognised, but there is little done in practice to ensure actual participation. This was recognised across our discussions, and is a problem that is not only present in Southeast Asia.

Participation

Participation of non-state actors in maritime security tends to be very limited and reflect the one-way flow in the participatory hierarchy. In Indonesia there were some examples of societal actors' participation in maritime security, but this is primarily limited to surveillance and monitoring activities.

Indeed, coastal communities have been seen as resources to assist the Indonesian government in monitoring the use of marine resources. The Vice Director of the Indonesian Marine Police, Commissioner Suristiyono, explained that as part of the Marine Police's operational activities to maintain security and order within the society, and enforce law they have "cultivated coastal community participation to act as early preventer against security disturbances and violation of law at the waterways; empower/encourage components of the society to play an active role in creating *Pam Swakarsa* [voluntary security forces]...".⁹⁵ He further elaborated that the Marine Police "provides guidance and community coaching activities to the members of society to enable them to carry out early prevention and address disturbances stemmed from within or outside of the country."⁹⁶ As part of the Indonesian maritime development grand strategy the government is developing the Monitoring, Controlling, and Surveillance (MCS) system to protect the country's marine resources. The MCS system incorporates the Community Based Monitoring System (*Pengawasan Berbasis Masyarakat/Siswasmas*). The *Siswasmas* encourages members of the society to carry out monitoring of illicit activities at sea or coastal areas and help the government to optimize the security of borders and outlying islands.⁹⁷ One of the concrete example of community participation in maritime security surveillance could be seen in the form of *Kelompok Masyarakat Pengawas (POKWASMAS)*, community groups formed and supported by the Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries. The duties

⁹⁵ Suristiyono (Komisaris Besar Polisi dan Wakil Direktur Polair Babinkam Polri). (2005).

"Penyelenggaraan Keamanan dan Ketertiban di Kawasan Perairan Selat Malaka," in *Pertemuan Kelompok Ahli Kebijakan Terpadu Pengelolaan Keamanan Selat Malaka*, Medan, 19-20 Juli 2005. Jakarta: Departemen Luar Negeri, p.49 as cited in Febrica. (2023). *Port Security and Preman Organizations in Indonesia*

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Dewan Maritim Indonesia. (2007d). *Perumusan Kebijakan Grand Strategi Pembangunan Kelautan*. Jakarta: Departemen Kelautan dan Perikanan, pp. 4-8, 4-9 as cited in Febrica. (2023). *Port Security and Preman Organizations in Indonesia*.

of Pokmaswas as stated in the Director General of Marine and Fisheries Resources Surveillance (Pengawasan Sumber Daya Kelautan dan Perikanan Regulation) No. 5 of 2021 concerning the 'Development of POKMASWAS in the Maritime and Fisheries Sector' noted that 'Pokmaswas has the duty to inform suspected violations [of law] in the fisheries sector to fisheries supervisors/law enforcement officers [who then] can arrest perpetrators...., monitor marine and fisheries resources management activities in their area and be involved in the marine and fisheries resources surveillance operations [as appropriate].⁹⁸ To quote the Director General of Marine Resources and Fisheries Surveillance (PSDKP), Dr. Pung Nugroho Saksono, A.Pi, MM (Ipunk), while attending the POKMASWAS Technical Guidance event in Cirebon, West Java, on 14 December 2024:

[Our] office appreciates and expresses gratitude for the active participation of the community, which is a crucial pillar in monitoring marine and fisheries resources. The government cannot monitor marine and fisheries resources alone; our budget and human resources are limited. The key is community involvement to assist with monitoring. POKMASWAS involvement in monitoring is legitimate and recognized by law. The community is available 24/7 in the field, aware of conditions on the ground.⁹⁹

While there is growing participation of non-state actors in maritime security, participatory spaces are those that are limited to thinking about environmental sustainability, or those that are directed towards the better management of local communities. It stops short of reconfiguring understandings to provide a more holistic form of maritime security.

Another obstacle centres on the sustainability of such participation, often because it is not sufficiently institutionalized into the formal structures of maritime security governance. Because it is ad hoc or reliant on the will of distinct actors, it can be dependent on political will which can quickly shift. The NGOs above are important for providing some stability to these consultative structures, but they are often focused more on development as a primary concern, with intersections with security but not a primary focus on security itself, or reliant on the sustainability of funding to continue such activities.

Indeed, across the examples of maritime security provision and cooperation, there are currently no examples of two-way participation outside of the environmental domain. This has limited the negotiation of what maritime security is, because it means that it has continued to be state-centric.

Engagement and Empowerment

Related to the above, engagement is also often one way – maritime security communities listen to ocean dependent communities in so far as they provide solutions, but do not necessarily create dialogue spaces where the communities can discuss their own vulnerabilities. More active listening is required. This is particularly problematic, however, in a context whereby traditional maritime security actors have already been reticent to listen to government institutions that do not necessarily have the same views.

⁹⁸ Dinas Kelautan dan Perikanan Prpvinsi Kalimantan Timur, Kelompok Masyarakat Pengawasa (Pokmaswas), 10 April 2025, https://dkp.kaltimprov.go.id/home/more_berita/101100420230002

⁹⁹ Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan Republik Indonesia, KKP Berdayakan POKMASWAS untuk Membantu Pengawasan Kelautan dan Perikanan, 14 December 2024. <https://kkp.go.id/news/news-detail/kkp-berdayakan-pokmaswas-untuk-membantu-pengawasan-kelautan-dan-perikanan-RO2E.html>

Similar to above concerns, the activities leading to stronger engagement and empowerment are often NGO driven, who themselves are vulnerable to changes in funding streams and priorities, raising questions regarding their sustainability. Such NGOs also often have limited resources, and are able to focus only on a distinct portion of the ocean dependent community (e.g. a particular local fishing community, or ethnic group) or a distinct issue area (most often fisheries or informal migration). This prevents a more collective and holistic form of maritime security from emerging, and limits the efficacy of current maritime security interventions and cooperation.