

# Their Decision, Not Ours

The Darawa community in the Wakatobi National Park, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, manages their octopus fishery by working tirelessly with community-based organizations

It was a beautiful and sunny Sunday. The Darawa village community in the Wakatobi National Park, in Indonesia's Southeast Sulawesi, was preparing to celebrate. The occasion was the first opening of Fulua Nto'oge, the 50 ha fishing site off One Mbiha beach which had been closed for three months. White steam billowed from four large cooking pots, stacked neatly over the fires. There were intoxicating aromas of lapa-lapa (rice cakes wrapped in coconut leaves) and seafood stews made from the most recent catch of crabs, squid, clams and snappers.

While the women were busy preparing this feast, young girls from the local schools were chatting enthusiastically as they finalized their colourful costumes for the traditional dance performance they were about

management method has been quite successful in the Western Indian Ocean because the life cycle of an octopus is short. An octopus typically lives for 15-18 months and grows very quickly during the first six months, almost doubling in weight every month during this period. Large octopus command a higher price.

All fishing activity in the closure area is prohibited but people can continue to fish at 13 other sites nearby. These alternative locations mean that the closure does not significantly limit the fishing activity of Darawa's fishers. Darawa octopus fishers usually fish from morning until afternoon. As an export-oriented fishery, fishers will take the octopus to the seafood buyer and sell it between Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) 10,000 per kg (for octopus of less than 0.5 kg) to IDR35,000 per kg (for octopus weighing more than 1.5 kg). Through a series of middlemen and buyers, these octopus are sent towards bigger cities in Sulawesi, where they are processed and prepared for export to consumers abroad.

"We are very proud to be undertaking this temporary fishery closure in our village. This whole process has proved that the Darawa community can work together as a team when it comes to monitoring our fishing sites and managing our fisheries," said Pak Jumani, the village head.

"We have also been successful in encouraging neighbouring communities to follow our example. We will continue to use temporary fishery closures and will make it part of our village programme," he added.

This rousing speech moved the proud crowd of community members to applause. Thanks to the participatory fisheries monitoring system, Darawa villagers learned that they had landed

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to give. Generally, Darawa women are in charge of household chores and taking care of the kids, while men are the breadwinners. Some inspiring older women fishers have proved the exceptions to this rule.

Darawa village is a community of 775 people, 105 of them are octopus fishers. The members of the community largely rely on the ocean for their livelihoods through octopus fishing or seaweed farming. For fishers, temporary fishery closures serve to give the octopus time to increase in size and reproduce, generating larger and more profitable catches and improved livelihoods. This

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Forkani's Nusi disseminates the closure data at the feedback session and Forkani facilitated many community meetings in order to reach a consensus about the closure timing, location and regulations

up to five tonnes of octopus in 2018. For small-scale fishing communities with limited or no available data on their fishery resources, this information was key to enabling informed decision making. Recognizing the potential and importance of octopus fishing, the community agreed to close this fishing site for three months. The initial closure was a chance to learn how to manage their fishery resources, acting to protect them for future generations. "Our hope lies in the sea," said Pak Jumani.

### **From community to community**

Forum Kahedupa Toudani (Forkani), a community-based organization in Wakatobi, has been supporting the community in Darawa village to start managing their own marine resources.

"We started by working with the community to ignite their curiosity and to help them gain a better understanding of their octopus fisheries," said Mursiati from the organization. "Forkani doesn't need the octopus data, it's theirs. They are the ones who will use and manage their natural resources to ensure that the octopus fishery will

last for generations. That's why raising awareness is important," Mursiati said. She spoke from her heart with a shaking voice, recalling what they had been through before Darawa became the first village in Indonesia to declare the first temporary octopus fishery closure led by their own community.

Forkani facilitated many community meetings in order to reach a consensus about the closure timing, location and regulations. They also assisted in conversations and agreements with four neighbouring villages to ensure that they understood and respected the Darawa community's closure rules. "The idea of the temporary octopus fishery closure developed through community discussions on how to preserve their octopus resources," said Mursiati. "The challenge was that the closure area is an open-access fishing site for all fishers. It's quite difficult for the Darawa community to monitor the area. An additional complication was that the area is under the authority of the Wakatobi National Park, not Darawa village. So, the co-ordination among us was very important," she added.

### **Participatory monitoring and feedback sessions**

Once the community agreed that they wanted to have better knowledge of their octopus resources, they began participating in octopus fishery monitoring. They started to collect data on their octopus fishery: the fisher's name, total catch, weight of individual octopus, sex of octopus and the fishing site. Taking a participatory approach to fisheries monitoring can provide fishers with meaningful opportunities to understand and participate in fisheries management. However, this process needs to be complemented by discussion platforms where the interpreted data can be regularly presented back and made accessible to communities through feedback sessions.

Forkani wanted the communities to understand the information they themselves had collected. So the data was presented in simple infographics to make it easier to understand. The data was patiently explained in the local language, so that the communities understood what the data represented. The Forkani team periodically receives the octopus catch data from their local data collectors. Its members have thought creatively about the many ways in which they can convey the data, once analysed, back to the fishing communities.

These feedback sessions were the entry point to further discussions about fisheries management with the community. During all these feedback sessions, Forkani and the community discussed the results of the closure and the next steps for furthering their octopus fishery management. For example, through the session, women octopus fishers expressed dissatisfaction about unequal opportunities to benefit from the village's first temporary octopus fishery closure, due to the depth of the closure site.

Male fishers go fishing using a small boat made from wood or fibreglass. They anchor the boat in the fishing area that has one-two metre-deep water. The men then put on swimming masks, swim and wade around the reef to fish for octopus using a metal spear. Female fishers go in the same kind of boat as the men, but they only

fish for octopus during the low tide on areas exposed by the tidal cycle. They walk on the reef and fish, using a metal spear. Following this feedback at the community meeting, all the fishers decided to close an additional site next year. Importantly, they decided to prioritize women's access from the opening, using community-collected catch data, disaggregated by gender, to guide their planning.

### **Revival of a customary institution**

Involvement from various stakeholders is fundamental in building community awareness from the beginning of the process. During the planning, closure, re-opening and data processing, Forkani engaged not just the community but also the village government, traditional leaders and national park authorities.

This first closure has led to stronger bonds of trust within the community, between neighbouring communities, with the government and with Forkani. These bonds have led to increased collaboration between all parties and the establishment of robust monitoring systems. This collaboration proves that the community has the capability for effective and sustainable management of their marine resources.

This first closure was a success and the Darawa community further organized three more temporary fishery closures—June-August 2018, January-March 2019 and June-August 2019. Building on these experiences, the Darawa community is now heading towards developing a broader plan for fisheries management through strengthening the role of a customary institution called 'Barata Kahedupa'. It consists of a structure, an institution and a customary area.

Barata Kahedupa has nine customary territories within Kaledupa District and nine areas outside. According to the history of Buton Kingdom, Barata was traditionally the point for the unification of autonomous territories. Each of the autonomous regions pays tax to the Central Kingdom of Buton. In each autonomous region of Barata, there is an authority with responsibility for overseeing environmental management, called 'Pengaksel (Wati)'.

Historically, Barata Kahedupa has a sea management policy which tells us that marine resource management practices have existed since long ago. For instance, in Kaledupa Island, nine Limbos (traditional villages) have their own sea management areas. People of the Limbo traditionally used natural signs to manage sea boundaries. If people in one community wanted to fish in another's waters, they had to give a part of their catch as payment.

Long ago, Barata Kahedupa also regulated the use of fishing gear and applied temporary fishing closures (hereafter called *Namonu Sara*) in the Laguna area. For managing the sea area, the central value underlying the management policies was called *ambil sebagian, simpan untuk hari esok* (it means 'take some, keep some for tomorrow'). Furthermore, the principles of good governance were built into the institution and its practice. For example, the head of the Limbo was elected by the conference of people through deliberative discussion.

The role of customary institutions governing resources is not limited to the ocean; forests are also being managed by traditional bodies. In Nusara, people divided the forest into two functions: production and protection. If people gathered resources within the forest, they would be fined in gold or were obligated to plant another tree.

Forkani and the community fought for legal recognition of this long-lost customary institution to help manage the ocean. It was successfully brought back to life through the regency regulation on the recognition of Wakatobi customary community law in 2018. The regulation is the first step in raising awareness of the importance of customary institutions. This will strengthen the body and its responsibilities over the marine resources that communities like Darawa depend on.

This recognition ensures that the early marine resource management efforts of the Darawa community can be embedded in legally recognized institutions with a clear mandate. Forkani's approach is to advise and support the community with a view to gradually step back from the active



Larangi, the traditional dance of Kaledupa Island. Now, together with all stakeholders, the Darawa community is rebuilding their fisheries for future generations

planning and organisation of fisheries management efforts. The community in Darawa is well supported to succeed.

### The decision is theirs, not ours

Forkani's approach and values are a clear demonstration of what makes community-based organizations (CBOs) such effective advocates. This way of working ensures that small-scale fishing communities fully understand their rights in managing their natural resources and are equipped to exercise them.

"Every member of a community is responsible for the protection of their environment and the management of their resources, so it is vital that everyone works together. Only when you are confident in how to protect your environment can you truly show other communities in neighbouring villages that your regulations are worth respecting," said La Beloro, head of Forkani.

Natural resource management is effective when the community that relies on this fishery for their livelihoods take a leading role in the management decisions. Forkani works tirelessly in equipping coastal communities with the skills they need to manage their natural resources sustainably. Now, together with all stakeholders, the Darawa community is rebuilding their fisheries for future generations. ♣

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<https://blueventures.org/>  
**Blue Ventures Beyond Conservation**

<https://www.icsf.net/en/proceedings/article/EN/104-indonesia-works.html?start=10>

**The Indonesia Workshop Report: Indonesia Workshop Report: Customary Institutions in Indonesia: Do They Have a Role in Fisheries and Coastal Area Management?**

<http://www.conservationandsociety.org/article.asp?issn=0972-4923;year=2015;volume=13;issue=2;spage=154;epage=165;aulast=won>

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