

1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)

Designation of Protected Areas has been the primary approach for achieving the long-term protection and conservation of marine, coastal, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems in Malaysia. A complementary approach introduced in Aichi Target 11 of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) – Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) – enables the protection and conservation of important biodiversity in areas that are outside of the Protected Area network.

OECMs are specified as a complementary area-based conservation approach in Target 6 of Malaysia's National Policy on Biological Diversity 2016-2025. Conservation set-asides, community forests or areas managed for conservation by private landowners, for example, are likely to have significant *in-situ* benefits for biodiversity - but for these to be recognised and reported as OECMs, it will be important to first develop a robust understanding of OECMs in Malaysia: what are the defining characteristics of OECMs and in what ways do the governance and management of these sites deliver long-term outcomes for biodiversity conservation?

CBD COP Decision 14/8 defines OECMs as “a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long term outcomes for the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values”.

The project - recognising and reporting OECMs in Malaysia

From October 2019, the SE Asia Rainforest Research Partnership (SEARRP) is conducting a two-year project funded by the GEF-Small Grants Programme in Malaysia to investigate the potential of OECMs and develop an understanding of how this approach could operate in Malaysia. The overall aim is to determine the policy and institutional pathways that would be needed for Malaysia's OECMs to contribute towards area-based *in-situ* biodiversity conservation in a more formal manner. For more information on the project and our areas of work, please go to: www.searrp.org/pr/oecm-malaysia.

Site-based assessment

The site-based assessment is one of the project's focal areas where we will field-test the criteria and methodology developed by the IUCN to assess potential OECM sites in Malaysia. At the project's Inception Workshop in March 2020, we consulted with the project's independent Advisory Group to review the case studies of potential sites that were submitted by stakeholders in response to the project's Call for Case Studies. On their recommendation, a number of sites that broadly meet the OECM criteria have been selected for further exploration for feasibility by means of the site-based assessment described in Annex II.

Independent Advisory Group

The Project Team is additionally guided by an independent Advisory Group comprised of key experts in the fields of protected areas and conservation governance and management in Malaysia and includes representatives from the Federal Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Sarawak Forestry Corporation and Sabah Biodiversity Centre. Advisory Group members provide their time and expertise in a voluntary capacity and will support the Project Team during the site-based assessment process.

Project team

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2. SITE-BASED ASSESSMENT WORKFLOW & DATA REQUIREMENTS

The project's site-based assessment can begin once consent has been obtained from the site authority. The assessment will be conducted in three stages:



STAGE 1: DESK-REVIEW

WHAT IS THE AIM?

To develop an understanding of the site through a review of documents and spatial information related to the site's biodiversity, cultural, spiritual and other values, management and governance systems.

HOW LONG WILL THIS TAKE?

We expect to complete this stage in approximately 2-3 months. This will depend on how long it takes to obtain access to the necessary information, the amount of material to be reviewed and complexity of the case study.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

1. The Project Team will contact the site authority to request access to materials for the desk-review. This information, as previously highlighted in the project's Call for Case Studies, includes:

	Type of information	Guidance notes
1	Spatial data (shapefile or KML) showing the boundaries of the site	Consideration of the site in meeting OECM criteria cannot proceed without a precise spatial delineation of the site's boundaries. These should be provided in a shapefile (ArcGIS) or KML (Google Earth) format. In cases where this is not possible, we would need access to a physical map (e.g. scanned image, JPEG or PDF) of the boundaries - the Project Team will then advise whether this can be georeferenced.
2	Current or previous management plans for the site if any	Evidence or documentation of how an area is being managed is necessary in meeting the OECM criteria. This type of information should be provided in the form of a management plan, village/community development plan, community protocols or rules (including any village customs).
3	Reports on biodiversity surveys conducted at the site (or in its immediate vicinity)	Achieving effective and sustained <i>in-situ</i> conservation of biodiversity is a requirement that OECMs must achieve. Hence, sites must be able to demonstrate that significant ecological value is being supported. Biodiversity surveys or assessment reports may be submitted, species lists and/or any other reports that indicate or describe the biodiversity found at your site, including any landscape-level functions (e.g. connectivity). Either descriptive or quantitative reports are useful in this context.
4	Outputs of any biodiversity monitoring programmes, including monitoring of associated values.	Monitoring is necessary to establish baselines and assess the effectiveness of measures intended to conserve biodiversity and associated values (e.g. ecosystem services, cultural, etc.) of a site. These could be in the form of a baseline assessment and/or on-going monitoring surveys (as well as community-based monitoring such as participatory mapping).
5	Any other documentation on the ecological or associated values supported by the site or through its management and governance.	Other types of information that would support our understanding of the site including details of associated ecosystem services, cultural, spiritual and other locally relevant values. These could include journal or news articles, photographs, videos, community maps, etc.

2. During this stage, we may contact the site authority to discuss the information that has been provided, request supplementary materials (e.g. documents that are cited in a management plan), or request a consultation with independent experts. In cases where the written documentation is unavailable, particularly in sites governed and managed by Indigenous peoples and local communities, we will conduct direct interviews with the site authority or their designated representatives. Throughout this process, we will work closely with, and provide updates to, the site authority.

STAGE 2: SITE VISIT

WHAT IS THE AIM?

To deepen the Project Team's understanding of the site, to observe the general condition of the site, any management activities and to conduct interviews with the site authority and their representatives.

HOW LONG WILL THIS TAKE?

A maximum two-day site visit, excluding travel time, is envisaged. This will depend on the availability of interviewees and the complexity of the case study.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

1. The Project Team will contact the site authority to coordinate timing and logistics for the site visit, including arrangements for conducting interviews. We would greatly appreciate any assistance that might be available with local transport, accommodation and meals. Any costs can be covered by the project.
2. The team will conduct interviews and informal discussions with the site authority and its representatives. If these people are not available during the visit, we will work with the site authority to arrange separate interview sessions.
3. A tour of the site to observe key areas and activities. The Project Team will only enter the site if accompanied by a designated representative of the site authority. During the tour, the team will make field observations and document site conditions (basic habitat quality, access, signs of disturbance, etc.) and discuss any observations with the site's representatives who are guiding the tour. The visit will not involve any biological sampling though we expect to record GPS points and take photographs or short video clips.

STAGE 3: FINAL EVALUATION

WHAT IS THE AIM?

To compile and assess information gathered from the desk-review and site visit stages and establish if the site satisfies the OECM criteria as currently described by the IUCN.

HOW LONG WILL THIS TAKE?

We expect this stage to take approximately two months. This will depend on how long it takes for the site profile to be validated and on the complexity of the case study.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

1. **PREPARATION OF THE SITE PROFILE.** The Project Team will compile information gathered and develop a descriptive profile of the site. The team will share the draft site profile with the site authority who will be asked to validate that the profile is an accurate representation of the site. Once validation has been received from the site authority, the team will submit the final site profile for evaluation.
2. **EVALUATION AGAINST OECM CRITERIA.** "Geographically defined", "governed and managed", "achieves sustained and effective *in-situ* biodiversity outcomes", as well as "outcomes for associated values including ecosystem services, cultural and spiritual values" are amongst the key characteristics of an OECM as currently described by the IUCN. The Project Team will be guided by the IUCN's OECM Assessment Methodology¹ and - with the input of the project's independent Advisory Group - will apply a "traffic light" rating (see below) to indicate the degree to which the site has satisfied each of the OECM criteria in the assessment methodology.

GREEN

The site satisfies the OECM criterion.

YELLOW

The site partially meets the OECM criterion, which may be acceptable under certain circumstances, or where additional interventions or changes may be necessary for the site to fully satisfy the criterion.

RED

The site does not satisfy the OECM criterion.

¹ www.iucn.org/commissions/world-commission-protected-areas/our-work/oecms/oecm-reports

3. **DETERMINE THE OVERALL OUTCOME.** Once the evaluation against all criteria has been completed, the Project Team, with the input of the project's independent Advisory Group, will determine the overall outcome regarding the suitability of the site in meeting the definition and elements of an OECM.

The Project Team will generate a summary report describing the assessment outcome together with a justification. Where sites are considered to fully satisfy the OECM criteria, the report will provide a detailed description of why this is the case and may suggest measures for longer-term monitoring where applicable. In cases where the assessment determines that sites are not OECMs, the report will identify and describe which criteria are not met and will recommend actions that the site authority may wish to consider in order to fully satisfy the criteria.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE ASSESSMENT?

Regardless of the outcome of individual assessments, we will draw on lessons learnt to generate a general, evidence-based review of the potential of OECMs in achieving the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity that falls outside of protected areas in Malaysia. This is an exciting opportunity to address, and learn from, the direct contribution of the full range of actors, including local communities, individual owners, private sector and government, who are responsible for managing and governing these sites. Insights from case studies will help us to understand the barriers and gaps faced by the various site authorities who are seeking to sustain and enhance their conservation work.

We intend for this review to guide a framework for an OECM approach in Malaysia; while OECMs are featured as an approach in Target 6 of Malaysia's National Policy on Biological Diversity 2016-2025, there is, at present, no specific policy guidance or "official standard" for how OECMs are to be defined, assessed, incentivised or supported in Malaysia. At the international level, the IUCN technical guidance on OECMs continues to be refined through an ongoing process of consultation, field-testing, feedback and learning from the experiences of different countries – and we intend that this project, and your input, will provide important feedback from the Malaysian perspective.

Site-based assessments (whether IUCN criteria are satisfied or not) represent a crucial, early step in our learning process through which we will engage with the Federal Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Sarawak Forestry Corporation and Sabah Biodiversity Centre (which are represented on the project's independent Advisory Group) along with other Advisory Group members who are working on biodiversity conservation across Malaysia.

We intend to use the site-based assessment case studies in these ways:

1. To compile a portfolio of OECM case studies for Malaysia, with an emphasis on knowledge exchange and supporting the continuous improvement in area-based *in-situ* conservation;
2. To inform the preparation of technical guidance for local stakeholders to identify and assess OECMs in Malaysia;
3. To support the project's strategic policy review in developing recommendations for OECMs in Malaysia; and
4. For public dissemination, including at stakeholder workshops, as described in Annex III.

The dossier of final outputs described above will be shared with our government collaborators, site authorities and project stakeholders, as the project draws to a close in late 2021.

3. INFORMATION FOR PUBLIC DISSEMINATION

Engaging stakeholders and disseminating information about OECMs are key components of this project and we have plans to feature case studies of Malaysian OECM sites at meetings, local and international conferences, on the project webpage (www.searrp.org/pr/oecm-malaysia) and on SEARRP social media platforms. We also intend to document and share the experience of the Malaysian OECM process and have plans to produce a series of communications materials (e.g. leaflets, posters, newsletter articles, etc.) in addition to project publications (e.g. reports, guidance manual on OECM assessments, etc.) that will draw upon our work with OECM case studies and other project activities (e.g. field visit to sites, stakeholder consultations, etc.). We intend to share this information widely and, in some cases, we may make PDF versions available online for download.

The Table below describes the information about your site that we would like to use for public dissemination to promote the work of the project and highlight case studies of OECMs in Malaysia. We will work closely with you (or your appointed representative) to compile an archive of site materials which will include the write-ups, maps and images described below.

We are seeking your consent for SEARRP to use, reproduce and disseminate information in the Table below to a public audience for the purpose of promoting the work of the project.

Information about the site	Details
Name	The name of the site.
Name of site authority(ies)	The name of the authority(ies) responsible for the governance and management of the site. In the case where there are shared arrangements, this would include the names of all relevant parties.
Location	Name of the district and state where the site is located, including proximity to protected areas and important geographical features (e.g. river, town, etc.). Maps will be generated by the Project Team (i.e. as jpeg files) and will show the site location and boundaries. If there is a core zone within the site (e.g. no-take zone, strict protection zone), this will be indicated on the map.
Size	The size of the site in hectares and that of any core zones, where applicable.
Description	A short description of the site to provide overall spatial context (e.g. geography, history, biological and socio-cultural background) and information on governance and management systems. This will be based largely on information provided by the site authority and any additional information obtained through the site assessment.
Summary of biodiversity values and any associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.	Description of biodiversity values (e.g. RTE species, ecosystems, etc.) and any associated values, based on findings of the site assessment.
Designation	Where applicable, information on any formal or informal designation of the site (e.g. RAMSAR site, Indigenous Peoples and Community Conserved Area (ICCA), Green Listed site, Important Bird Area or Flyway, Heritage Site, etc.); whether the designation is international, regional, local or informal; and whether the status of the designation is established or proposed.
Imagery	Photos or videos of the site and surrounding area. These can be provided by the site authority or captured by the Project Team during a guided tour of the site.

We welcome the possibility of including your logo (where applicable) alongside the case study of your site. This is however at your sole discretion and we would be happy to discuss the non-commercial terms of use with you.