



ASEAN Biodiversity Policy Brief No. 2026-01

# Operational Priorities for Strengthening Governance and Livelihoods in Indonesia's Marine National Parks





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# Executive Summary

Marine protected areas (MPAs) in Indonesia are increasingly expected to deliver both biodiversity conservation and socio-economic benefits for coastal communities. This policy brief synthesises findings from a policy and governance review conducted under the Effectively Managing Networks of Marine Protected Areas in Large Marine Ecosystems in the ASEAN Region (ASEAN ENMAPS) Project, focusing on Wakatobi National Park and Togean Islands National Park.

The analysis finds that Indonesia already has a strong legal and regulatory framework supporting community participation, conservation-compatible livelihoods, and diversified financing. However, its effectiveness is constrained by limited operational clarity, uneven implementation, and gaps in communication and coordination. Participation remains largely project-based, livelihood initiatives are fragmented, and key governance functions such as learning and scaling are insufficiently developed.

The brief identifies priorities and opportunities to support the Ministry of Forestry and Balai Taman Nasional in enhancing community livelihoods, coordination, and financing readiness within existing regulations to ensure that MPAs are both ecologically effective and socially inclusive.

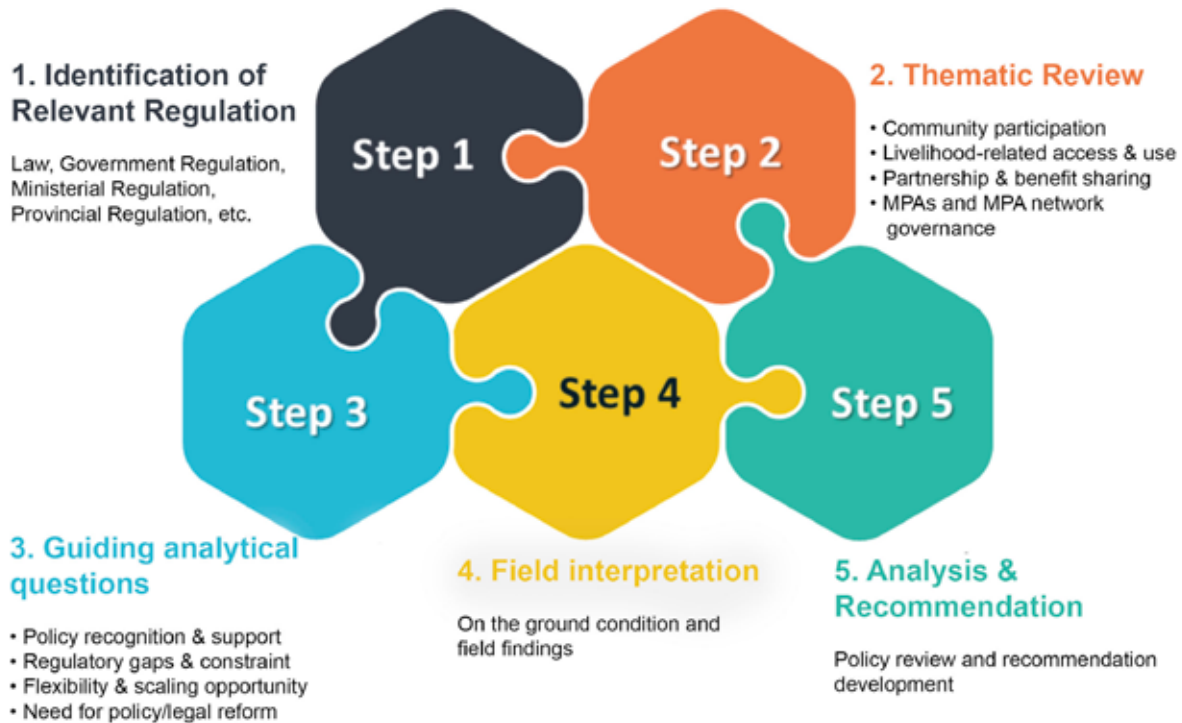
## Introduction

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are central to Indonesia's efforts to conserve marine biodiversity while sustaining fisheries and coastal livelihoods. As policy expectations evolve, MPAs are increasingly positioned not only as conservation tools but also as platforms for inclusive development. This shift reflects a broader recognition that long-term conservation success depends on aligning ecological objectives with the socio-economic needs of communities that rely on marine resources.

Indonesia's governance framework for MPAs is shaped by a dual institutional system involving the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries and the Ministry of Forestry. Marine national parks, including Wakatobi and Togean, are managed under the forestry conservation regime, guided by Law No. 32/2024, which emphasises shared responsibility, community participation, and sustainable financing.

Despite this strong policy foundation, continued attention is needed to ensure that these frameworks effectively support community participation and livelihood development in practice. This policy brief examines these issues by assessing the alignment between regulatory intent and field-level implementation, with a focus on identifying practical opportunities to strengthen governance outcomes.

# Methodology



**Figure 1.** Methodological approach applied to the policy and regulatory review conducted

This policy brief is based on a combination of desk-based policy analysis and field-level qualitative research conducted in Wakatobi National Park and Togean Islands National Park. The methodology was designed to assess both the adequacy of the regulatory framework and its practical application at the site level.

The desk review covered key national and sub-national legal instruments, including laws, government regulations, and ministerial policies related to conservation, fisheries, marine spatial planning, community participation, and financing. These documents were analysed to identify provisions related to participation, livelihoods, zoning, financing, and governance coordination, as well as potential gaps or ambiguities in policy design.

Field data were collected through key informant interviews and small focus group discussions involving approximately 60 participants. Respondents included national park authorities, local government representatives, civil society organisations, fishers, women’s groups, and local enterprises. These consultations provided insights into how policies are interpreted, communicated, and experienced by stakeholders at the community level.

The analysis was guided by core questions on how existing policies support participation and livelihood development; where practical constraints remain; and how the current legal framework facilitates adaptation, learning, and scaling. While grounded in field observations, the study focuses primarily on policy and governance dimensions rather than institutional performance evaluation.



Figure 2. Overview of interconnected recommendations and a sequential actions

# Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that Indonesia's policy framework for marine national parks is comprehensive and enabling, but its effectiveness is shaped by how it is operationalised. Several interrelated themes emerge from the analysis.

First, the governance architecture reflects a dual system that integrates marine and terrestrial conservation mandates. While MPAs under the fisheries sector emphasise sustainable use, national parks under the forestry sector prioritise ecosystem protection through zoning. Although these mandates are distinct, they are legally harmonised, allowing for coordination and creating a foundation for functional MPA networks. However, in practice, network governance remains informal and dependent on operational coordination rather than structured mechanisms.

Second, community participation is clearly recognised in policy but remains limited in practice. Mechanisms such as conservation partnerships and empowerment programmes exist, yet participation is often confined to consultations or project-based activities. In Wakatobi, participation is relatively broader and includes women-led initiatives and community enterprises. In Togean, engagement is narrower, with limited inclusion of women and youth. Across both sites, there are opportunities to strengthen earlier and more continuous engagement in planning and implementation processes.

Third, livelihood development is permitted within the regulatory framework but lacks strategic direction. Although communities are allowed to engage in fisheries, tourism, and small-scale enterprises, these activities are often implemented as isolated projects rather than as part of structured development pathways. Wakatobi demonstrates greater diversification, but many initiatives remain dependent on external support and face challenges in scaling. In Togean, livelihoods remain heavily reliant on fisheries, reflecting limited diversification and access to alternative opportunities.

Fourth, zoning plays a central role in balancing conservation and resource use but is frequently misunderstood at the community level. In Togean, zoning is often perceived as restrictive, with limited awareness of its potential to support sustainable livelihoods. This perception is linked to gaps in communication and socialisation, which undermine compliance and weaken community support for conservation measures.

Fifth, financing systems are diverse but fragmented. Although national and regional budgets provide a stable foundation for park management, they are constrained

by limited flexibility and do not allow for the retention of revenues at the site level. Communities face barriers in accessing financial services, and many initiatives depend on short-term donor funding. This limits the sustainability and scalability of both conservation and livelihood programmes.

Finally, the analysis highlights the absence of structured mechanisms for adaptation, learning, and scaling. Although policies allow livelihood initiatives to emerge, they do not provide clear guidance on how these initiatives should evolve. As a result, adaptation occurs informally, learning is not systematically integrated into governance processes, and successful models are rarely expanded beyond their initial context.

Together, these findings suggest that the primary challenge lies not in policy design but in implementation. Strengthening the operational application of existing policies is therefore critical to improving governance and livelihood outcomes.

## Policy Recommendations

Addressing these challenges requires targeted actions that enhance the implementation of existing policy instruments and operational systems.

**First, strengthening practical guidance is a key priority**, particularly in developing clearer livelihood progression pathways that help a community/communities to progress from small-scale or pilot activities toward more stable, market-oriented, and scalable enterprises. This requires greater emphasis on capacity development, value addition, and market integration, as well as improved access to financial services.

**Second, improving communication and understanding of zoning systems is also essential.** Clear and consistent messaging can help reposition zoning as an enabling framework for sustainable use rather than as a set of restrictions. This, in turn, can enhance compliance and strengthen community support for conservation.

**Third, reinforcing operational coordination between forestry and fisheries authorities.** Establishing output-oriented platforms for cross-sector collaboration can improve alignment of policies and facilitate the development of functional MPA networks.

**Fourth, governance systems should incorporate mechanisms for adaptation and learning**, allowing management approaches to evolve based on experience and evidence. A simple national registry or database of community livelihood initiatives could improve visibility, support performance tracking, identify scalable models, and strengthen readiness for future partnerships or financing support.

**Finally, strengthening existing financing mechanisms is critical.** Core public budgets remain essential and can be complemented through better budget justification, alignment of donor funding with long-term priorities, partnerships strengthened, and expanded access to innovative financing instruments such as blended finance and environmental funds. Enhancing community access to savings, credit, and performance-based financing mechanisms will also be essential for supporting sustainable livelihoods.

## Conclusion

Indonesia's marine national parks are supported by a strong and comprehensive policy framework that provides a solid foundation for conservation and community engagement. The key challenge lies in translating this framework into effective practice, particularly in relation to participation, livelihoods, and financing.

By focusing on improving operational clarity – including clearer implementation guidelines and registry system, strengthening cross-sector coordination, improving communication, and enhancing implementation mechanisms – Indonesia can significantly improve the performance of its MPAs. These efforts will not only support biodiversity conservation but also ensure that coastal communities derive meaningful and sustainable benefits from marine resources.

Ultimately, turning policy intent into consistent local practice will be essential for achieving inclusive, adaptive, and resilient marine conservation outcomes.

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*This policy brief is a summary of the ASEAN Biodiversity Research Report No. 2026-01 "Policy and Governance Review of Marine National Parks in Indonesia: Insights from Wakatobi and Togean National Parks".*

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