

LESSON 6

Living on
the coastlands:
The case of
the Sama-Bajau in
the Coral Triangle

Subject	History/Social Studies
Topic	Living on the coastlands: The case of the Sama-Bajau in the Coral Triangle
Level	Lower secondary
Key idea	Environment, highlands, lowlands, coastlands People, worldviews, way of life Commonalities and diversities
Key concepts	Across time, people respond to the varied natural environment of a region in multiple ways which shape their worldviews and way of life
No. of periods/lessons	1 period (1 period is approximately 50 minutes)
Facilities needed	A/V equipment and Internet access to play the video clips (or hard copy with similar content) Paper and pens Sources and handouts for distribution
Prerequisite knowledge	No prerequisite knowledge required

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson, the students will be able to:

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the geographic region known as the Coral Triangle, and where that territory overlaps with diverse groups of sea nomads. 2. List key features and the significance of features of homes along coastlands and those on the sea. 3. Link the way houses are built and the way of life in a community to the environment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examine maps to identify the regions where diverse groups of sea nomads live. 2. Interpret sources to compare and contrast living along coastlands and living on the sea. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate awareness of how people respond in multiple ways to the environment, which can influence their way of life. 2. Cooperate in groups to complete task at hand.

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
Introduction [6 minutes]	<p>1. Hook</p> <p>1.1 Show video (first five minutes) or images of Sama-Bajau and their houseboats (Sources 1 and 2 or equivalent).</p> <p>1.2 Ask the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do you think these people are? • Where do you think they live? <p>1.3 Explain that students are going to study about a unique group of people who live in the islands.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 1: Video (11 m 36 s) <p>Note: From 6:54 to 7:46, the video shows how Bajau develop fishing explosives. Caution may be exerted if students are invited to watch the full video (e.g. before the start of the class).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 2: Images of Sama-Bajau 	The hook acts to engage students in the lesson.
Development [39 minutes]	<p>2. Teacher talk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Orang Laut (literally 'sea people') are a seafaring people who treat the sea as their primary living space. The Bajau people go by many names – Orang Laut, Sama di Laut, Sea Nomads – yet they share similar languages that allow them to communicate and share a common identity as people of the sea. • They live in the Coral Triangle region, an ecosystem within a 6 million km² area that contains 76 per cent of the world's coral species and 37 per cent of the world's coral reef fish species. • Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Orang Laut played a special role in the development of Southeast Asian port cities. • The Straits of Malacca were the most important highway for trade between the Middle East and from China. However, the waters were dangerous. • The Orang Laut knew the sea very well and helped guide ships across the different sections of the Straits, or upriver, in order to get them safely, for a price, to the desired port city. • There were different groups of Orang Laut depending on their family relations, their relationships with port-cities, and the spaces within the seas where they came from. • Many served the sultan of a port city connected to their waters and islands. They acted as guides, rowers for a ruler's boat, sea soldiers, or as gatherers of sea products for trade in the ports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 3: The role of Orang Laut in port cities 	The teacher talk gives students the information to understand the Sama-Bajau lifestyle and to complete group work.

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some groups did not serve a local leader. Some attacked ships for their cargo. Some Malay rulers hired them to raid the ships of competitors. • The success of an entrepôt (port city) depended on having an agreement with local Orang Laut so that ships would come to these ports safely and pay various taxes. • Nowadays, the Bajau depend on traditional fishing methods for their food and livelihoods. • The relationship that the Bajau peoples around Southeast Asia have with their various ocean ecosystems has shaped not only their daily practices but also their religious practices. • The Bajau base their fishing practices on their beliefs about the spirits who inhabit the environment around them and their knowledge of ocean ecosystems. • Large-scale overfishing, global warming and other practices are threatening several species in the Coral Triangle. These environmental changes have led to decreases in fish species that the Bajau rely on for their livelihoods. <p>3. Source (map) analysis</p> <p>3.1 Distribute copies of Sources 4, 5 and 6 that illustrate Bajau territories, the Coral Triangle region, and the map of ecosystems in the Coral Triangle region.</p> <p>3.2 As a class, students identify the geographical areas where Bajau territories and the Coral Triangle Ecosystems overlap.</p> <p>3.3 Students list the oceans that Bajau/Sea Nomad territories cover, and which countries border those ocean territories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 4: Sea nomad territories • Source 5: Map of the Coral Triangle region • Source 6: Map of ecosystems in the Coral Triangle region • Chalk or masking tape 	<p>This activity helps the students visualize the Sama-Bajau territories.</p>

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
	<p>4. Group work: Taking perspectives</p> <p>4.1 Divide class into two groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 1 will take the perspective of those who live on the coast (in a house). • Group 2 will take the perspective of those who live on the sea. <p>4.2 Outline a rectangle on the floor representing a long canoe/dugout boat using tape or chalk. Outline a square on the floor representing a house on the coast using tape or chalk.</p> <p>4.3 Ask each group to come up with five characteristics of houses on land (Melaka) and five characteristics of houses on boats (Sama-Bajau).</p> <p>4.4 Each group answers the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where would you want to live: on the coast or at sea? • What is both similar and different about living in houses and living in houseboats? • What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in houses along the coast or living in houseboats? 		<p>This activity encourages students to consider various perspectives and to compare the respective advantages of different types of homes.</p>
<p>Closure [5 minutes]</p>	<p>5. Reflection</p> <p>5.1 Students reflect on the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does living at sea influence people's way of life? <p>5.2 Gather responses from students.</p> <p>5.3 Summarize the lesson:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our way of life (housing) is shaped by the environment we live in. • Hence, there are many commonalities, and some differences, in the way we live in coastlands, highlands and lowlands in the region (this forms the overall summary for the whole unit). 		<p>This exercise aligns the lesson plan to the comprehensive theme of how communities respond to the environment in similar ways.</p>

Sources and handouts

Source 1: Documentary - People of the Coral Triangle

▶ People of the Coral Triangle

Video documentary (11m 36s)

youtu.be/lwizKx4PCsQ

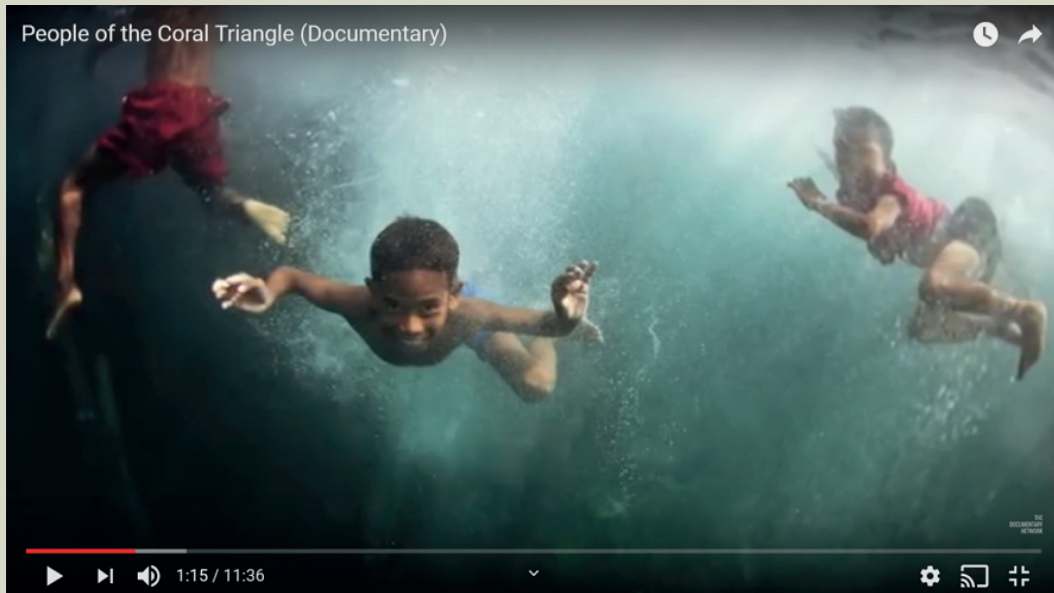
Source: The Documentary Network

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The video copyright belongs to James Morgan and the video can only be used for educational purpose within the framework of Southeast Asia Histories project.

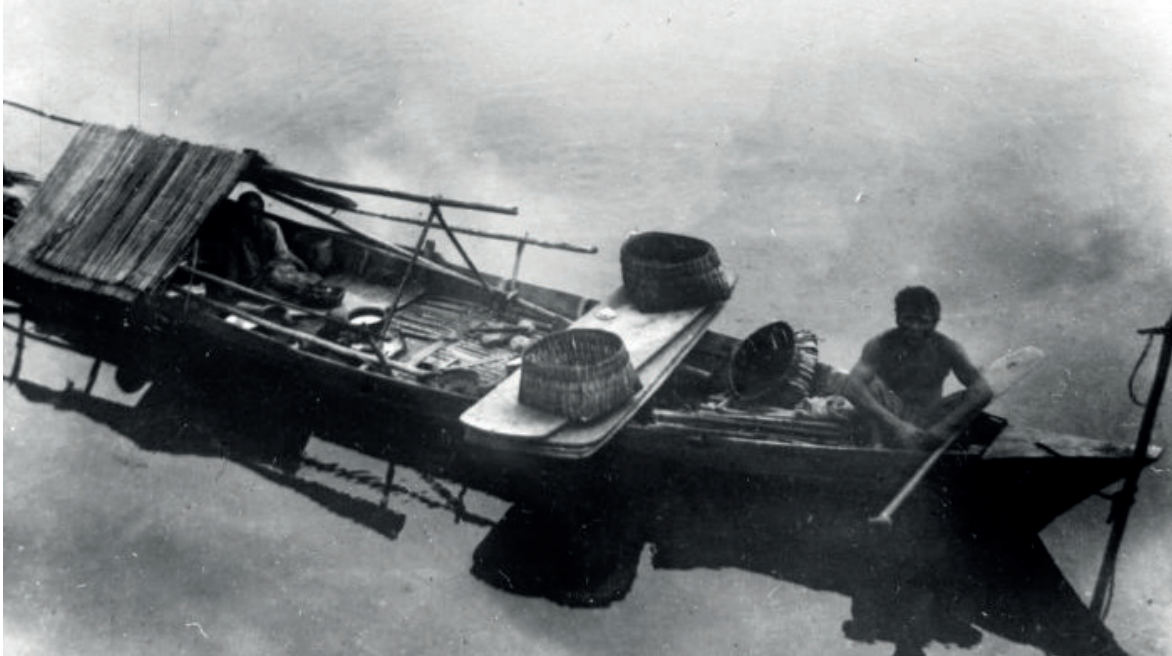
Notes:

- Suggested showing until 5:00.
- Caution: From 6:54 to 7:46, the video shows how Bajau develop fishing explosives.



Source 2: Sama-Bajau people

An Orang Laut family (circa 1914-1921)



Source:

Tropenmuseum (part of the National Museum of World Cultures). commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:COLLECTIE_TROPENMUSEUM_Woonschuit_van_een_Oorang-Laoet_familie_Ka_Toengkal_TMnr_10010488.jpg

Bajau woman captain, Sabah, Malaysia



Source:

Borneo Child Aid. www.flickr.com/photos/borneochildaid-org/4977105666/in/album-72157624799724459/

Sea Nomad village, Pulau Tetagan, Malaysia



Source:

Achilli, Fabio. www.flickr.com/photos/travelourplanet/30266542098

Source 3: The role of Orang Laut in port cities

The Orang Laut (literally 'sea people') are a seafaring people, a maritime group that treat the sea, and in particular the island straits, as their primary living space.

Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, a great interaction from the Indian Ocean to China occurred that brought people, goods and ideas to Southeast Asia. While many merchants, monks, soldiers, scholars and labourers travelled to and from this broad region, Southeast Asian communities living along these trading routes were crucial to this global commerce. The Orang Laut patrolled and worked in tandem with the leadership of port cities and their broader ocean-kingsdoms. Also, they acted as intermediaries, suppliers, guides and sometimes as hired guns to enforce the rules.

The Straits of Malacca were the most important highway between the trade coming from the Middle East (Western Asia) and the trade coming from China in the East. However, the waters were dangerous; they had different depths, currents, hidden shoals in the sand and quickly-changing winds. These obstacles led to many shipwrecks.

The southern part of the Straits of the Malacca was the territory or realm where the Orang Laut lived. These groups helped guide ships across the different sections of the Straits in order to get them safely, for a price, to the desired port city. Equally important was their knowledge of river systems that connected to the seas, as some port harbours and capitals were upriver and difficult to find. The Orang Laut became the 'sherpas of the seas' guiding these ships to the entrepôts.

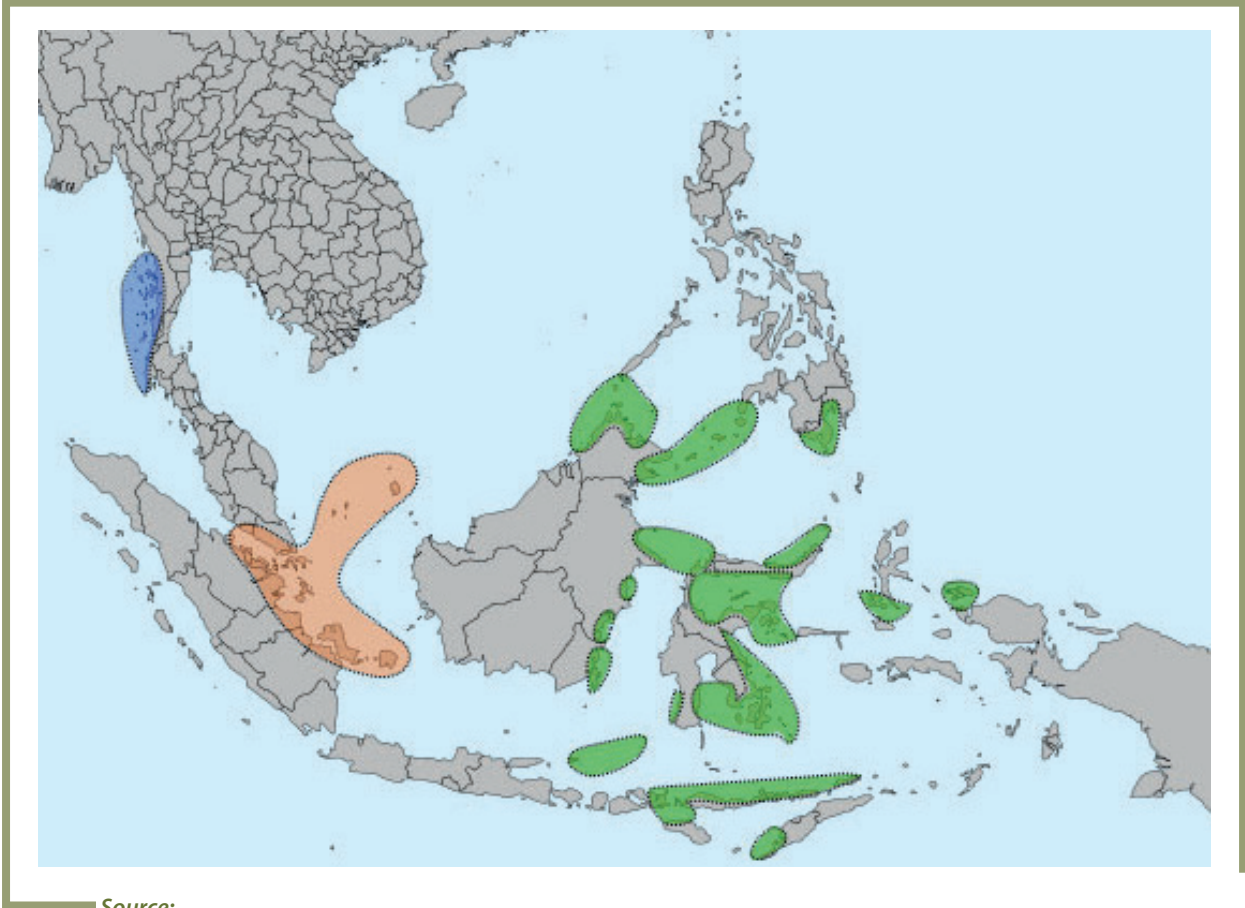
It is important to realize that the Orang Laut were not all the same. They were differentiated by their kinship relations, their relationships with port cities, and their ties to particular islands that they considered home. They knew the particular spaces within the seas. Those who would serve the sultan of a port city were usually connected to the surrounding waters and islands. Some acted as guides, rowers for a ruler's boat, as implementers of 'early warning systems' for port cities, or as hunter-gatherers who collected sea products for trade in the ports. Some served in battle, others served as mediators or envoys.

There were some groups that did not serve a local sultan or leader of a port city. These groups were often depicted as 'pirates' and 'marauders' as they attacked ships for their cargo. Some Malay rulers enrolled them to raid the boats and ships of competitors. Raiding, as one scholar put it, represented power in the Straits of Malacca.

The success of an entrepôt (port-city) depended on making sure that local Orang Laut were under an agreement with the local leaders. If port city leaders had an agreement with the Orang Laut, then they could guarantee that ships would come to their ports safely, raising the ability of the city to make money through taxes, tolls and other forms of charges. If port city leaders did not establish a patronage relationship with the local Orang Laut, then the likelihood of ships coming into their ports unscathed would be quite low. Thus, the greater the ability to bring into agreement the cooperation of the Orang Laut, the greater the influence and ability of local leaders to assert authority in the waters around their coasts.

Source 4: Sea Nomad territories

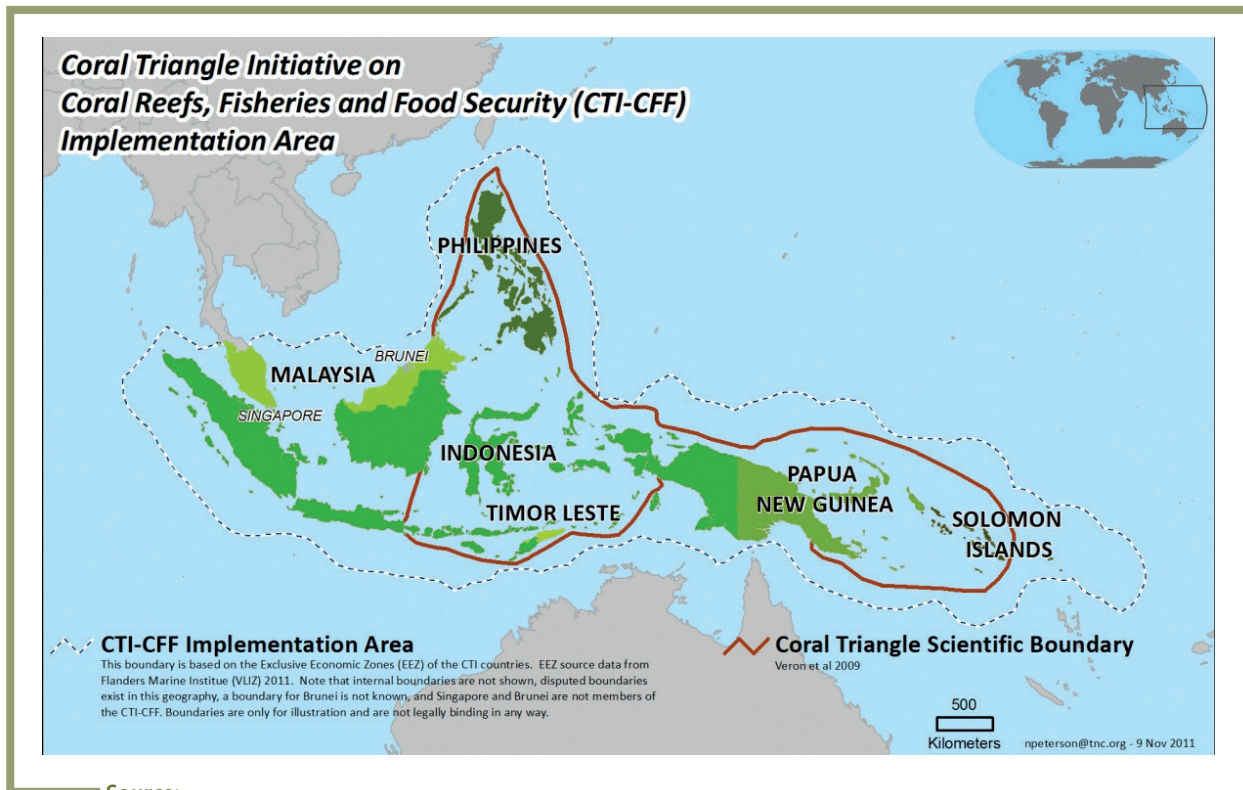
Distribution of three different peoples usually called 'Sea Nomads': Blue - Moken, Orange - Orang Laut, Green - Sama-Bajau



Source:

Obsidian Soul, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sea_Nomads_distribution_map.jpg

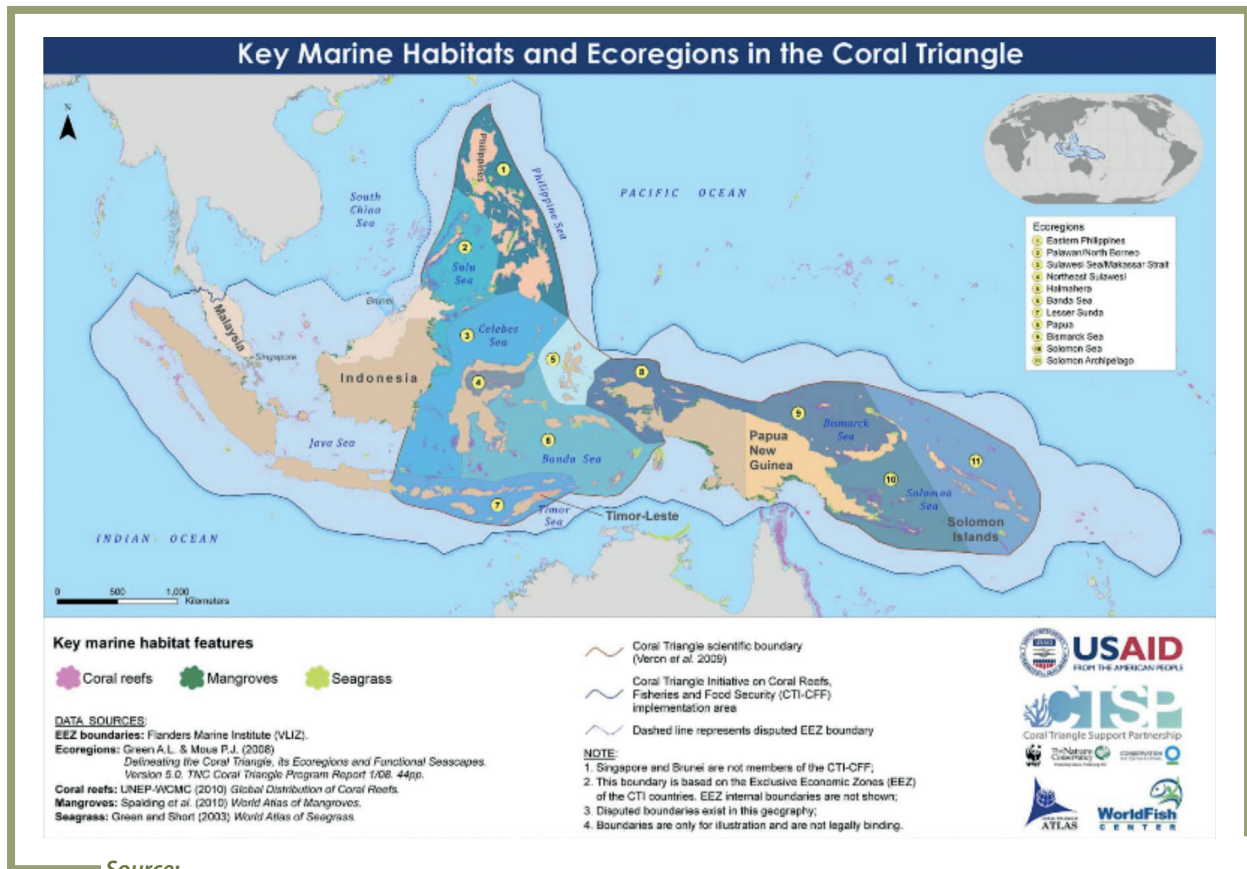
Source 5: Map of the Coral Triangle region



Source:

NoniMF. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CT_Boundaries_Map_2011_Nov_9_Final_0.jpg

Source 6: Map of ecosystems in the Coral Triangle region



Source:
 © Coral Triangle Atlas. ctatlas.reefbase.org

Supplementary resources

Asian Development Bank. 2014. *State of the Coral Triangle: Indonesia*. Manila: Philippines. coraltriangleinitiative.org/sites/default/files/resources/SCTR-IN.pdf

Feener, Michael and Sevea, Terenjit. 2009. *Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Publishing.

Kortschak, Irfan. 2010. *Invisible People: Poverty and Empowerment in Indonesia*. Mandiri: Godown Lontar. issuu.com/psflibrary/docs/2546_invisible_people

Nimmo, Harry Arlo. 2001. *Magosaha: An Ethnography of the Tawi-Tawi Sama Dilaut*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press. Gusni. 2003. 'The identity and social mobility of Sama-Bajau'. *Jurnal Alam dan Tamadun Melayu*, Vol. 21. pp. 3–11. ISSN 0127-2721.