

Event Report

Understanding Coastal Communities, Small-scale Fisheries and Climate Resilience in Southeast Asia and China



Ubud, Bali Province, Indonesia
25th and 26th September, 2024

SUMMARY

■ Goals and Purpose

Collaboration among NGOs is essential for advancing marine conservation, sustainable fisheries, and climate action, especially as countries like China and Indonesia face similar environmental challenges and socio-economic dilemmas. Such partnerships allow NGOs to broaden their perspectives and innovate, making more effective use of shared resources to address pressing issues.

Organized jointly by Dialogue Earth and China Blue, the workshop 'Understanding Coastal Communities, Small-scale Fisheries and Climate Resilience in Southeast Asia and China' is built on previous visits and conferences, and convened NGOs from Indonesia, China and the UK to discuss shared challenges and potential areas of cooperation in addressing the issues of sustainable fishery and coastal marine protection. The event took place against the backdrop of the increasing threats posed by climate change, which is jeopardizing the stability of marine food supply, coastal ecosystem and the livelihood of millions of fisherman and their communities in both China and Indonesia.

The workshop aimed to foster greater collaboration between NGOs of the two nations to enhance the climate resilience of coastal fishery through community-based ecological protection, fishery management and sustainable livelihood practices. The focus of the workshop was on sharing related knowledge and experiences, and to form a mutually benefiting collaborations between the NGO partners.

■ Outcomes

The first day focused on identifying the strengths and weaknesses of both China and Indonesia in promoting the climate resilience of small-scale fisheries communities. Through a detailed analysis of common challenges and complementary areas, participants deepened their understanding of each country's approach and the potential for collaboration. Key strengths identified for China included strong governmental policy alignment, financial support for community transformation, and the active role of NGOs in facilitating the implementation of policies. However, challenges such as a lack of transparency in fisheries data, limited community management rights, and a scarcity of NGOs that focus on sustainable fisheries were also discussed. For Indonesia, strengths included a robust civil society network, rich traditional knowledge within local communities, and strong trust between NGOs and local populations. However, weaknesses such as inconsistent policy implementation across provinces, lack of fisheries resource data, and limited recognition of community rights to marine resources were identified as barriers to progress.



The second day of the workshop focused on narrowing down the areas for future collaboration based on participant inputs. Through a voting process, three key areas emerged as the most promising: technology exchange, enhancing community-NGO interaction, and increasing youth involvement in building community climate resilience. Each group engaged in further discussions to outline potential projects for the coming year, culminating in the development of initial proposals.

The project proposals for future collaboration include:

- the use of solar photovoltaic (PV) technology in Indonesian fishing villages to provide affordable, stable, and clean energy, addressing the energy challenges faced by remote coastal communities.
- organizing field visits between Chinese and Indonesian NGOs to share best practices in community-based conservation and sustainable livelihood development.
- youth empowerment, with the development of a "Youth Climate Action Scholarship Program" to train and engage young people in both China and Indonesia in sustainable fisheries management and marine conservation

Conclusion

The workshop successfully brought together NGO stakeholders from Indonesia, China and the UK to share experiences on coastal ecosystems and fisheries protection, and challenges posed by climate change. It identified potential areas of collaboration on technology exchange, community engagement, and youth empowerment, and laid the groundwork for future developing these project concepts.

The workshop marked a significant step forward in fostering South-South cooperations between NGOs of China and Indonesia on coastal marine protection and sustainable small-scale fishery. We believe that through such collaboration, NGOs can be empowered to develop solutions that contribute to improving global marine biodiversity and climate resilience.



< CONTENT >

Summary	1
Presentations	4
1. Climate impacts on coastal small-scale fisheries in Hainan (South China Sea) and its potential responses	4
2. Climate impacts on coastal small-scale fisheries in Indonesia and responses	5
3. OECM - an area-based management tool	6
4. Coastal wetland conservation and development in Beigang Village, Hainan, China	7
5. Community-based octopus fishery management in Alas Strait, Indonesia	8
6. Conserving at-risk ecosystems through community-led governance	9
7. Building capacity of tuna coastal communities to be resilience in facing uncertainties of climate change	10
8. What is needed for a sustainable small-scale aquaculture? top-down vs. bottom-up efforts	11
9. Telling China's ocean stories that drive change	12
Group Discussion 1	13
Group Discussion 2	15
Project Concept 1: Solar-Powered Ice-Making Facility in Indonesian Fishing Communities	15
Project Concept 2: China-Indonesia On-Site Exchange and Documentary Film	16
Project Concept 3: Youth Climate Action Scholarship Program	16
SWOT Analysis	17
Next Steps and Future Outlook	18
Participants List	19

Presentations

01 Climate impacts on coastal small-scale fisheries in Hainan (South China Sea) and its potential responses



(Image: Regina Lam/ Dialogue Earth, CC BY NC ND)

Yuhe Tong Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Hainan Tropical Ocean College, China

“ The presentation highlights the impacts of climate change on small-scale fisheries in Hainan, China, and explores potential responses.

Hainan's fisheries are predominantly small-scale, with over 16,000 small fishing boats that make up approximately 75% of the total fleet. These fisheries support around 80,000 fishers, with a significant portion of the population involved in part-time or seasonal fishing. The region has a diverse range of economic fish species, including eel, hairtail, and scad, alongside reef fish like grouper. However, in recent years, fishers have faced a marked decline in catch volumes and a reduction in fish size, signaling the stress that climate change is placing on local marine ecosystems.

As fish abundance declines, many local fishers are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain their incomes through traditional fisheries. The Hainan Fisheries Department has proposed recreational fisheries as an alternative livelihood, promoting activities like sport fishing and eco-tourism. Although these activities have substantial market potential, they are still in the early stages of development, due to regulatory restrictions and the lack of organizations to help facilitate the transition.

In addressing these challenges, Tong emphasizes the importance of social organizations in bridging the gap between government agencies and fishers. These organizations can help disseminate information about policies and subsidies, assist in data collection, and provide a platform for communication.

Climate impacts on coastal small-scale fisheries in Indonesia and responses

02

Gayatri Reksodihardjo

Research Director
LINI Foundation



(Image: Regina Lam/ Dialogue Earth, CC BY NC ND)

Indonesia is a nation with abundant natural resources and over 17,000 islands, and is heavily reliant on its coastal communities and marine resources. With around 60 million people living in coastal areas, Indonesia's fisheries sector supports a vast number of small-scale fishers, with over 500,000 registered in the industry, though the actual number may be even higher. These small-scale fishers (using vessels under 5 GT) contribute around 15% of the nation's marine catch, with key species including octopus, mahi, small pelagic fish, and reef fish. However, only 30% of Indonesia's coral reefs are in good health.

In regions like Bali, many coastal communities depend on both fishing and non-fishing livelihoods such as salt farming, seaweed farming, and coral cultivation for aquariums provide alternative income sources, particularly in northern and eastern areas. Bali's economy is also highly tourism-dependent, with 70% of its revenue coming from tourism. This has led many fishers to transition into ecotourism-related services, including guided dives, homestays, and coral restoration projects. However, tourism growth has also reduced available fishing areas, and with a largely aging fisher population (60% of fishers are between 40-60 years old), the future of Indonesia's small-scale fisheries is uncertain.

Climate change poses significant challenges for Indonesian fisheries. Coral bleaching, unpredictable weather patterns, and shifting harvest cycles in seaweed farming disrupt fishing schedules and incomes. To counter these impacts, reducing reliance on capture fisheries and diversifying into sustainable aquaculture and ecotourism has become crucial. For example, in Bali's Les Village, a successful livelihood diversification project from 2009-2022 saw the development of aquarium fish farming, dive tourism, and reef restoration, supported by LINI which provided training and certification to help fishers transition to these new roles. Through such strategies, Indonesia can balance the preservation of its marine resources with the economic needs of its coastal communities.

03 OECM – an area - based management tool



Hari Kushardanto

Senior Director of Fish Forever in Indonesia
Rare

(Image: Regina Lam/ Dialogue Earth, CC BY NC ND)

“ In Indonesia, sustainable fishery practices focus on ensuring that fishers can reliably catch fish close to their villages with consistent yields, supporting local food security. Key to this approach is the Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM), a tool that helps communities protect local marine resources to maintain food supply resilience. For fishers, economic viability is as important as environmental sustainability, emphasizing the need for policies that address both income stability and resource protection.

Effective fishery management requires time, with results potentially taking years to manifest. NGOs working with local communities need a partnership approach, where solutions come from fishers themselves rather than imposed models. This inclusive process is supported through workshops and dialogue, which also engage government officials, helping to build support from public institutions.

Climate change presents an additional challenge, as seasonal patterns that once guided fishing activities are increasingly unpredictable. Community members may be skeptical of climate science, seeing the changes as divinely determined (by God), so outreach and education are crucial to integrating climate considerations into local practices.

Indonesia aims to expand its marine protected areas (MPAs), currently covering 10% of its waters, to protect 30% by 2045. This ambitious goal includes establishing OECMs with strong legal foundations and estimated 500 potential sites. Conservation requires collaboration beyond government efforts, involving community, NGO, and other stakeholders to ensure science-based, practical methods for sustainable marine management.

Climate impacts on coastal small-scale fisheries in Indonesia and responses

04

Mingzhi Chen

Senior Program Manager
China Blue



Located in northeastern Hainan, China, Beigang Island is home to abundant mangroves and rich biodiversity, including fish, shrimp, and shellfish, all of which are integral to both the ecology and culture of the island. Since the 1980s, beach gleaning—collecting seafood close to shore—has become a way of life for many fishers, yet balancing this tradition with sustainable conservation practices has become increasingly challenging because of the tourists flooding into the area.

To ensure sustainable development, China Blue works with local communities to promote eco-friendly income-generating activities. One example is transforming old fishing nets into reusable bags, offering local women an alternative source of income. Additionally, eco-friendly beach gleaning is promoted to tourists and residents, fostering awareness of the ecological value of the coastal wetlands. Through these activities, community members gain appreciation for their environment, bridging traditional fishing practices with eco-conscious tourism.

The "Bring Fish to Table, Bring Fishermen Home" project, another project implemented by China Blue across Hainan, documents Hainan's fishing culture by capturing the stories and changes within fishing communities. By recording fishing and local cultural practices, China Blue tries to build pride and empowers community members to lead cultural self-reflection.

05 Community-based octopus fishery management in Alas Strait, Indonesia



Taufik Hizbul Haq (Boen)

Director of JARI Foundation

(Image: Regina Lam/ Dialogue Earth, CC BY NC ND)

“ The coastal regions between Lombok Island and Sumbawa Island in Indonesia are characterized by narrow straits, many small islands, and a delicate balance between the ocean and the sea. They are home to rich marine biodiversity but face significant threats from destructive fishing practices, intensive shrimp farming, tourism, and marine debris.

The focus of JARI's sustainable fishery efforts in this region includes working with seven coastal villages through community-based initiatives.

The approach revolves around improving stock availability, implementing effective management, and ensuring climate resilience. Key initiatives include local capacity building, such as safety-at-sea training, scuba diving, and coral reef monitoring. Programs also focus on diversifying fishers' products and creating networks of fishers to foster community solidarity.

Despite these efforts, challenges persist, including destructive fishing practices, poor compliance during temporary closures, fluctuating octopus prices, debt policies favoring investors, and the need to harmonize stakeholder perceptions and policies. Opportunities for progress lie in the development of master plans for coastal villages, the application of provincial regulations like "Rapala Emas" in Alas Strait, and the potential for national and global partnerships.

To achieve long-term success, community-based small-scale sustainable fisheries and alternative livelihood programs must be designed to overcome these challenges while ensuring equitable benefits for local communities.



Conserving at-risk ecosystems through community-led governance

06

Adam Miller

Executive Director of Planet Indonesia



(Image: Regina Lam/ Dialogue Earth, CC BY NC ND)

Planet Indonesia (PI) is focused on community-centered marine conservation and sustainable fishing practices in Indonesia. The approach is grounded in four key areas: rights, management, governance, and financial support. This framework emphasizes community ownership and leadership in managing local marine resources, with spatial technology aiding in the effective monitoring and planning of fishing areas.

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However, significant challenges remain, as around 50% of mud crab catches consist of undersized juveniles, highlighting the need for stricter management practices. Through focused group discussions, Planet Indonesia has identified a strong community need for financial support, as economic resilience and community empowerment are closely intertwined.

Only 18% of Indonesia's marine protected areas (MPAs) is implemented, while the rest exist only on paper without active management or community involvement. The Indonesian government has ambitious conservation goals, aiming to establish a large MPA network by 2030, but limitations in resources and administrative capacity mean it is often unable to effectively oversee these areas. Furthermore, national and local legal conflicts create confusion over fishing rights, as local communities are not recognized as the rightful managers of their fishing grounds, and private companies occupying coastal areas often restrict fishers' access.

PI advocates for using Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) to strengthen community rights and achieve conservation goals. This tool offers a pathway for communities to gain formal recognition over local marine areas, which could help balance sustainable use and conservation.

PI also encourages examining legal frameworks from regions beyond Southeast Asia, including Africa and South America, to identify best practices for community-based resource governance. This approach could support Indonesian communities in overcoming legal and economic challenges, empowering them to sustainably manage their marine resources.

07 Building capacity of tuna coastal communities to be resilience in facing uncertainties of climate change



Yasmine Simbolon

Executive Director of Masyarakat dan Perikanan Indonesia (MDPI)

(Image: Regina Lam/ Dialogue Earth, CC BY NC ND)

“ MDPI is dedicated to building the resilience of tuna-fishing communities in coastal areas facing challenges from climate change and ecosystem pressures. Recognizing that strong community engagement is essential, MDPI has focused on initiatives that empower local fishers through sustainable practices, fair trade, and cooperative development.

MDPI's approach includes enhancing fisheries sustainability and social well-being within communities by implementing Fair Trade USA standards, empowering local champions, and establishing fishers' associations. These cooperatives provide a platform for fishers to achieve financial resilience and share resources, knowledge, and advocacy power.

MDPI has seen visible results, including increased compliance with legal fishing practices, improved data collection, and active participation by fishers in local and national Dialogue to voice their needs.

To bolster financial and environmental resilience, MDPI trains communities in leadership, financial literacy, and sustainable fishing practices. Recognizing the economic fluctuations and seasonality shifts caused by climate change, MDPI uses interactive methods like games to teach financial management, helping fishers adapt to unpredictable income. Additionally, they support fishers in collecting and sharing critical data with the government, fostering transparency and data-driven policies.

What is needed for a sustainable small-scale aquaculture? top-down vs. bottom-up efforts

08

Han Han

Founder and President of China Blue



(Image: Regina Lam/ Dialogue Earth, CC BY NC ND)

Small-scale fishery and aquaculture account for over 70% of China's seafood supply. China Blue has observed significant challenges in delivering policy, technology, and financial resources to this sector, noting that the industry remains poorly informed, loosely organized, and vulnerable to market volatility.

China Blue emphasizes that fostering resilience in small-scale aquaculture requires both top-down guidance and bottom-up engagement. Their experience suggests that a balanced governance approach that values community-oriented roles and responsibilities is crucial.

China Blue advocates for tailored, affordable solutions, including gathering detailed data on local aquaculture operations, such as wastewater management and food safety, to aid government authorities in delivering desirable environmental and social outcomes in coastal communities. China Blue also facilitates the formation of farmers' cooperatives, which help fish farmers access technical support for daily issues like disease control, feeding, and aeration.

Even though these cooperatives can enhance production efficiency, support seafood traceability and access to insurance services, however, when disasters like typhoon strike, many farmers feel left behind, as government relief efforts often focus on infrastructure recovery while aquaculture farmers are left to handle their own damages. China Blue highlights fair government relief allocation, through accurate data collection at the farm level.

09 Telling China's ocean stories that drive change



Lin Zi

China programme director
Dialogue Earth

(Image: Regina Lam/ Dialogue Earth, CC BY NC ND)

“ Through a case study on beach combing, Lin Zi introduced the growing popularity of marine harvesting on China's beaches, that is often encouraged by online videos. This trend has led to both environmental harm and threats to local livelihoods. In collaboration with NGOs and fishers, Dialogue Earth has worked to establish guidelines for sustainable beach combing. By including experts' input in policy discussions, they have supported China's Ministry of Environment and Ecology in strengthening environmental regulations to protect sensitive coastal habitats like seagrass beds.

In the "Blue Bay" case, where a construction company plans to build embankments in coastal wetlands, Dialogue Earth helped bring public attention to this issue, resulting in widespread media debate and ultimately leading to the cancellation of the project. This case highlighted the role of citizen-led advocacy in environmental protection.

Dialogue Earth emphasizes the role of relatable storytelling in driving environmental action, striving to connect with audiences both locally and globally by focusing on people and their livelihoods. Despite operating within a constrained space with limited data access in China, they believe that constructive Dialogue can foster change without creating division.

Group Discussion 1

The first discussion session on 25th of September highlighted the unique strengths and challenges both Indonesia and China face, particularly in the context of implementing policies, securing local community involvement, and addressing climate adaptation within these vulnerable communities.



(Image: Regina Lam/ Dialogue Earth, CC BY NC ND)

■ Unique strengths and challenges

China's strengths in supporting small-scale fishing communities primarily stem from its structured, centralized policy system and government funding support for community development. For example, China's government offers funding for skill training programs, facilitating job transitions for fishers as part of the broader national rural revitalization strategy. NGOs can play a key role in bridging policy implementation gaps, translating governmental mandates into accessible actions for communities. This approach has led to collaborative efforts between government bodies, such as the Haikou Municipal Bureau of Ecology and Environment, and NGOs working on climate risk assessment initiatives in coastal communities. However, the centralized policy system has its obvious limitations. Chinese policies often lack the flexibility needed to address local diversity,

while data transparency and resource management rights remain insufficient at the community level. Furthermore, the number of NGOs dedicated specifically to sustainable fishery and community-based marine conservation is limited in China, hampering grassroots environmental initiatives.

Indonesia, on the other hand, benefits from a strong civil society network, rich local knowledge, and established trust between NGOs and communities. Many Indonesian NGOs work closely with communities to build data literacy and encourage the sustainable management of fishery resources. This close NGO-community relationship allows for greater community-led initiatives and resilience in resource management, with some Indonesian communities actively participating in conservation and sustainable fishery practices. However, the decentralized policy framework poses challenges, as provincial governments' varying interpretations and implementations of national policies often lead to inconsistent enforcement. Data scarcity and inadequate resource monitoring further hinder effective policy application. Additionally, while community-based management is recognized, Indonesian communities lack exclusive rights over local marine resources, limiting their autonomy in decision-making processes.

Common challenges and needs

Both countries face significant gaps between policy formulation and on-the-ground implementation, necessitating NGO involvement to facilitate effective policy delivery and to provide feedback for potential policy adjustments. Data collection and utilization remain areas requiring improvement, with neither country possessing robust systems for fisheries data management. Furthermore, both countries' communities currently lack recognized ownership or management rights over adjacent natural resources, which impacts their ability to engage in sustainable practices fully. The need to integrate scientific knowledge with local practices was highlighted.

The workshop emphasized the importance of raising climate awareness within fishing communities in both countries. Shared tools and methods for climate risk assessment, along with joint community workshops, could foster greater awareness and adaptive capacity at the grassroots level.

Group Discussion 2

The second group discussion, held on September 26, focused on developing practical initiatives to enhance collaboration between fellow NGO participants.

We proposed a variety of potential areas for cooperation, which were then grouped into seven key themes through brainstorming and voting. These themes included technology exchange, community and NGO interaction, climate resilience, joint communication efforts, raising climate awareness, promoting ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) practices among Chinese investors operating in Indonesia, and fostering cultural understanding between the two nations.

The attendees selected three priority areas for collaboration: technological exchange, community and NGO interaction, and youth engagement in climate resilience. In breakout sessions, the attendees developed preliminary project plans for each selected area, aiming to implement these initiatives over the next year.

Project Concept 1:

Solar-Powered Ice-Making Facility in Indonesian Fishing Communities

The project idea involves connecting Chinese solar photovoltaic (PV) manufacturing capacity with Indonesian fishing communities to co-design and develop a prototype solar-powered ice-making facility. This initiative addresses the pressing need for stable, affordable cooling in Indonesia's remote fishing villages, where access to ice for fish preservation is critical. The project's initial steps would be assessing the specific energy needs of Indonesian fishing communities, including economic constraints and available space for infrastructure. A preliminary survey will also examine the local PV industry to understand the technical requirements better. After identifying a suitable Chinese PV company, the project will move forward with fundraising efforts to support the installation.

A pilot community will be selected to host the solar-powered ice-making facility, with local training on using and maintaining the equipment. This approach seeks to ensure that the technology is sustainable and operable by the community members themselves.

Besides the solar ice-making initiative, there was also discussion on the need for further technological exchanges, such as innovations in fishing gear recycling and fish preservation methods. For instance, China's current projects on recycling discarded fishing gear could be shared with Indonesia to reduce the environmental impact on marine ecosystems. Similarly, fish

preservation techniques like vacuum packing and chilling could improve the quality of small-scale fishers' products and facilitate market access, potentially linking Indonesian fish suppliers with China's high-end seafood market.

Project Concept 2: China-Indonesia On-Site Exchange and Documentary Film

The second concept aims to foster cultural and experiential learning through an on-site exchange program between NGOs of China and Indonesia. This initiative will involve visits to local fishing communities in Hainan, China, and in Maluku and Papua, Indonesia, regions known for their active community-led conservation efforts. This exchange will offer opportunities for Chinese and Indonesian community members to observe each other's sustainable practices, understand the role of traditional cultural values in environmental stewardship, and learn new strategies for conservation adapted to local environmental conditions.

To amplify the impact of this exchange, the project will also produce a documentary showcasing stories from the communities involved. Initial planning discussions will outline key messages for the documentary, focusing on the unique community-based conservation practices in each location. Community members, guided by NGOs, would co-create the storyline to ensure that it accurately reflects their experiences and insights. A team of media and storytelling experts will collaborate with NGO representatives to finalize the narrative, after which the team will carry out filming and production.

Once completed, the documentary will be distributed through various channels to reach a broad audience, including policymakers, researchers, and international partners, increasing awareness and support for sustainable fishery practices and conservation efforts in these communities.

Project Concept 3: Youth Climate Action Scholarship Program

The third project idea addresses the urgent need to engage younger generations in the sustainable development of fishing communities. With fewer young people pursuing careers in fisheries, the sector's long-term resilience is at risk. The "Youth Climate Action Scholarship Program" aims to cultivate a new generation of leaders within fishing communities who are committed to ecological preservation and climate adaptation.

Selected participants will attend climate communication workshops focused on storytelling techniques that emphasize climate impact and resilience-building. These workshops aim to enhance participants' understanding of climate change while teaching them to effectively communicate their experiences and mobilize community action. The program will also facilitate exchange visits between Chinese and Indonesian youth, enabling them to share their experiences,

challenges, and successes in fostering climate resilience in their respective communities. Technical training workshops will complement these activities, equipping young leaders with skills relevant to community-based climate adaptation. This includes knowledge on sustainable fishing practices, habitat restoration, and community disaster preparedness.



SWOT Analysis

For each of these project plans, workshop participants conducted a SWOT analysis to identify factors that could influence successful implementation.

In the case of solar-powered ice-making facilities, strengths included the availability of advanced solar PV technology in China and significant interest from Indonesian fishing communities. However, potential challenges, such as initial setup costs and the need for local maintenance knowledge, were also acknowledged. Opportunities lie in the potential for expanding solar applications to other community areas, while threats could include funding constraints and technical difficulties in implementing solar energy infrastructure in remote regions.

In terms of community engagement and NGO exchanges, strengths include the willingness of both Chinese and Indonesian organizations to collaborate and learn from one another. The main challenge, however, lies in the logistical complexities of organizing regular visits and exchanges, particularly in remote areas. Despite this, the project offers valuable opportunities to elevate community-led conservation efforts and gain greater recognition in international environmental and academic circles. The primary risks are related to funding, as long-term support will be necessary to maintain consistent engagement.

For the youth-focused initiatives, participants identified strengths in the widespread interest among young people in climate and environmental issues, but challenges remain in terms of limited resources and the infrastructural needs of certain communities. There is also a risk that without adequate support from families and local communities, youth engagement efforts may not reach their full potential. Nonetheless, these programs represent a significant opportunity to create a network of young leaders who can promote climate resilience and sustainable fisheries across the region, with the potential to inspire similar youth-focused programs in other coastal communities worldwide.

Next Steps and Future Outlook

Moving forward, detailed proposals need to be refined to secure the funding and resources. The participants underscored the importance of maintaining open channels of communication between Chinese and Indonesian NGOs, with regular follow-up meetings to monitor progress, share updates, and ensure accountability.

The outcomes of this workshop demonstrate a strong and promising start toward building a resilient, sustainable future for fisheries in China and Indonesia. By focusing on practical, actionable projects and fostering a spirit of cultural and environmental solidarity, these efforts represent a promising action for international collaboration on sustainable fishery and climate change.



(Image: Regina Lam/ Dialogue Earth, CC BY NC ND)



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