

# Embracing diversity: navigating different perspectives in orangutan conservation

! Orangutans are among the world's most famous and endangered animals, and many conservation scientists and practitioners are working to save them from extinction. Doing so means juggling various methods and models of responsibility.

## Conservation organisations and local staff

act as mediators between different parties, ideas about rights and responsibilities, and the orangutans themselves. They seek to collaborate with governments, local communities and others to save orangutans.



## Indigenous and rural communities

hold varied viewpoints, with some adhering to cultural rules against harming orangutans and others perceiving them as unexceptional. Rehabilitated orangutans are commonly seen as owned by, and therefore the responsibility of, rehabilitation centres.



In rural Indonesian Borneo, orangutan conservation is shaped by multiple social, cultural, moral and political factors, leading to **different perceptions** of orangutans:

## Western supporters and organisations

often regard orangutans as unique and integral to global biodiversity. Therefore, they feel a moral obligation to save orangutans, regardless of distance.



## The national government of Indonesia

recognises the global significance of orangutans. However, it sees orangutan conservation as the nation-state's responsibility, along with managing its natural resources and biodiversity for its citizens.

Such divergent perceptions, politics and priorities can lead to tensions and misunderstandings between communities and conservationists. For example, villagers often resent the perceived prioritisation of animals over humans by conservationists.

## Key findings



- International narratives about orangutans and biodiversity may not ‘travel’ well to other contexts.
- There are cultural and political reasons that people view orangutans and conservation differently. Some of these might not have anything to do with orangutans.
- Effective conservation is not just about changing local mindsets and livelihoods; conservationists can also adapt their own ideas and methods to respond to the specifics of each situation.
- Spending time getting to know and working with local communities helps build trust and makes conservation more effective in the long run.

## Recommendations for conservation organisations



- Carry out social research when designing new programmes to identify different perceptions of orangutans and understand local contexts and concerns.
- Consider broader contextual influences which shape different parties’ views of orangutans and conservation.
- Acknowledge and work with the diverse perspectives and interests at stake in orangutan conservation. This will help conservation actors navigate complex interactions.
- Fund and support ground-level engagement of staff with community members for effective, enduring relations and building trust.

For more information read the full paper: L. Chua, H. Fair, V. Schreer, A. Stępień & P. H. Thung (2021) **“Only the orangutans get a life jacket” Uncommoning responsibility in a global conservation nexus**, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 48, Issue 4, pp. 370-385.

Cite as: **The Global Lives of the Orangutan** and **POKOK** (2023) Visual summary of Chua et al., ‘Only the Orangutans get a Life Jacket’ (2021) University of Cambridge and Brunel University London.

