

Eyes and ears

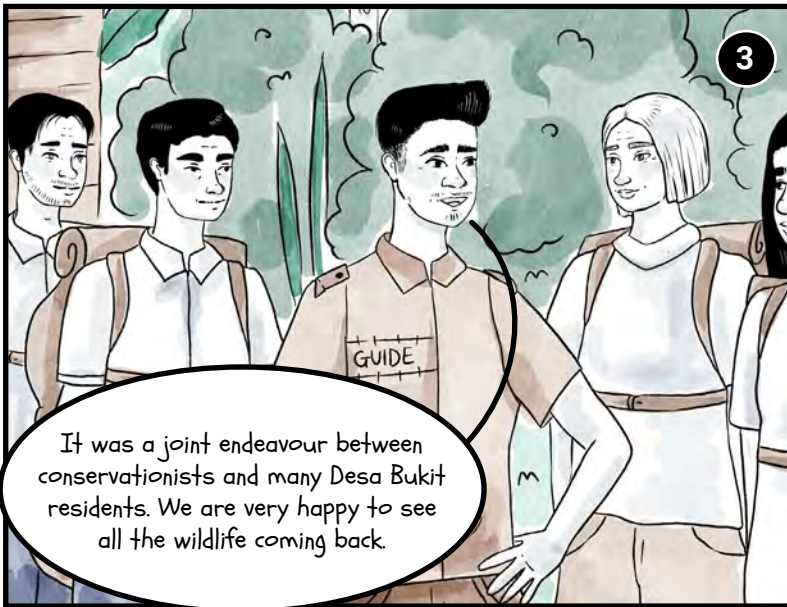
The risk of losing contact



At the border of a National Park in Indonesia, a restoration project is underway.



Western tourists visit the NGO's most successful forest restoration site.

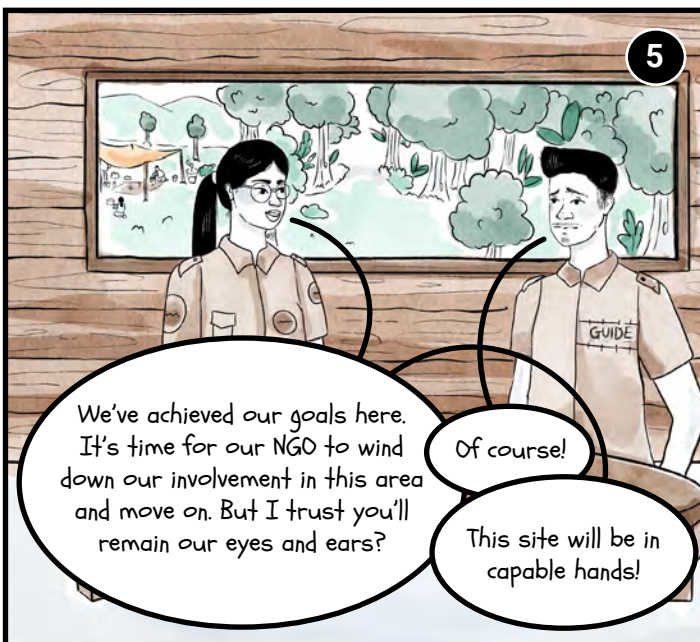


It was a joint endeavour between conservationists and many Desa Bukit residents. We are very happy to see all the wildlife coming back.



Another great tour, Pak Unut. It's amazing to see orangutans returning, too!

Thanks! And I'm excited to stay involved in your next projects!



We've achieved our goals here. It's time for our NGO to wind down our involvement in this area and move on. But I trust you'll remain our eyes and ears?

Of course!

This site will be in capable hands!



A few years later.

It's good to hear your voice! The pandemic has really hampered our ability to visit. How's it going?

I still lead tours and make some money! But the recent land disputes were brutal. They're logging and planting oil palms again.



We'd heard rumours about that. It's disappointing for sure, but we are planning a trip soon. With your help, we'll be able to restart our programmes!

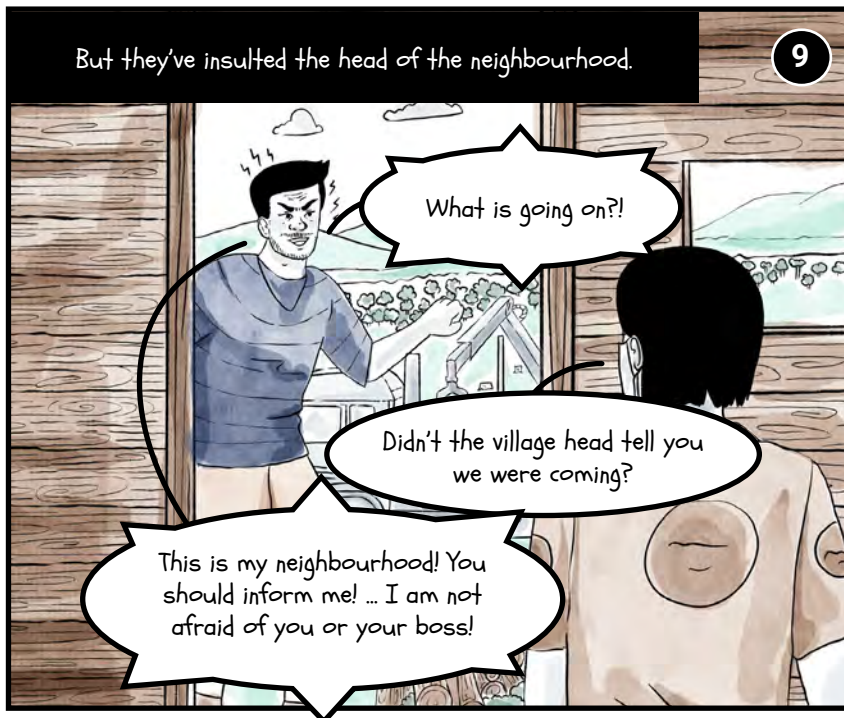


Soon, the NGO team returns to start a new survey.

Thank you for letting us stay with you, Pak Unut. Travel restrictions have been a hassle.

My pleasure!

We should get to work ASAP.



But they've insulted the head of the neighbourhood.

What is going on?!

Didn't the village head tell you we were coming?

This is my neighbourhood! You should inform me! ... I am not afraid of you or your boss!



A few hours later

I tried talking to him - he wanted no part of it.

Don't mind him, he is just jealous.

Let's try starting in the next neighbourhood.



At the home of the head of the next neighbourhood

I heard you were coming. I am sorry, but I cannot let you do your survey here because of our travel ban.

Why did we assume Pak Unut alone could maintain our reputation here? They don't know or trust us...



Who were they, dear?

Representatives from another NGO. They've got good intentions, but they don't really know how things work around here.



Takeaways

1. While key collaborators enhance projects, overreliance on them can lead to unintended consequences, like exacerbating tensions and inequalities within communities.
2. Prior successes don't ensure future collaboration. Conservation efforts need to consider wider political and social shifts, foster diverse connections, and remain adaptable in the face of change.
3. Effective conservation requires understanding the intricate web of community, politics, and environment.



Questions for conservation practitioners

1. What could the NGO have done differently during and after the forest restoration project, and before restarting their community engagement?
2. What should you consider when starting or restarting engagement with a specific community?
3. What steps should you take to avoid or deal with tensions within the community?
4. How can you ensure that your activities don't cause or deepen social divisions? How can you make sure that what you do benefits the whole community, not just a few?
5. How can you build lasting relationships with different community leaders and local collaborators?

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