



# An Introduction and Overview to Technical Writing

## Aims

Unblocking writers

Equipping writers of proposals and reports to understand their readers

Introducing a suite of practical tools, skills & methods

Integrated thinking around design, image & text

Teaching the editing mindset

[@foreversabah](#)

[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](http://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)

[www.foreversabah.org](http://www.foreversabah.org)



# Concept Notes, Proposals, Grant Reports, Institutional Reports and reports on Issues

Similarities and differences between these kinds of document

Understanding the differences between different kinds of funders and readers

The writer in the ecology: where does the information and content come from?

[@foreversabah](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)



# The Technical & The Creative

What is the place for eros and meaning in professional & technical writing?

What is the place for design in professional documents?

When and how do we diversify voices and content?

Key Point: “The Medium is the Message”

[@foreversabah](#)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](http://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](http://www.foreversabah.org)



## EROS IN ACTION: FULL CIRCLE FOUNDATION REPORT 2016 - CONCLUSION

### *In closing:*

Reflecting on this fertile and dynamic phase of LEAP and Forever Sabah, with the 18-month period of your support through this grant and through your personal engagement with us, we draw the following conclusions:

We are becoming more self-aware of our place within the larger web and our distinct role in tending to process and weaving connections. Our “methodology” is becoming clearer; we focus on humanizing processes and building community, on opening spaces for self-organizing and shared leadership that coalesce around passion and responsibility, on developing collaborations with strategic visions and tasks, that represent potent symbols of possibility and power. This happens in a circular motion, from level to level, fractal to fractal, spiraling open in an arc of creativity and transformative potential.

This “methodology” holds both the material and the spiritual in its consciousness; the arc sweeps with coherence and integrity and understanding that the two are indivisible.

At the material level, we operate with the deep knowing that the socio-cultural, ecological, economic and political are integrated dimensions of a whole - a full circle. In our recent Forever Sabah retreat, a young double-shaman lineage colleague said that he saw Forever Sabah as a web-sonar (as in spiders and whales!) system.

Our deepening discovery of the currencies of generosity, reciprocity and trust has revealed a new understanding – that the exchange of these is how the spiritual manifests into the material. It is becoming clear that a circular economy holds at its heart a revival of spirit and values of the spirit. The linear, extractive economy needs to be liberated from itself, its homelessness and loneliness and the excesses it cannot sustain.

We started the Forever Sabah process four years ago with a civil society deliberation that identified institutionalized corruption as the core of our socio-cultural and ecological devastation; we are tending to a spiritual and cultural revival, an opening of closed systems, a revealing and releasing of the hidden and silenced, the decolonizing of psyches and systems, and the remembering and reclaiming of our humanized, equal and just place in the web of all life.

We look to continuing our co-learning process and systemic and strategic tasks with a new commitment to sharing our stories to wider regional and global allies. American poet Drew Dellinger states that “the future belongs to the most compelling story”; we are beginning to see more clearly the importance of language, frames and narratives and the process of articulation, to ourselves and to citizens of the world through spaces and platforms that are appropriate, ready and influential.

We deeply appreciate your support of our work.

With warmest regards,

Cynthia Ong  
For LEAP (and Forever Sabah)





## EROS IN ACTION: FULL CIRCLE FOUNDATION REPORT 2016 – CONCLUSION

### Learning Points

Tone, layout and language matches reflective content

Poetic language conveys wild courage & vision making heart connection

Reference to Full Circle; circular writing; photo of our team sitting in circle

Seamless connection of practical and inspirational, spirit and material

Positivity in the midst of the struggle and the fight

Eros and empathy; sharing emotional atmosphere of the organisation

It was this only section of the report that was shared by Full Circle staff to the Full Circle funder – enabled them to share our journey

It ends with identifying what we would ask for funding next

[@foreversabah](#)

[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](http://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)

[www.foreversabah.org](http://www.foreversabah.org)



## DESIGN & INCORPORATING DIVERSE DIRECT EXPRESSION: FOREVER SABAH ANNUAL RETREAT REPORT, 2018

*"The essence of FS has not changed since I first engaged in 2014, despite the growth, the funding and everything else."*

*"I have been opening up to working with different people"*

*"There is no growth without challenge. I have been facing personal criticism and learning to deal with it without internalizing it in ways that make me sick"*

*"Learn to rest not quit"*

*"All that we want to do will only work if we practice the values in our FS DNA"*

*"I have been learning so much since joining. Including the practical things like about fish in our rivers."*

### Some Personal Reflections Shared

*"FS has gone for me in the months since I joined from pictures to understanding"*

*"I used to be quiet and retiring. But now I talk about FS. I am making quite a few friends trying to explain it because it takes so long."*

*"I was having fun until the accident in October, which traumatized me. But folks encouraged me. FS is like a family."*

*"This work needs resilience and courage"*

*"I am starting to see how everything in FS is connected. The journey of the process"*

*"I am still so new and have missed so much. I don't yet know what the straight lines and triangles mean."*

In opening Day Three and our expressing our intention to conclude how to re-design the FS ecology, Cynthia characterized Day Two as having worked on "unravelling the old diagram", and she reported the underlying changes proposed as follows:

- **CORE:** We started at the core. We can't change that, but only find ways to articulate it to better to share it with others. What we had done was to add "Nature, Culture & Economy" across the space between the living landscapes and seascapes. To reflect that purpose of working out from the core she remarked that people had drawn in both the milky way and an oil palm on the diagram!
- **FOCAL AREAS:** She remarked that there had been interesting and robust discussions about the four focal areas, and that we had added new dimensions that reflect our work on fisheries, forestry, livelihood, enterprise and infrastructure; and relocated waste.
- **PROJECTS:** this had now been re-framed as "Programs, Projects and Partnerships" and the activities allocated accordingly, and the actual list revised by many developments on the ground over the year.
- **OUTER HEXAGON:** the coordination/finance/governance issues remained the institutional frame, while the cross-cutting components were now incorporated in an arrow literally cutting across the work.
- **DNA:** this continued to encase the program.

## Day Three: The Convergence

### PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS AT THE START OF DAY THREE

"FS has now become very simple and very deep. Very beautiful and very tough. And that is the only guide to its quality. All the representation out there is very complex. It is very hard to describe. We only try to explain it because we have to. The hard work has become a forest. Transformation. We have heard the song. We can feel the suffering but also the happiness. It has been very hard to come up with this diagram the last two days but it's worth it."

"This image is like a computer. The centre is the motherboard."

"We're are doing all this like this because we are trying to heal communities and the Earth"

"When coming to this Retreat some of us were more interested in the food, and in the informal and creative connecting and relationship building. In seeing the results, I feel the need to celebrate. All societies celebrate when building something together."

The revised FS Ecology can be seen on the right



# DESIGN & INCORPORATING DIVERSE DIRECT EXPRESSION: FOREVER SABAH ANNUAL RETREAT REPORT, 2018

## Learning Points

Layout creates mood and accessibility

Font and colour – personalizes the individual reflections

Balancing central voice with diverse sentiment shows not tells  
engagement

How to provide platform for motivational language

[@foreversabah](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)





## FOREVER SABAH 2019 REPORT – WATERSHED & COMMUNITY

### WATERSHEDS AND COMMUNITIES

Claudia Lasimbang (Program Facilitator)

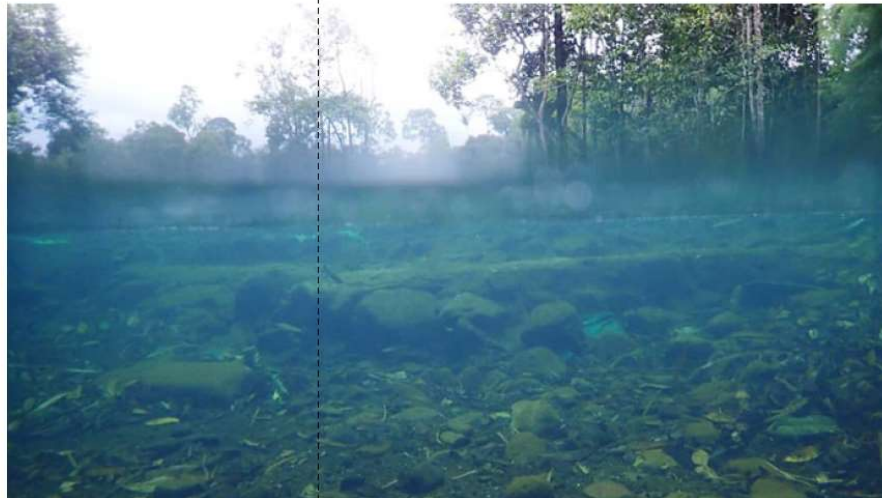
The year 2019 has been a very important period for the Watershed and Communities program, which started in 2014 as a project. The transformation journey has been filled with many ups and downs, like the flow of the Liwagu river into the sea. At times it became stagnant, blurry or murky, and sometimes clear, beautiful and strong as Tawai Waterfall. Persistence, conversations and reflection always helped us to find our way. Since last year, there are now two very active and important projects under the Watershed and Communities program; in Telupid the Human Elephant Harmony (HEH) project, and in Penampang the Payment for Ecosystems Services (PES) pilot project. With the two projects, there are at least 20 youths emerging as leaders from the villages working on very important issues and giving hope for the future. The two young project coordinators are also very important outcomes from the transformation. Both of them have shown not only strong dedication towards achieving the project goals and KPIs but also willingness to impart whatever they have learnt to their respective teams.

Year 2020 promises both projects continuity with possible expansion to other areas and contributing to different levels of work.

There are internal issues in both teams that need regular support and guidance, but in general they are enthusiastic, energetic and ready for the adventure. As the current program facilitator, feedback and conversation have highlighted my holding of the threshold, indicating that

it is probably time for me to continue my journey with my base organisation, PACOS Trust. At the time of writing this note, I am uncertain whether being back in my base organisation means that I will not be able to give support and guidance to the HEH and PES project implementation. From the six-

year journey with FS, I can only trust the process for our transformation. For in my heart, I believe Watershed and Communities has its role in changing Sabah's Landscape to a better place



*Confusion & Transformation*





## FOREVER SABAH 2019 REPORT – WATERSHED & COMMUNITY

### Learning Points

Layout creates mood and accessibility

Photograph reflects & conveys mood

Watery & flowing language and metaphors

A personalized style enables delivery of the crucial messages

[@foreversabah](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)



## FOREVER SABAH 2019 REPORT – CSPO



*"Combined molecule of H<sub>2</sub>O represents continuity, like water it flows over the rock along the river and can exist in different shape. It also represents flexibility just how our mindset, skills and attitude towards our work as it will make it easier for us to adapt in every situation"*

### **CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE PALM OIL (CSPO) TEAM**

Philip Chin (Technical Coordinator), Megavani Kumar (Assistant Technical Coordinator), and Elisna Latik (Technical Assistant)

Our 2019 was not smooth sailing. It started off with a storm tearing our boat apart, tossing us into the churning swells of an angry sea. We were drowning at one point to catch up with the deliverables to be completed before 2019 reaches its end. The delay of activities from the previous year felt like a weight that we carried along this year. It feels unbearable at times but we believe in ourselves knowing even if the wind doesn't blow our way, we can always adjust the sail because we are the one navigating the boat after all.

We trust the journey and decisions in every step we make. Thus, here we are towards the end of the year and we would like to believe that we leveled up to become a better version of ourselves achieving the "impossible" that we once thought earlier in the year. We completed our Good Management Practices (GMP) Model training that was rescheduled so many times, produced a final version of FLAP report with difficulties to gather the data, conducted train-the-trainer (ToT) using the RSPO Smallholder Academy Master Trainer module which we found was

hard to put into use, deployed "smallholder champions" (successful producers and graduates of Wild Asia training) as the Trainers of other smallholders, built good networks with partners from other NGOs, RSPO certified mills around TTBK and government agencies like Sabah Forestry Department (SFD), Lands and Survey Department (LSD), Sabah Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) and Suruhanjaya Koperasi Malaysia (SKM).

Despite having members from all sorts of backgrounds, personalities and work ethics, we managed to work with the same enthusiasm with which we hoped, to build inclusion of smallholders that produce sustainably while earning a livelihood from palm oil. We are hopeful 2020 will provide more capacity building to produce a higher number of organised independent smallholders, along with an effective management system with implemented GMP to take them to the scale of transformation required to achieve sustainable palm oil practices.

[@foreversabah](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)



## FOREVER SABAH 2019 REPORT – CSPO

### Learning Points

Layout conveys interface of the technical and the connected

Plunges straight into the drama – heavy language

Doesn't focus on blaming others but shows the courage of Sabahans

Uses that plunge down towards drowning to return soar with  
motivation and diversity

[@foreversabah](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)

## FACTUAL STORY TELLING FOR THE HUMANS HABITATS HIGHWAYS REPORT JAN 2019

### KAMPUNG KOLOPIS (KOLOPIS VILLAGE), KOTA KINABALU OUTER RING ROAD

In August 2018 LEAP-FS was approached by representatives from Kampung Kolopis, a Kadazan community on the outskirts of Kota Kinabalu, who reached out for help as a stretch of the PBH had started to be constructed through their land. Particular concerns were raised about potentially serious flooding issues which had not been addressed adequately by the authorities. The LEAP-FS team made visits to the site and held several dialogues with the village head and representatives of the Village Development and Security Committee. We were interested in partnering with this community because the problems they face are typical of the environmental issues all along west coast where the PBH surveyors have chosen to run the road through the padi (wetland rice) lands among the hills to reduce gradients and financial compensation, but with major risks and costs for disruption of water catchments. We also welcomed the opportunity to partner with the kinds of mobilized and expert community representatives we met in Kolopis.

To better understand the issues, LEAP-FS members accompanied one community representative to a meeting with EPD to discuss the many issues. Worryingly the EIA for this stretch had already been approved but was not available for viewing despite several requests to do so.



*Meeting with the village representatives in Kolopis after the site visit*



*LEAP-FS team members with a village representative viewing Kolopis valley where construction of the PBH will go through*



*Kolopis valley with hill cutting and earthworks for the PBH construction already started*

In mid-September in conjunction with some of the village representatives, the LEAP-FS team created a proposed "Kempen Kolopis" (Kolopis Campaign), incorporating a hydrological study, potential legal approach, a community rice field initiative and a communications/advocacy strategy, including facilitating workshops in the community. Building on an earlier report by FS on flooding in the Moyog Catchment, where the village is located, preliminary remote sensing and field visits were undertaken to analyse the increased flooding risks feared by community members, many of whom were technically trained, in what is a highly unusual catchment. These indicated the proposed flood mitigation work would likely increase the speed and unpredictability of flooding (which flows upstream into the valley that actually comprises the old river channel), as well as displace flooding into other parts of the Moyog catchment, one of the most expensively flood prone in Sabah.

The legal approach included FS team member Holly accompanying two village representatives to meet a local lawyer on 20<sup>th</sup> September who advised on litigation, mediation or arbitration options, including a stop-work order which must be done within a broader lawsuit. Subsequently however the village representatives decided not to go for the legal approach as the burden if the case was lost was too great.

For the hydrology study, discussions were initiated with hydrology experts Dr Felix and Dr Rodeano at UMS on flooding modelling and PBH alignment files were obtained which were then converted into shape files with the intention of sending to Dr Felix for flood estimates pre and post construction.



## FACTUAL STORY TELLING FOR THE HUMANS HABITATS HIGHWAYS REPORT JAN 2019

### Learning Points

The power of story telling: including factual story telling  
Combines origin myth, striving, obstacles, hope and outcome  
Takes something conceptual into the practical  
Photos create vividness & authenticity & document

[@foreversabah](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)



# The Use of Illustrations

When and what to use to communicate different kinds of information?  
Importance of subliminal communication & mood setting  
Connecting illustrations and textual arguments

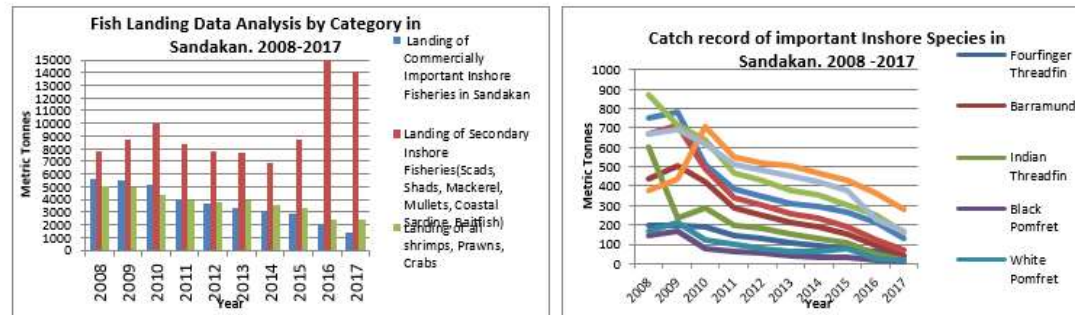
[@foreversabah](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)





## USE OF DATA GRAPHICS - RAMSAR 2020 PROPOSAL TO UNDP

Despite its protected status, the Ramsar site is still threatened by illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUU fishing), primarily by commercial operators from outside of the area (some of whom illegally enter Sabahan waters). Furthermore, the fisheries are impacted by water pollution caused by unsustainable palm oil practices upstream and far from the site, that leads to mass fish death events in de-oxygenated water. This has significant impacts on these local fishing communities as well as on the biodiversity.



LEAP Analysis of fisheries landing data from 2008 -2017; Data Source: Dept of Fisheries Sandakan

Overfishing has been devastating. For example, in the 1970s the use of unlicensed and illegal trawlers in the rivers themselves after Giant Tiger Prawn (*Penaeus monodon*) and Indian White Shrimps (*Fenneropenaeus indicus*) led to a permanent collapse of those fisheries by the end of the 1990s. Pressure then shifted to other species with similar consequences. Due to this, and in order to survive, communities often shifted to unsustainable activities themselves such as indiscriminate use of gill nets, hunting, illegal logging or migration to nearby cities. Analysis of catch records collected from the Fisheries Department for ten of the most significant coastal fish species has shown declines of between 75% and 95% over the decade since 2008 (see above).





## USE OF DATA GRAPHICS - RAMSAR 2020 PROPOSAL TO UNDP

### Learning Points

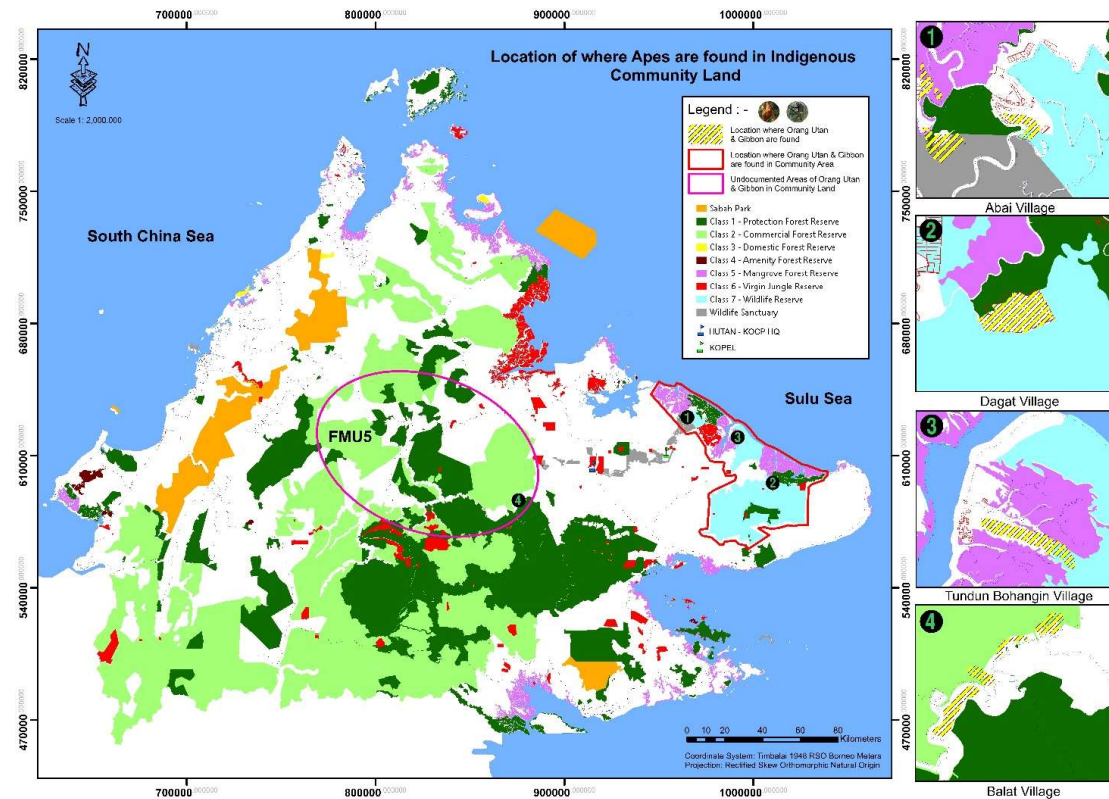
Carefully designed graphics can convey complex details: changes in the amount of fish caught, where/how they are caught and what species

Connect your graphics to your textual arguments without repetition “a picture paints a thousands words”

Graphics and text shows how detailed, empirical & sympathetic is the knowledge built up by the Ramsar Team of ecology, history & society

Shows how LEAP/FS bridges community organizing with scientific insight

## USE OF MAPS IN PROPOSAL DESIGN - ARCUS 2020





## USE OF MAPS IN PROPOSAL DESIGN - ARCUS 2020

### Learning Points

We started mapping BEFORE we knew what we wanted to do: we just started mapping neglected orangutan populations on community lands

Helped us (as well as helped the funder) to decide what to do & where

The village maps illuminate the depth of relationship and degree of planning done

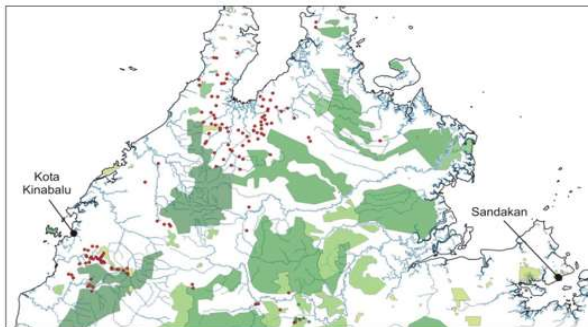
Conveys technical competence to a technical donor

[@foreversabah](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)

## USE OF MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS - FFF REPORT FOR THE SHARED EARTH FOUNDATION, 2017



Beginning June 2017, I have been appointed to a small team known as Jurisdictional Certified Sustainable Palm Oil High Conservation Value Technical Working Group (CSPO-HCV TWG) responsible for identifying all high conservation value (HCV) elements within Sabah. I was assigned to be the lead assessor for HCV4 Ecosystem Services i.e. landscapes that are critical to human survival, namely watershed for freshwater, food species production (tagal), pollination, fire barrier and landslide prevention. Our target is to produce a "Draft 0" map by June 2018 to drive state wide conservation work in subsequent years under the Jurisdictional CSPO process.



For example, a part of the HCV4 work requires me to map out all freshwater water intake points (red dots) in natural streams by villages. These are known as Gravity-fed Systems (GFS) and as shown on the map, many GFSs are unprotected i.e. not within protected forest marked in green. I would also be required to conduct many field trips to collect ground-truthing data and identify the issues.



Ground truthing field work conducted in Ulu Kiansom for HCV4. The key highlight of the trip was we crossed path with a huge eel with mottled body pattern. Initially, we thought it was a python swimming underwater. You should see how grown men yelped and sprang out of water.



Ground truthing field work conducted in Kijulu watershed for HCV4. The Dusun communities here build awesome low-impact hanging bridges across the river for daily use. I feel blessed to be given the opportunity to view such sensible and sensitive approach that is community friendly.



## USE OF MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS - FFF REPORT FOR THE SHARED EARTH FOUNDATION, 2017

### Learning Points

- Layout reflects human reality of the program that the donor needs
- Shows hands on work by dynamic program coordinator – in field, lab and virtual space
- Shows connection to colleagues & communities



# Understanding your reader's needs

Diversity of funders and audiences for our proposals and reports  
Before writing: understand those audiences and enter their shoes  
Reflect that understanding in design, tone, length & content

[@foreversabah](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)



## TARGETING REPORT CONTENT TO FUNDERS - WOODTIGER FUND REPORT 2017

Report to Woodtiger Fund, 2017

### LEAP BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION REPORT FOR 2017

Biodiversity conservation has continued to play a central role in the work of LEAP (and Forever Sabah). Our efforts typically involve both work at species level to curtail threats such as poaching or wildlife trade (and rehabilitate its victims), while also working at landscape scale to secure habitat. Most of this involves partnerships between NGOs, government agencies and researchers, and is aimed at



Forever Sabah Team at the close of the 2017 Annual Retreat at [Tengah](#)

changing systems, cultures and practices on the ground, since only long term collective action can tackle our biodiversity crisis. This has included initiatives that explore new conservation approaches for key species (including sun bears, elephants, sharks and rays and pangolins), state-wide action plans for endangered species (proboscis monkeys, [Sunda](#) clouded leopard and wild [banteng](#)), and engagement with the broader environmental law framework. Sylvia [Yorath](#) has anchored many of these efforts.

LEAP and FS also deploy advocacy through media releases, networking and dissemination of information on critical issues such as species conservation, poaching, wildlife trade, environmental law and related issues and is now developing systematic work on the threats of large-scale infrastructure development.

### SUN BEARS



*Sika, one of the young bears kept illegally as a pet that was brought to BSBCC in 2017*

Borneo is home to the world's smallest bear species, the Malayan Sun Bear (*Helarctos [malayanus](#)*). This jungle dependent mammal was once widespread throughout Southeast Asia, but now Borneo is one of its last strongholds. Even here its home is fast diminishing, with forest degradation and loss pushing this bear to the brink. Sun bears are also threatened by illegal hunting for food and medicines, and the capturing of cubs for the pet trade. As a

result, there are still orphaned young bears being illegally kept in captivity, living in small cages and with no access to the forest.





## TARGETING REPORT CONTENT TO FUNDERS - WOODTIGER FUND REPORT 2017

### Learning Points

- Intimacy of photos for both our people and our wildlife
- Conveys the situation for the creatures and our work at conceptual as well as practical levels
- Sense of direct communication with the species and team
- Photos and text integrated
- Lightness of design and tone: aimed sustaining engagement with funder

[@foreversabah](https://www.foreversabah.org)  
[www.foreversabahinstitute.org](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org)  
[www.foreversabah.org](https://www.foreversabah.org)