Abstract

It was in 2017 when we first visited the town of Sasmuan in Pampanga, Philippines, to evaluate the mangrove site in Bangkung Malapad for our Connected Mangroves project. We wanted to replicate the success of the Connected Mangroves project that we had done in 2015 in Malaysia, and so we set out to install soil and water sensors and a CCTV camera onsite. The data and the images from the site allowed the community to better manage the area, and it drew great public interest to these wetlands.

These coastal wetlands include mudflats, mangroves and riverine habitats that serve as important stopover points for migratory waterbirds on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. As such, protecting Bangkung Malapad was critical towards maintaining the biodiversity of the area, providing a natural barrier against typhoons, flooding, and other natural disasters, sequestering carbon, and allowing the community to earn from ecotourism.

From 2018 to 2019, together with our customer partner for the project, Smart Communications, Ericsson worked with the community to identify how the sensors and cameras were supporting them in their daily work of protecting the mangroves. The cameras, they said, helped to reduce incidences of unauthorized visits to the site. And as people became aware that the site was being monitored, they also became more educated on how they could act more responsibly. It was also in 2019 when the community, together with other partner organizations who were experts in mangrove conservation, decided that the main focus would be on-site protection, rather than re-planting mangroves. Experts had determined that the location of Bangkung Malapad, located at the mouth of the Pampanga river, meant that water flow should be unimpeded by mangroves at some points. We then worked together with the community to identify how we could support with enhanced site protection.

In January of 2019, we were greeted with the news that an endangered species of bird not seen in the country in the last 100 years, the black-faced spoonbill, was sighted in Bangkung Malapad. We were very glad to see it reported as news in the country's leading news daily, as it served to further bolster the community's efforts to secure this site as a wetland of international importance. In their application to be recognized as such, the community cited the Connected Mangroves project as proof of the site's relevance, given that organizations such as Ericsson and Smart were supporters of the project. Notably, the spoonbills were seen again in larger numbers the following year.