

# Learning through practice: a hands-on, multi-stakeholder approach to environmental legal education in Sabah, Malaysia

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IUCN Academy of Environmental Law  
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# What is “Forever Sabah”?



It started with one 'simple' question...

**Where will Sabah be in 50 years if we continue on our current trajectory?**

Over 2 years, it gathered views from...



SUPPORTING SABAH'S TRANSITION TO A

DIVERSIFIED

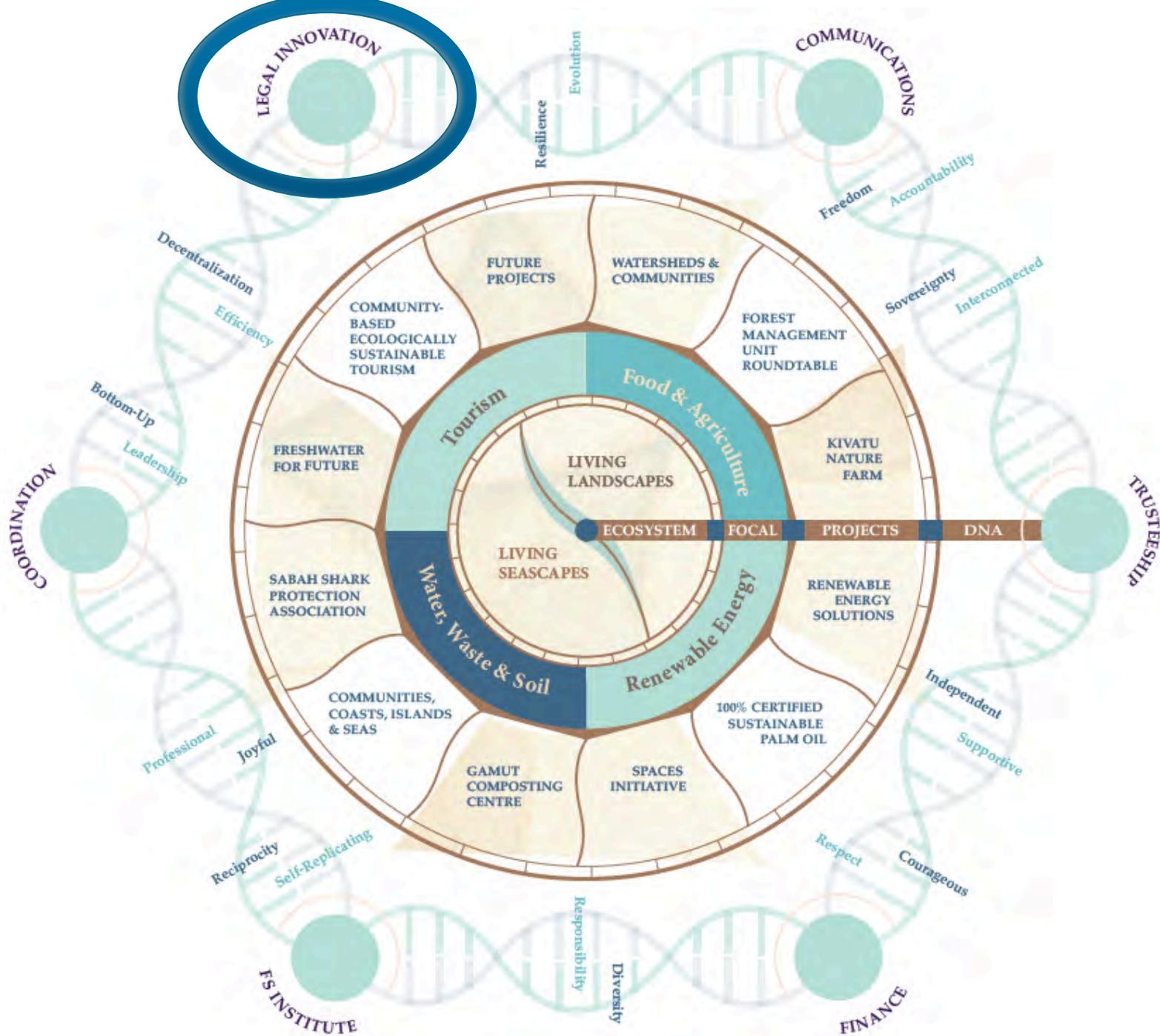
EQUITABLE

CIRCULAR

ECONOMY



# Forever Sabah Ecology



# FS Legal Internship Programme

- Since 2014, we've hosted 15+ interns from 6 universities - and more coming this year from 2-3 other universities
  - Mostly ad hoc - individuals or law schools approaching us
  - Most are in-person in Sabah but some are 'remote' interns
- Most established: accredited IEL clinic with University of Queensland's Pro Bono Centre
  - Funding for students under Australian Government's New Colombo Plan
- In discussions with several other law schools in Southeast Asia, N America and UK to establish accredited internships, intensive short courses, etc.

# In-person Internship Programme

- Selection and orientation process; based in Sabah for 4-6 weeks
- Weekly seminar series on issues at the nexus of development, conservation and law (tailor-made)
  - Foundational seminars on critical legal studies, political ecology, and indigenous peoples' worldviews and jurisprudence
  - Interactive seminars (role play scenarios and debates) on controversial issues in Sabah such as the palm oil industry
- Researching and developing technical papers on relevant areas of law - specific topics are decided with the Forever Sabah Team in light of needs at that time
  - They are actively used!!
- Attending meetings, workshops, conferences, etc. with local partners - where appropriate to do so

# UQ Students (January 2017)



# Future Plans

- Incubating a **stand-alone centre** with 3 intersecting areas:
  - a) **‘Advancing Knowledge’**: interdisciplinary research lab on issues at the nexus of law, society and environment
  - b) **‘Fostering Innovation’**: innovation lab for processes on public interest and (environmental) rule of law issues
  - c) **‘Enhancing Skills’**: lifelong learning hub for community leaders, students, practitioners and legal professionals
- Ideas for **‘Enhancing Skills’**:
  - For communities and practitioners: paralegal programmes
  - For students: hybrid accredited placements/clinics, short courses
  - For children and youth: model UN negotiations, moot courts, ‘Little Lawyers’ workshops
  - For government and private sector: trainings on key issues

# Key Issues: a self-critique

How can we be of most use to the communities we aim to support?

- What is our value addition - in light of what already exists?
- Are our future plans trying to cater to ‘everyone’ - to our detriment?
- Should we focus instead on a couple of niche ‘products/services’?

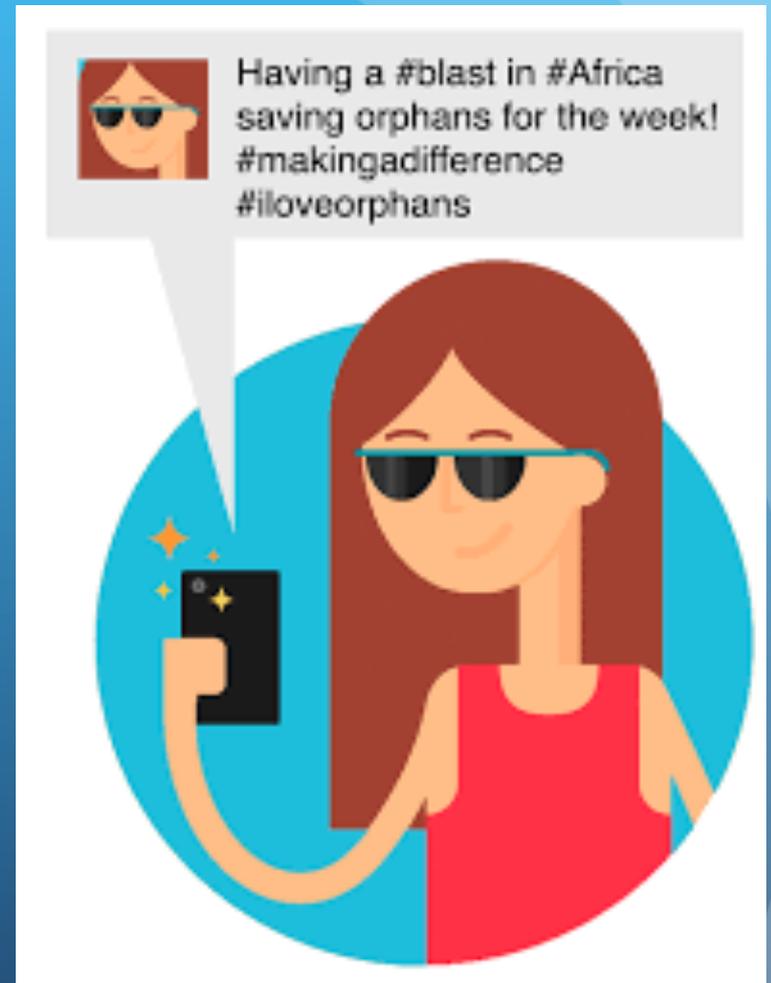
# Key Issues: a self-critique

What are the **built-in biases** in our current accredited internship programme?

- It suits certain skills (e.g. literature and legislative reviews, ability to synthesise lots of info, etc.)
- It suits certain ways of learning and working (e.g. focus on reading and writing, independent work ethic, adaptable to new situations)
  - NB: FS has a very unique organisational culture!
- It requires financial resources (e.g. flights, accommodation and living expenses, admin fee, 'lost time' from paid jobs)

# Key Issues: a self-critique

‘Extractive education’



# Key Issues: a self-critique

*Relationships are carefully nurtured over time ...*

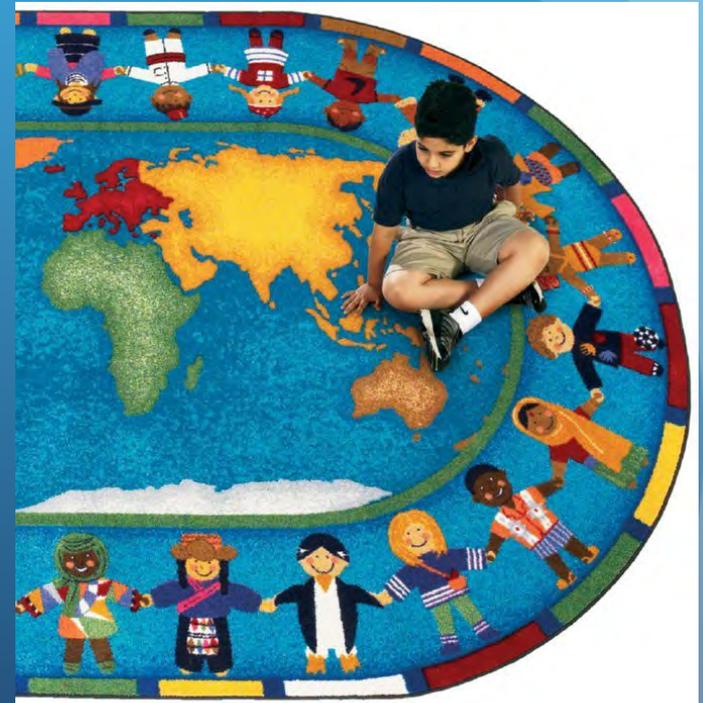
*... they are the basis of our work!*



# Key Issues: a self-critique

David Mears (Vermont): *“The more uncomfortable I feel about a student doing something, the greater the learning opportunity”*

- Benefits / drawbacks of focusing on foreign vs. local students
  - Foreign: may have more financial resources... but unaware of local contexts and diffuse long-term impact
  - Local: may face some practical barriers... but they are the future of environmental law in Malaysia!!
- We want to offer life-changing educational opportunities that also contribute meaningfully to ongoing processes



# Discussion Questions re: Legal Education Beyond the Classroom

## 1. The student's perspective:

- *What types of educational opportunities are students looking for (e.g. internships, intensive short courses, graduate research, etc.)?*
- *What do students most want to gain (e.g. skills, credits, travel, etc.)?*
- *What are the main barriers that students face in pursuing such opportunities (e.g. finances, family obligations, confidence, etc.)?*

# Discussion Questions re: Legal Education Beyond the Classroom

## Some reflections from the Teaching Workshop:

- Students want all of these things - but especially skills for employability
- Need to have strong preparatory process and risk assessment to prepare students / mitigate 'extractive education'
  - Cross-cultural communication and diplomacy = KEY
- Offer hybrid opportunities such as part-time or by distance
- Provide active support, guidance and feedback
- Offer students direct contact and personal connection with local partners
- Share updates with them on how their work is being used, offer co-authorship, etc.

# Discussion Questions re: Legal Education Beyond the Classroom

## 2. The educator's perspective:

- *What are educational institutions looking for - both for students (e.g. above) and for faculty (e.g. teaching, research, sabbatical, etc.)?*
- *What are the main benefits of such opportunities for you / your institutions?*
- *What are the main challenges that you face in working with 'service providers' / host organisations?*

# Discussion Questions re: Legal Education Beyond the Classroom

## Some reflections from the Teaching Workshop:

- Students from low income brackets often have lower hiring rates - but those with internships are hired; want everyone to have access to this
  - Focus on employable skills, e.g. writing
- Design it to be inclusive re: language, confidence, other barriers
- Work with universities with relevant research focus - long-term partners
  - Lots of faculty / institutions are likely interested to co-teach intensive short courses, help with preparatory seminars for interns, etc.
- Very important to undertake 'risk assessment' - ID which relationships can sustain working with students + be ready to mitigate issues
  - NB: certain countries are stricter with 'health and safety'... liability issues

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Salamat po, terima kasih, thank you!

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For more information,  
please visit  
[www.foreversabah.org](http://www.foreversabah.org)

