



ECOP ASIA

INTERMEDIARY

REPORT

-

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Individual Consultant



ECOP

Early Career
Ocean Professionals

Introduction

This intermediary report provides an overview of the progress and tasks undertaken by the Regional ECOP Coordinator for Asia from December 14th, 2021 to March 31st, 2022 (3.5 months).

Alongside Africa and Canada, the ECOP Programme also established and financially supported a regional node/hub in Asia. The initial goals involved scoping, creating, and developing regional ECOP networks in Asia, with the following **Terms of Reference** serving as a roadmap:

1. Carrying out an **inventory** of ECOP **networks or initiatives** in the region and **consulting with stakeholders** on the best approach to the creation of a regional node for ECOPs. On the basis of these consultations, establishing a regional network of ECOPs or strengthening an existing one, creating a database of members;
2. **Scoping options** for the development of the regional ECOP network by identifying the **needs and challenges** of ECOPs in this region;
3. Building **relationships with strategic partners** including **National Decade Committees (NDCs)** and **regional taskforces** to **support ECOP activities in this region**: creating partnerships with research institutions, businesses, multi-stakeholder groups, governments, and philanthropical organizations, in order to **address identified challenges and gaps**;
4. Identifying **specific needs** of ECOPs for **capacity development** in the region and determining **existing training opportunities**;
5. **Acting as a regional focal point** for constant cooperation with the overall ECOP Programme, for **distribution of opportunities**, news, and providing feedback in the form of **surveys or assessments**.

With the aim to develop and sustain a vibrant, engaged, and inclusive regional ECOP community in Asia, the consulting proposal re-organized the aforementioned Terms of Reference around **three key pillars** or action items, as illustrated in **Figure 1** below. This report will synthesize the insights and evidence (both anecdotal and statistical) garnered under each pillar, and offer a detailed account of all activities and events that the consultant actively took part in over the past 3.5 months.

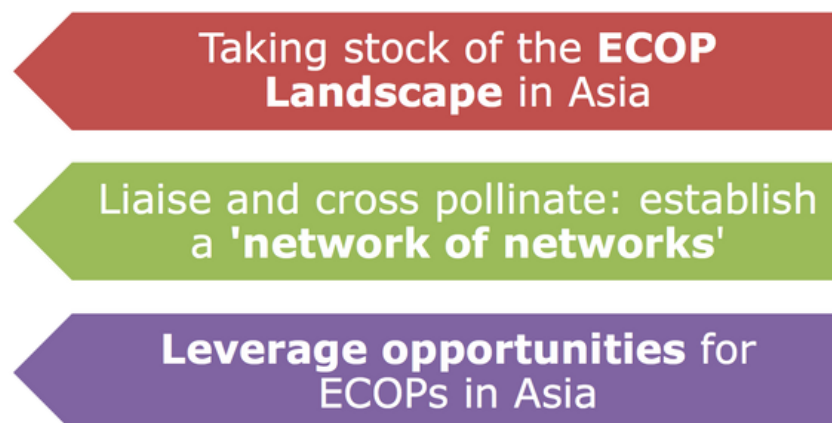


Figure 1

Background

In the case of Asia, we built upon and strengthened a small but growing community of early career researchers who, in **May 2021**, established an informal regional hub called "**ECOP Asia**". This informal node aimed to connect existing networks of multi-disciplinary ECOPs across Asia, and exchange current knowledge of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (hereafter referred to as the "UN Ocean Decade"). The group was initially convened in anticipation of the **Virtual Early Career Ocean Professional Day** (V.ECOP day), a 24-hour livestream event hosted by and for ECOPs from all around the world ([link](#)). ECOP Asia took this opportunity to introduce their fledgling network and showcase key results from the first **pan-Asia survey** ([link](#)), investigating the demographics, needs, and priorities of ECOPs in the region (see **Pages 6 to 9** for synthesis of results).

The ECOP Asia group was composed of 23 core members by the end of 2021, spanning 8 different countries: Bangladesh, China, Japan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and South Korea. Regular monthly meetings on Zoom helped to keep the core members connected to one another. ECOP Asia was very active in 2021, assisting in the organization and planning of events dedicated to ECOPs and related to the UN Ocean Decade (e.g., seminars, workshops, etc.), and disseminating useful information about future opportunities, such as jobs, scholarships and conferences.

Notable activities in 2021 included:

- **Video** released by the ECOP India network during World Oceans Day on June 8, 2021 ([link](#)),
- **Webinar** on Ocean Governance in Southeast Asia,
- **Incubator session** during the Kickoff Conference for the Western Pacific and its Adjacent Areas (WESTPAC, November 25-26, 2021) titled: "Early Career Ocean Professionals (Asia): A Perspective on science communication". Recording and summary report available [here](#) and [here](#).



I. Taking Stock of the ECOP Landscape in Asia

Since early January 2022, a **regional database** of ECOP members has been curated to keep track of all ECOPs who expressed interest in joining our regional node (through surveys, event registration forms, personal channels of communication, social media, etc.). As of March 31st, 2022, the database comprises **228 ECOPs** coming from 25 different countries and spanning all Asia subregions, as illustrated in **Figure 2** below.

While East, South, and Southeast Asia are well-represented (see Top 8 countries on **Page 5**), geographical gaps remain in West and Central Asia, with a total of only 11 members registered in these subregions (Kuwait, Lebanon, Turkey and Saudi Arabia). Further targeted efforts will be needed to balance ECOP representation in Asia and increase awareness of the ECOP Programme and UN Ocean Decade activities.

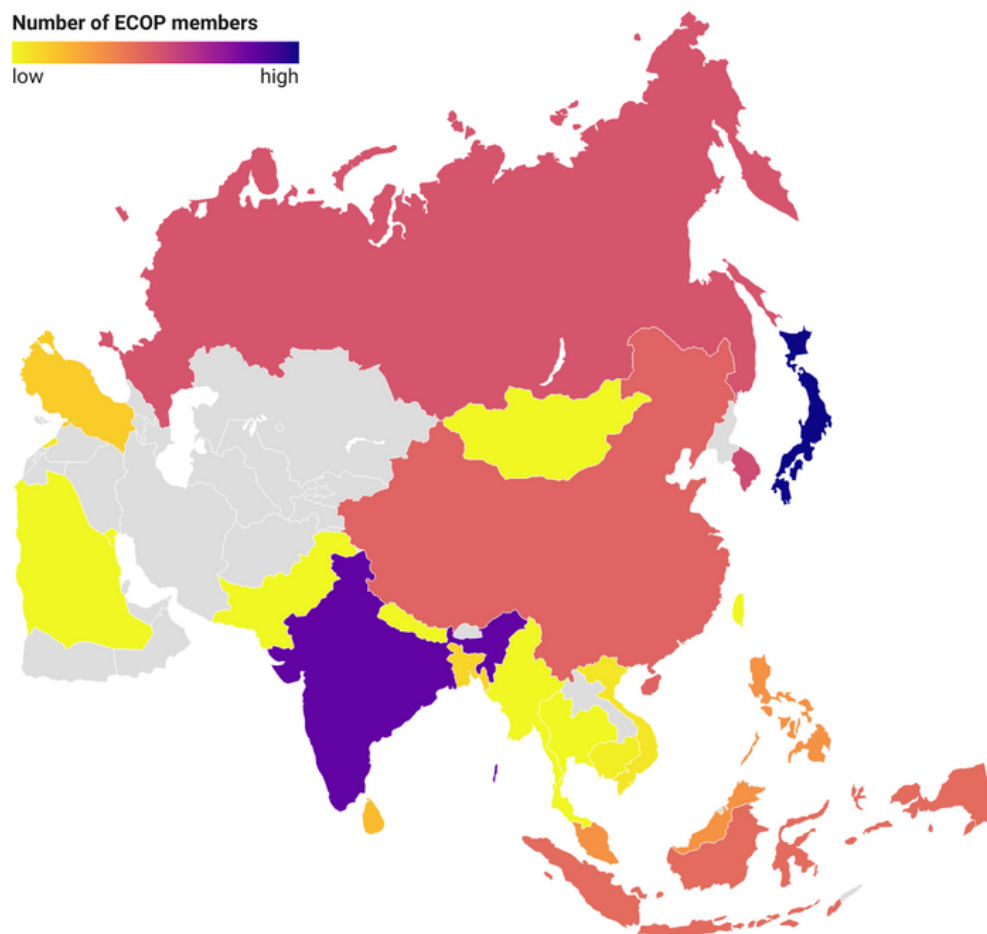
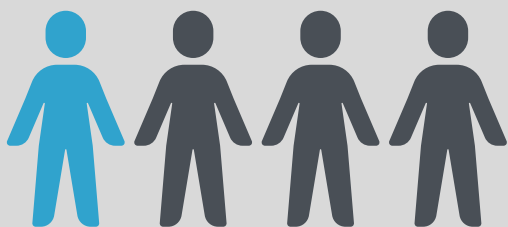


Figure 2 - Geographical Distribution of ECOP members in Asia

I.1. Additional Statistics

Country	Number of Registered ECOPs	Share/Proportion
Japan	40	18%
India	34	15%
Republic of Korea	22	10%
Russia	21	9%
China	19	8%
Indonesia	18	8%
Malaysia	13	6%
Philippines	13	6%

Table 1 - Top 8 countries by number (and %) of ECOP members



1 in 4 ECOPs from the
Global registry is from or
working in Asia

I.2. Identifying the needs and priorities of ECOPs

In May 2021, the ECOP Asia group disseminated their **first regional survey** (see link [here](#)), presenting the results during the V.ECOP day on June 1st, 2021. The aim of this survey was to raise awareness of the UN Ocean Decade among ECOPs in Asia, while better understanding the barriers they face and the resources they need to thrive, advance knowledge, and develop their ocean-related careers.

Aligned with the insights garnered through the [Global ECOP survey](#), **Figure 3** reveals that ECOPs in Asia are facing three major challenges related to: **funding** (52%), **career opportunities** (50%) and **lack of community and network** (45%). The relative absence of **training opportunities** in ocean-related fields gathered around 30% of the votes, while 21% of respondents mentioned **language barrier** as an impediment to further engagement with the global ocean community.

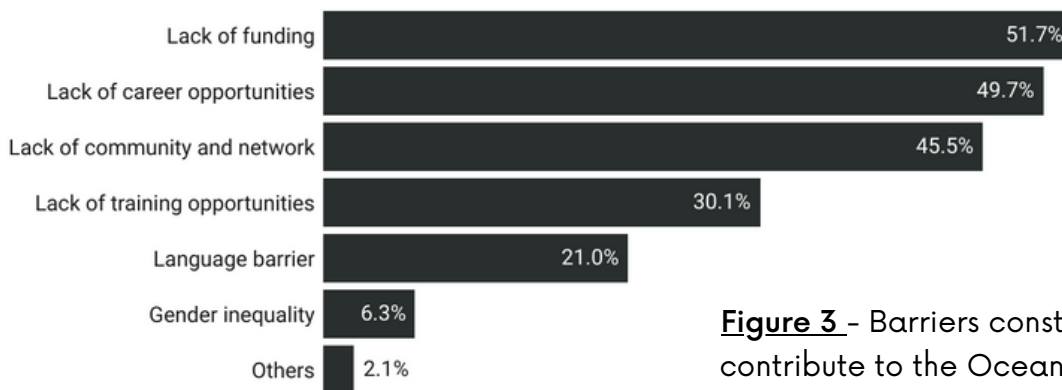


Figure 3 – Barriers constraining ECOPs ability to contribute to the Ocean Decade (% respondents)

When stratified per country (see **Figure 4**), different **national priorities** emerge. While a lack of community and network was the most salient issue in China (89%), the lack of career opportunities was the greatest concern raised by ECOPs in India (74%) and the Republic of Korea (54%). Funding was the biggest barrier in both Indonesia (64%) and Japan (46%). The need for more training opportunities was particularly important to ECOPs in India and Indonesia, while the language barrier appeared to mainly resonate with East Asian ECOPs (> 30% in both Japan and Republic of Korea).

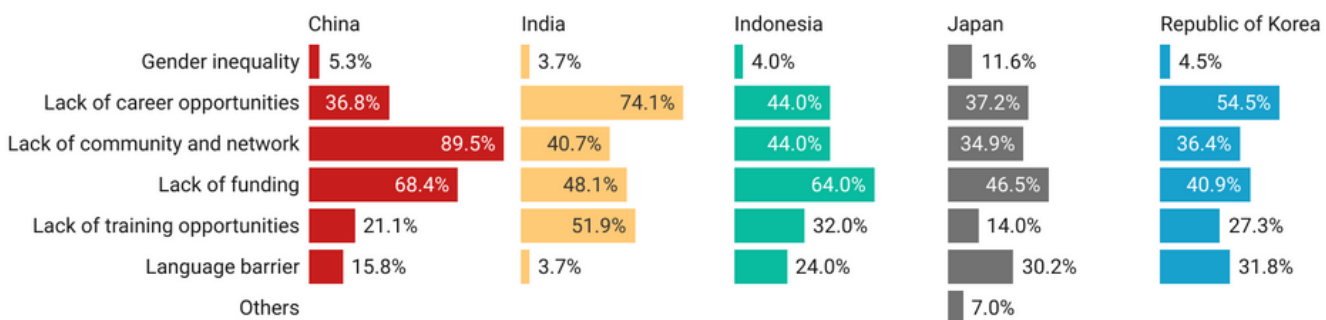


Figure 4 – Barriers faced by ECOPs in Asia, disaggregated per country (% respondents)

I.2.1. National nuances

Considering the vastness and diversity of the Asian continent, it is crucial to **enhance understanding of contextual peculiarities and cultural distinctions** in the needs, priorities and challenges of ECOPs across countries in Asia. Through various events (symposiums, workshops, etc.), virtual meetings, and email exchanges, we gathered anecdotal evidence complementing the results obtained in [Figure 4](#).



Many experienced and mid-career professionals are concerned about how **language and cultural barriers** are inhibiting the willingness of young Japanese researchers to engage with overseas collaborators and gain experience abroad (in reference to the relatively low levels of English proficiency in the country). Some are encouraging Japanese ECOPs to actively participate in international ocean fora to practice their English and help contribute to global research efforts. **Insufficient ECOP resources** in ocean sciences are also considered an issue, and longstanding **gender inequalities** have been regularly highlighted by Japanese ECOPs (reflected in [Figure 4](#)). Some early career groups and networks are reportedly **conservative** and satisfied with their own community, and are thus not willing to collaborate with ECOPs. This is important to keep in mind and respect such positions. In addition, **inter- and trans-disciplinary research practices** are not the norm in Japan, and there is a growing need to transcend boundaries between academia and the industry.



There are **capacity development needs** in marine science programs in Vietnam, with some graduate schools reportedly lacking students interested in ocean-related training and careers. Due to the relative **unattractiveness** of such careers (e.g. lower pay and prestige when compared to jobs in the finance and retail industries), not many graduates end up pursuing positions in environmental sustainability and ocean health (academics in these fields are not well-remunerated either).



Some ECOPs in India are **unaware of the UN Ocean Decade** and other international UN frameworks and processes. They tend to be relatively **isolated** in their own research group/unit, where they generally **lack professional independence** (a common issue among other countries in East and South Asia), thus making it hard to initiate and establish international collaborations on their own.



Chinese and Russian ECOPs have shared similar reactions to Ocean Decade initiatives and to the Global ECOP Programme. While they mentioned the need to translate communications, news, and other materials **into their national languages** (inclusiveness), many of them do **not see how they would benefit** from engaging with our ECOP Programme and other Ocean Decade activities. The lack of funding opportunities and tangible support are the main reasons for holding such views.

I.3. Survey demographics

Among the **144 survey respondents**, 95% came from 5 different countries in East, South and Southeast Asia, as illustrated in **Figure 5** below. While Japan was the most represented country with 30% of ECOP respondents, India, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea and China comprised 19%, 17%, 15% and 13% of responses, respectively. A few ECOPs from the Philippines and Malaysia completed the survey form, and two ECOPs from outside Asia (Brazil and Canada) provided their insights as well.

As for the gender composition, it was slightly skewed towards males (61%, see **Figure 6**), while the large majority of survey respondents were from academia or the research sector (76%, see **Figure 7**), with a non-negligible proportion involved in marine policy (10%) and management (5%).

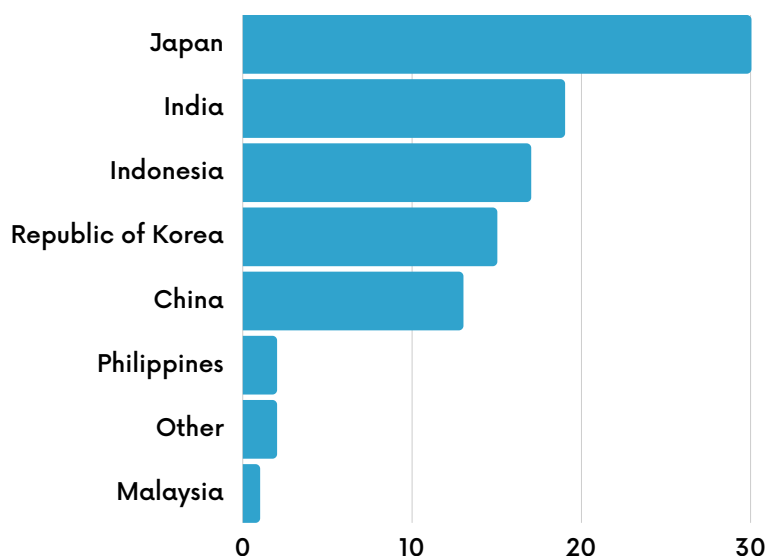


Figure 5 - Percentage (%) of respondents per country

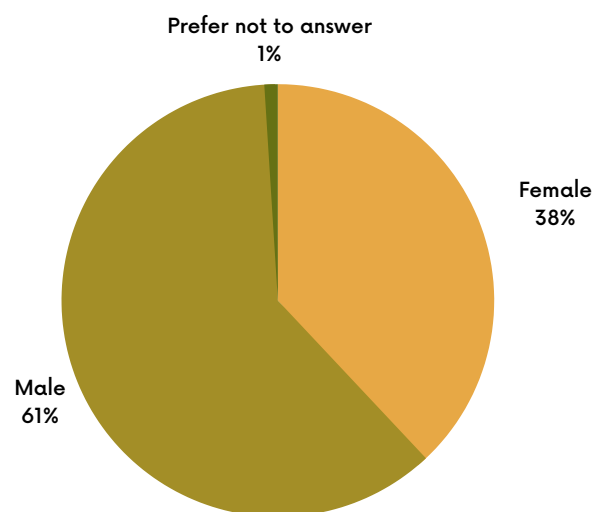


Figure 6 - Gender composition (%)

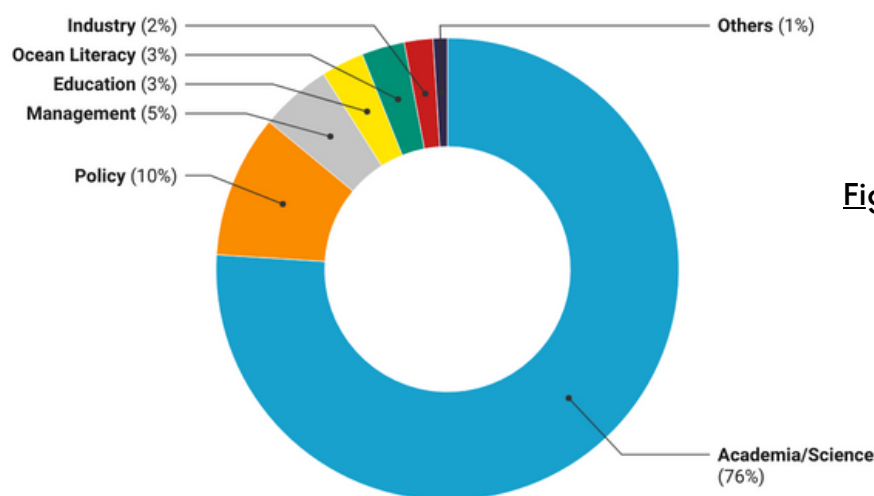


Figure 7 - Sector representation (%)

I.4. Awareness levels of the UN Ocean Decade

When asked whether they were aware of the UN Ocean Decade (global convening framework and related activities), the majority of survey respondents (62.5%) answered "Yes", although a quarter (25%) did not know about the Decade at the time of the survey in May 2021 (See [Figure 8](#)).

When disaggregated per country (limited to the 5 countries that comprised 95% of all answers), ECOPs in Japan, India, and China demonstrated a greater level of awareness about the UN Ocean Decade (72%, 68% and 58%, respectively), as shown in [Figure 9](#). The Republic of Korea and Indonesia displayed a greater percentage of ECOPs who did not hear about the UN Ocean Decade or who were uncertain about what it is. Such information can help target national and subregional efforts towards awareness-raising and education in the first years of the Decade.

Figure 8 - Level of awareness (%) of the UN Ocean Decade

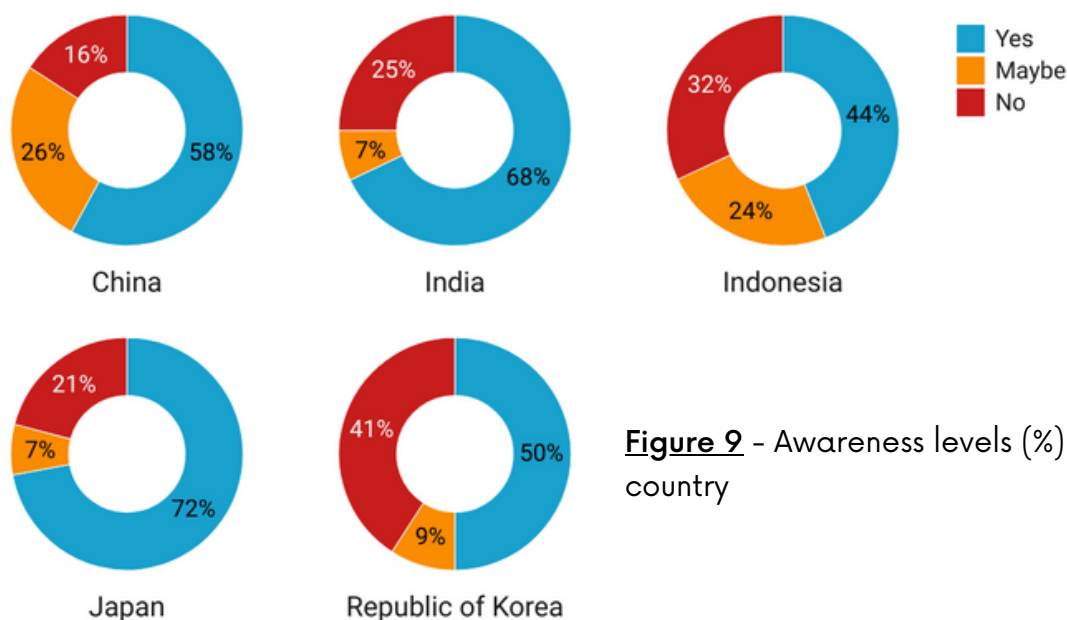
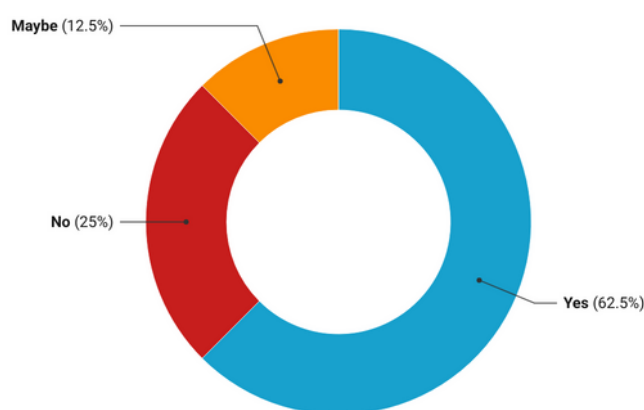


Figure 9 - Awareness levels (%) disaggregated by country

I.5. Connecting to UN Ocean Decade Outcomes

The survey also investigated which of the **seven Ocean Decade outcomes** aligned the most with the respondents' primary area of involvement (only 1 choice available). Results from **Figure 10** show that a majority of ECOPs in Asia (31.4%) were involved in and/or working toward "A predicted Ocean", followed closely by "A healthy and resilient ocean" (23%) as well as "A productive ocean" (20%). When disaggregated per country (see **Figure 11**), there was a fairly distributed representation for both "A predicted ocean" and "A healthy and resilient ocean", while Japan contributed a little more than half of all responses towards "A productive ocean". As for the other Decade outcomes:

- "A safe ocean" was a major focus area in both India and Indonesia (62% combined),
- "An inspiring and engaging ocean" resonated the most with ECOPs in Japan (50%),
- "A clean ocean" gathered a majority of responses from ECOPs in India (57%).

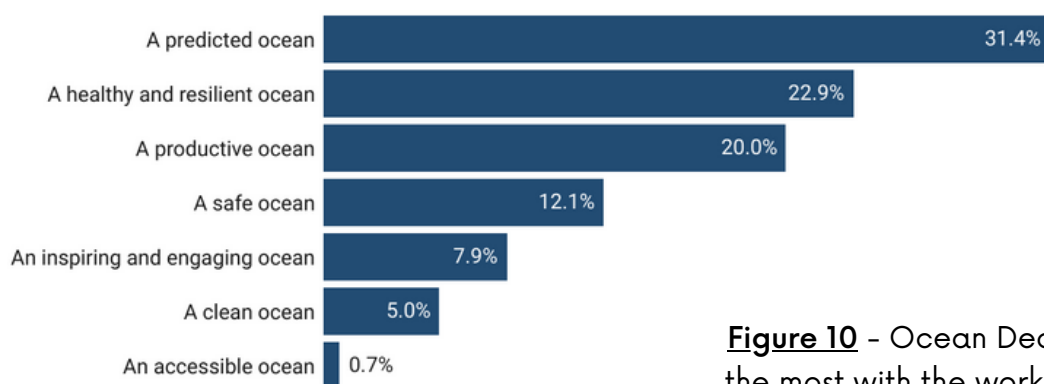


Figure 10 - Ocean Decade Outcome that aligns the most with the work of ECOPs (% respondents)

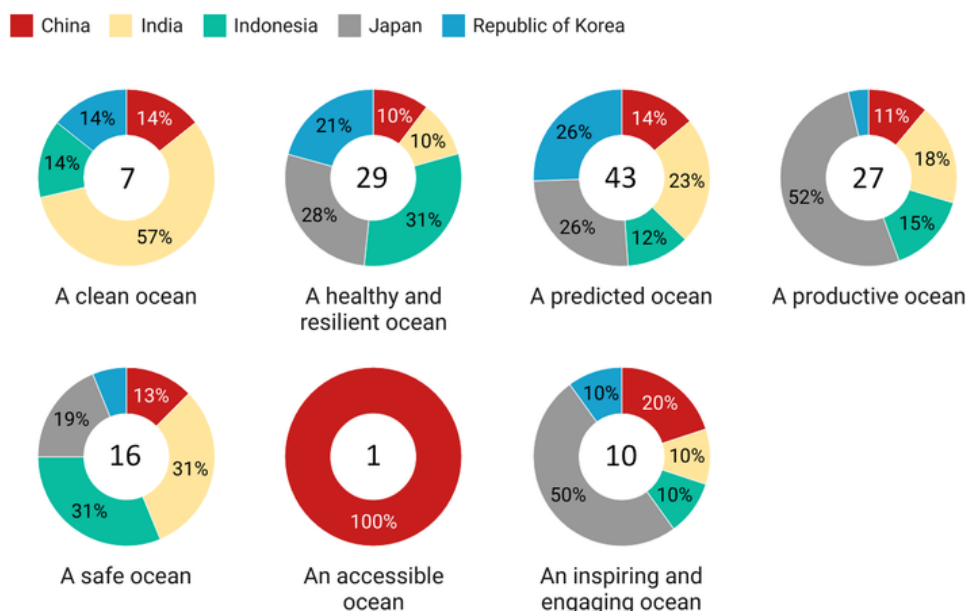


Figure 11 - Percentage (%) of ECOPs engaged in each Ocean Decade Outcome, disaggregated by country

I.6. Identifying training opportunities in Asia

Since the 22nd of March 2022, our **second ECOP Asia survey** is open to ECOPs and partners living and/or working in Asia (see link [here](#)). This follow-up survey aims to gather additional and more detailed insights about regional priorities in terms of funding options, networking and outreach, science communication, UN Ocean Decade engagement, and training/learning opportunities in the ocean realm. The question related to the latter aspect was framed as follows: **"What ocean topics would you be most interested to learn about and gain knowledge on? (through webinars, trainings, joint workshops, etc)"**, with multiple choice options available, which were inspired from the cross-cutting themes and communities of practice of the UN Ocean Decade.

Compiling **preliminary results** from the 2nd pan-Asia survey (52 respondents as of March 31st, 2022), **Figure 12** below provides a snapshot of the **top 8 ocean topics** selected by the survey respondents so far. While "Coastal Ecosystems and Community Resilience" garnered the majority of the votes (61%), between 43–45% of respondents expressed interest in gaining knowledge on various topics including: "Blue and Sustainable Ocean Economy", "Marine Pollution", "Deep Sea Research & Management", and "Ocean-Climate Nexus". "Capacity Development" and "Ocean Literacy" were also popular among our audience (37% and 33% respectively).

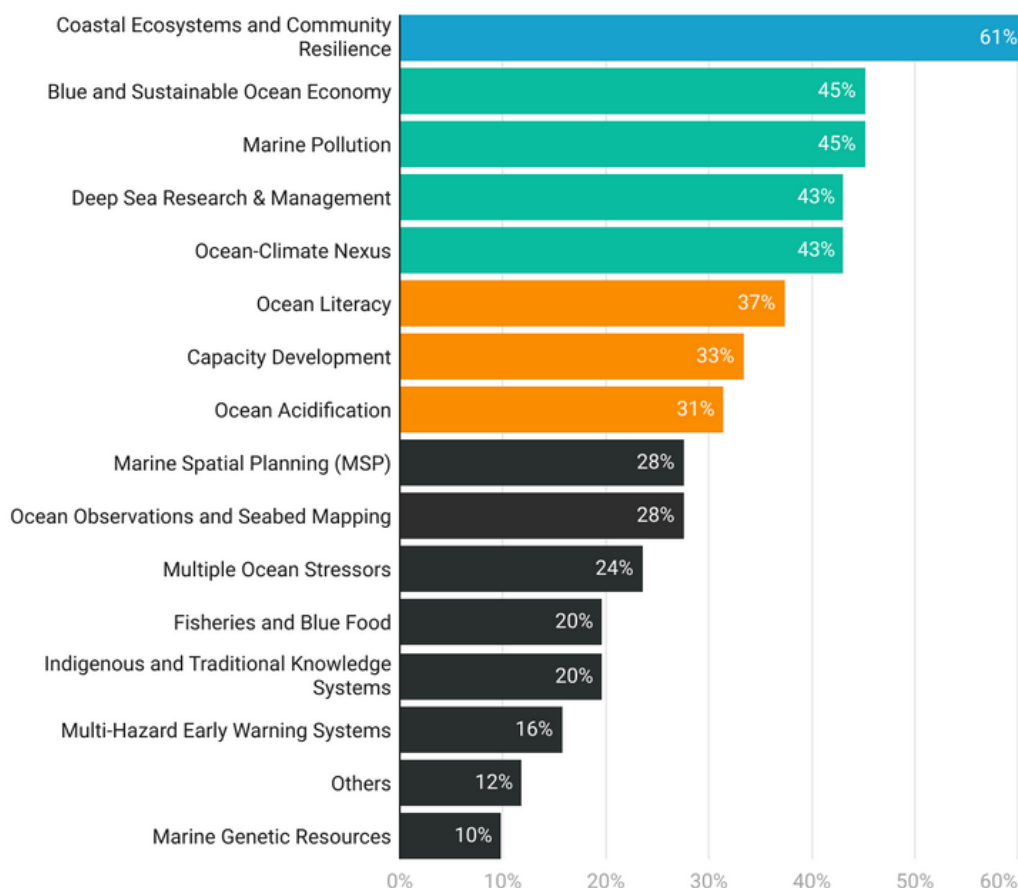


Figure 12 - Ranked preferences of ocean topics by percentage of survey respondents in Asia (coloured bars identify the top 8 selected ocean topics)

II. Establish a 'Network of Networks'

Building cross-sectoral partnerships and engaging with a broad variety of ocean stakeholders have been instrumental in laying the foundations of our regional "network of networks", and in increasing awareness about our ECOP Programme and the UN Ocean Decade. This cross-pollination process led us to find and/or connect with **70 different ocean actors** based or working in Asia. The full list comprises ocean-related organizations, groups and networks (including early career ones) from all sectors: academia/research, government, non-profit, multilateral development bank, philanthropy, industry, UN entity, etc. For the majority, we have identified a contact person and prioritized early career liaison agents if possible.

The map below (**Figure 13**) provides a snapshot of where these partners and relevant stakeholders are located in Asia. The list will continue expanding and diversifying as new ramifications and organic connections develop, especially among countries who lack appropriate representation.



Figure 13 - Regional distribution of partners and ocean stakeholders. The size of each pin is proportional to the total number in each country

II.1 Building relationships with regional ocean leaders

ECOP Japan Symposium: Toward creating an ECOP network in UN Decade of Ocean Science: On January 18th, the **Ocean Policy Research Institute (OPRI)** and the **Japan Society of Ocean policy (JSOP)** co-organized a virtual kick-off symposium (in Japanese) for the ECOP community in Japan.

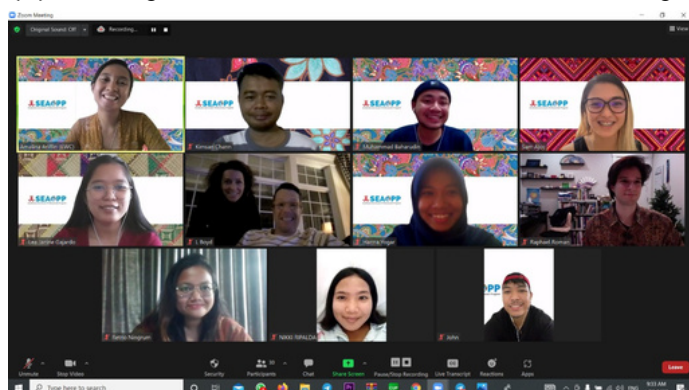
The event attracted more than 100 participants. It convened early- and mid-career professionals from a variety of disciplines and sectors. The speakers introduced the UN Ocean Decade, shared their personal journeys, and offered their perspectives on the Global ECOP movement and what a future national ECOP hub in Japan might look like. Our regional consultant for Asia was invited to give a short presentation about the ECOP Programme, and to encourage the audience to get in touch, spread the word, and take advantage of the opportunities to connect and network with other ECOP communities in Asia and around the world. A recording of the event is available [here](#), and an event summary report can be consulted [here](#).



Screenshot of the panel session

East-West Centre Southeast Asian Ocean Professionals Program (#EWCSEAOPP): On January 29th, the EWCSEAOPP, one of the three endorsed projects under the ECOP Programme, organized a final event showcasing the work undertaken by their first 2021 cohort of Ocean Corps. The 12 EWCSEAOPP fellows, who come from a diversity of disciplines and countries in Southeast Asia, hosted the session, shared their research findings and other outcomes of the Program, and facilitated insightful and intellectually stimulating dialogues that revolved around **3 conservation topics**:

(1) Ecosystem services in the Coral Triangle; **(2)** Community engagement in the Coral Triangle, and **(3)** Management and resilience of the Mekong River, one of Southeast Asia's most well-known rivers.



Our regional ECOP consultant was invited to join the event, where he was given the opportunity to introduce the ECOP Programme and its regional node in Asia. He also had a chance to share his feedback and thoughts towards the end of the session, congratulating all the fellows for their work, dynamism and ocean leadership in Southeast Asia.

Screenshot of facilitators and participants

Early career networking session at the 2022 Indian Ocean Science Conference (IIOSC): On March 16h, the ECOP Programme was invited to participate (presentation and Q&A) in a networking session organized and facilitated by the **International Indian Ocean Expedition 2 (IIOE-2) early career scientist network (ECSN)**. This special workshop was part of a series of ECOP events running each day of the 2022 IIOSC. The main purpose of the session was to enhance connectivity and collaborative opportunities between several early career networks engaged in the Indian Ocean. The IIOE-2 ECSN came together in 2015 and totals more than 200 members. They have been a key partner of the ECOP Programme in South Asia. They invited our regional consultant to record a presentation, while our Global coordinator (Evgeniia Kostianaiia) attended live to participate in the discussion session and to answer any questions from the audience (around 20-30 people).



Screenshot of speakers and key participants

Other notable organizations and ocean actors we started **building bridges** with:

- **Guardians of the Blue** (an NGO in Lebanon, see Instagram [here](#)),
- **Blue Communities** Early Career Scientist Network in Southeast Asia (see [here](#)),
- **North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES)**, an intergovernmental organization connecting countries across the North Pacific (see [here](#)),
- **Prameya Foundation**, an environmental non-profit that empowers coastal communities in the Sundarbans mangrove ecoregion in East India (see [here](#)),
- **Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Sciences (IOCAS)** (see [here](#))
- **South Asia Regional Hub on Ocean Acidification (SAROA)**, which is part of the Ocean Decade Programme OARS: "Ocean Acidification Research for Sustainability" (see [here](#)),
- **Acoustics Research Laboratory (ARL)** at the National University of Singapore (see [here](#)),
- **Build up Sustainability (BUS)**, an NGO located in the coastal city of Danang, Vietnam (see [here](#)),
- **Reef Check Malaysia Foundation**, a reef conservation network/NGO (see [here](#)),
- **Sustainable Ocean Alliance (SOA)** regional hub in Southeast Asia (see [here](#)). [...]

II.2 Building relationships with NDCs in Asia

National Decade Committees (NDCs) are voluntary and multi-stakeholder platforms that play a key role in facilitating national coordination of Decade activities and in raising awareness and interest about the ocean among the general public ("Ocean Literacy"). More information about the role, structure, establishment, and operations of NDCs can be accessed in this [2021 report](#).

Regarding the **Asian continent**, we compiled a list of all NDCs that have been **officially established** and the ones **in the process** of being so (i.e. countries who expressed interest in establishing a NDC). As of March 31st, 2022, **five NDCs** have been officially established in: Japan, the Republic of Korea, India, Russia and Iran, while **another four**: China, Philippines, Bangladesh and Turkey, have showed interest in establishing their own NDC (see [Figure 14](#)). Thus far, **national ECOP representatives** have been identified in both **Japan** and the **Republic of Korea**, and our regional node has been in close contact with their respective NDCs, with plan to collaborate further in the near-future (e.g. co-organization of events, workshops and trainings, knowledge sharing and regular communications). While **Russia** has yet to start their selection process for ECOP representatives, we are planning to convene and recommend 4-5 dynamic ECOP leaders in **India**, with the aim of developing a national ECOP hub which will help coordinate ocean-related activities and initiatives across the country. A similar vision is currently in progress in **Malaysia**, where we hope to co-host an ECOP kick-off symposium later in 2022.

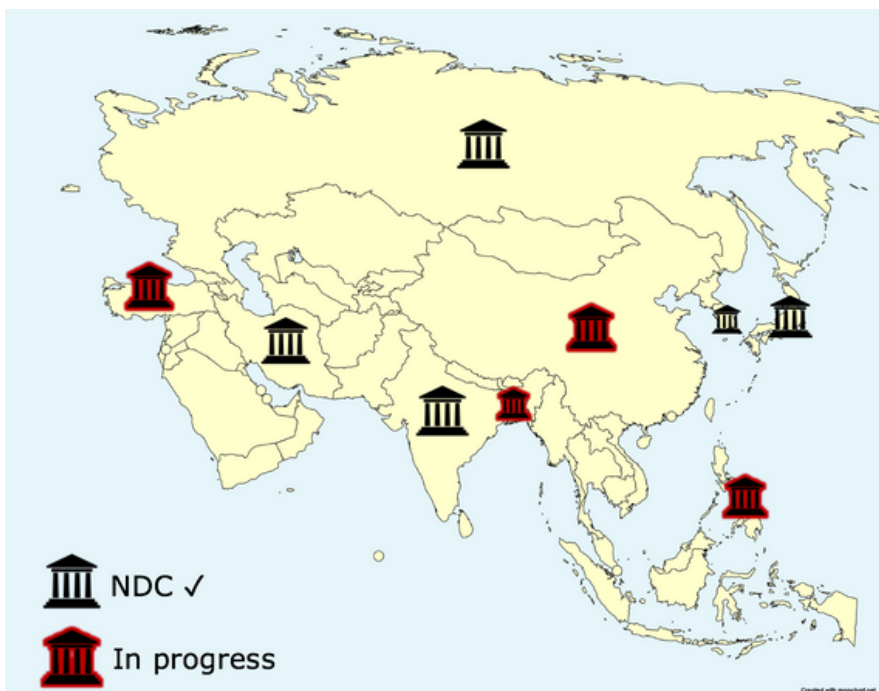


Figure 14 - Geographical distribution of NDCs in Asia, alongside their status (established vs. "in progress").

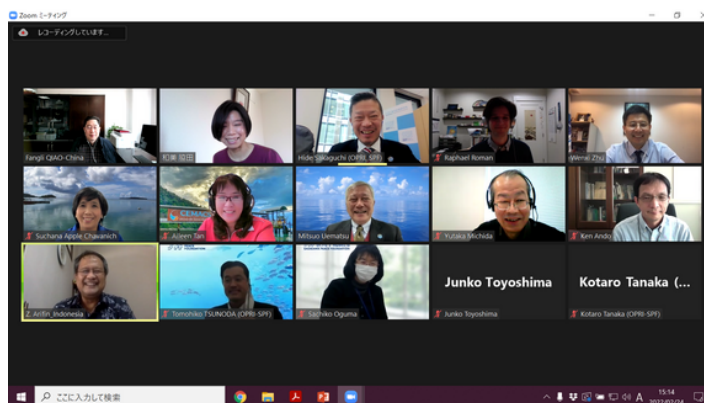
II.3 Building relationships with regional taskforces

Established in 1989, the **IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific and Adjacent Seas (WESTPAC)** is a regional arm of the IOC, with its office located in Bangkok, Thailand (new website [here](#)). WESTPAC fosters international cooperation and coordinates ocean-related initiatives and programs that align with the needs and priorities of their 22 member states.

On **February 24th, 2022**, the Ocean Policy Research Institute (OPRI) and Japan Society of Ocean Policy (JSOP) **convened high-level WESTPAC representatives** from China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, alongside an ECOP focal point (Raphael Roman - our Asian node coordinator). During this **closed/private session**, participants were asked to share their research/work and perspectives on priorities and challenges related to the UN Ocean Decade (connecting it to their respective constituencies), as well as to provide their views and thoughts on how Japan can contribute to promoting transformative ocean science through regional collaboration in the Asia-Pacific.

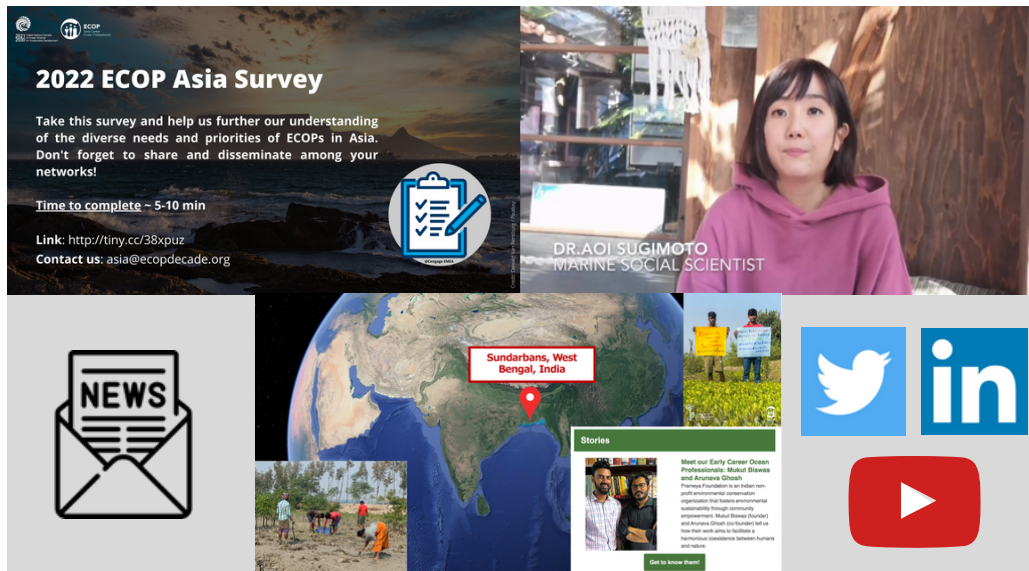
The session was particularly fruitful and engaging. Key insights & takeaways are summarized below:

- Successful **kick-off conference for the WESTPAC region** in November 2021, which gathered high-level support and promoted region-wide efforts to catalyze partnerships in the Decade;
- Need to engage **diverse stakeholder groups**, **localize objectives** and help push ocean sciences further up **national agendas**. Opportunities to look beyond **business-as-usual**;
- Establishment of **Regional Training and Research Centres (RTRCs)** for capacity development;
- Increase involvement & representation of **mid-career scientists**, who can influence and support ECOPs throughout the Decade. Recommend ECOPs as **interns** to the WESTPAC office;
- People have **limited ownership** over the UN Decade, need to change mindset;
- Translate regional and national priorities towards **more concrete programmes and projects**;
- Enhance **engagement of younger generations** in **NDC operations** and deliberations;
- **Lack of resources & mechanisms** in **developing countries** (more listening from developed ones);
- Lack of experts in **interdisciplinary studies** (especially in Japan).



Screenshot of all participants

III. Leverage Opportunities for ECOPs in Asia



Sustaining a regional ECOP community and retaining members' interest and engagement over the longer term requires dynamic, accessible, and inclusive communication platforms. With a solid presence on **Twitter** (> 1,700 followers), **LinkedIn** (> 200 followers), and the **Global Stakeholder Forum** (> 120 members), the ECOP Programme provides important communication channels to disseminate news, events (e.g. conferences, workshops, trainings, etc.), jobs, internships, and other relevant opportunities. Using the hashtag **#ECOPAsia** (sometimes complemented with national hashtags if the target audience is more specific), we actively engage with our regional (and global) ECOP community, by sharing inspiring stories (see our two ECOP highlights from Japan [here](#) and from India [here](#)), and by keeping them informed and involved (e.g. via our 2nd pan-Asia survey) on a regular basis.

For the months of January and February 2022, we designed and disseminated "**Ocean News Digests**" that were specifically tailored to our Asian members. These informal but informative newsletters aimed to update our regional ECOPs about tangible career development opportunities, upcoming events of interest, and ways to engage further in the Ocean Decade. Since April 2022, a more formal and integrated newsletter is sent to our global ECOP audience (> 800) with region-specific sections.

Our regional coordinator also acted as a liaison between new partners in Asia and our global ECOP coordinator (Evgeniia Kostianai), providing regular updates and facilitating stakeholder meetings and brainstorming sessions, among other things. We are also actively exploring and developing linkages with the Communities of Practice (CoP) on "Capacity Development" and "Indigenous and Local Knowledge Holders", bringing a regional perspective to the discussion table.

Driving the ECOP Decade Forward in Asia

In light of the results and insights summarized in this report, the regional consultant for Asia has updated the **Terms of Reference** for his consultancy. These ToRs reflect newly identified priorities for the Asian ECOP hub, adjusting the direction it ought to follow while building on the initial action items introduced on **Page 2**. The new ToRs listed below will serve as a compass until the end of 2022:

1. Curating a **regional inventory of ECOPs** and filling out **gaps in geographical representation**. Building on a list of regional and national ocean stakeholders, networks, and initiatives to help **connect and leverage opportunities** for ECOPs and partners in the region;
2. Enhancing the **understanding of important nuances** and differences in the needs, priorities, and challenges of ECOPs across **national and cultural contexts** in the region;
3. Overseeing and facilitating the establishment of **subregional and national ECOP nodes** to improve coordination of ECOP activities in the region. Identifying **ECOP representatives for National Decade Committees** that have been, or are yet to be, established in the region;
4. Strengthening and exploring **new cross-sectoral relationships** across the region, including **strategic partners** such as NDCs, regional task forces and other multi-stakeholder groups. Seeking **new sustainable funding sources** to support ECOP ideas, activities, as well as training and career development opportunities during and beyond the UN Ocean Decade;
5. Acting as a **regional focal point** for constant cooperation with the overall ECOP Programme, by disseminating opportunities and news, bridging regional nodes, and providing feedback in the form of surveys or assessments.

Momentum is growing in Asia, where ever-expanding networks of inspiring ECOPs and cross-sectoral partners are starting to interact, cooperate, share knowledge, and co-design initiatives and activities that will be key to the successful implementation of the UN Ocean Decade in the region.



"Imagine we are now in 2030 towards the end of the UN Ocean Decade. What would success look like to you?"

Word cloud of answers from the 2nd Asia survey.



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Acknowledgements

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