



# Bridging the gap between regional plans and local action: The case of the Malaysian Coral Triangle Initiative and Semporna, Sabah.

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## Introduction

Semporna is a town and district in the southeast corner of the Malaysian state of Sabah, on Borneo. Semporna has Malaysia's largest concentration of coral reefs and dive tourism industry as well as commercial and artisanal fishing industries. Mabul is a 26-hectare island on a reef at the southern edge of Semporna District and is the closest island to the famed dive spot, Sipadan Island. Mabul has 5 resorts and 13 backpacker accommodations catering to dive tourism. There is also a community of approximately 2900 individuals on the island whose main livelihood is based on fishing.

Semporna PCA falls under CTI-CFF, although there is no specific action listed in the NPOA for Semporna. In Malaysia, the National Oceanography Directorate (NOD), under the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (MOSTI), functions as the CTI Interim National Coordinating Committee (NCC) secretariat. With oversight by the NCC, the NPOA implementation is split between federal agencies and state agencies in Sabah, reflecting the complex relationship between Sabah and the federal government.

The objective of this study is to examine whether the Mabul Island communities' initiatives have the potential to scale up in order to reach SSME and CTI regional planning goals and if the CTI and SSME objectives are trickling down to the local scale at Semporna and Mabul.



Figure 1: The image of infrastructure on Mabul Island in 2009. Coloured lines are resort jetties. Local communities and backpackers are concentrated on the west and northwest sides.

Table 1 Key activities on Mabul Island, Semporna, relating to management and monitoring.

Time line	Key events
1997	The initiation of Mabul Marine Day (MMD) by Sipadan Water Village which focused on coral transplanting to recover the reef that had been bombed
2004	Sipadan Island was closed to tourism. Tourism pressure shifted to Mabul Island. Increase of local population in Mabul Island due to job opportunities and more profit for small grocery shops in the island.
2006	The Limits of Acceptable Change study was conducted by Aw <i>et al.</i> (2006). The condition in Mabul Island was confirmed as over-populated.
2008	"Mabul Island: Acceptable Change (LAC) workshop" organized by WWF and partners to a range of stakeholders.
2009	MMD extended to Mabul Marine Week (MMW), with the change in objective to "Cleanliness of Mabul, Our Responsibility". MMW committee had officially become the sub-committee for the Semporna Tourism Action Council (STAC).
2010	Study on Environmental changes in Mabul Island by Universiti Malaysia Sabah continued
April 2011	Series of collaborative environmental monitoring activities conducted with the stakeholders
Nov 2011	The result of the environmental monitoring shared with stakeholders
Dec 2011	The agreement from tour operators to form a management body to prioritize working on a waste management system.

## Material and Methods

- First, analyzed the Malaysian CTI National Plan of Action's (NPOA) priority action list.
- The list has 5 components, including, (1) planning and management, (2) policy and administration, (3) funding, (4) information and awareness, and (5) monitoring, control and surveillance.
- Secondly, examined the perceived relevance of NPOA to Semporna and Mabul.
- A select list of stakeholders from 13 agencies with knowledge of the CTI-CFF NPOA and the conservation situation in Semporna and Mabul were sent an online survey using Survey Monkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)).
- Assess the relevance and benefits to the area from the NPOA's priority action list.
- For each priority action, the survey asked if the action would; (1) Be relevant to Semporna, (2) Benefit Semporna, (3) Be relevant to Mabul Island, (4) Benefit Mabul Island.
- The survey was sent to stakeholders from government, NGOs and academia.
- The survey was sent via email to 25 experts to ask their perception on the 70 prioritized actions listed with a two-week deadline to respond.

## Results

- Within the Malaysian NPOA for CTI-CFF list of priority actions from a total of 134 actions
- Almost half of the priority actions are listed under the "Planning and Management" section (Figure 2).
- The "Information and Awareness" section was the second largest group of actions, contributing 32% of all actions.
- Other groups of actions, in decreasing order of size, are Policy and Administration (11%), Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (6%), and Funding (4%).
- Most of the actions are management-based.
- Within the 134 actions, 70 actions were prioritized.
- 70% response from a total of 630 potential responses.
- Most respondents perceived that the Malaysian NPOA is relevant and helpful to Semporna (~80%) and Mabul (~60%) (Figure 3).

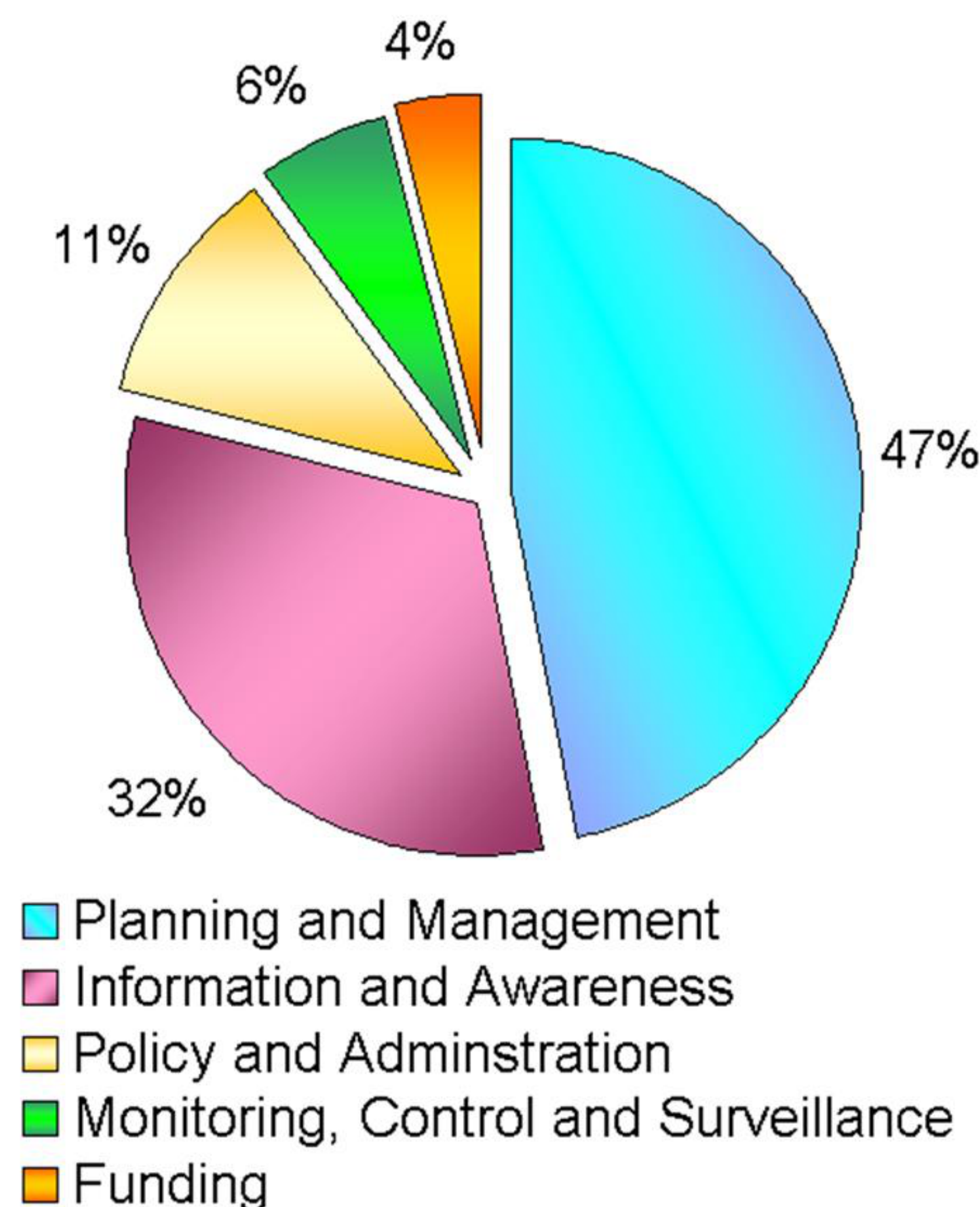


Figure 2. The types of Actions listed in the NPOA in CTI-CFF.

- More actions were perceived as relevant to Semporna compared to Mabul.
- There were 35 priority actions that at least one participant thought would be or might be relevant to Semporna and Mabul.
- Five priority actions were unanimous in being relevant and useful without any "maybe" or "no" responses.

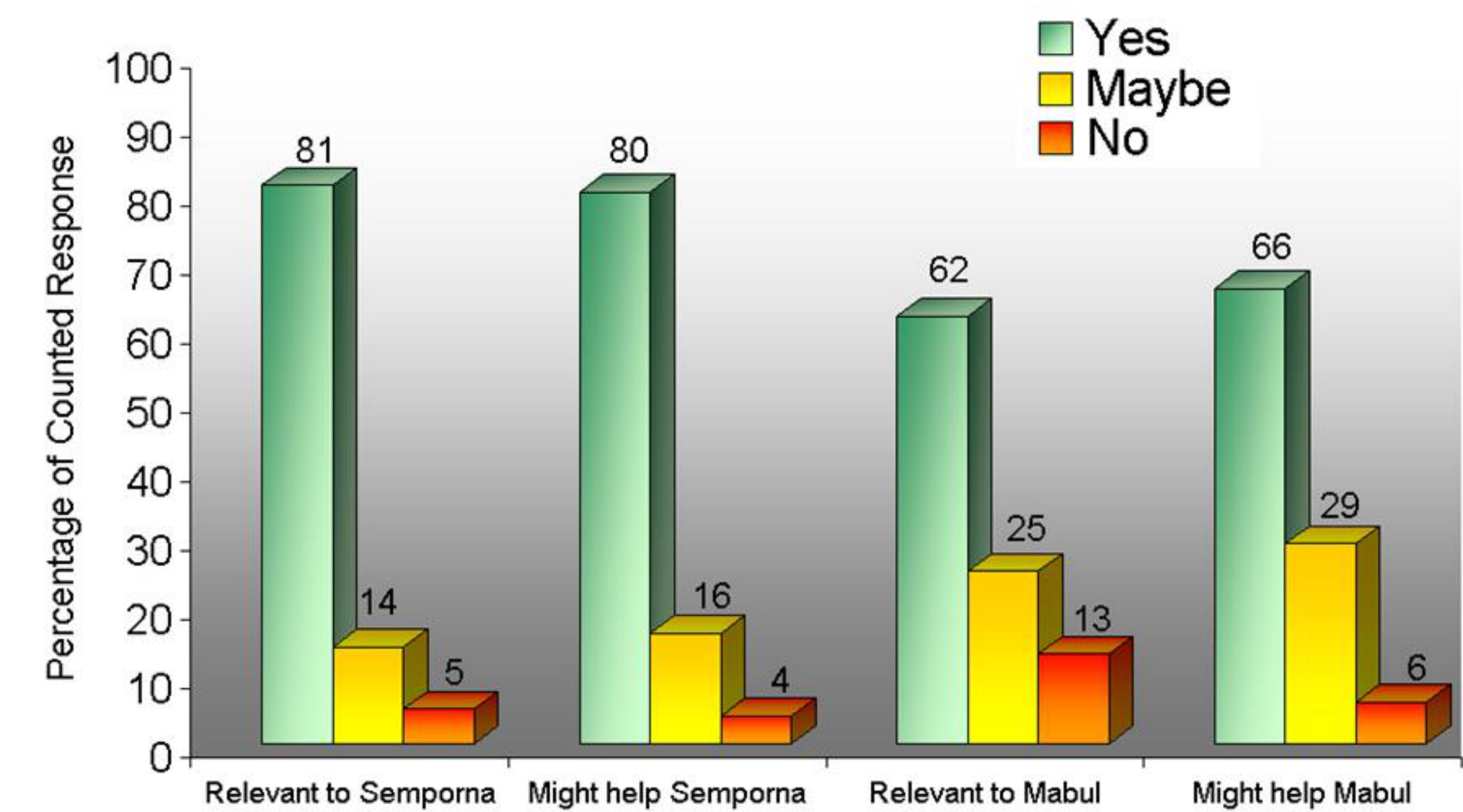


Figure 3. Percent of counted Response regarding relevance of Priority Actions to Semporna (n=469) and Mabul (n=433), and benefit to Semporna (n=470) and Mabul (n=429).

## Discussion

- The Malaysian NPOA forms a bridge between the CTI-CFF Regional Plan of Action and implementation on the ground in Malaysia.
- Perception that it lacks on-the-ground activities specific to Semporna, this might be due to inadequately representation during the NPOA planning process.
- Stakeholders with knowledge of the large-scale plans for the Coral Triangle see the potential for those plans to benefit Semporna and Mabul.
- However, there is clear lag-time between the regional plan and improvements on the ground..
- Semporna has been benefiting from several initiatives that can be indirectly tied to regional initiatives. The SSME Tri-national Committee Fisheries Sub-committee is implementing the GEF funded Sulu Celebes Sustainable Fisheries Management Project with a pilot site in Semporna.
- The Tun Sakaran Marine Park has been benefiting from the presence of the Semporna Islands Project of Sabah Parks and the Marine Conservation Society, UK.
- WWF-Malaysia has been increasing its presence in Semporna with funding generated the Coral Triangle.
- The potential for scaling up activities from Mabul to regional levels may be difficult.
- There were very few conservation-related activities on Mabul to be up-scaled.
- Regional initiatives do have some trickle-down effects. It just lack of agreement about the degree of relevance as well as a time lag between the regional agreement and implementation on the ground.
- Scale up the local initiatives needs to have a clearer communication channel for informing local, state and federal agencies about lessons learned from local initiatives. The communications channels need to match the desired level of scaling up and down.
- With better communication between the local scale and the federal level, the regional plans should be more relevant and successful.

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