

Seeds of Change

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ZU-PER SHRIMP PASTE INITIATIVE

In a small suburban house, a group of women in the front room carefully cut trays of pungent shrimp paste into small cubes ready to be packaged and shipped to eager buyers.

Business has never been so good and they work hard to fill orders for the paste, called Zu-Per. In a matter of months, a modest enterprise that started in a remote village several hours away from the Seruyan district capital Kuala Pembuang, has grown quickly. The delicious cubes are now sold as far away as Surabaya on Java, with Jakarta set to be a major new market.

Zu-Per is an example how a village enterprise can be transformed with the right technical advice and support.

Until last year, the shrimp paste made in the village of Sungai Perlu on the Java Sea coast in Central Kalimantan had no name and was made mostly for local consumption. It was not packaged to meet national health standards and nor was it cooked to preserve it, so the paste only lasted for about a month.



The Rimba Raya Conservation programme team, though, saw its potential as a way to boost local incomes. The village is one of 10 that Rimba Raya supports and the programme team asked the local families that make the shrimp paste how best they could assist them.

Everyone involved saw the need to improve the paste's quality, packaging and to earn national health and safety certification, which they received in April this year with support provided by Rimba Raya. The villagers named the paste Zu-Per, after their village and the brand name now appears on their plastic packaging.



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"In the past, shrimp paste only fetched 20,000 rupiah (about US\$1.50) a kg. But after we developed Zu-Per, the price has gone up to 50,000 rupiah because we have improved the quality," said Heldawaty, 34, the Sungai Perlu village chief.

Packaged for retail sales, the paste sells for much more.

"Rimba Raya has become a facilitator by inviting officials from the offices of maritime, industry and cooperative as well as health. They came to check directly. (Rimba Raya) was also involved in helping get permits from the National Agency of Drugs and Food Control," she said recently during an interview at the house in Kuala Pembuang where the paste is cooked and packaged.

The shrimps are caught near the village before final processing in Kuala Pembuang, a bumpy five-hour ride away by motorcycle on dirt tracks.

"Before Rimba Raya entered (our village), nobody cared about Sungai Perlu. Now, because of Rimba Raya, our shrimp paste programme has even been written about by newspapers. This really helps our village, especially the women," Heldawaty explained.

"In the past, when we made shrimp paste, it was just a matter of making it. We didn't even bother to turn them into cubes and a product which is ready to serve. This helps boost the income of women in Sungai Perlu," she said, adding their husbands were also happy because the wives were boosting household incomes. "The shrimps actually come from our husbands," she said.

"I, on behalf of people in Sungai Perlu, would like extend our big thanks to (Rimba Raya). It never occurred to us that a shrimp paste business can develop into this ... that the price can be this high," she said.

Misbah, 35, who heads the group that makes the shrimp paste, also agreed the investment in transforming Zu-Per has made a big difference to the village.

"I am very happy because I have something to do. I was only a housewife before. My husband is supportive and this business is also done in my own house."



RIMBA RAYA CONSERVATION PALM OIL INITIATIVE



Since the 1990s, large areas of rainforest near the project area in Seruyan regency in Central Kalimantan on Borneo island, were cleared to plant palm oil. Peatlands were drained and rivers and streams, once brimming with fish, were polluted with silt and pesticides and other chemicals. Lack of tree cover and the draining of peat swamps exacerbated floods along the Seruyan river.

A large part of the Rimba Raya project area was also slated to be deforested and the peatlands drained for palm oil. The area was saved at the last minute.

The national and local government recognised the long strip of land that comprises Rimba Raya is an ecologically important buffer zone for the adjacent Tanjung Puting National Park. They decided to conserve the forest instead as part of a climate change scheme, called REDD+, that allows private firms to manage and protect a patch of rainforest provided they rehabilitate the area, work with local communities and generate revenue from selling carbon offsets and non-timber forest products.

Rimba Raya and the local government recognise the palm oil sector provides employment and export revenue. Many locals in the villages around the nearly 65,000 hectare conservation zone work for palm oil firms. But not all villagers are happy about this, saying the salaries are low and that the palm oil sector has damaged the environment. Many villagers want to do other things to earn an income.

"There has been a decline in our livelihoods. Fish stocks are falling and floods often hit the areas. This is why people were shifting to palm oil," said Syahriand, 27, chief of Ulak Batu village, one of 10 villages that Rimba Raya supports with livelihood programmes.

"Initially, palm oil was our saviour but now, it's causing problems in the village." He said the local palm oil company is putting pressure on workers to work longer hours.

"People who used to work for the company have now quit. We hope that the presence of Rimba Raya will help people in Ulak Batu become independent."

He said seedlings and replanting projects initiated by Rimba Raya help villagers earn extra money.

"There are intimidations. They (palm oil company) always question our relations with Rimba Raya. They ob-



Rimba Raya and the local government recognise the palm oil sector provides employment and export revenue.

ject to Rimba Raya's presence. Every day, people who work for the palm oil company are being intimidated, verbally. They keep making comparison. Are there jobs that it can give to the local people?"

Rimba Raya is replanting large areas of forest cleared over the years for timber and agriculture. The project team, with the assistance of local communities, is replanting hundreds of thousands of local trees species. The saplings are grown in community nurseries and Rimba Raya pays villagers for the trees. It also employs villagers to plant the saplings.

"I think agroforestry is also suitable in Ulak Batu. We'd like to launch an agroforestry programme which allows us to plant pineapples and others. Rubber trees have earlier been planted," he added.

"Rimba Raya's programmes in Ulak Batu are very important. One is to solve the issue of poverty because at the moment the village of Ulak Batu is in such a sorry state. People who used to depend on palm oil companies no longer work for them."

"Looking ahead, we want people to become independent and no longer dependent on palm oil companies. That's the hope," he said.

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RIMBA RAYA CONSERVATION PROFILES – IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Local communities are at the centre of Rimba Raya's goal to protect and restore nearly 65,000 ha of Borneo's tropical rainforest for future generations.

The project team work closely with 10 local communities and the district government to develop local livelihood, training and employment programmes that aim to improve their independence and economic resilience. Rimba Raya hopes to make local communities stronger so as to build a broader foundation for their future growth, one that boosts their economic status but also protects the local environment.

To achieve this, Rimba Raya has programme members working within the communities as partners.

"It doesn't take a lot of money. It takes time, it means helping communities think through stuff and to provide advice and technical expertise," says a senior team member. "What the local communities need are people with expertise to take the time to listen and suggest possible solutions."

Following are questions and answers from two of Rimba Raya's senior Indonesian field staff who outline their philosophies.

NASRUL ICHSAN, 40

Pak Nasrul manages Rimba Raya's programmes in the project's central region, one of three geographic teams that cover 10 communities that border Rimba Raya's forest area. He lives in Muara Dua village. He trained in soil science and specialised in peatlands and hydrology, visiting the United States for courses and training and working for major peat and forest restoration projects in Indonesia. He has worked for Delatares and Wetlands International previously.

Q: What makes you so passionate about communities? Why are communities so important?

A: "I grew up in a very big family from a very traditional village in South Sumatra. And day by day I see the change. We lost the traditions, we lost everything we felt was important in the past. For me they are the biggest losses.

"The Malay and Dayak cultures are very close with the forest. When you try to protect the forest, you should



try to protect the community and the forest will survive. That's what I believe. That's why I think it's very important to work with communities because I believe if the community is strong, the community can survive, you don't need to think about protecting the forest. They will protect the forest because their traditions, their needs, their lives are forests."

Q: Why is community development important to Rimba Raya?

A: "Commercialisation and capitalisation have caused communities to lose their identity, tradition and culture, which in the end also cause them to lose control over their own lives. The logging era, which is followed by the opening of big plantations, has introduced and encouraged them to embrace totally new habits, which they regard as part of modern life. That encourages them to cut more trees so that they can sell the wood, or collect other non-wood forest products to get cash.

Those who didn't have much in the past are now using borrowed money or money raised from selling wood to buy electronic goods, motorcycles and other modern stuff. Day by day, they are becoming obsessed with material possessions, and slowly but surely, this new kind of life will change their point of view about nature and forests. It's all about money. This has been worsened by a low degree of education, exposure to information, and a declining environmental capacity.

Community development is a way to strengthen and develop people's capacity and enable them to adapt to challenges and problems, which in the end will improve their quality of life. Communities, through their own initiatives, can protect and rehabilitate their forests."

Q: From your experience, what is the most successful method of introducing programmes to villages? For example, you mentioned that RRC does not "push" programmes or ideas but gently socialises them over a period of time to see if villagers are interested. You become a trusted partner, you said.

A: "We try to make sure there's participation from community leaders or elders who hold key positions in making decisions or in representing the community. This will serve as an initial stage to introduce programmes or ideas and gain trust from people. Before implementation, active discussions must be held with the community to give the best and clearest overview of a programme or idea by touching on its positive and negative aspects. That also involves providing other alternative programmes or ideas.

Of course, people will need time to digest information and data contained in a programme or idea. Eventually, together with a member





or some members of the community, the programme or idea will be implemented in a small scale, documented and then assessed to find out their benefits.

This doesn't only encourage people to become active and dynamic, but also, in critical times, give them full freedom to choose what is best for them. I believe there's no greater power than an inner desire that emerges from themselves, which is accompanied by an understanding of what needs to be done."

Q: What are the most important aspects of community development programmes?

A: "It is important to give villagers a sense of independence, resilience, additional sources of income, other options to learn and progress. These aspects have to be well-programmed and well-planned. To implement them, a strategy is needed because it's important to synchronise what people need with programmes or ideas on community development. It is hoped that community empowerment programmes should not take local cultural aspects for granted so that a better quality of life can be achieved."

Q: What more can RRC do to assist villagers? What's your vision?

A: "I think there are a lot of things which RRC can do to help people achieve a better quality of life such as in the field of culture, education and public health. It can also nurture people's independence to manage and take advantage of their environment as well as forests in a wise and sustainable fashion."

"I think there are a lot of things which Rimba Raya Conservation can do to help people achieve a better quality of life such as in the field of culture, education and public health."

-- Akhmad Efendi

Rimba Raya's local staff are key to its success. We are fortunate to have staff who understand why saving forests is important and the crucial role local communities play. Our staff work closely with local communities, sharing their expertise and their passion for the environment and local culture. Akhmad Efendi is head of Rimba Raya's local government affairs and grew up in the Rimba Raya area. Here he discusses why he joined Rimba Raya and how its programmes are helping local communities with livelihood projects that also reflect the goals of the local government.

AKHMAD EFENDI, 46

Pak Efendi was born and raised Kuala Pembuang, the main southern town in Seruyan district and the seat of the Seruyan government. It is also close to the southern boundary of the Rimba Raya concession. Pak Efendi is a former member of the Seruyan regional council, on which he served between 1995- 2004. He is Rimba Raya's head of local government affairs.

Q: What inspired you to join Rimba Raya?

A: "I love the environment. Seruyan is my home, my dwelling. I don't want Seruyan to be destroyed. I want Seruyan to return to its original shape where forests are dense, the environment is ideal, and there's a co-existence between people and forests. There are also suitable jobs. Now, it's different. The presence of



big palm oil companies has in fact failed to provide solutions to people. That's why I am attracted to Rimba Raya. Rimba Raya shares similar programmes with the local government, including the Community Development sector. That's very interesting. There's an opportunity for me to help my people in Seruyan."

Q: When we talk about under-developed areas, usually what comes to mind is palm oil as far as job opportunities are concerned. Can you explain what can Rimba Raya offer to local communities?

A: "I have encouraged my colleagues in Rimba Raya especially, and also the local government to empower local people. Originally, you would find rubber and rattan trees in people's gardens. So there's no need to create new programmes for them. They are already able. Several times, I have encouraged the local government and the regional council. Why should we create new programmes? I share similar ideas with Rimba Raya because its programmes are actually for the benefit of local people. I told the government and the local council that rubber and others were promising before. So why do they have to be killed? Help them, cultivate them, bring them back so that people don't have to be labourers anymore."

Q: Can you tell us more about the nursery programme, which is expected to provide alternative employment for the men in the long run?

A: "From the beginning, I already pushed for (development of the nurseries). This was one of my past programmes together with the forestry office in Sampit. Then, people were given a certain amount of capital to develop seedlings and we bought them. I hope this will continue with Rimba Raya because Rimba Raya restores the ecosystem. A few days ago, I mentioned to the regent that we plan to develop nurseries in several villages. Please help us in getting permits and legal certifications. Make them easy to get. We also hope that once nurseries are established, the government, especially the forestry and agriculture sectors, should buy our seedlings. They don't have to go far away to get them, so that people can be helped."

Q: Looking ahead, are you convinced that Rimba Raya will give an extremely valuable contribution to the people of Seruyan?

A: "I am convinced. Rimba Raya's programmes are always synchronised with those of the local government. Rimba Raya's roles have caught the eyes of the government and it is only Rimba Raya which can assist the local government."

