

# Seeds of Change

Newsletter

2nd Quarter 2015



InfiniteEARTH  
Beyond Carbon. Beyond Sustainability.



## RIMBA RAYA CONSERVATION TREE PLANTING INITIATIVE

All around us lies a vast carpet of ferns and grasses and a few scattered trees, all thriving in the brown water-logged peatland. In the far distance stands the edge of the rainforest that comprises the central core of the Rimba Raya concession in Central Kalimantan. To reach the forest's edge, a deep canal stretches from the Seruyan River several kilometres in land, cutting deep into the peatlands, the tea-coloured water pouring out into the muddy river.

The huge expanse of green was once rainforest but it has been cleared by successive waves of loggers, leaving the area vulnerable to fires during the dry season, destroying crops and livelihoods.

New life, though, is sprouting among the ferns and grasses. With assistance from Rimba Raya, thousands of native trees are being planted by local villages using saplings grown in local nurseries. The aim is to restore the area, to bring back the forest. It's an ambitious plan and one that has the backing of the local community and local government.



The Rimba Raya Conservation (RRC) team has worked closely with local villages to develop a programme that helps provide employment and income from tree planting. Many villagers want the area to become forest again to improve fish stocks, to curb fires and to limit the impacts of droughts and floods. Getting back to nature makes sense financially and culturally, they say.

Rimba Raya is planting more than 20 species of native trees over hundreds of hectares and the initial plan is to plant at least 500,000, with more than 100,000 planted since the programme began last year. All are grown locally, with Rimba Raya buying them from village nurseries.





**Rimba Raya is planting more than 20 species of native trees over hundreds of hectares and the initial plan is to plant at least 500,000, with more than 100,000 planted since the programme began last year.**

Nasrul Ichsan, 40, who manages Rimba Raya's programmes in the project's central region, explains the goals of the tree-planting project:

"This part of the Rimba Raya concession area is hit by fires every year. We are doing our best to return this area closer to its original form by planting some native species which originally grew here. We are continuously trying to make sure what we are planting will survive," he said during a recent interview at the planting area.

He explained that the survival rate is 89 percent for the saplings, which are planted every five metres in a grid pattern.

"This programme is basically a cooperation between local Dayak people and RRC. We are pushing them to always be independent, and this is actually one alternative source of income for the people."

Rimba Raya provides technical support, he says, teaching people how to produce high-quality seedlings. "We give them capital to produce seedlings, and then teach them how to plant trees and take care of them. These are initial steps. The next stage is to make sure people can be independent in restoring damaged land, burnt land. To make it productive again or return it to its condition as a natural, forested area."

The replanting area is across the Seruyan River from the village of Muara Dua, a traditional Dayak community.

"They live from forests, either wood or non-wood products. In the era of logging which began in late 1970s until the present time, they are so dependent on wood. They have earned enough money from logging but eventually, the amount of wood, its quality, is getting difficult to meet and to catch up







**“Excessive actions as well as development of canals have dried up peat land which is then followed by fires. They have contributed to the deterioration of people’s quality of life”**

**-- Pak Ruslan,  
Employed Villager**

with rising demand from the market. Automatically, they are losing their income,” Pak Nasrul explained.

“Moreover, excessive actions as well as development of canals have dried up peat land which is then followed by fires. They have contributed to the deterioration of people's quality of life,” he explained, and this has reduced the number of alternatives for livelihoods.

Pak Ruslan, 34, is one of the villagers employed full-time to plant the saplings and is happier now he has a steady job to work towards his goals.

“I used to be a fisherman but the income was not sufficient for my family,” he said in an interview. “I love taking care of forest plants for people's prosperity, especially for my own family, for its future. My wife never asked me about the nature of my job (before). What is important is that I get the money legally. “

“I want to start a business in the future. My plan is for my wife to sell goods from home. That's my hope. I want to thank Rimba Raya for helping me, friends and the local people.”

Pak Ruslan's views are reflected across the community, Pak Nasrul says. “People are very receptive and especially like the planting activity because they believe it is beneficial, and because one day they will be able to make use of forest products, either wood or non-wood. Moreover, they believe that if forests are coming back, it will be easier to find fish in the river. Basically, what they really mean is if their environment is healthy and natural, their livelihood will be better.”

For Pak Nasrul, tree planting is not just environmental work. “This is work for their culture too, for tradition. In RRC, we're thinking about the community, the traditions. You can see the tradition of the Dayak – the crafts, that's their impressions about the forests, their life.”





# INTERVIEW WITH SERUYAN REGENT, SUDARSONO, MAY 2015



**Q: What is your view of Rimba Raya's project on ecosystem restoration. Have you seen the benefits?**

**A:** Firstly, I'd like to thank Rimba Raya for what it has done. I believe Rimba Raya has done something for our community, especially in the 10 villages it's helping. Even though it's new and the coverage is small, I can appreciate it because I can feel the ripples and movements from the community after Rimba Raya makes its direct presence to help them. My conclusion is that we start to feel the presence of Rimba Raya.

**Q: The current focus for Seruyan is mostly on palm oil. But do you think Rimba Raya can become a good example for people in the regency which you head?**


**A:** To tell you the truth, we can't expect much yet because this is indeed new. But I am convinced that Rimba Raya wants to prove to us they have the capability to stir up economic activities in our community. In relation to the rapid expansion of palm oil plantations in Seruyan, we do understand that it has an economic impact which affects the development of the people's economy. But I don't want them to lose their identity. To me, the most important aspect is that those villages should not lose their culture, their identity. In fact, a lot of things which they own, can be explored. That's the thing which I'd like Rimba Raya to show.

**Q: And Rimba Raya can provide employment?**

**A:** That's right. Employment doesn't have to come from palm oil only. There are other local products and their strength which can be promoted. What happened was that nobody made a move. Nobody was on the frontline. Rimba Raya's presence is a proof there is a real movement which can grow the spirit of our people in villages. They have realised there are potentials, and they can be developed.

**Q: This can serve as a bridge between palm oil and Rimba Raya?**

**A:** Indeed. In the end, this will develop an understanding that employment doesn't have to come from palm oil only. We also see the palm oil industry will gradually be reducing the number of workers. This will give a negative impact to future development. That's because the palm oil industry will employ less and less workers.



**"I believe alternatives provided by Rimba Raya are correct because local products won't disappear. If the products are developed day by day, they will multiply"**

**-- Seruyan Regent,  
Sudarsono**

**Q: Is the number of workers being reduced because of the fall in palm oil prices, or because there's a global oversupply?**

**A:** That's not the case. This is what is happening. Local people do not possess extra knowledge. They only have the capability to become labourers to do jobs such as cleaning up plantations. As plantations mature, they will become cleaner. This is why the number of labourers will automatically be reduced. I believe alternatives provided by Rimba Raya are correct because local products won't disappear. If the products are developed day by day, they will multiply.

**Q: Seruyan is considered to be an underdeveloped area and you strive to improve it. Do Rimba Raya's contributions have the potential to improve livelihood?**

**A:** I would say yes, even though it has yet to cover all villages. I've noticed it's obvious now in two or three villages. Looking back, I am proud of the launch of the shrimp paste products in one of the villages, Sungai Perlu. This has become the pride. I've received a report that what may be needed now are tools (to catch shrimps) in order to get more raw material. Demand is surprisingly high.


**Q: How to approach the local community and tell them about Rimba Raya's projects. What is the best way if we want to involve the government?**

**A:** The best way is the government through related sectors, and through socialisation. The related sectors are, for example, industry, agriculture and fishery. Then, the village apparatus will be in communication with the local government. I believe that's where our role can be implemented. Eventually, and if needed, we are actually ready for fund collaboration.

**Q: So there's funding available?**

**A:** As long as the programmes are clear and for the benefit of local people, we are ready to collaborate on funding.





**“I think it will be more useful if the villages with the existing funds collaborate with Rimba Raya to stir up the economy of the people”**

**-- Seruyan Regent,  
Sudarsono**

**Q: The media in central Kalimantan have written about the harmonious relations between Rimba Raya and the government. Is that something which needs to be maintained?**

**A:** I would say it's not an exaggeration if the media say we have a harmonious relationship because I do feel the government needs help from a third party to give feedback and motivate people in villages. One thing I need to say is that now there are special budgets for villages, and this is huge capital. There many villages, and I won't mention names, but there are also some villages which until now still have no clue what to do with the huge funds. I think it will be more useful if the villages with the existing funds collaborate with Rimba Raya to stir up the economy of the people.

**Q: Can we assume that when you said that land should not change hands, you specifically talked about palm oil plantations?**

**A:** That's happening because the impact of palm oil plantations is extraordinary. We do understand that land which initially had no value in Seruyan, then became so valuable after palm oil plantations sprang up. That has influenced the way people perceive things, their point of view because they want instant results. They've got income by giving up their land and other things, but they don't realise that one day it will put them into trouble. This is why I believe that from now to later, the presence of Rimba Raya is badly needed because it could provide an understanding to local people they don't have to depend on anyone. Because we have our own natural resources here.


**Q: Do you think eco-tourism is important? When will you start?**

**A:** If we say it's important, it is important. If you ask me when it can be done, I can't answer the question yet because they will be a lot of preparation. It's a long-term preparation. Once again, it's important and preparation should begin now.

**“The presence of Rimba Raya is badly needed because it could provide an understanding to local people they don't have to depend on anyone. Because we have our own natural resources here.”**

**-- Seruyan Regent,  
Sudarsono**



A portrait of a man with glasses and a goatee, wearing a green batik shirt, looking slightly to the left. The background is a light-colored wall with a gold-colored decorative element.

**“Rimba Raya can cooperate with the government to make use of the funds for more productive things.”**

**-- Seruyan Regent,  
Sudarsono**

**Q: Can you explain the main preparations. Two or three main points?**

**A:** The first one is infrastructure, and then improving of the quality of education. Infrastructure and education are the key words.

**Q: Are forests very important for people of Seruyan?**

**A:** Very important. Forest is part of life in Seruyan. Actually, from generation to generation, the people can't be separated from the forest. I can assure you forests are extremely important because they are an integral part of the life of the Dayak people. Because it is important, then there should be real efforts (to protect forests). That is why from the beginning I already said that I am ready to support efforts by Rimba Raya because I understand and I was born here. I do understand the natives here, the Dayaks, are longing for a life surrounded by forests. But bear in mind, we talk about a prosperous life surrounded by forests.

**Q: Any feedback for Rimba Raya?**

**A:** My feedback is that our potentials are great. I want Rimba Raya to make use of the funds disbursed by the government to villages. Rimba Raya can cooperate with the government to make use of the funds for more productive things. Rimba Raya should develop a role to motivate them so that the money can be transformed into extremely productive funds in villages. I guess my message is that there should be a cooperation with village and district governments to make the most of the funds, in addition to the funds which may be disbursed by Rimba Raya itself.

**Q: On illegal logging, do you think we need help from the police force or military to tackle it?**

**A:** When it comes to eradication, then of course, it's the duty of security officials. But once again, I want to say before it is done, we need to reach out to them. My wish is that they abandon illegal logging not because we force them, but because there are other alternatives at home. Job alternatives at home which can make money, which may be equal to what they earn from the forests. That's the most interesting solution. It's not by force ...