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NEWS RELEASE

Local Communities Key To Successful Fire Management

Jakarta, 21 October 2020 – Although the weather in Indonesia in 2020 has been generally wetter due to the La Niña anomaly, as soon as dryer and hotter weather spells arrived in West and Central Kalimantan at the end of September and in the month of October, the hotspots started appearing in our monitoring systems. This coincides with the annual burning season of the indigenous community that traditionally uses the slash and burn method in preparation of community owned land, some inside of our operational permits.



The provincial regulations in West and Central Kalimantan (No. 103 of 2020 and No. 1 of 2020 respectively), implemented by the relevant lower administrative-level decrees such as the Ketapang Regent's regulation No. 37 of 2020, have to a certain extent validated the community's entitlement to use fire in land preparation. While the intention of the lawmakers was to limit the large-scale forest fires through a properly regulated approval process that would only allow burning of land for cultural needs of indigenous people, we find that the communities are mostly unaware of the specific requirements such as seeking and obtaining prior approval of the village/sub-district head, informing neighbouring land owners, forming of a fire-break around the area or having fire-extinguishing equipment ready on standby at the site, and very often consider this broad legal instrument a universal permission to use fire to clear land. We also sense that the sudden increase in number of hotspots could be a result of the long Covid-19 pandemic, which had reduced the sources of income for the communities, who now turn back to their land for livelihood.

To effectively engage the locals in a fire prevention programme and to encourage them to refrain from the traditional land preparation method, we used a collaborative approach of stakeholder involvement. Expanding on our existing *Desa Bebas Api* and *Masyarakat Peduli Api* programmes, we have stepped up our partnerships with the community leaders organised through *Muspika*. Regularly conducting joint community outreach sessions, we clarify the new regulations' requirements, encourage compliance and promote alternative means of land clearing. The programme has received a positive response from a few villages, who now update us with the scheduled use of fire inside and around our administrative permit boundaries. With the list of village-approved clearings available to our teams, we meet the applicants and share on our Zero-burning policy, while educating them on substitute land preparation methods that can provide them with better yield and healthier soil without the use of fire. For those that are not convinced yet, we are there to help put out the fire together with the Village team.



Posko 20 Patdu BPPIKHL Ds. Kendawangan Kanan

To make our case stronger and noticeable, we have just launched the development of a small sustainable vegetable farm of 0.5 hectares in Cegolak village in West Kalimantan's Ketapang Regency. Applying the method of manual clearing that we are promoting, this plot of land will serve as a "WOW" pilot for the local communities, for 'seeing is believing'. Using equipment loaned from BKSDA, the twigs and branches from trees will be processed for "wood vinegar", a natural fertiliser that will substitute the good nutrients brought to the soil through burning. The land will be planted with rice, eggplants and local cucumbers that should provide the locals with steady revenue throughout the year. This process will be studied, documented and published by the academics from a local university to provide scientific proof and encourage more communities to shift away from traditional land clearing methods. This method can also provide them with better yields, without having to resort to further land clearing.



While we will not be able to see the full results from this programme immediately, Bumitama will continue with its Sustainability Policy commitments, protecting the existing forests and rehabilitating our set-aside areas together with the community, educating them on risks of burning land and the benefits of alternative means of land clearing. It is our goal to activate positive planting cultures through innovation with the indigenous communities so that healthy and balanced environment and sustainable economic development continues to have positive impact on their life.

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