

Community Empowerment Hand in Hand with Forest Conservation



Bumitama Biodiversity and Community Project (BBCP)

West Kalimantan

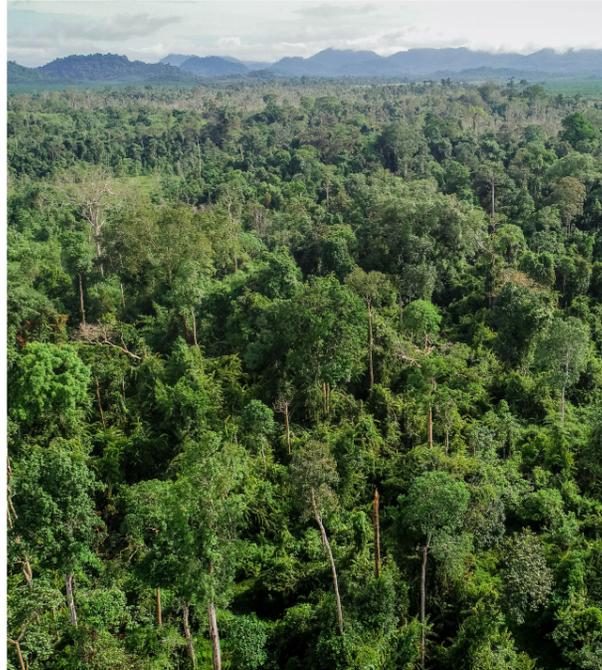
Walking down southwest the slightly sloping path at Simpang Tiga Sembelangan village forest, we could see the sun setting behind the horizon, lining the sky from the Sungai Putri peat swamp forest in the distance. This forest is one of the major ecosystems in West Kalimantan, that are the natural habitats of endemic species such as orangutans (*Pongo pygmaeus-wurmbii*), kelasi (*Presbytis rubicunda*), proboscis monkey (*Nasalis larvatus*), canary squirrel (*Rheithrosciurus macrotis*) and black orchid (*Coelogyne pandurata*), together with the neighbouring Gunung Tarak forest and Gunung Palung National Park.

Being so close to villages and oil palm plantations, these ecosystems are susceptible to many threats from human activities such as illegal logging, slash-and-burn practices, land conversion, and illegal hunting. As a leading grower and producer, Bumitama understands the importance of protecting these ecologically sensitive areas. Moreover, conservation areas located in one of its subsidiaries connect the forests of Sungai Putri with those in Gunung Tarak, offering a migration route for wildlife in search for food.

Besides providing unconfined space for several key species, this migration corridor can also enhance the genetic quality of orangutans because it enables the same sub-species of orangutan in Sungai Putri to breed with the ones in Gunung Tarak and Gunung Palung.



Bumitama commits to protect, conserve, and enhance the ecosystem through the management of natural resources and biodiversity, including the conservation of this crucial connecting area. This also translates to its operational practices through implementation of the *No Deforestation, No Peat, No Exploitation* policy. Setting aside areas of forest, peat and biodiversity from development, the company manages more than 40,000 hectares for conservation purposes across all of its management areas.



Janrahman Led the Rehabilitation of the Migration Corridor

The launching of the Bumitama Biodiversity and Community Project (BBCP), a collaborative project with a variety of stakeholders in 2016, was just another step in the process of managing conservation areas alongside oil palm plantations. The BBCP is a landscape-based program that aims to protect and sustain biodiversity and forests while engaging the essential participation of the local communities in activities directly linked with conservation but also helping them to improve productivity of their farms, which has a direct impact on deforestation in the area.



BBCP Signage at Berajang

With 2017 marking the recognition of BBCP's work in Sungai Putri as an essential ecosystem zone (KEE) by the Governor of West Kalimantan, Bumitama and other stakeholders agreed to carry out joint management that includes protection, preservation, and sustainable use of land in the wider landscape area.

This provides an umbrella for the conservation activities conducted by Bumitama and its partners in the area of around 8,000 hectares managed under the BBCP, including ecosystem and biodiversity monitoring, forest rehabilitation and agroforestry partnerships with local communities.



All programmes are controlled by the Bumitama forest rangers, who, with the help of the neighbouring community, monitor the areas for threats and record sightings of protected species of biodiversity.

The trained team patrols the vast areas using Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tools (SMART), drones and camera traps. They often encounter many protected or rare, endangered and threatened species, such as the Bornean orangutans, proboscis monkeys, hornbills, or sun bears. A positive sign of progress was seen in early 2020 when a baby orangutan was born in the conservation area.



A Mother and Daughter of Orangutan Seen in 2020 at the Conservation Area



Proboscis Monkey (*Nasalis larvatus*)



Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tools (SMART) and Camera Trap

At the management site of the BBCP, located in a former oil palm tree nursery called Berajang, the Bumitama team set up a multi-purpose training centre for its employees as well as for interested local communities. To help improve their income from the existing land and thus prevent land clearing in forest areas, Bumitama trains locals in the correct way of growing fruits and vegetables, integrated with rearing chicken which eat the local produce and, in return, provide fertiliser for the farm.



Jungle Track Towards the Southern Part of the Corridor

Early in the morning, the team of forest rangers departs to check the regular patrolling route in the forest, carrying seedlings of the trees ready to be planted. The team often collaborates with people from neighbouring villages in return for a small compensation and the promise of future harvest from the trees that they carry to the forest with them.



Yoga, Iwan, and Haris, Walk for a Morning Patrol at BBCP



Nursery at Berajang Area

Here at Berajang, seedlings of trees collected from the forest or purchased from illegal loggers in effort to stop cutting down of the surrounding forests are nurtured before being planted back into the forests of the BBCP programme and the social forestry partnering areas.



**Pak Nurmanto Jarwano
One of the Local Partners**

Pak Nurmanto Jarwano, who migrated with his family from Central Java to West Kalimantan more than a decade ago, was one of the local partners who participated in this program. *“The restoration of this area brings significant benefits to the surrounding community. Fires are prevented, we can breathe fresh air, and we live in a healthier environment. In addition, the local community’s economy is also improved by joining this effort,”* he said. *“When I planted trees here with my friends, I imagined the blessings the forest would bring in the future, from a simple thing like firewoods to the serenity we can feel by seeing the green scenery.”*

Some reforestation areas are difficult to access or unsafe to access because of the remains of trees burned in the 2019 fires that could injure people underneath them. Bumitama overcame this challenge through a technology-integrated program, FlyForest, which

disseminated seeds using drones over an 800-hectares area. *“With this program, reforestation became more convenient, efficient, and effective,”* explained Pak Amin, Bumitama’s Conservation Manager.

In this program, 150 kg of sengon and 500 kg of nyamplung seeds were spread.

Sengon (*Albizia chinensis*) is a fast-grow legume tree which can create shade and microclimate, making it the perfect supporter for nyamplung (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) during its germination before growing into a mature tree, up to 20 metres high.



Flyforest a New Technology Development for Forest Restoration

BBCP works in collaboration with local communities to benefit the environment and people. Pak Amin explains, *“Our conservation programs are not just about protecting the environment and biodiversity but also transforming damaged or abandoned lands into productive ones that can become an alternative source of income for the community.”*

BBCP supports the locals with an agro-forestry scheme, supplying them with many different tree seedlings, like crystal guava, mango, longan, cacao, durian, and jengkol, to plant in the village forest areas.



Crystal Guava (*Psidium guajava*)



Pak Amran Sinaga a Cacao Farmer

This scheme is also one of the many initiatives Bumitama undertakes to mitigate illegal logging and hunting threats. Among the proactive figures is Pak Amran Sinaga, a man that once was in the unauthorised timber processing business but then ran a cacao plantation with a farmer group in Simpang Tiga Sembelangan, Ketapang Regency. As much as he likes to win, he experienced some failures first-hand when he tried several times

to plant cacao seeds that he brought from his hometown, North Sumatera. In 2021 he encountered Janrahman, Bumitama's conservation specialist and shared his story. This young man strongly favoured Pak Sinaga's willingness to learn about cacao plantation. *"Bumitama provides us with seedlings, trainings, and facilities. They also helped us to sign an MoU with an artisan chocolate company,"* said Pak Sinaga brightly. With his farmer group he intercroops the cacao with banana, durian, and citrus trees. *"Looking back, fires always happened here during drought season. Today with the trees grown, fire no longer happens in this area, which was my main goal when I started this plantation. I also often take my daughter here, share some of the profit from the banana sale with her, and teach her how protecting nature this way is beneficial both for us and the environment."*



Cacao Tree (*Theobroma cacao*)

When it comes to putting BBCP into action, ensuring community participation still remains a challenge for Bumitama's team. The community believes they do not have the skill set to pursue a livelihood aside from the traditional means of income, such as the small plantations they held for many years. *"Due to the lack of experience with intensive plant cultivation in the area, we strive to ensure there is a continuous transfer of knowledge from our team to the local community, through various group discussions, trainings and field studies so that they can gradually learn how to effectively grow crops that will become their alternative source of income, utilising the existing land and without having to resort to deforestation or dangerous methods such as land clearing through burning,"* stated Pak Amin.



Multi-stakeholder support is essential for efforts like BBCP. For conservation initiatives to succeed alongside palm oil plantations, coordination among all key stakeholders, including the government, is needed to establish a solid foundation and integrate conservation activities of all involved into the



Pak Jumadi the Regional Head of Management of Nanga Tayap

long-term development planning. As Pak Jumadi, the Regional Head Management of Nanga Tayap, put it, *"The community must continue to prosper while being mindful of the environment. A collective effort from outside and inside needs to be further pursued for programs like BBCP to thrive."* Aside from the challenges, BBCP closed 2022 with a good note, succeeding in rehabilitation of additional 40 hectares of land with more than 21,000 trees. This initiative will continue to build on the accomplishments of the past 6 years and expand its activities to increase participation with programmes tailored to the needs of the local communities and the surrounding ecosystems.