

# Central Kalimantan Peatlands Project



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**In Central Kalimantan in Indonesia, logging and conversion to agriculture has badly degraded an enormous area of peat swamp rainforest. This situation leads to incredible carbon dioxide emissions and annually long lasting fires, causing smoke and health problems, leaving many people living in poverty. A consortium made up of the Borneo Orang Utan Survival Foundation (BOSF), CARE, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Wetlands International and the University of Palangka Raya is therefore working closely with the provincial and local authorities to help**

## The problem

The peat swamp forests of Central Kalimantan have heavily been degraded by logging and drainage for conversion into agricultural lands and oil palm and pulp plantations. Many of these initiatives have failed, as most species cannot grow under the extreme peat swamp-conditions.

A well known example of a failed project is the huge agricultural development known as the Mega Rice Project that begun in 1996. Conversion work for the project included deep drainage which dug a network of 4600 kilometres of channels. This has led both to huge amounts of carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere and to annual peat fires which cause smog concentrations that damaged people's health both locally and across the region.

Many people from other parts of Indonesia migrated to the area, either to help with the development of the mega-rice project or as part of transmigration schemes. These people now try to seek a living on the area's heavily degraded peat soils. As a result, poverty rates in the area are 2 to 4 times higher than in other areas of Indonesia.

## How we work

The project partners are working to ensure that the best possible use is made of existing knowledge and expertise to address the problems found in the area it is working in. Our approach requires us to work closely with local communities and local authorities, as well as within the framework of provincial policies and development strategies.

Our priority is peatland rehabilitation, which requires restoring waterflows, reforestation efforts and fire control. However, this work is complemented by a range of efforts to reduce poverty. These include work to improve local health facilities, develop alternative livelihood strategies and invest in socio-economic development through, for example, the development of sustainable fisheries, agriculture and forestry.

We're also investing heavily in our work to conserve any remaining peat swamp forests, including those in the Sebangau National park (work which is lead by WWF) and the Mawas area (work lead



by BOSF). CARE leads the poverty-reduction thrusts of the project. The local university (the University of Palangka Raya) is involved in all aspects of the work, including local communication and outreach. Wetlands International manages the project overall and provides support to Green Governance development at the provincial level. Wetlands International also runs the project's international communication work and leads the hydrological work done to restore severely degraded peatlands and the buffer zones of the remaining forest areas.

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## The project's concrete actions

### Fire prevention

The project has already established 25 community-based fire brigades in



different villages throughout the area. Using satellites to monitor for fires means that fire brigades like these can respond rapidly.

### Hydrological restoration

Blocking drainage canals is the most important practical way to reduce drainage. The first step towards this is to raise awareness among local communities of the need for such action, since many of the canals in the area are owned and operated by local villagers and are used intensively to transport forest products. The project therefore works with local communities to construct and maintain dams



across the canals. So far, the project has built 12 large dams and hundreds of small dams by working with local people. This has restored 10,000 hectares of peatland in the Sebangau National park and over 50,000 hectares in the former Mega Rice area and buffer zones of Mawas, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by around 4 million tonnes per year.

### Poverty reduction

Restoring the peatlands in these areas will help to reduce poverty by providing the environmental security necessary for economic development to take place. Plus, reducing poverty will in its turn help to ensure sustainable development and conservation. With this in mind, local villagers have been trained in farming techniques and (sustainable) development practices. The project has also provided support to improve the quality of local agricultural and forestry products

and people's ability to market them. We've also supported small-scale 'Bio-rights' schemes, a financial system which will pay people to protect their natural resources and to develop sustainable ways of using.

### Improvement of public health

Many villages in the area lack basic medical and health facilities. So, as well as working to prevent the yearly fires that cause a high incidence of respiratory problems among local people, the project has also improved health facilities and services in 14 villages. It's done this by providing equipment, training and guidance for volunteers and health workers, and by assessing water quality and the availability of clean drinking water.

### Reforestation and greening

We've also replanted about 1000 hectares with 750,000 seedlings of indigenous peat swamp tree species, all of which have commercial value. The Jelutung tree is one good example, as it produces a type of latex used by the international chewing gum industry. All replanting activities are carried out through community-based reforestation plans, creating jobs and a long-term source of income.

### Biodiversity conservation

Both project areas (Sebangau and Mawas) are recognized as being important reserves of biodiversity. However, this is threatened by the yearly fires, drainage and illegal logging. To combat these threats, the project is helping to improve Sebangau National Park's management facilities and to develop management plans and improved law-enforcement in both areas. This work is helping to create much-needed infrastructure and the capacity necessary for efficient park management and effective patrols to discourage illegal logging. It also involves workshops with local stakeholders



and villages to assist in planning, design and implementation. Other successful efforts include action which prevented a road from being constructed through the Sebangau National Park.



### Training and awareness-raising

The project also organizes workshops and training courses to make local people aware of the causes and effects of peatland degradation. The project has also boosted the capacity of the University of Palangka Raya in a range of ways. These include helping it to establish a knowledge centre focussing on peatland issues, compiling and improving access to scientific and 'grey' literature on peatland issues and solutions, and helping local scientists and students to become actively involved in peatland research and monitoring.

### Policy development

CKPP has helped to improve the local, national and international policies that deal with tropical peatlands in general and the Central Kalimantan peatlands in particular. The Provincial Government of Central Kalimantan is committed to developing and implementing a Green Government policy, and is making peatland conservation, restoration and sustainable development high priorities. An example of this commitment is Presidential Instruction No2/2007, which states that 80% of the former Mega Rice area should be restored and conserved. At a global level, the project consortium has been able to put the alarming issue of peatland degradation on the agendas of the United Nations climate convention and the Convention of Biodiversity.

### Sustainable financing

The project has also identified and developed options that could be used to enhance the finances available for peatland conservation and restoration. These options include innovative mechanisms such as the World Bank-funded scheme for Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation and the ICARUS fund. Other examples include the use of private-sector interests who wish to offset their carbon emissions by investing in peatland restoration and reforestation. Wetlands International is now investigating options for setting up a Global Peatlands Fund, which would make it possible to capture such interests in order to support the work being done in areas like the Central Kalimantan peatlands.