

## **Cross-border cooperation to protect Borneo's natural environment**

**“The trail was little more than a mud path and one of the groups had to walk half the night, but nothing could stop us from getting here to talk about the things that are threatening our future in the Borneo highlands. This shows how united we are in shaping a better future for us and future generations.”**

Pak Lewi is one of the leaders of the FORMADAT (the Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Highlands of Borneo, Indonesia/Malaysia), In 2015 FORMADAT won the UNDP Equator Prize. The prize is awarded to advancing innovative solutions for people, nature and resilient communities. FORMADAT received the award for its local environmental food production scheme.

The island of Borneo is divided between Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia and is one of the world's top biodiversity hotspots. It still has enormous rainforests and several national parks, but the deforestation of Borneo is going at a rapid pace. Industrial oil palm plantations are eating up the land, the mining industry is expanding, and slash and burn land clearance is posing a problem.

Borneo is also home to the Dyak people, a collective name for the 200 or so indigenous groups living in Borneo. Today they comprise of around 500,000 people and have a rich, and in many ways, unique culture. The people living in the highlands in the heart of Borneo support themselves with small-scale farming, forestry, fishing and livestock breeding. They have long lived as one with nature and the various ethnic groups have always maintained contact. The only blot on the landscape is that their traditional lands are divided between the two states of Indonesia and Malaysia. Around ten years ago people from four ethnic groups formed a cross-border organisation to fight for their culture, environment and rights.

“FORMADAT was formed for the benefit of all those living along the borders in the heart of Borneo. We are united in a common cause to protect our lands, our rights, our environment and our culture,” continues Pak Lewi.

The traditional landscape in the heart of Borneo is made up of small fields, ancient forests, rivers and streams and many culturally significant sites. Over the years the farmers here have developed a sustainable system for growing rice, fruit and other crops without the need for deforestation. People use organic buffalo manure just as they have done for countless generations.

But there is also new thinking. In spring 2015 FORMADAT organised a Tropical Forest Fruit Festival for the first time in Borneo's history. The aim was to raise awareness of the unique biodiversity while passing on knowledge of how to utilise the fruit both commercially and responsibly. This caught the eye of the international *Slow Food* movement (with the motto Good, Clean and Fair) and of the Indonesian capital, Jakarta.

“Borneo is the only homeland that we, the Lundayeh, Kelabit, Lun Bawang and Sa'be peoples have. Previously we all looked after our own interests, but we now have an organisation to represent us that has united us,” concludes Pak Lewi.

And that is exactly how it is. It may be a long trek into the heart of Borneo, but the people there are no longer isolated but a significant part of the positive force that is the global community.

## **Borneo**

Borneo is the world's third largest island with an area of 745,000 km<sup>2</sup> (almost twice the size of Sweden). Many animal species live side by side: orang-utans, elephants, leopards, rhinos and gibbons. Roughly 70 per cent of Borneo belongs to Indonesia, which in turn is divided into five provinces of which central Kalimantan is one. The states of Sabah and Sarawak in northern and western Borneo belong to Malaysia and the tiny sultanate of Brunei is sandwiched between them. Today roughly 20 million people live on Borneo, mostly in the coastal cities. Borneo is also home to important, and unified, ethnic groups. By empowering them WWF is helping them to create a sustainable future for this unique island.