

## **Villagers who cherish their fishing**

**“Our villages have lived off fishing for generations. I want my children to be able to fish in the future. This is why it's so important to protect Lake Danau Hai from overfishing.”**

Pak Arson is 59 years old and comes from a family that has fished along Katingan River in the Indonesian part of Borneo for generations. Pak himself has fished since he was a little boy and is well aware of how price and availability can fluctuate throughout the year.

“In recent years we’ve noticed a sharp rise in the number of people fishing and, inadvertently, sharpening competition for the fishing waters. We villagers in Tumbang Runen soon realised that we had to protect the lake from overfishing.”

The majority of the people living along the river are Dajaks, that is to say the indigenous population of Borneo. They live off the forests and rivers by fishing, farming and gathering rattan. Nowadays many work on the oil palm plantations that are increasing in pace with the rapid deforestation of the rain forest. Borneo’s indigenous population is feeling the squeeze, not only from the exploitation of their natural resources but also by the migration of people from the more densely populated parts of Indonesia. These developments have also caused a drop in the amount of fish in Katingan River and the surrounding lakes. Pak Arson’s wife, Lamsiah Parson (40), has always fished alongside her husband.

“Up until 2000 we were able to live off our fishing, but since then there has not been enough fish and my husband has had to find alternative employment,” she says.

Pak Arson began working on one of the oil palm plantations while Lamsiah continued to fish in the smaller lakes surrounding the village. She dries and salts the fish to sell it to buyers who transport it to the district capital a hundred kilometres up river. With support from WWF, the regional fisheries office and staff from Sebangau national park, Lamsiah and other villagers have begun to breed fish in wooden barrels. People in the villages have also compiled a list of regulations for fishing along the river. Only those living here have fishing rights and the net mesh must be of a certain size. Anyone found breaking these rules could face a hefty fine. Utilising the resources in a more sustainable and responsible manner guarantees the villagers a more regular income from their fishing.

“The support we’ve received from WWF has been crucial. The lake is like a larder to us, especially now when the river catch has dropped,” continues Lamsiah.

But the people along the river are not used to organising. There is a strong tradition of village councils, but few know how to organise in a modern way. The distances are also prohibitive. From Pak’s and Lamsiah’s village it takes several days to get to the capital, Jakarta.

“The greatest challenge for most indigenous groups is in learning how to organise in a more modern way. They may find it difficult to understand that they actually have rights and that they have to be defended! It’s also about making authorities accept the fact that indigenous groups have a right to live off the natural resources,” explains Olle Forshed at WWF in Sweden.

## **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 with the remainder belonging to Malaysia and the tiny sultanate of Brunei. Today roughly 20 million people live on Borneo, mainly in the coastal cities. The participation of local communities in nature conservation is vital in preserving Borneo's natural resources in the long term. WWF therefore works to strengthen Borneo's indigenous influence on issues relating to the management of natural resources. In 2007 Borneo's three governments agreed upon a cross-border management plan for the island's heartlands. With this as the starting point, WWF will continue its efforts to halt the deforestation of natural forests, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide the local population with opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and participation.