

Avoiding research fatigue

CIFOR began working in the Malinau Research Forest, in East Kalimantan, in 1996, when the Indonesian government designated 300,000 hectares of forest lands for long-term research into sustainable forest management. Since then, dozens of researchers from CIFOR and its partner institutions have put Malinau's forests, and its mostly Dayak communities, under the microscope. Ecologists, ethno-botanists, economists, sociologists, soil scientists, anthropologists – all have come here to gather information. And the gathering of information has relied heavily on local people, so it would be scarcely surprising if they were beginning to suffer from research fatigue.

And indeed a survey carried out in it 2006 found that 30 per cent of those interviewed reckoned that the number of visits by CIFOR scientists was excessive. However, the survey findings also suggested that even those who found the number of visits excessive valued CIFOR's presence in the area. 97 per cent of respondents – they included government officials and villagers – said it was important that CIFOR should continue working in Malinau. 80 per cent agreed that CIFOR's research results were useful and had helped to improve their knowledge about forestry and environmental issues. The survey found that local people appreciated the way in which CIFOR fed the results of its research back to officials and villagers. While the former preferred to receive their information in the form of illustrated books, posters and calendars, government officials preferred books.



CIFOR conducted interviews in many of Malinau's villages, including Respen Sembuak, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Photo: Yani Saloh

Introducing CIFOR's new DG

The relationship between CIFOR and the host government's Ministry of Forestry has always been important. In Indonesia, forests help to support the livelihoods of tens of millions of people and they are vitally important for the economy. Although CIFOR has an international mandate, many of its research activities have focused on a broad range of forestry issues in Indonesia.

In November 2006, a meeting in Jakarta introduced CIFOR's new Director General, Frances Seymour, to the Minister of Forestry, M.S. Kaban, to senior Ministry staff and to representatives from donor agencies, non-governmental organisations, the media and others with a close interest in forestry research. Seymour previously occupied influential positions at the World Resources Institute, the World Wildlife Fund and the Ford Foundation. She spent many years working in Indonesia, and speaks fluent bahasa Indonesia.

The Minister and CIFOR's new Director General both expressed their profound hope that the Ministry, its research arm, the Forestry Research and Development Agency (FORDA) and CIFOR would continue to work closely together in the future. In her speech, Seymour invited guests to consider how CIFOR might develop over the coming years, and there was a lively panel discussion on "making well informed choices about forests."



CIFOR's new Director General, Frances Seymour, is officially welcomed to Indonesia by Indonesia's Minister of Forestry M.S. Kaban (centre), and FORDA's Director General and host country representative on CIFOR's Board of Trustees, Wahyudi Wardoyo. Photo: Eko Prianto