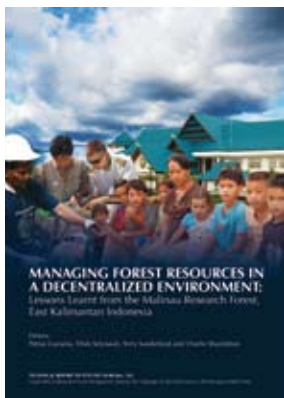




Pristine forest in Seturan, Malinau, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. (Yani Saloh)

Reflections on a major research project



“This has been a great opportunity to focus on one locality for an extended period of time, with different scientists looking at different facets of the same issues.”
Douglas Sheil

“The real strength of this book is that it celebrates the multidisciplinary nature of CIFOR’s research,” explains Terry Sunderland, co-editor of *Managing Forest Resources in a Decentralized Environment*. The book provides a portrait of the second phase of a major CIFOR research project in Malinau, in Indonesian Borneo, funded mainly by the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO).

When CIFOR and Indonesia’s Forestry Research and Development Agency (FORDA) first began working here, President Suharto was still in power, central government held an iron grip over the allocation of natural resources and this corner of East Kalimantan had experienced little in the way of development. Since then, there has been rapid and sometimes chaotic change. The Asian economic crisis led to the fall of Suharto, and soon afterwards a programme of decentralisation heralded a period of intense development. Small-scale logging began to change the landscape, foreign investors in search of timber poured into the area, and the sleepy backwater of Malinau was transformed into a vibrant district capital.

CIFOR’s research in Malinau District has covered a remarkable range of topics, from reduced impact logging to decentralisation; from the health and diet of Punan communities to local perceptions about biodiversity; from adaptive collaborative management to the use of wood waste. Although much of the research took place in the 302,000-hectare Bulungan Research Forest – now known as Malinau Research Forest – CIFOR scientists

also worked throughout the much larger area encompassed by Malinau District, some 90 per cent of which is still covered with forest.

The research may have been less collaborative than originally anticipated, with small groups of scientists working independently, but there has been plenty of creative interaction. “We may sometimes have come to very different conclusions, but that in itself has been stimulating,” explains Douglas Sheil, whose Multidisciplinary Landscape Assessment (MLA) research explored local perceptions of biodiversity. “This has been a great opportunity to focus on one locality for an extended period of time, with different scientists looking at different facets of the same issues.”

Like Sheil and his colleagues, Patrice Levang, an agronomist seconded to CIFOR by the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), has



Rattan weaving in Malinau, East Kalimantan. (Eko Prianto)

also been studying Punan hunter-gatherers. His focus, however, has been the economic welfare of Punan communities, their health status and their material aspirations. “We asked different questions, so we got different answers,” he says, “but we undoubtedly benefited from each others’ research. I certainly wouldn’t have sensed how strong the Punan attachment is to nature had it not been for the MLA research.”

The researchers working in Malinau have sought to influence the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the different agencies in the region, from communities to district authorities, national planners to logging companies. It is too early to make a definitive evaluation, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that CIFOR’s research has had a significant impact.

The research on reduced impact logging (RIL), which seeks to lessen the environmental impact of commercial harvesting, has proved influential, according to CIFOR scientist Hari Priyadi. “Partly as a result of our research, logging companies like PT Alas Kusuma and Sumalindo have adopted RIL techniques,” he says. “The research also encouraged the government to introduce a regulation in 2001 making RIL mandatory.”

Sheil believes that his research has helped to make conservation activities – so often driven by the values of Western scientists – more democratic, by taking into account the views of local people. Levang hopes that his research has

helped to dispel what he describes as the “noble-savage myth”, which maintains that the best way to conserve the forests is simply to give greater access and ownership rights to indigenous people. “Our research clearly shows that remote communities want all the sort of things the rest of us want, in terms of televisions, health care and education, and to get them they are quite prepared to sell the forests to loggers,” he says.

CIFOR’s research on adaptive collaborative management (ACM) helped local people to adapt to the swift changes taking place in Malinau District, and led to greater empowerment of local communities, encouraging them, for example, to take the initiative in local land-use planning. CIFOR’s research on poverty – described on page 22 – has had a significant influence on the way the district authorities measure and assess poverty. The research on the health of Punan communities in the Upper Tubu, conducted by Edmond Dounias, an ethno-ecologist seconded to CIFOR by IRD, had a major influence on the work of Médecins du Monde.

It is hoped that this book will help to disseminate the key messages to a wide audience, including district governments, development agencies and forestry donors, as well as central government ministries in Jakarta. “The research described here has a relevance which goes far beyond Malinau District,” explains Petrus Gunarso, the project coordinator.



Rewarding the Regent

Each year, the Government of Indonesia awards the Kalpataru Prize to a community or individual who has shown outstanding leadership in protecting the environment. This year, the prize was presented by the President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, to Dr. Marthin Billa, the regent of Malinau District, which declared itself a ‘Conservation District’ in 2005. A keen supporter of CIFOR’s research in

the Malinau Research Forest, Dr Billa also received the Raksaniyata Award from the Minister of Environment in recognition of his efforts to promote conservation.

“We have to be sure that as a conservation district, Malinau’s development will benefit the community,” says Dr Billa. “Even if we don’t experience the benefits ourselves, we must be sure future generations do.” Conservation principles are fundamental to Malinau’s development, according to Dr Billa, and he hopes community welfare will benefit from schemes involving payments for environmental services.

Malinau Regent, Dr Marthin Billa (2nd left), was awarded the Kalpataru prize for his efforts to make Malinau a conservation district. Accompanying Dr Billa at the Presidential awards ceremony were CIFOR’s Kresno Dwi Santosa, Mrs. Yuari Itun Billa and, to her left, Ir Junus Poddala from Indonesia’s Environmental Impact Agency. (Pemda Malinau)