

## Rhino Protection Unit Community Outreach Activity to Protect Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park

Asian Rhino Project helps support Rhino Protection Units (RPU) in Indonesia through a strong partnership with the International Rhino Foundation and the Indonesian Rhino Foundation (Yayasan Badak Indonesia).

The rangers work hard to monitor and protect the rhino and their habitats by removing snares and animal traps, patrolling for signs of illegal encroachment or activities in the park such as logging or farming, and researching and recording sign of the rhino and other endangered species within the rhino range. Another very important aspect of the RPUs role in the protection of the rhino is community outreach – working with the local people to find sustainable and sensible ways of farming on the bufferzones surrounding the park and to work together to protect the park and the wildlife within it.

The following is a report from one of the RPU rangers and the International Rhino Foundation which gives you an insight into some of the important work these guys do in their community outreach programs.

My name is Marsum; I am an RPU member. I work in Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park (BBS) in Sumatra. One of my duties is helping with community outreach activities in BBS. This activity is not the main job of RPUs but is becoming an important component to help us to engage local villages and communities, and especially farmers.

Once, in Margomulyo Pekon Tugu Papak village, which borders BBS, I went to a farmers group meeting with Mr. Bambang from the BBS National Park office. We go to show our support and to learn and share information about farmers' activities.

We recently had received information (or perhaps a rumor) that a Jakarta businessman has promised a lot of money to farmers if they can produce "Jarak" (*Jatropha curcas*) in large quantities for export. Jarak is in high demand. It is grown in plantations because a lot of space is needed for planting.

Suddenly, in our farmers' group meeting, several people came in and said that they were from a local NGO in Lampung. They asked all farmers in the meeting to plant Jarak and said that they can use BBS for planting. They said that they had a letter with this recommendation from the governor and the local mayor approving organization of this activity within the National park. I thought to myself, "This is an illegal activity."

I saw that one of these men was a target of our RPU/ intelligence operations in BBS – he was suspected of conducting a number of illegal activities in the park. I knew his name. Sukarna, yes, he is Sukarna. Fortunately, he did not know that Mr. Bambang and I were attending the farmers' group meeting. We both debated their statements with them. We said that the statement was illegal and that there is no regulation that mentions planting in BBS. We caught them in a lie. .

Then we had to help the farmers to understand that their

statement was illegal – step-by-step. We mention that the National Park has regulations and is under the management of the Ministry of Forestry, not under the Provincial or District government.

After the meeting, we made an incident report to the police, with support from the others RPU members and the staff of the National Park office. After considering our report and evidence, the police arrested Sukarna one week after receiving information from us. Meanwhile the "NGO official" (who was brokering the 'deal' for the businessman who wanted to plant Jarak in BBS) disappeared and has not yet been located.

This is one example of how the community outreach that we are doing helps to provide effective protection for BBS. We provide and share information with farmers whose land borders the National Park. They trust us, and together we used this opportunity to help to protect BBS.

*Translated and edited by Sectionov Inov*

