HoB Pulse Still Strong at Local and Regional Level

Agreements and resolutions announced at the third annual HoB tri-national meeting and the 6th BIMP-EAGA Summit prove that the local and regional ‘pulse’ of conservation and sustainable development - the lifeblood of the HoB Initiative - is still strong.

Opening the HoB tri-national meeting held in September in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia’s Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, the honourable Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Joseh Kurup, said the HoB was a crucial part of South East Asia’s natural heritage. However, he warned that the task was far from complete and looked to the three governments involved to agree on effective implementation of agreements reached at the tri-national meeting.

The BIMP-EAGA Summit held in Thailand in October, released a joint statement conveying its support of the programs being undertaken to protect, conserve, and sustainably manage rich marine and terrestrial resources such as the Heart of Borneo and Coral Triangle Initiatives, and directed the concerned ministries to strengthen collaborative actions in protecting the environment.

The statement also welcome Brunei Darussalam’s offer to host a ministerial conference focusing on the Heart of Borneo, particularly in supporting global efforts to address climate change and help ensure a successful and workable outcome at the forthcoming Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December, 2009.

WWF’s Heart of Borneo Initiative Leader, Adam Tomasek, said he was encouraged by the local and regional support so publicly articulated at both meetings.

“As the world struggles with global climate change, it is vital for the governments of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia to position the HoB Initiative as part of the solution,” he said.

WWF Director General Jim Leape visits Heart of Borneo

WWF Director General (4th from right, back row) explored the Heart of Borneo for the first time in October and was impressed by what he saw, both in terms of conservation outcomes and WWF staff dedication to the cause. “Via the Heart of Borneo Initiative, WWF has proven the power of how a solutions-oriented approach can work. We must continue to use the power of our vast Network to overcome some very daunting challenges,” he said.
Peatland project in Brunei on track for 2010

The planning phase for a project in the HoB to rehabilitate degraded peatlands, reduce CO₂ emissions and help mitigate climate change is on track for delivery of its final report next year, according to project director, Dr Jon Davies.

The ultimate goal of the project is to reduce CO₂ emissions, fire and smog by creating awareness on the wise use and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands.

According to Dr Davies, most of Brunei’s peatlands are within the HoB area and are largely intact. Moreover, Brunei peatlands are net carbon dioxide absorbers and hence very important in terms of mitigating climate change.

However, peatlands are also very fragile ecosystems. Once they are drained for logging and agriculture, the peat starts to decompose and dry out and releases carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. In the process they lose their carbon-accumulating ability, flood control function and much of the biodiversity is lost.

“They also become very susceptible to fire and are major contributors to the haze that envelopes parts of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei during dry periods. The carbon dioxide released to the atmosphere from peatland drainage and fires in SE Asia is a major global contributor to climate change,” Dr Davies explained.

Rehabilitation of peatlands requires restoration of the hydrological regime (raising of the water table) by blocking canals, which will improve land’s humidity. Followed by reforestation of the degraded areas.

Experience in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia has shown that peatland rehabilitation is viable and very cost-effective in contrast to other carbon emission reduction schemes.

The two year project is jointly funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the UK and the Standard Chartered Bank, and strengthens regional cooperation by integrating peatlands experts from Indonesia and Malaysia in the studies.

Standard Chartered Bank sponsors forest survey in Brunei’s HoB region

Standard Chartered Bank in partnership with WWF and the Heart of Borneo Council has announced its sponsorship of a faunal biodiversity survey of the Sungei Ingei Protected Forest.

The survey project is the first of its kind in the Sungei forest and promises to reveal much about the biodiversity treasures to be found in the area.

According to the leader of the survey, Dr Joseph K. Charles, from the Faculty of Science, University Brunei Darussalam, Brunei’s HoB region is home to some of the most biologically diverse forest habitats in the world with amazing wildlife.

“It is a major hotspot for global biodiversity. The faunal survey will gather necessary scientific data to enable us to better manage Brunei’s natural habitats and their wildlife. Over a period of approximately two years, much of the vertebrate and invertebrate fauna will be surveyed through two major expeditions.

Speaking at the launch of the survey proposal, Danny Quah, CEO of Standard Chartered Bank said the bank had a strong focus on sustainability and the environment, and urged the community in Brunei to take steps to ramp up efforts for positive changes towards our environment.

Dr Glyn Davies, Director of Programmes with WWF-UK, also at the launch added: “Borneo is indeed nature’s Treasure Island and Brunei is its splendid green jewel. As the world wakes up to the importance of forests in combating climate change, the conservation of the Heart of Borneo is being recognised as a crucial part of this effort.

Standard Chartered Bank’s funding for this Heart of Borneo Project is part of the US$500,000 prize donation from the Race For A Living Planet campaign which Brunei won in 2008.

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Building Indonesia’s future generation in the border region

On 17 October 2009, the Heart of Borneo Program, in collaboration with national foundation, Yayasan Sampai, organized a national seminar entitled Building Indonesia’s Future Generation at the Border of Indonesia-Malaysia in Kalimantan.

The seminar aimed to gain ideas and recommendations on how the government should govern the border area in relation to poverty reduction, improvement of education, health issues, conservation and the economy.

The seminar was opened by Vice People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) of Indonesia, Mrs. Hj. Meilani Leimena Suharli and presented experts and officials of different expertise, both national and from Kalimantan.

The result of the seminar was brought to the president to be considered in the new cabinet's workplan.

An experts’ forum, held as part of the seminar was attended by members of People's Consultative Assembly of Indonesia (MPR) and Legislative (DPR), who recommended further workshops be held to have in-depth discussions on infrastructure, ecotourism and bio-prospects.

It was concluded at the end of the seminar, that development of the border must not only be based on “prosperity and security” but now it needs to include conservation value as an important element for border governance.

This commitment further strengthens the trans-boundary conservation and sustainable development principles.

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Orangutan school campaign in the remote Heart of Borneo

About 300 students from 7 schools in Batang Lupar, Kapuas Hulu District, West Kalimantan, participated in the orangutan campaign organized by WWF-Indonesia West Kalimantan Program Office from 10-12 September 2009.

This educational campaign leveraged students’ knowledge, skill and creativity through class sessions, quizzes, film screening, writing, drawing and sports competitions, traditional games, photography and film documentaries.

The orangutan conservation school campaign is the third of its kind, with the first being organized in Ukit-ukit Village in September 2008 and in Nanga Leboyan, October 2008.

Those areas are villages located along Labian-Leboyan River, a natural link between Betung Kerihun National Park and Danau Sentarum National Park. Unfortunately several forest areas and orangutan habitats linking the two parks have become fragmented.

At least 2000 orangutans (Pongo pygmaeus pygmaeus sub-species) are found in Betung Kerihun National Park and Danau Sentarum National Park, two important Heart of Borneo national parks.

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Charting the future of indigenous empowerment in Borneo

by Dora Jok & Cristina Eghenter

Recent meetings between WWF and leaders from FORMADAT* - the Alliance of Indigenous People of the Highlands of Borneo - have set the scene to forge a strong partnership on trans-boundary issues led by this important indigenous advocacy organization.

Key decisions reached at the meeting in Kuching included more organized and collaborative efforts among the communities in Malaysia and Indonesia on trans-boundary tourism and organic agriculture.

In addition a strategy was developed for a ‘Visit the HoB Year’ in 2012 and participation of FORMADAT in the Rainforest World Music Festival in Kuching, July 2010.

FORMADAT is recognized as a strategic partner of the HoB initiative and WWF supports these grassroots communities as leaders for effective action for trans-boundary conservation and sustainable development.

Sabah’s REDD workshop generates policy outcomes

by Rashidah Maqbool

Sabah Forestry Department (SFD) in collaboration with WWF Malaysia held a REDD workshop in Sandakan, in August. The aim of the workshop was to generate awareness, improve knowledge and build capacity on forest and carbon issues.

The workshop successfully:

1. Obtained the most recent and updated information on the Climate Change Negotiations at the UNFCCC pertaining to tropical forest mitigation efforts;
2. Deliberated on forest climate mitigation options from the ongoing compliance market to the voluntary market;
3. Detailed our options for financing voluntary carbon projects and credible carbon standards for full implementation in Sabah;
4. Harmonized and mainstreamed forest climate mitigation actions in Sabah for credible policy (Sabah Development Corridor); and
5. Reviewed viable options/activities for REDD implementation in Sabah.

Information presented at the workshop will contribute to Sabah State Policy on REDD and Carbon Projects.

“The FORMADAT that we established in 2004 is a forum in our own backyard to serve the interests of all of us who live along the border of the Borneo highlands. It unites us in one fellowship, one thought, one journey, to look after our homeland, our rights. This place we call patar dita’ (highland) Borneo is the only homeland we the Lundayeh, Kelabit, Lun Bawang and Sa’ban have. We have no other homeland, save the patar dita’ Borneo where we have lived for generations,” said Lewi Gala P, the customary leader of Krayan Hulu area and Head of the FORMADAT-Indonesia

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* Forum Masyarakat Adat Dataran Tinggi Borneo

Participation of indigenous groups in international music festivals empowers them to preserve and celebrate their culture with a global audience. Photo: © WWF-Malaysia / Dora JOK
Once the values have been identified, only then can the management prescriptions be put in place to manage and monitor the areas.

In pushing HCVF in the Sabah region, WWF-Malaysia has been working with relevant stakeholders to establish a Sabah HCVF Resource Group. Information gathered from this assessment will provide the base for a full scale HCVF assessment in the near future.

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MoU signed for restoration of Orangutan Habitat in Heart of Borneo

A five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between WWF-Malaysia and the Sabah state government has been signed to restore 967 hectares of degraded orangutan habitat within the Heart of Borneo.

The MoU for the project - made possible with RM4.35 million contributed by ITOCHU Corporation of Japan - was signed during a regional forum on ‘Enhancing forest ecosystems and corridors within the Heart of Borneo in Sabah, Oct 26-27.

Opening the forum, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman, said the state was very serious about conserving its forests and very committed to the Heart of Borneo, adding that 250,000 hectares of forest had already been set aside for conservation. However, he said financing remained a crucial subject. To this end he thanked the Malaysian Federal government for its contribution of RM5 million to the Sabah Forestry Department to kick-start programme implementation - but stated that it was the hope of the Sabah state government that ‘friends’ from European countries and the USA could lend support to this endeavour.

WWF’s Heart of Borneo Initiative Leader, Adam Tomasek, congratulated the Sabah state government’s commitment to the Heart of Borneo and emphasised his gratitude to Japan’s ITOCHU Group for its generous contribution.

“These funds are vital for the restoration of a high priority landscape and long-term viability for orangutans. Healthy forest ecosystems are a priority for the three country Heart of Borneo initiative, and Sabah is providing a strong leadership example of working with the international community to realize this goal”

"ITOCHU’s support is a clear sign of Japanese interest in the Heart of Borneo and as host of the 2010 UN Convention on Biological Diversity conference we look forward to profiling this growing partnership between governments and the private sector,” Mr Tomasek said.
HoB, new ecotourism destination
by Hermas Rintik Maring

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of global tourism and WWF-Indonesia’s staff in West Kalimantan, are looking to capitalize on this growth by forming a group called KOMPAKH to promote tourism in the region.

Remotely located deep in the Heart of Borneo, Kapuas Hulu District offers adventurous tourism opportunities as a destination for its original culture and nature. The Kapuas Hulu region is a conservation district containing two internationally known national parks - Betung Kerihun and Danau Sentarum.

The government of Kapuas Hulu and WWF helped to promote and facilitate KOMPAKH with operators, agencies and even individual tourists. In particular, WWF assisted KOMPAKH to engage a prominent German-based travel agent, which significantly boosted tourist numbers.

KOMPAKH is providing an effective ‘bridging’ agent between interested tourism agency/groups, tourists and the local community.

“This is our commitment together to help facilitate alternative income for our community, especially for those who live in and around the forest,” said Hubertus Tengkirang, a local member of KOMPAKH team.

Information regarding KOMPAKH promotion and marketing activity is accessible on www.kompakh.org.

Bukit Baka Bukit Raya National Park’s 20-year plan moves to final phase

One of Indonesia’s important national parks in Heart of Borneo, Bukit Baka Bukit Raya National Park, located between West and Central Kalimantan, will soon finalize its long-term management plan.

One priority task to handle by the park management is the boundary of the area. Currently the park boundaries are not yet finalized, a few points on maps and on the ground are not synchronized, especially with production forests and community lands, both in the West and Central Kalimantan.

Bukit Baka Bukit Raya National Park is still a largely intact wilderness, especially along Swhanner mountain range with steep topography in parts of West Kalimantan. The national park is situated adjacent to timber concession areas and some villages whose communities still carry out swidden farming, forest product gathering and hunting. The hills are headwaters of some tributaries and waterfalls. The diversity of these locations means the area still requires proper zonation.

Since Bukit Baka Bukit Raya National Park is recognized priority of Heart of Borneo Program’s Strategic Plan of Action for three countries, it is now more important than ever to ensure that plans for the park are coordinated with regional plans and aspirations.

The areas of cooperation between Bukit Baka Bukit Raya National Park and Heart of Borneo Program include:

1. Advocacy on management policy: such as effectiveness of park management, improving the status of the region, as well as cross-border management.
2. Strengthening information systems, park management and joint tourism development with neighboring protected area management in the Heart of Borneo.
3. Strengthening the role and benefits for local community, particularly on policy and implementation of cooperation (including community-based tourism development).
4. Involving private sector in the management area, such as investment in tourism sector, research, and development of other livelihood alternatives.

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