

## **Contribution to discussion 22 January, re: Synergy intro paper by Izabella Koziell**

**By Miriam van Heist**

The paragraph 'each data set...may not be easily understandable to the other party. Perhaps we need a cadre of interpreters....' triggered the following response: I would be very interested to hear about experiences with 'interpreting/ translating' survey data back to communities and vv, since we are considering a follow-up phase for the biodiversity work Doug Sheil has described earlier during this e-workshop for Malinau, east Kalimantan.

We have an extensive amount of information in which to assess what is important for several communities in Malinau. Especially important to us as researchers is the fact that we can now in many cases also place these data from local communities in relation to detailed biophysical information about a previously un-researched region. Further research, management and conservation suggestions can take into account what is relevant for local people and thus might be more effective.

Once we have interpreted the data, specifically those on 'importance of landscape units and resources to local people', we still need to cross check with the communities if they 'recognise themselves' in these interpretations before the results 'start living a life of their own'. This is a challenge in itself and we hope we can find some of the people who worked with us willing and interested to be intermediaries.

But 'what is in it for them'? In what way can (results from) our survey be beneficial to local communities? We were always hoping that our survey would eventually help to make local people's views on their surrounding land and resources more explicit and understandable for 'outsiders', (local) policy/decision makers and companies, assuming/hoping they would thus be more likely taken into account.

But who will/should do the communication with those outsiders? One option is 'us': CIFOR has already good relations with local government, who is asking for input in management plans for the area and so there is a ready 'reception' for information gathered from our survey.

But wouldn't it be better/more sustainable if communities themselves were (assisted in) presenting their views? So far people in our study area have little experience in voicing their views, but at the same time, they have already indicated that our many questions have made them more aware of what is important in the landscape surrounding them, and say that implicit value has become more explicit to them. In times of negotiations over land and its use that is very important.

How can we (and our survey results) be of help with that? Do we have (relevant and) enough information? Can we present it to the communities in a clear/digestible/fun way? What training (and of whom?) is needed to make people better prepared for negotiations with outsiders?

The best example of 'synergy between ecological researchers and local communities' I have seen so far is Patricia Shanley's work in Brazilian Amazone, described in Shanley, P. (1999) Extending Ecological Research To Meet Local Needs: A Case From Brazil. FAO website.

I think crucial elements were:

- Resources that were surveyed were selected by communities themselves, because of their economic potential. That way, people's interest is secured from the start;
- Patricia lived for several years with the communities and thus learned to understand their outlook on life, what was important to them and 'their kind of communication';
- Methods to monitor the resources production were developed together with communities from the start and kept simple, but robust ;

- Presentation of (intermediate) results was totally adapted to education/ understanding level of audience and because people saw data presented in an early stage, they realised what they could do with the data and became much more aware of resource consumption levels (both subsistence and market oriented) and its value to them;
- Results proved immediately relevant and useful for actual choices: people could now compare costs and benefits between 'selling trees out to a logging company' and 'saving them for long term fruit production'.