

‘Mandah’ with Mat Cengkong, Deep in the Forest for Damar

To collect damar resin, Mat Cengkong and his family have to go deep into the forest and “mandah” for about ten days (mandah means living in the forest using a plastic tarp as a tent). The damar comes from the resin of *Shorea Sp* tree species. As a non-timber forest product (NTFP), damar resin has potential to be an alternative source income for the Batin Sembilan indigenous people. Most damar resin is produced by tapping trees; however, some is collected in fossilized form from the ground. Damar resin has economic value for industrial needs, such as cosmetics and paint ingredients. Mat Cengkong is one of the fifteen heads of the Batin Sembilan Kandang Rebo Bawah Bedaro group who collects damar resin from Hutan Harapan with their families every month.

Mat Cengkong, his wife Yu Er, and their three children enter the forest after breakfast. The Ambung (basket from rattan) contains food, drinking water, machetes, and empty sacks that are a must for Mat Cengkong and his family. They walk in a neat line along the forest floor, looking for fallen trees, such as Kempas, Meranti, and Kruing. Around these fallen trees damar resin can be found that has hardened and embedded in the ground. They take the resin which is the shape of pale yellow stones by digging it out of the ground using a machete. The collected resin is transported in 50kg sacks. If at one location they are not able to collect a full bag of resin, Mat Cengkong and his family will move onto another location.

Around 15 sacks (700kg) of resin are collected during a “mandah”. The resin is sold to Hutan Harapan for IDR 2,300 /kg (0.16 USD). Hutan Harapan helps transport the damar resin that has been collected to the base camp for weighing. In April 2020, PT REKI bought four tons of damar resin from the Batin Sembilan community.

The income from the sale of damar resin is used by Mat Cengkong and his family to buy daily necessities, such as rice and cooking oil. “Collecting damar resin in Hutan Harapan is important for the Batin Sembilan’s livelihoods. We hope that the forests remain forever, so we don’t lose our livelihoods,” said Yu Ris.

Indeed, Hutan Harapan’s purchase of damar resin from the Batin Sembilan community is part of efforts to encourage them improve their livelihoods while taking an active role in protecting the forests from the threat of land clearing. **(Syafrizal)**



Closing Road Access to Illegal Oil Drilling

Located on the border between Hutan Harapan in Sarolangun and an industrial plantation forest concession (HTI), the old oil wells have attracted the attention of illegal oil drillers from Jambi and South Sumatra. The oil wells have already been sealed by the government, but the prospect of making some quick money from the sale of low quality unrefined oil overrode any concern about the legality of their activities.

Although the wells are not in Hutan Harapan, the easiest access route is through Hutan Harapan. Previously, four-wheeled vehicles and trucks carrying large empty water reservoirs travelled in and out of Hutan Harapan area without permission. The Hutan Harapan guard post team recorded the number of vehicles, the driver’s identity and gave warnings. These appeals were ignored, however, as it became apparent that some of the vehicles were backed up by powerful individuals. Nevertheless, in 2020, road access has been closed and there is now 24 hour surveillance to ensure that no vehicles pass through Hutan Harapan.

“Even though the illegal oil mining activities are not located in Hutan Harapan area, but because the trucks use our road it will have a negative impact on Hutan Harapan, so we are obliged to stop activities related to illegal oil mining,” said Adam, Director of Operations PT Restorasi Ekosistem Indonesia.

In addition to closing the access gate, the forest protection team also conducts monthly patrols to the border area where the oil well field is located. “We must not be careless because illegal oil miners always have many ways to find road access,” explained Saparudin, from the Forest Protection team. Up until mid-2020, there have been no further attempts to gain access via Hutan Harapan roads to oil mining in the Sarolangun border area, Jambi. **(HOS)**

REPLACING PALM OIL TREES WITH RUBBER TREES

It took a year for Solimin to come to a decision to replace his palm oil trees with rubber trees. This was driven by his own awareness that his life and family could not be separated from the forest. “Because basically we live in the forest, we will go back to the forest,” said Solimin.

Solimin’s home is already surrounded by palm oil trees owned both by a company and other residents in the Simpang Macan Luar area. Solimin, a father of eight children, even worked as a labourer in a palm oil plantation from 2005-2019 as he felt the steady employment would be the best way to meet the family’s economic needs. As prices for oil palm increased, in 2018 Solimin took advantage of the opportunity to convert 1.5 ha of his land into an oil palm plantation.

His decision, however, was not well received. Solimin and his family were repeatedly reminded by Hutan Harapan’s Community Partnership Team not to plant palm oil in Hutan Harapan because it was not in line with the goals of ecosystem restoration. In addition, Solimin had signed the Forest Partnership Cooperation Agreement as part of the farmer group “Advance Together” (Maju Besamo) in Simpang Macan Luar where the farmers agreed not to plant palm oil. Solimin ignored the warnings because he was so confident of the benefits that could be gained from planting palm oil.

After he resigned from the palm oil company, Solimin was once again reliant on the forest for his livelihood and he came to the conclusion that palm oil is not part of his life. “Now that we think about it, we Batin Sembilan people are not able to cultivate palm oil,” Solimin told the Hutan Harapan Community Partnership team in early 2020. Hutan Harapan management supported Solimin’s decision to replace the palm oil. The initial process of replacing palm oil with rubber was witnessed by Head of Jambi Provincial Forestry Service, Ahmad Bestari, the Forest Management Unit, Batanghari, PT REKI, a local NGO, Cappa Foundation, the Maju Besamo farmer group, and the Batin Sembilan Community on 4 July 2020.

“Today, a member of the Forest Farmer Group Maju Besamo, voluntarily replaced palm oil trees with rubber trees. Based on regulations, palm oil trees are not be planted in forest areas,” explained Ahmad Bestari. Solimin hopes that by participating in the Forest Partnership Cooperation Agreement and for the sake of his family, he can engage in sustainable farming that will not damage the forest. **(Fahrudin | AWI)**



BATIN SEMBILAN ETHNOBOTANY IN HUTAN HARAPAN

The Batin Sembilan Indigenous People have a long history of gathering plants, leaves, flowers, bark, wood, sap and tree roots in the forest for use in traditional treatments. The plants are used to cure various diseases or health complaints, such as skin problems, fever, diarrhea, malaria and persistent coughs. The interaction of the Batin Sembilan with their surrounding ecological, social and cultural context is known as the Batin Sembilan ethnobotany. It involves the indigenous knowledge of plant classification, cultivation, and use as food, medicine, shelter and customary rituals.

The Batin Sembilan have an in-depth knowledge about the function of plants as food and medicine in the forest. The research team of Hutan Harapan, assisted by the Batin Sembilan, identified nineteen Batin Sembilan plant species in Hutan Harapan and their uses. The identification process was carried out with Mang Rusman, a Temenggung (a chief of the Batin Sembilan). “From the time of our ancestors, if we got sick, we would look for leaves, sap, or roots of the tree in the forest to cure fever and stomach aches. There are many medicinal plants in this forest,” said Mang Rusman.

The forest contains medicinal treatments for a range of ailments: the serekan root (*bauhinia sp*) is used for treating white tongue disease; the Biawak root (*Uvaria sp*) can treat eye pain; the Lempunai (*Palaquium*) treats swelling and boils. The Kalkait root (*Uncaria sp*) is used to treat stomach ulcers, while Mampat wood (*Cratoxilon sp*) is used to cure stomach aches and diarrhea. Sansubal (*Polyaltiah*) is used to cure fever and malaria. The root, selinsing simpai reduces bleeding during childbirth and the Plusu kubu root (*Scindapsus sp*) eases labor pain. The longjack (*Eurycoma longifolia*) treats malaria and fever and finally, the Candis tree leaves (*Callophyllum sp*) are used for dry and phlegm cough.

The plants, roots and leaves are used by the Batin Sembilan because they can easily be found in the forest. Where the forests are still intact they are abundant and easily accessible. Furthermore, they are easy to use; the plants can be used directly by rubbing it on, pounding it first, or after boiling them.

“There are still many potential species that can be used as medicinal plants by the Batin Sembilan community, but specific studies need to be done regarding the chemical makeup of these plants by cooperating with the Health department or researchers in the field of medicinal plants,” said Rohmat Eko, Coordinator of Hutan Harapan’s Flora unit. Eko added that the Batin Sembilan ethnobotany can play an important role in improving community knowledge both inside and outside Hutan Harapan about medicinal plants and their utilization. **(Rohmat Eko)**