

## **Crucial Indonesian river delta at risk due to mangrove degradation and shrimp farming expansion**

**(11.12.2009) Scientists calls for better management of mangroves and shrimp culture in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, to prevent the impacts of climate change in the Mahakam Delta, home to 52 thousand people. COP15 Press conference scheduled 14th Dec. 19:30 – 20:00, Asger Jorn Press Conference Room, Hall H on the ground floor of the Bella Center, Copenhagen.**

Footage of the Mahakam Delta and interview with shrimp farmers, scientists and government spokesman available on DVD at SEI COP15 stand. Contact: Maria Osbeck.

The Mahakam delta was once the home of one of the biggest mangrove forests in the world, which were cleared to make room for shrimp farms during the boom of the 1990s. As a consequence 80% of the mangroves have been lost. Today most governments acknowledge the importance of mangroves in dissipating the force of storms, and tides and waves caused by extreme events like Nargis. Mangroves serve as natural nurseries and feeding grounds for three-quarters of all commercially fished species in the tropics. Their unique root systems capture sediment and prevent erosion. They also filter out pollutants that would otherwise flow into the sea.

The Stockholm Environment Institute says that flooding events will become more frequent and severe without the natural protection of the mangroves. Embankments that channeled brackish water into shrimp ponds are already breaking down.

Climate change has brought a fresh set of challenges to the delta, said SEI researcher Maria Osbeck. The Indonesia government agencies are starting to work hard on mangrove restoration now, because of the natural protection that it gives to people and the environment. But farmers are still clinging to their shrimp ponds because they have no other option to earn a living.

SEI researchers say that conflicting priorities among government agencies also must be overcome. The Mahakam delta is classified as a conservation area by the central level of government. However, local government authorities still want to use the land for agriculture and shrimp production.

The success of mangrove rehabilitation depends on whether the conflict between production and conservation can be reconciled, said researcher Maria Osbeck.

People are already experiencing the impacts of climate change and we urgently need to address this.

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English Translation of Interviews on VNR;

SOT 1– Pak Syamsul Shrimp Farmer, Saliki Village

I came from Sulawesi and ended up here in Kalimantan. I have worked as a shrimp farmer for 9 years. I used to be able to save a little of what I made to by gold and land. I can no longer do so. My income barely covers the cost of food for my family.

SOT 2– Professor Syafei Sidik– Mulawarman University

There is a great crisis in the Mahakam Delta, which is the ongoing mangrove ecosystem degradation due to land being converted for shrimp farming.

SOT 3– Pak Syamsul, Shrimp Farmer, Saliki village (nb. The two shrimp farmers have the same name)

We are now planting mangroves to protect the embankment as well as for reforestation and to keep the water from reaching the shrimp ponds. They say that if there are lots of mangroves, then there will be many shrimps and the water quality will improve.

SOT4– Arsak Santung, Resident Saliki Village

We want the community to realise what we have here and how to protect the Mahakam Delta so we will not lose the delta or the ponds. One initiative being taken by the Government is to rehabilitate the mangroves. By doing this we will get our mangroves and delta back, but we lose our shrimp ponds. However if we do nothing we will lose our delta.

SOT 5– Dadang Supriatman, Indonesian Fisheries Department

The Government now has to find a solution to co–ordinate all the laws. Fisheries, forestry and land laws must all be co–ordinated. We need a clear plan to divide the delta into areas for production and conservation.

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