



## USAID LESTARI: STORY FROM THE FIELD

# EXPEDITION TO SEARCH FOR BIRDS OF PARADISE

By: Rezki Mulyadi

*The Kamoro people only utilize the forest as necessary and without any commercialization. The rule of the game is clear: if you cut one tree, you must plant ten more.*

TIMIKA-PAPUA Our boat, the Camar Papua (the Papuan Seagull) could easily maneuver the long and winding river, heading to Kampong Manasari, Timika. Alongside the riverbeds, on the left and right, we could see enchanting and bushy mangrove shrubs throughout the journey. Sometimes the boat had to slow down when passing by other traditional fishing boats or seeing the Kamoro women and children that were hunting for keraka (mangrove crabs) on the riverbeds of Puriri River.

Kampong Manasari itself consists of two smaller kampongs namely Omawita and Fanamo. Both of them are under the administration of Mimika Timur Jauh Sub-District, Mimika District. This area can only be accessed by water transportation, either by travelling through the river or from the coastline, which takes 3 hours from Pomako port or from the docks that the local people built near the main dockyards. The journey to Manasari is not always easy as the climate often changes unfavorably.

*“Here we have to really pay attention to the water level as recorded in the water table. If we are too late then we have to push the boat away because of*

*the low tide,”* said Rini Sulistiawati, Communications Officer of USAID LESTARI.

What we had worried about finally did occur. The LESTARI team’s boat became temporarily stuck. The propellers could not spin due to the low water level and presence of tailings from mining activities. Despite the minor setback, the journey was worth it thanks to the warm welcome from the local people of Manasari. The team, consisting of journalists, representatives from the Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA), and Lorentz National Park staff, entered the village to begin the LESTARI expedition to search for birds of paradise.

*“This journey aims to record and portray the potential of Lorentz National Park and observe how the communities protect nature and preserve their culture. Hopefully we could see the birds from heaven, the Birds of Paradise - locally known as Cenderawasih,”* said Rini.

## Customs and Climate Change

The people of Manasari are from the Kamoro tribe that resides along the south coast of Papua, stretching 300 km in the most eastern part of Indonesia. The Kamoro people maintain their livelihood by hunting, particularly mangrove crabs for the own consumption or to be sold. For the Kamoro people, the forest is their “mother” that provides life. Destroying the forest means destroying life.

Similar to other kampongs in Mimika, the geography of Manasari village consists of village settle-

ments and the forest. The people highly regard their customs in maintaining a balanced life. According to Azis Usman, one of the staff of the Mimika Timur Jauh District assigned in Manasari, the people of Manasari have always protected their mangrove forest, which serves as the main home for the Kamoro people. An environmentally friendly and sustainable livelihood has always been their way of life.

*“Ever since I was stationed here, I have learned a lot from the local people. Protecting the forest is a lifelong principle for the people because the forest is the source of living for their children and their children’s children,”* said Azis.

The customary rules are strictly upheld. Any violation of the agreed customary rules, particularly on preserving natural resources and biodiversity, are subject to sanctions that will also affect the family of the offender. For example, irresponsible catching of turtles is believed to cause children to become sick, according to Julianus Matngarewa, the guide who escorted the group into the village forest of Ufutawi in Manasari. Behind this simple message, there is a logical meaning of conservation. The Kamoro people only utilize the forest as necessary and without any commercialization. The rule of the game is clear: if you cut one tree, you must plant ten more.

The Ufutawi forest in Manasari is a haven for several indigenous birds such as the cockatoo and birds of paradise. The journalists were entertained with sightings of several cockatoos. Unfortunately, there were no sightings of any birds of paradise even after waiting until sunset. *“We never catch the Cen-*



**Photo:**  
Azis Usman - staff of the Mimika Timur Jauh District assigned in Manasari, provided explanation on the Ufutawi forest in Manasari.

**Photo:**  
*Preparing caught Karaka and other fishes to be sold to middlemen.*



*derawasih bird. We know it is endangered and protected by law,” said Julianus.*

### **Different kampong, same rules**

The journey continued the next day to kampong Ohotya. While the sun was not yet high, the sound of the engine of the Camar Papua boat again vibrated along the river. At the docks, the friendly people of Manasari waved us goodbye. Upon exiting the estuary, we could see hundreds of pelican birds that migrated from Australia (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*) on the banks of uninhabited islands. The pelicans migrate to warmer regions in order to reach their breeding grounds.

The children of kampong Ohotya were playing freely in the mangroves while the adults arranged their catch of mangrove crabs and fish in large baskets to be sold to traders for further marketing in Timika. In Jakarta, people would have to pay hundreds of thousands of rupiah to be able to enjoy mangrove crabs. But in Ohotya, the price is less than fifty thousand rupiah. Poverty and lack of knowledge leads to vulnerability and exploitation of the people. The pressure from these middlemen is choking them. At first, it would seem that they were helping the local people, but on the contrary they were not.

The local people were initially given a boat equipped with fuel and food supplies for their fishing trip. The capital that the local people borrowed must be repaid in installments generated from their catch. Being desperate for money, the local people were no longer selective in picking the size of the crabs. What became most important was the urgency to pay back the loan. This situation raised concerns from Daniel Bipowaro, the chief of Kampong Ohotya. He gathered the traders (capital providers), the village people, and the village officials to discuss and agree upon the “rules of the game” to accommodate the interests

of all the stakeholders and ensure sustainability of this crucial mangrove ecosystem.

*“At first it was quite difficult, because the collectors had a certain target and they were competing with each other. The crabs were picked up without any particular criteria, so we decided to set a rule,” said Daniel.*

The village officials arranged a schedule for collecting the crabs among ten traders. All the traders had to follow this agreed upon schedule. This arrangement aimed to ensure a stable price of the crabs and clean competition among the collectors. Another rule was subsequently introduced to prohibit collecting and selling small-sized crabs.

Unfortunately, this agreement has not been officially adopted as an official village regulation. Therefore no firm sanctions could be imposed. There are times when the collectors do not follow the schedule. Nevertheless, the village took an important step to regulate the trade of crabs in order to ensure the sustainability of the ecosystem and protect the interests of the local people and collectors.

### **Aquaculture**

The two days in Ohotya passed very quickly as many new insights were gained from the local wisdom of the Kamoro people. It is apparent that excessive exploitation of the environment poses a threat to the livelihood of the local people in Ohotya, Manasari, and other kampongs of the southern Papua coast. Climate change has also contributed to the change in the distribution pattern of the fish and crabs in that area. Therefore, it is necessary to regulate the allowable volume of the catch and its schedule to ensure sustainability of livelihoods by introducing the aquaculture system.



**Photo:**  
*Exploitations threatens the local communities source of daily income.*

Aquaculture is the farming of fish and crustaceans in ponds, pools, tanks, fish traps, and floating fish traps. The staff from the Marine and Fishery Agency of Mimika, Sofiah Katili said that aquaculture is very suitable for the coasts of Mimika.

*“Aquaculture will help boost the production of the crabs. It saves time, the production is better, and certainly the price would also be better,”* said Sofia.

Whatever it is, the people in the coastal area need a solution that is environmentally friendly, both in terms of alternative economic activities as well as in practicing sustainable management of the business. As aquaculture is a novelty for most people in Mimika, it needs to be promoted not only to the local people but also to the collectors/traders of the catch.

The small discussion in Ohotya that afternoon raised hopes for a better future. It was almost as if the voices of young children heard from the background had endorsed our dialogue. While sipping hot coffee we contemplated the chief’s wise words: *“Nature is God’s possession. If dong (they) catch the crabs carelessly, the crabs would end up extinct, the fish would be gone, and God will be angry,”* said the Chief in closing the discussion.