

USAID LESTARI: STORY FROM THE FIELD

“TOUGH BUT CARING” (BADAN TEMPE, HATI SAGU) AND CONSERVATION OF CYCLOPS

By: Noldy Abraham

“We don’t want another landslide to happen again like the one in 2007 that was disastrous in the Cyclops Nature Reserve. Several bridges were destroyed by the landslide including the bridge near the Sentani Airport resulting in delayed and cancelled flights as the passengers arrived late at the airport and even some could not reach the airport at all. Building an alternative route-during the rehabilitation of the ruined bridges- also took time to set up.”

Landslides and floods are common threats for the people living around the Cyclops Mountains. Every time heavy rains hit the region, the people fear that the same catastrophe in 2007 will happen again. Prayers were offered, hoping that it will never happen again. The people’s concern, of course, is understandable as the Cyclops Mountain is in critical condition. For example the critical area of the sub-watershed regions of Sentani (Hubay) has reached 819 hectares (43.1% of the total area). This is also due to the large population occupying the area of the Cyclops Mountain for agriculture activities in which at least 5,230 farmers live and cultivate the land in the Cyclops region.

These circumstances has motivated Amar Ondikeleuw to find a way how to prevent landslides. He became a volunteer working together with the community under the “Partners of Forest Rangers” Community or Masyarakat Mitra Polhut (MMP). This community group conducts supervisory and controlling activities in the Cyclops Mountains to prevent illegal logging, to control land utilization and mining and other activities.

From his name, people would think that Amar Ondikeleuw is a native Papuan, imagining him with a heavy built posture, dark skin and curly hair. However, meeting him in person, people would be surprised that he is actually a slim, brown-skinned man with straight hair. When talking to him, people would notice his Javanese accent in between his Papuan language

Amar Ondikeleuw was born in Semarang on 25 December 1975 on Christmas day. In 1985, when Amar was 8 years old, he was adopted by Amos Ondikeleuw and was brought to Papua. Amos Ondikeleuw at that time was single and worked as a civil servant under the Forestry Ministry. After marrying, he had 1 daughter and 6 sons, but Amos' treated Amar as his own son and provided Amar with education up to high school. Amar graduated from SMAN 1 Sentani I in 1998. Then in 2004, Amar married Lea Florida Kuasuna, a native Papuan from Depapre –Jayapura District. Amar and his wife have three sons, Abed Arnold Mustika Ondikeleuw aged 9 years, Yulian Imanuel Mustika Ondikeleuw aged 6 years and Dede Yusuf Mustika Ondikeleuw aged 4 years.

Amar started as a WWF volunteer in overseeing the Cyclops Nature Reserve from 2000 until 2006. He did once try to find other jobs, but he returned to work again at the Natural Resources Conservation Center (BKSDA) to guard the Cyclops Nature reserve in 2010 until now, specifically at the Holorowa area.



Photo:
Amar Ondikeleuw work together with BKSDA to protect Cyclops Nature Reserve.

The Cyclops Nature reserve covers quite a vast area, starting from Kampung Harapan to Doyo Baru. Initially the area was only watched by 2 rangers namely Amar Ondikeleuw and John Kopeo. Now there are groups of rangers consisting of 15 people with one of them a women named Nelce Ondikeleuw. The operational costs to patrol the Cyclops Nature reserve is partially from the BKSDA. Every year, there are 5-8 patrols covering the area. However, according to Amar Ondikeleuw, they often conduct patrols at their own cost every month. There are 3 members of the patrol group that often conduct patrols at their initiatives, namely Yustinus Taime (43 years), Detus Klemen (39 years) and Jeffry Kopeo (36 years).

Amar explained the reason why he and his colleagues conducted monitoring rounds at their own cost, "We don't want another landslide to happen again like the one in 2007 that was disastrous in the Cyclops National Park. Several bridges were destroyed by the landslide including the bridge near the Sentani Airport resulting in delayed and cancelled flights as the passengers arrived late at the airport and even some could not reach the airport at all. Building an alternative route -during the rehabilitation of the ruined bridges- also took time to set up."

The patrols led by Amar and the Forest Ranger Community (MMP) of Holorowa is aimed to reduce the nomadic farming in the Cyclops Nature reserve. In a single month, on average they would catch 5 perpetrators that illegally cleared the forest for farming. Some of them who were caught were able to understand and accept the advice not to clear the forest for farming but some others had to be advised repeatedly to finally understand. The nomadic land clearing for crops is one of the greatest threat for the conservation of the Cyclops Nature Reserve.

Amar Ondikeleuw together with his group not only conducted patrols, but also planted trees during their rounds. Amar gave an example that "Kampung Sereh used to be just a bare hill with only wild spear-grass growing on the land, but now many trees have grown covering the hill. Some of the plant seedlings were given by the government, but some were derived from the area around the Cyclops Nature Reserve. The tree species included rambutan trees, jack fruit trees, etc with fruits that could be consumed by the farmers' families or some are sold to earn extra income while the mahoni trees (Meliaceae) are used as firewood". Apparently their success in conserving the area had gained attention and since 2013 many other institutions started to appreciate their work and provided funding for the operational costs every year. As an example, the Environmental Agency (BLH) of the Papua Province provided assistance in planting the area and in protecting the bamboo forest stretching 5 km from Merah Mountain to Iifar Mountain. "The bamboo trees are planted 100



Photo:
Amar Ondikeleuw with his colleagues conducting monitoring activities in Cyclops Nature Reserve

meters outside the border of the Cyclops Nature Reserve as a living demarcation to curb any further attempts to open land for human settlement or for farming,” said Amar.

When asked, what his goal is, Amar Ondikeleuw responded that he personally does not know what his is aim. Do you think this kind of action will be sustainable and continued? He answered firmly with enthusiasm, “I believe that this activity will continue to thrive as many children also are involved with the community in patrolling the forests.”

Amar Ondikeleuw is a straight forward person. His words are consistent with his actions. He is consistent as a forest ranger in the Cyclops area since he was probably “shaped” by his daily experience living in such environment. Born as a Javanese, raised by one of the Ondoafi families (head /chief) in Sentani, Amare then married a local Papuan girl and worked as a forest ranger to protect the Cyclops Nature Reserve and this has made him who he is now. As in a local saying “Badan boleh Tempe tapi Hati Sagu” (tough but caring) , it has shaped Amar as an important forest ranger to protect the conservation of the Cyclops Nature Reserve .