

NGOs fund plantation for small growers

Tifa Asrianti, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta | Sat, 05/21/2011 8:00 AM



Time to yield: A worker harvests oil palm fruit at a plantation owned by PT Guna Dodos in Pelalawan, Riau, in this file photo. *Bloomberg/Dimas Ardian*

In a bid to expand the practice of sustainable oil palm plantations, NGOs are sponsoring small-scale farmers to preserve the environment while growing palms in Indonesia.

Secretary-general on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) Darrel Webber said that his organization has worked with Solidaridad, a social development organization, to finalize the funding scheme that values $\text{₹}200,000$ annually for three consecutive years.

“This sum, the largest single funding contribution ever made by RSPO, is part of a larger fund that Solidaridad aims to generate for the purpose of supporting independent smallholder farmers from around the world,” he remarked.

“Indonesia will benefit from this initiative given the large presence of smallholders and their contribution to the palm oil sector.”

RSPO recorded that Indonesia is the second largest palm oil producers after Malaysia, and 45 percent of palm oil is produced by smallholder farmers who plant palms to lift themselves out of poverty.

Indonesia has recorded phenomenal year-on-year growth of certified sustainable palm oil (CSPO) production, with 200,000 metric tons in 2009, quadrupled to 800,000 metric tons in 2010, to a whopping 1.2 million metric tons as of April 2011.

Alongside with the oil ambition, conservationists have expressed concerns that the swelling plantation would take its toll on the reducing tropical forest areas and the rising emission.

World Watch Institute reported that the raising environment concern has driven more and more governments and global enterprises demanded sustainability certification to palm oil producers.

Established in 2004, RSPO is a not-for-profit organization that aims to promote the growth and use of sustainable oil products through credible global standards and engagement of stakeholders. The organization unites seven sectors of palm oil industry, from producers to traders to nature-conserving NGOs.

Desi Kusumadewi, RSPO Indonesia director, said that the organization had been cooperating with the Agricultural Ministry since 2008 to train regional facilitators who would later educate the smallholder farmers on sustainable palm farming.

“So far, we have trained 40 facilitators and reached out to 360 farmers in Sumatra and Kalimantan. In the future, we want to make a pilot project on CSPO for farmers,” she said.

She said that the certified farmers were the ones who supplied palm oil to Hindoli and Musim Mas, and those farmers worked on around 7,000 hectares.

Webber said that his organization had principles and criteria on sustainable oil palm and the one applied for big companies was different from the one applied for the smallholder farmers.

“We want to help the smallholder farmers on producing sustainable palm oil. We give them information and funds. If anyone has ideas on how to help them, we’d love to hear it,” he said.

Desi explained that one of the differences was the smallholder farmers did not need to make environmental impact analysis (Amdal) when they wanted to open new plot of land, unlike the big companies.

The organization has eight principles and 39 criteria to define sustainable oil palm, with principles include commitment to law and transparency and criteria involve environment conservation and social responsibility.

“For example, we have a standard that growers should use fertilizer responsibly, they must not pollute the environment,” Webber said.

As of January 2011, the organization has recorded 760,000 hectares of RSPO certified planted area and 4.2 million tons of certified sustainable palm oil, or 8 percent of the global oil palm, which is a fantastic number considering that the certification process started two years before.

Webber said that his organization had started a campaign in China and India to promote the importance of sustainable oil palm. He believed that when the two countries had agreed to purchase the certified palm oil, the demand of certified sustainable palm oil would increase.

“The younger generations are more aware of climate change and conflicts. The world is getting more knowledgeable on the products it consumes. We believe that more and more people will choose certified sustainable palm oil in the future,” he said.