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## Where biodiversity meets development: How East Kalimantan is turning data into decisions

When M. Chamidin talks about East Kalimantan, he shows not only his deep connection to his home, but also enormous pride in what the province has achieved: making biodiversity count when economic interests are at stake. As Head of the Environmental Management Division at the East Kalimantan Provincial Environmental Agency, he has helped shape the systems that give biodiversity evidence a seat at the table – and can influence decisions, for example about where private companies can operate. If reliable data shows that specific species are present in an area where a company wants to operate, the evidence can inform environmental safeguards and support recommendations to adjust or move planned activities. Where necessary, it can also help determine whether an activity should proceed. In some cases, this biodiversity data can be used as evidence in court.

The tool behind this change is SIHATI, East Kalimantan's biodiversity information system (*Sistem Informasi Keanekaragaman Hayati*). The platform provides a space for storing, managing and accessing data on species, populations, ecosystems and conservation activities. Until recently, biodiversity information in East Kalimantan was often scattered across institutions. Different organisations collected data, but they did not always share it. Institutions did not necessarily meet to compare what they knew, and the quality of available information could vary. That made it difficult to build a common picture of what was happening to biodiversity – and to use that information when decisions about land and development were being made.

SIHATI has changed this by bringing biodiversity information and people together. Its development was supported by GIZ through the project *Strengthening National Implementation of Global Biodiversity Targets*, on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). The project supports biodiversity monitoring and the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in seven other countries besides Indonesia: Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lao PDR, Madagascar, Namibia and Peru.

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### From provincial data to national action

For Chamidin, building this system is also a very personal achievement. Of his 26 years working in biodiversity and environmental management, he spent 11 years at Indonesia's Ministry of Forestry, dealing with biodiversity issues from the national level. Then, the East Kalimantan Environmental Agency gave him the opportunity to change his perspective and make it more local: he decided to return to his home province and bring his experience with him. He has now been with the Agency for 15 years. "I wanted to come back to East Kalimantan and work more directly with the places and people I know," he says. "At the national level, you see the bigger picture. Here, I can go deeper." His ambition is to make East Kalimantan a pioneer in biodiversity protection by making sure that decisions about development are informed by data on species and their habitats.

SIHATI is also designed with the aim to connect what happens in East Kalimantan with biodiversity planning at the national level. Indonesia launched its Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2025–2045 (IBSAP) in August 2024. The strategy provides the country's long-term framework for biodiversity management and was developed with national ministries, research institutions, universities, development partners, civil society and Indigenous communities. It is aligned with Indonesia's national development planning and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The IBSAP contains 20 national targets.

National Target 15 focuses specifically on bringing biodiversity data and information from different sources and platforms together, making it more useful for biodiversity management. One of its action areas is strengthening the Biodiversity Clearing-House Mechanism – a system designed to make biodiversity knowledge accessible and to connect the people and institutions that produce, use and need that knowledge. SIHATI forms part of this mechanism. It compiles data and experience generated in East Kalimantan with the aim of feeding this information into national monitoring and reporting in the future, helping to build the evidence base at national, as well as international level. That makes the provincial system part of a much longer chain.

**When biodiversity becomes everyone's business**

For Chamidin, one of the most exciting changes is that people who previously worked separately are now beginning to work together. Chamidin explains: "What makes me proud is that this platform initiates dialogue. Universities, government, local communities and the private sector now want to be part of the conversation. Its information can support education in schools and universities, helping students and future professionals understand the biodiversity around them."
That dialogue matters in a province where economic development and biodiversity conservation can come into direct conflict. East Kalimantan is rich in natural resources, including forests and wildlife, but also has a large mining and industrial sector. When a company wants to operate in a particular area, biodiversity information can show what is already there: which species occur, their population size, where they are located and which habitats and ecosystem services could be affected. This information can be considered when assessing whether environmental safeguards are sufficient and if a permit should be issued. For Chamidin, this is precisely where the value of SIHATI becomes tangible. "We need to make sure that industrial development does not destroy what we are trying to protect", he insists.

**When biodiversity becomes everyone's business**

After decades of working on biodiversity, Chamidin feels that he is in the right place at the right time. "This is my home. I want to contribute to the development of my region and make sure that we protect the biodiversity that makes East Kalimantan special." His next ambition is to share East Kalimantan's experience with the other 37 provinces in Indonesia. He plans to present the platform to representatives of the other provincial environmental agencies and national focal points. The goal is for them to develop comparable systems suited to their own needs. Chamidin has convincing arguments: "The system has become much more than data. It brings people together, it helps us learn, and it gives us evidence to make better decisions." In East Kalimantan, biodiversity data is no longer information held by one institution and used by a few specialists; it is becoming shared knowledge and shared evidence for deciding what happens next.

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Registered offices
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GIZ Global Project GBF Implementation

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32+40
53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 228 4460-0
F +49 228 4460 1766
E info@giz.de
I www.giz.de/en

**Author:**
Steffi Noelting

**Design:**
Agnes Weegen, Cologne

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