

Philantopedia podcast

Speakers:

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[Nuni] Hello listeners.

Welcome to the Philantopedia podcast.

A casual and light-hearted chat about the world of philanthropy and sustainability.

With me, Nuni Sutyo, your host for this podcast.

This time, we'll discuss a crucial environmental issue.

And very important, and HSBC Indonesia has already implemented a programme for it.

This topic is actually a common word.

We all think we already know and are familiar with it, but do we truly understand it?

Let's see how it goes.

We're going to be talking about mangroves.

For today's discussion, we'll be chatting with Senior Manager of Coastal Resilience from the Yayasan Konservasi Alam Nusantara. Our guest speaker, Mariski Nirwan.

Iki, how are you?

[Mariski] I'm good, Nuni. And you?

[Mariski] I'm good too.

Iki, as our mangrove expert, I would like you to tell our listeners about this.

We often hear people say things like, I want to go on vacation and take pictures at a mangrove tourist spot. But in reality, I believe not many people truly understand what a mangrove actually is.

[Mariski] Thank you, Nuni. And thank you for bringing up the mangrove issue today.

The topic of mangroves is trending again.

Indonesia and mangroves are very close, we're besties because we are so blessed. We should be proud that we are a country with so many natural resources. One of them is our mangrove forests.

Indonesia's mangrove forests are the largest in the world, number one.

The total area of Indonesia's mangroves is 3.4 million hectares.

To give you an idea of how big that is, imagine if all of Taiwan were covered in mangrove forests. If 82% of the Netherlands is covered by mangroves, that's how vast our mangroves are!

So why are mangroves so important for Indonesia?

Mangroves act as a barrier, a natural fortress for Indonesia's coastal defence.

This is especially important for us, Nuni, because we are an archipelago, right?

We have the second-largest shoreline in the world, at 95,000 kilometres, and this shoreline needs to be fortified by mangroves.

[Nuni] So, mangroves are important because they safeguard us from erosion and other issues.

[Mariski] Yes, that's right.

Mangroves have many functions, but the most direct benefit we feel is their ability to prevent abrasion and erosion, keeping our beaches wide and protecting them from harsh waves.

Besides that, they have many other functions because a mangrove is also a habitat for many animals and marine life.

Without mangroves, these animals would have no place to find food, to breed, or to raise their young.

Mangroves act as a foster home for marine life like shrimp, crabs, and so on.

[Nuni] You've told us about all the beautiful sides of mangroves. But HSBC has a partnership with YKAN in Bengkalis, Riau.

Most of the time, we hear about mangroves in Jakarta's PIK area or Bali. So, what's happening in Riau with the work that HSBC and YKAN are doing together?

[Mariski] Thank you so much to HSBC for supporting Teluk Pambang Village in Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province.

In the last two decades, this area has lost up to 1,200 hectares of mangroves, which is a huge amount.

Studies show that the economic value of one hectare of mangrove is between USD15,000 and USD57,000.

So, if we just take the lower end of USD15,000, the opportunity costs in Bengkalis have already reached USD18 million.

That's how valuable mangroves are.

So why do we work in Bengkalis?

Because the challenges are unique.

There are very open water areas where, if you plant a mangrove 1,000 times, its survival rate is zero.

So, we need to use different techniques to help the mangroves thrive again.

Also, there's a very passionate community group there.

At first, there were only one or two champions, but now, thanks to HSBC's support, we have 170 active people involved in mangrove protection and restoration.

It's a great three-year programme supported by HSBC, and the results are truly visible there.

[Nuni] So you talked about community there.

We're talking about mangroves. We're talking about community. So, what's the connection?

What's the community's dependency on the sustainability of these mangroves?

[Mariski] First, they live in areas adjacent to the mangrove ecosystem, so the relation is very close.

About 60% of Indonesians live on the coast, and most of them are certainly near mangroves.

But there are often economic factors involved, Nuni.

People need a livelihood, so they clear mangrove land to create ponds, or they cut down mangroves to sell as charcoal abroad.

This is all due to economic needs, but what they forget to consider is the impact of losing the mangroves.

We think too short-term, like, 'I need money for school,' and then cut down the mangrove.

But what happens?

You can see the most obvious example on the north coast of Java.

I've been there, Nuni, and when you stand on the beach, you can see the ruins of houses far out in the middle of the sea.

People used to live there, but the land is gone.

[Nuni] It's so sad for them.

[Mariski] In West Java, for example, there's an area where the coastline recedes by 10 metres per year.

In Central Java, it's 550 metres.

The water hasn't receded since the last election.

Well, I hope that doesn't happen in Bengkalis, because we've already started to anticipate and act quickly.

We protect the mangroves that are still healthy and restore the degraded areas.

That's what people sometimes forget.

[Nuni] But that's the thing.

As you said, people tend to forget about it.

We're here in the city, just fine, and you just told us an incredibly sad story.

What's your suggestion, Iki?

How can we in the city create awareness about the importance of mangroves?

[Mariski] There are several ways, Nuni.

We're not actually 'just fine' in the city.

We just haven't felt the direct impact yet.

[Nuni] We only go to PIK to take photos.

[Mariski] But this is our world together. There's no Planet B.

As a former Secretary-General once said, we live on the same planet, in the same boat.

What happens in one area will eventually affect us all.

One of the most important functions of a mangrove is that it can store a lot of carbon. It's like a huge savings account.

[Nuni] I was just about to ask you about that, the economic value of mangroves.

You mentioned carbon trading. So, how does that work, exactly, with mangroves and the carbon market?

[Mariski] We're still waiting for carbon trading to take off, but scientifically, mangroves are known to store carbon at a rate that is 5 to 10 times higher than tropical forests.

The numbers vary, but it's a massive carbon deposit.

These carbon deposits act as storage.

If that carbon is released into the atmosphere, it causes global warming, which triggers climate change.

Everyone will feel it in the city, on the coast, everywhere.

This is our shared world, after all.

[Nuni] When did you get involved with mangroves? You're like the Mangrove Queen!

Compared to other conservation efforts, is mangrove preservation the main priority, or what?

[Mariski] I've only been with YKAN for two and a half years.

At YKAN, we have two programmes: terrestrial and marine.

I'm part of the marine programme, specifically coastal resilience, so we focus on coastal communities and mangroves.

However, that's not all we do. We also work on ocean protection, fisheries and the blue economy.

The blue economy is often tied to mangrove conservation in Indonesia because of economic pressures.

We have to consider what the compensation is for the community if we want to preserve and restore the mangroves so they can still make a living.

If the area is suitable, we can develop ecotourism, like the photo spots you mentioned earlier.

But there are also many other things that can be developed, such as mangrove-derived products.

There's mangrove honey and even mangrove fruit, which can be made into cakes and other foods.

There are also mangrove shells, which are called 'lokan shells' in the local Bengkalis language. They can also be an alternative source of income for the local people.

[Nuni] There is batik too, Iki?

[Mariski] Of course.

[Nuni] How is it that mangrove could be batik?

[Mariski] The colours come from mangrove roots, similar to other natural batik dyes.

It's completely natural and doesn't use chemicals that pollute the river.

This is a natural dye from the mangrove roots and leaves, all converted into ink for batik.

[Nuni] What do you think about public awareness, especially among the younger generation?

Is there still a chance for them to better understand and take action?

What's your opinion on their overall environmental knowledge, let alone about a specific topic like mangroves?

[Mariski] I'm very happy with the younger generation now.

Their awareness is much higher than my generation's.

Surveys show that young people globally truly care, especially about climate and the environment.

So, the seeds of awareness are already there.

What's needed is the information and the 'call to action' on what they can do.

HSBC is already doing this with awareness programmes.

We do planting events, and even though mangrove restoration is not just about planting, it's about education.

We're introducing people to the experience; maybe not everyone has fallen into mangrove mud before, but now they understand it better.

So, the seeds of awareness already exist, and I think this podcast is one way for us to provide information and knowledge so people know that there's something they can do.

[Nuni] That's something we always do at HSBC: creating awareness.

Because an issue or topic whether it's about mangroves or the energy transition, needs a stage for us to share and build understanding.

You can't explain it all in one day; people need to have an experience.

That's why we do things like planting mangroves together.

We also took some HSBC employees to Bengkalis to see the conditions there.

Another thing I've noticed is that sometimes these events can be ceremonial.

I hope we continue doing the ceremonials, but what we always have to do is educate.

[Mariski] That's right. I'm not completely against ceremonials; after all, they help voice a cause and are part of creating awareness and commitment.

Even presidents do it, and Cristiano Ronaldo planted one in Bali, so it catches people's attention.

But then we want to know, is it enough just to plant them?

The main point is that we're pushing for nature-based solutions.

Why?

Because we know nature understands itself.

It knows what it needs and what to do.

But since we've already caused so much degradation and damage, we need to help facilitate the restoration of nature to its original condition, making it conducive for mangroves to grow.

Here are a few general, non-technical things we consider.

First, we have to look at the hydrology of the water, how it flows.

We conduct baseline studies to see where waterways need to be created and how the water moves in and out, and its ups and downs; this is crucial because they need water.

Second, we look at the elevation of the land and the sea during low tide to ensure the water can flow in and out smoothly.

Then, we also make sure the land is clean so the mangroves can grow.

If there are weeds or trash, it has to be cleaned.

The community groups there are the ones who do this for the hundreds of hectares we work on.

After that, we spread the seeds.

But it's not enough to just wait; we have to make the environment conducive for them to thrive.

We need maintenance.

[Nuni] And that's where the HSBC programme comes in.

What you just explained sounds so complicated, and that's precisely why a project like this one between YKAN and HSBC is a three-year programme.

It requires a lot of mentoring for the local community.

So, what happens when the project ends?

How do we ensure the community can carry on?

[Mariski] That's right. The community is the key, especially the people who live there and own the land.

From the very beginning, community involvement has been very strong because we can't just enter someone else's territory.

So, from the start, we've been talking with them, identifying issues together, and jointly formulating solutions.

We share the knowledge with them so they can do the work.

If you go there, Nuni, you'll see that it's the local people who will tell you the story of the restoration techniques, how often they patrol, what they've found and what apps they use to monitor growth and health.

All that knowledge is now with them.

We don't just come and go; we build local capacity.

We also help them gain legal access through social forestry, so they can manage their land and create their programmes.

We even helped them write a development proposal to the government to access more funding to continue their work.

[Nuni] So, they can develop their programmes and their income.

Were you surprised when HSBC first came and said, 'Okay, we want to do this mangrove project'?

Is it something you'd expect a bank would do?

[Mariski] I'm actually very proud of HSBC. It sets an example; not many financial institutions are involved in this yet, but it's becoming a rising trend.

Sustainable financing is one of the issues in the conservation world, and HSBC is doing a great job. I hope this continues.

[Nuni] There's often a gap between conservationists and the business world, which is why partnerships like this are so important.

And this is why we want to go into the conservation side.

Does YKAN see the potential to partner with businesses?

[Mariski] Yes.

There is one of our programmes called the 'Mangrove Ecosystem Restoration Alliance'.

It's an alliance of private-sector partners who share a mission for the environment and understand that it's a shared world, and we all have a responsibility.

In a way, if everyone is better off on a macro level, it's better for business as well.

We all have a stake in it.

[Nuni] You know, many years ago, a lot of people in the business world thought that conservation wasn't their concern.

But now, these conversations are happening in boardrooms and are frequently discussed.

[Mariski] I'm happy to hear that.

[Nuni] Yes, and I'm sure at YKAN, you have many discussions and dialogues with policymakers and the business world.

[Mariski] Yes. One function of mangroves related to the business world is that in a congested area like Java, for example, the mangrove ecosystem can reduce wave energy and strength by up to 75% over several kilometres.

For coastal infrastructure and businesses, having mangroves is a huge benefit.

That's a real, concrete stake that helps both businesses and individuals on the coast.

[Nuni] So, I see two main efforts we need to make.

One is to the wider community: explaining what a mangrove is and what it means to them.

The second is for businesspeople, explaining its functions and benefits for their businesses.

I think it's important to see which sector we can invite into this dialogue and help them with mangrove conservation.

[Mariski] We welcome everyone who has the awareness and willingness to help.

We welcome with open arms businesses.

Some have a direct impact, and some don't.

But with all the functions of mangroves and the shared responsibilities we have, collaboration is key.

Even at the grassroots level, our partnership with community groups is essential.

Without it, the amazing results we're seeing wouldn't happen, and the long-term sustainability wouldn't exist.

So, from the scientific side and the funding side, we're very open to collaboration.

Let's all join together.

You can strengthen the research, monitoring, and technology; drones aren't cheap, for example—to see from the images.

And also, with longer-term funding.

You put it correctly, Nuni: It's not a one-time thing or come and go.

It's not an event.

We're raising mangrove seedlings.

[Nuni] We still have so much to do and so much to discuss.

Maybe we should focus on education.

And, like you said, this podcast initiative is exactly why we're doing this, because we'll be discussing other topics later.

[Mariski] And if you can, please don't forget to protect what we still have.

Mangrove for life!

[Nuni] Thank you once again.

Alright, listeners, it's the end of our chat with Iki from YKAN.

It's been a very interesting chat, and I've certainly learned a lot from her.

I hope you have too.

I hope this episode is useful for all of you.

Don't forget, we'll have many other chats in upcoming episodes about philanthropic stories, and various casual conversations that are both entertaining and useful.

I'm Nuni Sutyoiko, and I'll see you in the next podcast.