

## **Students see more than trees in mangroves**

For many, mangroves are a complex ecosystem. But for a group of students from Yogyakarta's Gadjah Mada University (UGM), the plants also offer a source of income and nourishment.

The students found another function that bridged the sea and the land: Processing the mangrove leaves to make edible crackers.

"We wanted to improve the welfare of residents in Baros village, Tirtohargo, Kretek, Bantul. They have been preserving mangroves in their region for years," group leader Laila Nurhayati said recently.

She said, thanks to the residents, over 7 hectares (ha) of mangrove forest was healthy and growing very well. Together with Nur Dwi L. Kurniawati, Jihan Ulya M. and Afifah Nur Indah, the group decided to make crackers from the leaves of mangrove trees (jeruju).

According to the group's research, jeruju was believed to have medicinal properties and the leaves were sought as a treatment for stroke and heart attack.

"After much trial and error, we finally found the right recipe for jeruju crackers and showed the residents of Baros how to make them too," Jihan said.

The residents were first taught how to pick jeruju and then how to make the crackers.

Jihan said they blended jeruju leaves with baking soda and then added wheat flour, salt, shallots and garlic. The dough is then steamed for around an hour, sliced into thin slices and dried in the sun.

"The crackers must then be fried before eating," Jihan said. She hopes that the commercial production of jeruju crackers would add to resident's enthusiastic in preserving mangroves.

"Hopefully, if the business succeeds they will plant more mangroves," Jihan said.

She believes there is a market for the crackers as they had designed modern packaging, not to mention they were delicious. Besides, they already saw high demands for raw jeruju leaves.

Sancoko, one of the residents attending the training session, said many people sought jeruju leaves for medicinal purposes.

"They said the leaves were good for your health," he said.

He was buoyant about the future of jeruju crackers, as crackers were such a popular snack.

"After being processed into healthy crackers, these leaves will have an added value. They can be sold for more [than the raw leaves]," he said.