



# Our Story

Since 2008, IEF Director Rob Henry has been living in and out of the Mentawai community; he speaks the local dialect and has earned the trust of the people.

Through extensive observational and interactional research, it became apparent that the forced relocation from the forest and into government resettlement villages has disconnected a majority of the Mentawai population from their culture, land and its resources. This, combined with the lack of opportunity for employment and now relying on a cash-based economy, is shifting the people away from a subsistence lifestyle toward a state of poverty.

During time spent living amongst the Mentawai, IEF engaged key members of the community seeking to reconnect with their Indigenous land and culture as a means to prevent long-term poverty for their people. In support, we empowered these individuals by helping facilitate actions such as conducting a baseline community survey, enabling them/us to determine an accurate indication of community wants, needs and attitudes. These findings have been published in our [Mentawai Community Research Report](#) document and have formed the basis of all ensuing community development activities.

Most notably, these findings revealed that an overwhelming majority of the community believes cultural and environmental education is critical for their current and future development. In fact it is believed that this knowledge is

more important to their survival than learning to read and write. Despite this, it was found the settlement communities have no access whatsoever (within their current village system) to this type of education; thus becoming the need for a Mentawai CEEP.

To facilitate the implementation and expansion of the Mentawai CEEP, key members of the Mentawai community established a local foundation called Suku Mentawai. Over the past few years, IEF and Suku Mentawai have focused a great deal of research documenting the aspects of Mentawai culture and their connection to the land that is believed most relevant to their current and future development. This research is purposed for the Cultural Education Booklet (CEEP curriculum), the development of which is well underway.





As a means for the Mentawai community to sustain their CEEP, whilst also strengthening the value of their Indigenous culture and forest environment, we are collaborating with Suku Mentawai in the development of a new system for forest-based tourism called Mentawai Ecotourism. This system is to allow the community the ability to ensure all interactions between visiting tourists, guides, tribes-people, their culture and natural habitat remains respectful and beneficial to their sustainable development.

Late last year, IEF and Suku Mentawai presented this CEEP model and overall strategy to the heads of the local Mentawai Government. The response was overwhelmingly positive and they have given us their support, including access to the Tourism Office space at the port of Siberut Island and commitment to contribute at least 10% of the annual budget during the first 10 years.

At present, honoring our mission to empower the Indigenous Mentawai community by facilitating opportunity to implement their CEEP, IEF has developed a unique campaign strategy that aims to raise the program's entire 10-year implementation budget in just 30 days. Incorporated into this campaign is the release of our feature documentary film, *As Worlds Divide*, which, captured over the past nine years, reveals some rather confronting truths about the impacts of displacement from indigenous culture, the land and its natural resources. The film conveys the voice of Mentawai and the profound importance of their CEEP. For more information, please visit <http://www.asworldsdivide.com>.

Given the intimate connection between culture and language, and that the Mentawai dialects are disappearing at a dangerously high rate, IEF & Suku Mentawai are also in the process of developing a Mentawai Dictionary. Mentawai is not a written language and, with limited access for people to learn how to speak it (it is not being taught at any level of schooling), their dialect is slowly vanishing.

To help prevent this, we've conducted extensive research, established a partnership with the West Sumatran Language Department, raised a small amount of funding and scheduled a research expedition for November 2017.



By achieving these goals and successfully integrating cultural and environmental-based knowledge into their day-to-day education, the Mentawai people will be better equipped to utilise the skills, knowledge and connection to the land/themselves to regenerate a healthy and subsistent livelihood and environment.