

# Project changes lives of Long Napir folks

Long Napir lays within the Sungai Medihit Watershed area, about 90 miles from Limbang, Sarawak, and some 377 miles east-north-east of Kuching, the capital of Sarawak. It is home to the Kelabit community as well as the Penans (who live in Kampung Bahagia, Long Napir).

The communities here live traditionally, in wooden abodes and longhouses, and they used to depend solely on the forest as their source of economic income, besides farming and hunting.

On March 23, 2015, Sarawak Forest Department, together with APFNet and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) signed a tripartite agreement to launch the Community-Based Sustainable Forest Management of Sungai Medihit Watershed, Sarawak. The agreement was signed at Mega Hotel in Miri and was witnessed by then Second Minister of Resource Planning and Environment Sarawak, Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hassan.



The project, implemented on July 1, 2015 in the Sungai Medihit Watershed area, targets the Kelabit community of Long Napir and the Penans of Kampung Bahagia.

It aims to promote sustainable forest management in Sungai Medihit Watershed by building the capacity of the local community, demonstrating innovative operational models and establishing new governance mechanism on community development.

To achieve this, a couple of surveys were carried out. One was a resource survey that was done in the deep jungle, and the other was a socio-economic study. These were carried out by their respective project consultants, with help from field assistants comprising university students.

These enabled the researchers to collect data on both forest resources as well as socio-economic circumstances, which helped in the development of an initial Community Forest Management Plan. And the researches enabled the successful implementation of other activities, leading to the improvement of the Community Forest Management.

The project also saw the team having discussions with the two communities in the Sungai Medihit Watershed area as part of their Community Forest Management Planning. Topics which includes limiting the felling of important timber species for house and boat construction, ensuring only mature trees are cut down, and leaving seedlings, saplings and immature trees to mature.

The team also conducted interviews and field surveys with help from the local community, identified potential forestland to be reserved for the two communities in the area, and created a complete list of tree and NTFPs species with economic value to the said communities.



Through these, the team gained better understanding of the locals' traditional model of forest resource usage before the new method of Sustainable Community Forest Management was introduced.



These led to the establishment of a demonstration site for High Protection Value Forest and nursery of vital species like Gaharu, Sekaliew, fruit trees and timber trees.

They all resulted in the establishment of the Participatory Community Forest Management Mechanism, which saw the project consultant carrying out signing of co-management agreement and conducting co-management meetings with the locals.

The implementation of the Community-Based Sustainable Forest Management of Sungai Medihit Watershed has contributed to an improved livelihood of the local Kelabit and Penan communities within the area. Four alternative livelihood activities were introduced. These include the establishment of Tagang System at Sungai Medihit that encourages sustainable fishing practices, chicken rearing, vegetable farming and upgrading of selected homestay site to be tourist ready. These help equip the to local community with new livelihood skills and increase their household income, while at the same time not depending too much on timber and NTFPs.

Of significant importance to the local community in the Sungai Medihit Watershed area is the improvement of infrastructure. This includes the construction of road from Long Napir to Kampung Bahagia to which NCR land owners in the area have agreed. The installation of solar energy power system to allow for access to electricity for the households in Long Napir and Kampung Bahagia is being built.

The Community-Based Sustainable Forest Management of Sungai Medihit Watershed projects have been progressing nicely despite some delays long the way. The implementation of the project has also helped to foster a close rapport between the Sarawak Forest Department, the project team and the two communities involved. But perhaps a little more time is needed to make sure the project is truly effective in changing things up for the two communities that have been doing things in their own traditional ways prior to the implementation of the project back in 2015.

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