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Viola Schreer & Paul H. Thung

YAYASAN TAMBUHAK SINTA (YTS)
& YAYASAN PLANET INDONESIA (YPI)
PALANGKA RAYA & PONTIANAK
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Field Reflections: Stories of Community Engagement in Indonesian Borneo
Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS) & Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI), April 2026

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Foreword

NOVIA SAGITA
Chief Executive Officer
Yayasan Planet Indonesia

At Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI), we believe that true conservation is rooted in relationships between people and nature, between trust and responsibility. As an intermediary organization, YPI stands in the flow between global financing and local governance. This position demands constant reflection: how can we ensure that resources, decisions, and knowledge flow to those who live closest to nature? How can field-based learning become part of systemic change?

The *Field Reflections* book records the voices of those who are rarely heard: facilitators and program officers who, every day, bridge global aspirations with the realities of community life. They tell the story of conservation as it is: full of challenges, tensions, learning, and hope. In reading their reflections, we are reminded that community engagement is not merely a method or a project, but a moral and emotional commitment to listen, build trust, and walk alongside communities on their path toward independence.

This collection of reflections is an initial step in affirming that a culture of learning is an important part of YPI. From the beginning, I have believed that YPI is not only a place to work but also

a space to learn and grow together. Going forward, I hope we can strengthen our field learning mechanisms and build ongoing spaces for reflection through reflexivity sessions with management, across teams, and even between organizations.

On behalf of senior management, I would like to express my gratitude to all YTS and YPI staff whose courage to write and share has opened the way for collective learning. Their reflections show that expertise does not belong only to those who speak in forums, but also to those who listen at the edge of the forest, by the riverside, and in the everyday spaces of life. ■

Foreword

BARDOLF PAUL
Executive Director
of Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta 2003–2025

I am delighted to write a brief foreword to this wonderful collection of field reflections from Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI) and Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS). Staff from both of these foundations took part in a short, focused training on strengthening social research and community engagement skills. The culmination of the classroom- and field-based learning processes was a writing workshop that brought together 20 participants from both organisations to share their stories and experiences, and to write individual stories based on their direct experience in villages in West and Central Kalimantan.

Several things struck me about these stories: one of which was the variety of experiences each of these individuals has encountered; and the other was their insights and openness in writing critically about their experiences, some of which were quite challenging. One common theme that emerged was the difficulty in building strong and trustworthy relationships with villagers in order to tackle important economic, social, and environmental issues. This is a big challenge for field staff in many places in Indonesia, and is a reflection of our every increasingly fragmented world.

Of great benefit were the joint sessions with YPI and YTS, which, apart from the thematic learning process, provided exposure to the different programs and different ways of working with communities. It was quite enriching and valuable to experience these differences, as well as the common factors they both face and share in implementing community-based programs and field activities in villages. A lot of cross-fertilisation took place during these sessions, as well as informally outside of the classroom.

Field Reflections is a very good and unique example of curated writing from NGO field staff. The value for YTS, apart from the experience of those who took part in the process, is to demonstrate what is possible with a structured approach and support program that supports individual observation, analysis, and writing. So, it could act as an incentive, motivator for other staff to want to improve these skills. This initiative also dovetails perfectly with YTS's recent focus with staff to strengthen their analytical and communication skills, and I hope some of the learning assets can be incorporated into YTS's capacity building program for field staff.

Writing and analytical skills are often very limited amongst field staff. They seldom are properly trained in observing, documenting, analysing, and writing up their field experiences. And it is not very often they are given the time and space to reflect upon their experiences working with communities. This training provided an opportunity for a select number of staff to do this in a semi-structured way that strengthened their individual capacity to carefully examine, analyse, and write up their observations and thoughts.

The lack of good writing skills is endemic within local NGOs in Indonesia. This is the result of an education system that does relatively little to encourage and provide support for developing critical observation and analytical thinking, with associated communication skills. There are of course exceptions, but these are rare. So without addressing the formal education system, this situation is unlikely to change. In the absence of this, what can make a difference and bring about change is for students to study abroad, where they will be in an environment where they can readily develop these skills. The other prospect is in collaborative research with out-of-country institutions, where people are exposed to and mentored by researchers and academics from abroad, or by nationals who have acquired those skills. In the absence of a dedicated effort within the education system, it then falls on individual organisations to provide this kind of capacity-building for their staff.

To conclude, I hope the reader of these stories will gain a deeper understanding of what organisations and their staff face in working collaboratively with communities in Kalimantan, and how they go about overcoming difficulties and obstacles. And in addition, the hidden challenge of giving public voice to field staff to enable him or her to tell those rich stories from their experiences. ■

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Introduction

VIOLA SCHREER
Institute of Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences

PAUL H. THUNG
Planet Indonesia

Across the world, conservation field staff work with Indigenous Peoples and local communities. They build relationships, negotiate potential conflicts, and accompany communities through the processes of learning, compromise, and change that conservation often entails. Through regular interactions with communities, of which they are sometimes a member themselves, field staff build up a wealth of knowledge, experiences, and insights into local histories, livelihoods, and social relations. Where conservation models and programs come into friction with local realities, perspectives, and needs, they are the ones who have to navigate, mitigate, or simply endure the resulting dilemmas. Although often in junior positions, field staff are thus "key actors in global conservation encounters, clashes and cooperations".[1]

The roles and contributions of field staff deserve greater recognition and support in conservation science and practice, as their expertise about community dynamics is essential for making con-

servation more fair and effective. Traditional protected area approaches to conservation have often been exclusionary and unfair towards Indigenous Peoples and local communities. But since the 1980s, the sector has made diverse efforts to move towards more inclusive approaches through community-based natural resource management, Integrated Conservation and Development Projects, environmental education initiatives, and participatory approaches to planning and monitoring. These initiatives, however, have been widely critiqued for a number of reasons, including elite capture of benefits, tokenistic inclusion of local communities without real devolution of power, and a failure to adapt to specific local contexts. To remedy those shortcomings, a proliferation of tools, principles, and approaches has been proposed, such as "rights-based approaches", "community-led conservation", "convivial conservation", "co-design", and "shared governance". These debates are increasingly urgent in the context of international targets for scaling up conservation.[2]

In these debates, however, there is a striking lack of attention to the voices of conservation field staff. Despite their key role in facilitating community-based conservation, they are largely excluded from international policy forums, academic journals and conferences, and the boardrooms of NGOs and funding agencies. Their daily struggles and unique insights rarely make it into donor reports, peer-reviewed articles, and policy briefs. As a result, new conservation principles and approaches are being developed and agreed upon without optimally drawing on the expertise of, or ade-

quately considering the implications for, the professionals carrying out the work on the ground.

To remedy this neglect, this collection of *Field Reflections* features the voices of staff members from two NGOs based in Indonesian Borneo: Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS) and Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI). Both YTS and YPI partner with Indigenous Peoples and local communities living on the frontiers of conservation to support their social, economic, and organisational development and create the enabling conditions for sustainable environmental stewardship. In this collection, seventeen staff members share their experiences, insights, and reflections on what this work looks and feels like on the ground. With this collection, we hope to encourage conservation organizations, donors, academics, and governments to better cultivate and learn from the expertise of field staff.

We call these contributions "*stories of community engagement*", even though in some circles the term "community engagement" has become unfashionable and is interpreted as signalling a lack of commitment to genuine power-sharing. While we support the need for transformative approaches, we find that "community engagement" remains a fitting description of the patient work of mediating, relationship building, and accompaniment through which conservation field staff help translate conservation models into practice. As their reflections reveal, this is sensitive, complex, and deeply personal work.

The rest of this introduction offers some background and guidance on how to approach and interpret the collection. We begin by

explaining some of the reasons why the expertise of field staff is often neglected. We then describe how the collection came together as an example of what we call "co-reflexivity",[3] a process that we advocate to implement more widely to strengthen cultures of learning and critical thinking within conservation organisations. Next, we summarise the stories and highlight some common themes and connections between them. Finally, we identify some key lessons that could positively shape the design and implementation of community-based conservation initiatives.

The Neglected Expertise of Field Staff

Building on our research as members of the "Global Lives of the Orangutan" (hereafter: GLO) and POKOK projects, we identify three main reasons why the expertise of field staff is often not adequately acknowledged, used, or encouraged in conservation science and practice.[4] First, there is a lack of organisational mechanisms and support for field staff to convey their insights to NGO directors, policymakers, and funders in conservation. The extent to which field staff can openly discuss challenges, reflect on their interactions with communities, and find solutions to potential problems depends on organisational cultures, hierarchies, and established procedures, which are often not conducive. Reporting mechanisms, for example, tend to rely on standardised templates which leave little room for nuanced descriptions and critical reflections.

Second, field staff frequently don't have the methodological training to identify, develop, and present their insights in a way

that enables these insights to inform conservation planning and design. They may struggle to write field reports that go beyond formulaic descriptions of project activities, for example by providing more contextual information about why something went well or failed, how they adapted to changing circumstances, or what future risks and opportunities emerged. Informal interviews with field staff revealed that a common challenge they face is how to identify relevant information and communicate it to management levels. As one of the authors put it: "The knowledge is all in my head but how to put it on paper, that's the difficulty. I don't know what information to insert." Consequently, a significant portion of their field insights remain "stored in the brain" (*disimpan di otak*) and don't find their way into formal reports or team discussions.

Third, and more fundamentally, genuine acknowledgement and use of field staff's expertise is also hindered by enduring knowledge hierarchies in conservation. Reflecting colonial legacies and donor expectations, conservation initiatives often centre Western scientific categories, concepts, and norms. These frameworks can have little meaning in local contexts and even conflict with local and indigenous ways of knowing and relating to the environment, for example when they frame "nature" as separate from humans or highlight the economic value of "nature" but disregard socio-cultural, religious, and affective dimensions. To address this discrepancy, conservationists have recently started to acknowledge local and traditional ecological knowledge as valid and tried to incorporate them into conservation efforts. However, there is a vital middle layer that connects and mediates between external and indigenous

or local ways of knowing. This is the knowledge that conservation field staff develop through their work at the interface between different conservation actors. The intermediary knowledge of field staff is seldom taken into account in efforts to make space for multiple forms of expertise in conservation—in part, perhaps, because it isn't considered "local" enough. This is a missed opportunity, because the ability to translate between different ways of knowing and relating to the environment is essential for conservation to succeed.

Fostering Expertise through Capacity Building and Co-Reflexivity

This collection grew out of a training initiative called "Building Capacity for Social Research and Engagement among Conservation NGOs in Indonesian Borneo" (hereafter: the training), which sought to address some of these challenges. Generously funded by the University of Cambridge Social Science Impact Fund (HEIF award number G130539), the training was a means of following up on some of the insights and outputs of the GLO and POKOK projects. The GLO project investigated relations between communities, orangutans, and conservation organizations in rural Borneo between 2018–2023. POKOK was a collaboration between anthropologists and conservationists running from 2017–2022 that used anthropological methods and insights to explore the root causes and contexts of human–orangutan conflict. Based on their findings, members of the two projects developed several ethnographic re-

sources to strengthen social research and engagement skills within conservation organizations. The training put these resources into action, through a series of theoretical and practical sessions with field staff from YTS and YPI in February and March 2025, culminating in an exchange workshop between both organisations. Despite the limitations of time, the training aimed to provide a foundation for developing and improving organisational processes for learning and capacity building. By developing ground-level staff's social research skills, the training ultimately aimed to promote conservation approaches that benefit both people and nature.

At YPI, this training consisted of a full-day session on critical reflexivity and writing techniques for forty staff members, building on Paul H. Thung's efforts at integrating anthropological and other social science methods and insights into the organization since 2023. These efforts have included the development of a system in which all field staff write one story per month, reflecting on something they learned in the field.[5] Field teams regularly meet with their area manager to discuss these lessons and identify any necessary follow-up actions. These actions range from sharing stories with certain YPI staff, to conducting further investigations or taking practical steps in response to opportunities or threats. Ten staff members involved in this fieldnote system were selected to participate in the joint workshop with YTS, including six field facilitators, two members of YPI's "technical team", and two communications officers.

The training for YTS staff ran over four weeks in February 2025 and was led by Viola Schreer. It consisted of an assessment of

training needs (week 1), theoretical and practical training sessions in ethnographic research (weeks 2 and 3), and the experience and knowledge exchange workshop with YPI (week 4). Ten staff members—eight community engagement staff, one communication assistant, and one capacity development trainer—joined the training. Four staff members had previously participated in a training in ethnographic research methods led by Viola and Paul in 2023, so that the participants' background knowledge in social research skills and familiarity with the trainer varied. To build up staff's writing and analytical research skills and foster their critical thinking, the training covered a diverse set of themes, including the (dis)advantages of different qualitative research methods, questions of ethics, writing and analyzing qualitative insights, key principles and concepts of social science research, and alternative ways of documenting and communicating knowledge. During a village stay in the third week, five of the participants applied some of the methods practically in the field. They practised their ethnographic writing and informal interview skills, developed their analytical capacities, and produced a first draft of their field story in preparation of the joint workshop with YPI.

The three-day workshop provided space for participants to share field insights, exchange knowledge, and improve their writing skills through the practice of co-reflexivity. Co-reflexivity refers to a process in which conservation professionals and social scientists jointly develop critical yet constructive perspectives on conservation.[6] The central idea of co-reflexivity is that the development of critical self-awareness about one's work can benefit from shared

reflection sessions with others. By engaging expertise from social scientists, moreover, conservation professionals are empowered to consider not only the way in which individual traits (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, religion, values, preferences) impact their work and relations with various actors (communities, government and business actors, donors, etc.), but also how contextual factors, such as historical and political conditions and the physical environment, influence their engagement. As such, co-reflexivity can be a valuable tool for organizational learning and development.

Following theoretical introductions to the principles of co-reflexivity and drawing on written field reflections that the participants had prepared in advance, they identified common challenges of their work, thought through the institutional and broader political and economic conditions of their engagement, and discussed potential ways forward to address their concerns. These joint reflections served as a basis for participants to further develop their stories. After several rounds of feedback and revisions in the months following the workshop, the results now appear in this collection.

The stories have been edited with a light touch both because the editors aren't native Indonesian speakers and to preserve the individual style of the stories. Since some of the stories address sensitive issues, such as corruption and conflict, the names of some of the people and villages have been anonymized to protect identities and avoid doing harm. Although the stories emerged through a process of co-reflexivity, they neither show a collective consensus nor are they the opinions of organizations. Rather, they

represent the experiences and views of individuals. An interesting point to observe is that the given perspectives sometimes deviate from organizational viewpoints and official procedures. For instance, some staff members describe projects in ways that are at odds with organisational models and theories of change. In other cases, moreover, the field stories refer to internal dynamics and challenges within the organizations. And sometimes they reveal personal frustrations over community responses, workloads, and project procedures. As editors of this collection, we greatly appreciate the leadership shown by YTS's and YPI's senior management in allowing such internal dynamics to be opened up to external scrutiny. This is unfortunately unusual in a project-driven sector, where funding pressures lead to the privileging of simplified success stories that hide failures and other complexities from view.

The Stories

Our collection comprises seventeen stories and an afterword, covering a broad range of topics, which we have sorted into four main themes: (1) culture and history, (2) livelihoods, (3) governance, and (4) education and capacity building. However, the individual stories often discuss more than one of these topics. For instance, the story of "Ibu Rosi and the Role of Women in Village Land Administration and Management" gives insight into local gender roles, while also discussing the importance of capacity building to strengthen customary land rights. In the following, we give an overview of the stories structured around the four main themes.

1. Culture and history

The first section highlights local history and culture as important factors that shape the context in which conservation takes place. This context is often complex and takes considerable time and sensitivity to understand. Sahril Novian Pratama describes a customary rule regulating social interactions in the village where he works, which prohibits guests from entering a house when the household head is away. This sometimes frustrates outsiders as it limits their ability to interact with local women, and thus, for example, makes it harder to ensure equal participation of women in conservation activities. Over time, however, Sahril learned to see this not as a restriction, but as an expression of shared values that strengthen local social cohesion. Abdul Kadir Jailani's story shows how social dynamics are shaped not just by old traditions, but also by histories of external interventions, which influence local responses to new interventions. Implementing successful NGO interventions, Abdul reflects, requires coming to terms with those histories, by understanding, avoiding, and repairing the damage they left behind.

Muhamad Sulthaanan Saputra (Aan) and Effan Dena Musa further explore how local historical developments and cultural norms can create challenges for NGO field staff. Aan chronicles a deep-seated history of internal conflict between different factions within a village, and how this ultimately undermined the legitimacy of the village organisation he was employed to support. Effan's story, in contrast, highlights a norm of conflict avoidance in a vil-

lage of Javanese transmigrants. While preserving social harmony may seem positive, Effan finds that it hampers the development of strong business groups, which he supports in his capacity as field staff.

Alfi Syahrina concludes the section by reflecting on a Dayak belief that, when planning to open up a plot of forested land for rice cultivation, it is important to first wait and look for animal omens. She sees this as evidence of a long-held understanding of the importance of listening to nature and the connection between the well-being of humans and that of other living creatures. As such beliefs fade in the wake of economic and social change, Alfi expresses hope that sustainable agriculture programs can help preserve the values inherent in these traditions.

2. Livelihoods

Improving the livelihoods of the people living close to nature is seen by many conservation organizations as a prerequisite for the protection of biodiversity. For example, they seek to relieve environmental pressures caused by exploitative economic activities by introducing sustainable alternatives. It is also common for conservation initiatives to provide economic incentives for ecosystem protection. Sometimes, livelihood interventions risk reinforcing the problematic assumption that poverty drives biodiversity loss, which puts the economic and moral burden for biodiversity protection on communities, while glossing over the impact of far-away consumers and wider socio-economic and political forces.[7] As the stories in

this section show, improving livelihoods requires a keen awareness of those wider contexts.

Roni Bia Santo observes that conservation policies can have detrimental economic impacts by "creating even greater burdens for lives that have never been easy", such that it can feel like people have to choose between conservation and their economic well-being. He suggests that livelihood projects can play an important part in overcoming those dilemmas. However, he cautions, livelihood interventions can only be sustainable if they don't create new dependencies on external support, but contribute to the development of community-led governance. An example of how conservation and economic development can go hand-in-hand is given by Raja Nammy Petrus Purba, who discusses efforts of a remote community to become economically independent from YPI's support and overcome the stigma of "the village at the end of the world". While his story celebrates the collective action of this community, it also acknowledges the challenges posed by climate change and infrastructure limitations, reminding us that people's efforts to increase their autonomy are always embedded in broader ecological and structural dynamics. This point is also made by Mathius S. Nanyan, who argues that the environmental and social impacts of small-scale gold mining by means of excavators are hard to address, since diverse actors have vested interests in maintaining the status quo. Such conditions make the implementation of alternative economic activities extremely challenging, as they lack support from both community members and the wider network of people involved in the mining activities.

Community participation also features in Elvina's story. Revealing her frustration about farmers' fading participation in a dried rubber program, she concludes that organizations need to accept that they do not always achieve their goals. In this case, the local Dayak villagers highly appreciated independence and flexibility in the way they organise their livelihoods. Elsinawati's ethnographic account moreover gives a vivid insight into how questions of economic dependence and independence are experienced and negotiated between farmers and middlemen. Reflecting on her role as field facilitator within that relationship, she realizes that community engagement is not simply about providing technical solutions. Rather, she suggests, it is about listening and providing a space to speak up as well as changing relations of power and strengthening the solidarity between people.

3. Governance

Conservation organisations increasingly recognise governance as a key factor for conservation success.[8] While "management" refers to the actions taken to achieve objectives, "governance" is about how those goals are set. It includes the organisational processes that define who has authority, how people are held accountable, and how conflicts are resolved. The three stories in this section, all from YPI, reflect on the organisation's learning journey over several years, each highlighting the value of good governance. Putri Damatashia Liana Pratiwi describes how the team realised that the

community organisations they supported were characterised by a siloed implementation of program activities, largely leaving coordination and decision-making to YPI. This realisation led to organisational restructuring both within YPI and at the community level, to place governance more firmly within the community. Cuwita's story reflects on the risks of this approach, recounting an escalating case of fund misuse by community members and her prolonged attempts to resolve the issue, spanning multiple years. From this experience, she concludes that YPI needs to increase oversight over the finances of community groups in order to avoid future misuse. Ghufron Mubarok, on the other hand, takes us to an installation that provides clean water to a rural community to show how community-led governance can help ensure the long-term maintenance of such infrastructure. In this case, it also led to a form of environmental protection, as the community decided to create a rule against cutting trees in the vicinity of the dam, to reduce soil runoff.

4. Education and capacity building

Environmental education and capacity building are central strategies of conservation organizations. While environmental education seeks to raise knowledge and awareness about environmental and biodiversity issues, capacity building aims to strengthen people's skills and knowledge to enable them to manage natural resources and biodiversity more effectively. The stories in this section make

clear, however, that environmental education and capacity building are not simply technical issues, but rather involve a social process of relationship building, trust, and collective learning.

Discussing YPI's environmental education program for school children, Lia Syafitri highlights the need to develop knowledge and raise awareness about biodiversity from an early age. She emphasizes that learning and caring about biodiversity is not something to be done by rural communities only, but the responsibility of all humans. Feronika Desy's story about YTS' scholarship program for rural children and youth reveals the structural conditions that continue to hinder children's access and participation in education, from lacking facilities, to limited access to information, to parents' economic situation. Reflecting on her role as facilitator, she considers building strong relationships with villagers and listening to their concerns and needs as key to successfully implementing education programs like YTS's Kalimantan's Kids Club. Romi Irawan's story about a GPS training program for villagers to better deal with land conflicts similarly highlights that the success of capacity building efforts depends not only on technical aspects, but also on recognizing and strengthening the role of individuals, especially women, in the village government system. His story reveals that when learning opportunities are provided, women are equally capable of handling both technical and administrative matters that continue to be dominated by men.

The last story, by Adinugroho Purbo (Adi), communications officer at YTS, takes us back to the aim of the training: capacity building for YTS and YPI staff. Openly, Adi reveals his struggle to

understand facilitators' field reports and translate them into project documents for management and donors. More than highlighting the challenges of internal communication, his contribution makes an excellent point about the need for organizations to self-critically reflect and develop staff capacities before trying to change the behaviour of others.

Key Insights

The various field reflections in this collection give insight into the experiences, perspectives, and dilemmas of ground-level staff. They also demonstrate their deep understanding of various facets of community life, be it conflict cultures, local gender norms, or economic (in)dependencies. Their skills in understanding, navigating, and communicating these realities are crucial for implementing inclusive and equitable conservation. Unfortunately, this expertise tends to be overlooked in conservation. Despite the recent push for respecting local and traditional ecological knowledge, the intermediary knowledge of field staff often fails to reach higher management levels, governments, and funders. This collection of *Field Reflections* therefore aims to expand current ideas of local expertise in conservation to make space for the knowledge of field staff, which deserves more attention and, if better cultivated and valued, could lead to better conservation outcomes. In the afterword, Liana Chua, who led the GLO and POKOK projects and the University of Cambridge Social Science Impact Award, discusses how these stories advance our understanding of the interface between conser-

vation and communities: by providing ethnographic insights into local contexts, illuminating how conservation unfolds in practice, and demonstrating the value of reflexivity. To conclude this introduction, we focus on three lessons about what community engagement looks and feels like for field staff—lessons that, we hope, can inform future conservation strategies.

1. Community engagement is a personal commitment

Almost all of the stories show the moral ambitions and commitment of field staff. Driven by an ethic of care, they seek to transform both people and environments. Through livelihood projects, they seek to improve people's health and socio-economic situations. Through education and capacity building, they seek to improve people's skills, access to information, and educational opportunities. Through awareness raising, they seek to change mindsets and behaviour. And through support for good governance, they seek to improve people's political participation, agency, and bargaining power. This commitment to improving the lives of others shows not only the emotional and moral engagement of staff members, but also their hopes for a sustainable future. However, the sense of responsibility for creating change also involves struggle. If communities don't respond or participate as expected, field staff can feel disappointed and frustrated. If internal community dynamics hamper project progress, staff can face a difficult dilem-

ma over how to position themselves. And if programs don't work as planned, field staff may start feeling insecure about the approach taken and face the struggle of communicating a lack of success to higher organizational levels. For field staff, community engagement is thus never simply a technical issue, but an emotional and moral investment.

2. Community engagement is a two-way relationship

This is also seen in the way in which field staff approach their work. They see strong relationships with communities as key for successful project implementation. Villagers are not treated as "beneficiaries", but as fellow humans that become acquaintances, friends, and sometimes allies. They stay in their homes, share food, stories, and laughter. Often fluent in local dialects, field staff understand the hidden meanings conveyed in speech, silence, and action. They move through village spaces, gardens, and forests, often far more naturally than other outsiders, including clumsy anthropologists. They sense the atmosphere of settlements, the moisture of the forest, and the noise of cicadas. Through care, time, and presence, they provide opportunities for villagers to raise their concerns, perspectives, and hopes. This immersion in village life builds trust and connection. Community engagement work is, hence, not just about technical fixes. It is about building, maintaining, and navigating relationships across space and time.

3. Community engagement is a balancing act between dependence and independence

Despite ambitions of increasing the economic and political autonomy of local communities, these relationships simultaneously create new dependencies, raising questions of how to reconcile the two. For example, organizations constantly need to balance how they can best support communities' self-governance without imposing too much external control, while at the same time avoiding detrimental practices and outcomes. Striking a healthy balance between dependence and independence is also needed when livelihood projects are implemented. Sustainable livelihoods programs commonly aim to reduce villagers' dependence on natural resource extraction and strengthen their bargaining power vis-à-vis powerful outsiders. Overcoming local economic interdependencies and ties is, however, far from easy, as some stories powerfully demonstrate. Moreover, livelihood initiatives can lead to dependence on NGOs in the form of financial and technical support, political and economic networks, and access to information. This can even go so far that villagers actively seek to establish long-term relations with NGOs, as this "strategic dependence" guarantees their livelihoods.[9] However, the stories also highlight that sometimes it is not the villagers that need NGOs, but the NGOs that need villagers to carry out their projects. This becomes painfully evident when villagers choose not to participate in or leave NGO activities, for example because they prefer to maintain their autonomy and flexibility. The success of community engagement depends, moreover, not only on the will-

ingness of villagers, but also on broader historical, environmental, economic, and political conditions. By revealing the various ways in which dependence and independence are negotiated in NGO–community relations, the collection suggests that this is a key dynamic deserving more attention.

These are just some of the aspects that we as editors read in the stories. We could also have focused on other things that seem key for successful community engagement, such as the role of governance and long-term thinking. However, rather than closing down interpretation, we believe the main value of these stories lies in the richness of detail and context that they present, offering ground for readers to learn, interpret, develop, and test their own theories. Accordingly, following anthropological tradition, we offer *Field Reflections* as an "ethnographic record" of NGO staff experiences and insights at a particular point in time. In that spirit, we hope that the collection will be useful for actors working at the community–conservation interface. NGO field staff and other conservation practitioners may want to learn from the approaches and experiences at YTS and YPI, in part as a mirror through which they can reflect in new ways on their own work by asking "How are our own experiences and approaches similar or different from what was recorded in these stories?". For students and educators, the stories might be valuable educational material that provides insights into the complexities of conservation practice. Researchers interested in conservation labour can develop their understanding of what community engagement looks and feels like for those carrying out that work on an everyday basis, not only as a source of income but as a com-

mitment to improving the lives of communities and wildlife across Borneo. ■

Notes

1 Kiik, L. (2019). Conservationland: Toward the Anthropology of Professionals in Global Nature Conservation. *Critique of Anthropology, 39*(4), 391–419. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X18821177

2 See Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), agreed upon by the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2022 (https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf). With this agreement, governments have committed to protecting 30% of the planet's lands and waters by 2030 to halt and reverse global biodiversity loss. To ensure that this doesn't exacerbate the harmful effects of past conservation efforts, a number of alternatives to traditional, state-based protected areas are being developed, such as OECMs (Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures), ICCAs (Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas), and ITTs (Indigenous and Traditional Territories). In some of these different models and frameworks, the role of conservation field staff may be less central than in others, but we suggest that they would have interesting things to say on all of them.

3 Schreer, V., Thung, P., Freeman, S., Anirudh, N. B., Campbell-Smith, G., Eghenter, C., & Spehar, S. (2025). Doing Social Science with Conservation: Co-reflexivity on the Project Model in Conservation. *Oryx, 59*(1), 81–90. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0030605324000747

4 See https://globallivesoftheorangutan.org/ and https://pokokborneo.wordpress.com/

5 For more information, see Thung, P. (2024, December 2). *Harnessing Place-based Expertise in a Growing Team: Introducing Planet Indonesia's Fieldnote System*. Planet Indonesia. https://www.planetindonesia.org/news/2024/12/2/harnessing-place-based-expertise-in-a-growing-team-introducing-planet-indonesias-fieldnote-system

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7 Carmenta, R., Lima, M. G. B., Choiruzzad, S. A. B., Dawson, N., Estrada-Carmona, N., Hicks, C., Kallis, G., Nana, E., Killick, E., Lees, A., Martin, A., Pascual, U., Pettorelli, N., Reed, J., Turnhout, E., Vira, B., Zaehringer, J. G., & Barlow, J. (2025). Unveiling Pervasive Assumptions: Moving Beyond the Poverty-Biodiversity Loss Association in Conservation. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, *74*, 101537. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2025.101537

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9 Oakley, R. E. (2020). Demarcated Pens and Dependent Pets: Conservation Livelihoods in an Indigenous Amazonian Protected Area. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, *25*(2), 248–265. https://doi.org/10.1111/jlca.12479

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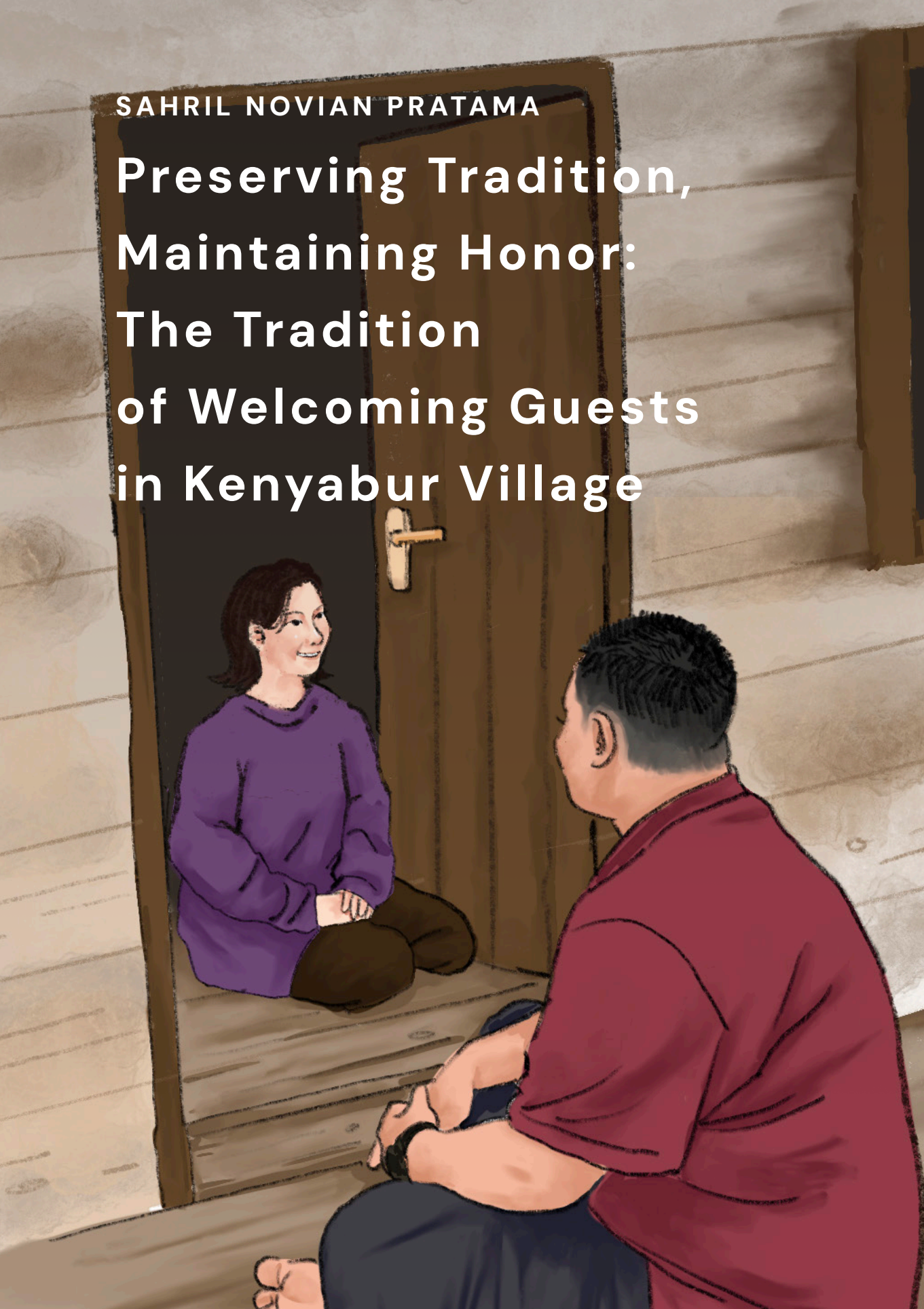
PART I

Culture and History

SAHRIL NOVIAN PRATAMA

Preserving Tradition, Maintaining Honor: The Tradition of Welcoming Guests in Kenyabur Village



"When little, we are carried by the mother; when grown, carried by tradition; and when dead, carried by the earth." This expression illustrates that social norms accompany our lives. This is clearly reflected in the lives of the people of Kenyabur village, Hulu Sungai sub-district, Ketapang regency, where I have been working as a field facilitator since October 2024. One of the traditions that developed in this village is "*sambut tamu*" (welcoming guests), which symbolizes the preservation of culture that has been passed down from generation to generation.

The tradition of *sambut tamu* prescribes that, if the head of the family is not at home, guests are only welcome up to the doorstep of the house. In other words, if a guest comes with a specific purpose but only meets family members, especially women, they are not allowed to enter the house. Any violation of this tradition is subject to punishment in accordance with the applicable customary law. For example, this may include the sanction or punishment of "*membayar tajau*" (paying the *tajau*). *Tajau* is a large pot used as a container for storing things. In Dayak traditions, *membayar tajau* has an important purpose as an absolute requirement for the implementation of a customary law. Most traditional processions in Kenyabur village involve the giving of a *tajau*, as it is believed that the *tajau* can gather the spirit for the success of the traditional procession. *Membayar tajau* in the customary law of sanctioning, can also be monetized. According to the *Domongk Adat* (customary leader) of Kenyabur village, one *tajau* is valued at 2,500,000 Indonesian Rupiah (IDR). The more severe the sanction, the more *tajau* must be paid. In the case of a violation of the tradition of *sambut*

tamu, usually the *tajau* that must be paid is around two to five *tajau*.

Despite the challenges of modernity, the people of Kenyabur still try to maintain this tradition. For them, this tradition is not just a rule, but also a reflection of noble values that are still relevant to be applied in an increasingly modern life.

However, these rules are not always easily understood by guests from outside the village. For those unfamiliar with Kenyabur traditions, the rules can seem strange or even rigid. At times, a well-intentioned guest may feel disappointed when they are not allowed to enter the house simply because the head of the family is not around.

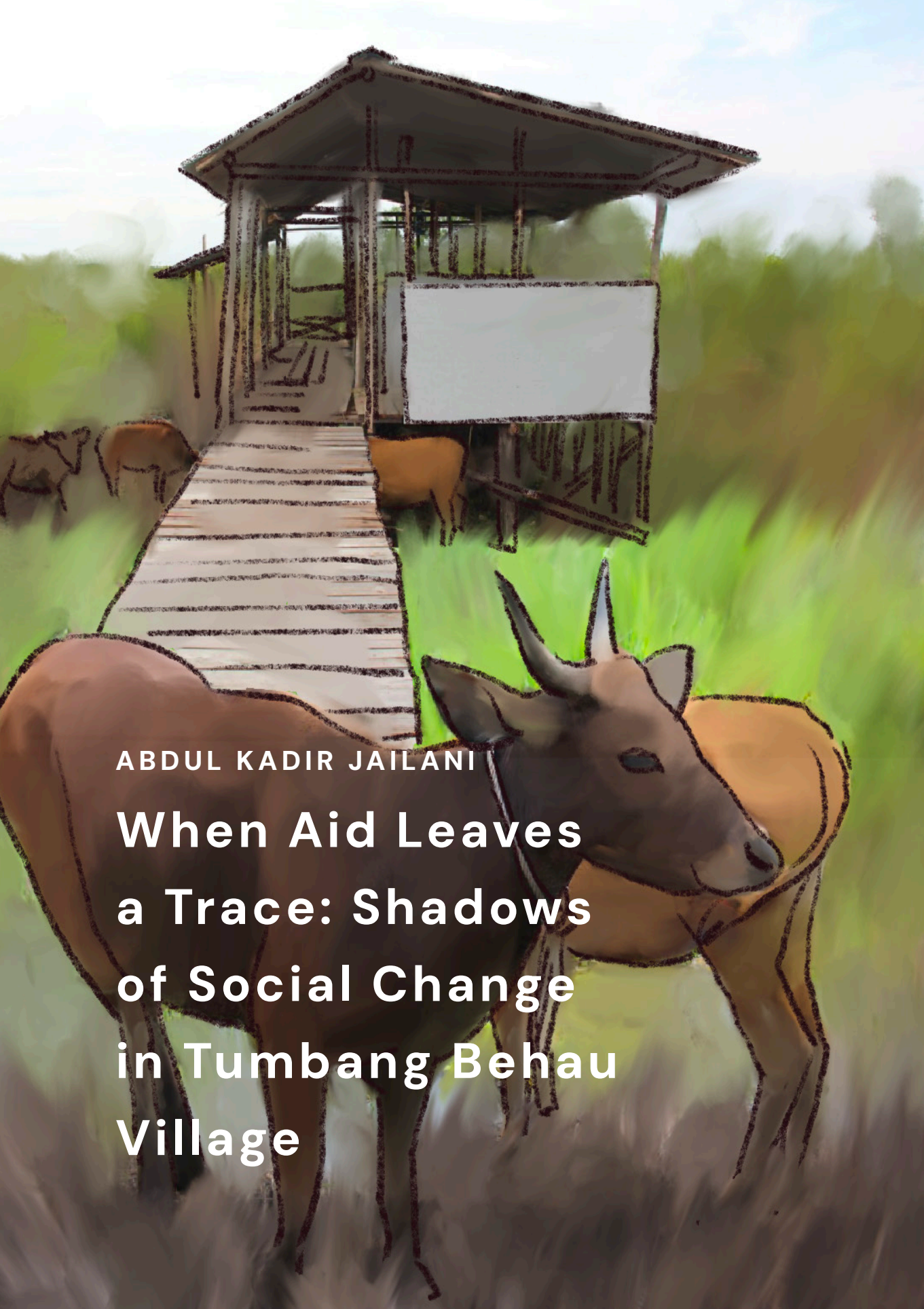
I experienced firsthand that learning about customary law is not easy and requires a long journey. For almost eight months I grew in Kenyabur village, so I gradually realized the wide range and extent of traditions in Ketapang regency.

During my time in Kenyabur, the community has always patiently explained that this tradition is not a restriction, but rather a respect for social norms that have taken root in their lives. The man who is known as Kulan said:

> "We have a lot of respect for women here, both married and maidens. We maintain their honor by not letting them get involved in illegitimate relationships. Even in terms of visiting, if the husband is not at home, guests can only be received outside, and violations of this tradition will be subject to customary sanctions."

From the narrative, it can be concluded that this tradition is not just a regulation, but a social norm that respects the role of the head of the family and maintains the honor of women. In fact, in everyday life, this tradition serves as a reminder that family and community ties are not easy, but must be built in a respectful way.

This teaches the young generation of Kenyabur to always respect others, maintain politeness in their interactions, and place family values above all else. As a field facilitator, I am also well aware of the importance of this customary law, which governs and binds. This tradition does limit personal interactions, especially between men and women. However, this does not affect the level of women's participation in NGO activities and programs because this tradition does not limit, but rather strengthens, group interactions and bonds. ■



ABDUL KADIR JAILANI

When Aid Leaves a Trace: Shadows of Social Change in Tumbang Behau Village

Tumbang Behau village (a pseudonym) is located in a deep peat area, with an average depth of more than three meters. In 1997–1998, when there were major fires in Indonesia, Tumbang Behau village was one of the most severely affected areas. This phenomenon repeated itself in 2015, when severe fires engulfed most of the peatlands in Kalimantan and Sumatra, causing heavy smoke that reached across the country. In 2019, fires broke out again, sweeping across thousands of hectares of land and threatening neighborhoods and ecosystems. Seeing this history, it is not surprising that many local and international organizations have made various efforts in handling fires in Tumbang Behau village. Various efforts have been made to improve the peat ecosystem, including peatland rewetting by building canal blocks and drilling wells, as well as activities to support peat-friendly livelihoods.

The large number of non-governmental organization (NGO) programs entering Tumbang Behau village bring various positive benefits, although they are not free from negative impacts that affect the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the community. One impact that often occurs is social inequality in community involvement. Not all residents have the same opportunity to participate in the program. Usually, programs only involve certain groups that have a close relationship with the program implementer or the village government, so they get more benefits. This can lead to social jealousy and widen the gap between those who are actively involved and those who are not.

Beyond that, external support can create a mindset of dependency within the community. Many people begin to see projects or

programs not as long-term development efforts, but as sources of income. Instead of taking the initiative to develop their potential within the local context, they wait for support to come in the form of financial or material incentives. As a result, community involvement in these programs often lasts a short time and lacks genuine commitment. People are active only while the project is running, but once it ends, they tend to fall back into old habits.

In some cases, programs that are not aligned with local needs actually fail to provide optimal benefits, as in the case of the cow breeding assistance program and the food estate program. Flooded peatlands make it difficult for cattle to move around in search of food and food estate lands have been abandoned because of poor irrigation. Moreover, programs that are based on external perspectives are not necessarily in line with local customs and traditions. Interventions that lack understanding of indigenous culture can lead to resistance from the community or even shift long-established traditional practices.

These shortcomings make it difficult to achieve the intended impact. Thus, many NGO programs are considered failures and fires are still an annual threat in Tumbang Behau village, especially during the long dry season. Among NGOs, there is a popular opinion that this failure is due to the mindset of the local community. According to an NGO staff, "The community thinks that they don't need the program, but the program needs them." Villagers are also aware that some outsiders have begun to "have a negative view of this village", as one village official put it when discussing the frequent fires in Tumbang Behau village. According to this village offi-

cial, outsiders even suspected that the fires were deliberately set to attract projects into the village.

All the traces left by past projects and programs form a sensitive context that needs to be considered in the interventions conducted by Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS). One example is a program we ran with funding from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). This program aimed to increase the selling price of *bahan olah karet* (bokar) or smallholder-processed rubber because the potential of rubber in Tumbang Behau village is quite large. We conducted various activities, such as value chain analysis, rubber plantation mapping, training for rubber farmers, connecting farmers with markets, and providing capital loans. However, the program faced major challenges and the results were not as expected.

As a facilitator, I can't help but feel disheartened by the situation. Looking for solutions, I try to understand why these things happen. One contributing factor is the community's livelihood patterns, which tend to change with the seasons. As a result, interest in rubber-related activities is inconsistent, making it difficult for the initiatives that have been implemented to develop sustainably. More fundamentally, it is possible that we do not yet have sufficiently in-depth data to fully understand the local conditions. Therefore, it is important for NGOs to conduct a deeper analysis of the factors that hinder program effectiveness, as a basis for designing more appropriate solutions. In addition, NGOs need to apply a more comprehensive and inclusive approach, one that is based on the real needs of the community and supported by a clear system

for implementation and sustainability. Only by avoiding and addressing the negative legacies left by previous projects can current programs provide long-term benefits for the local community and help break the cycle of recurring peatland fires. ■

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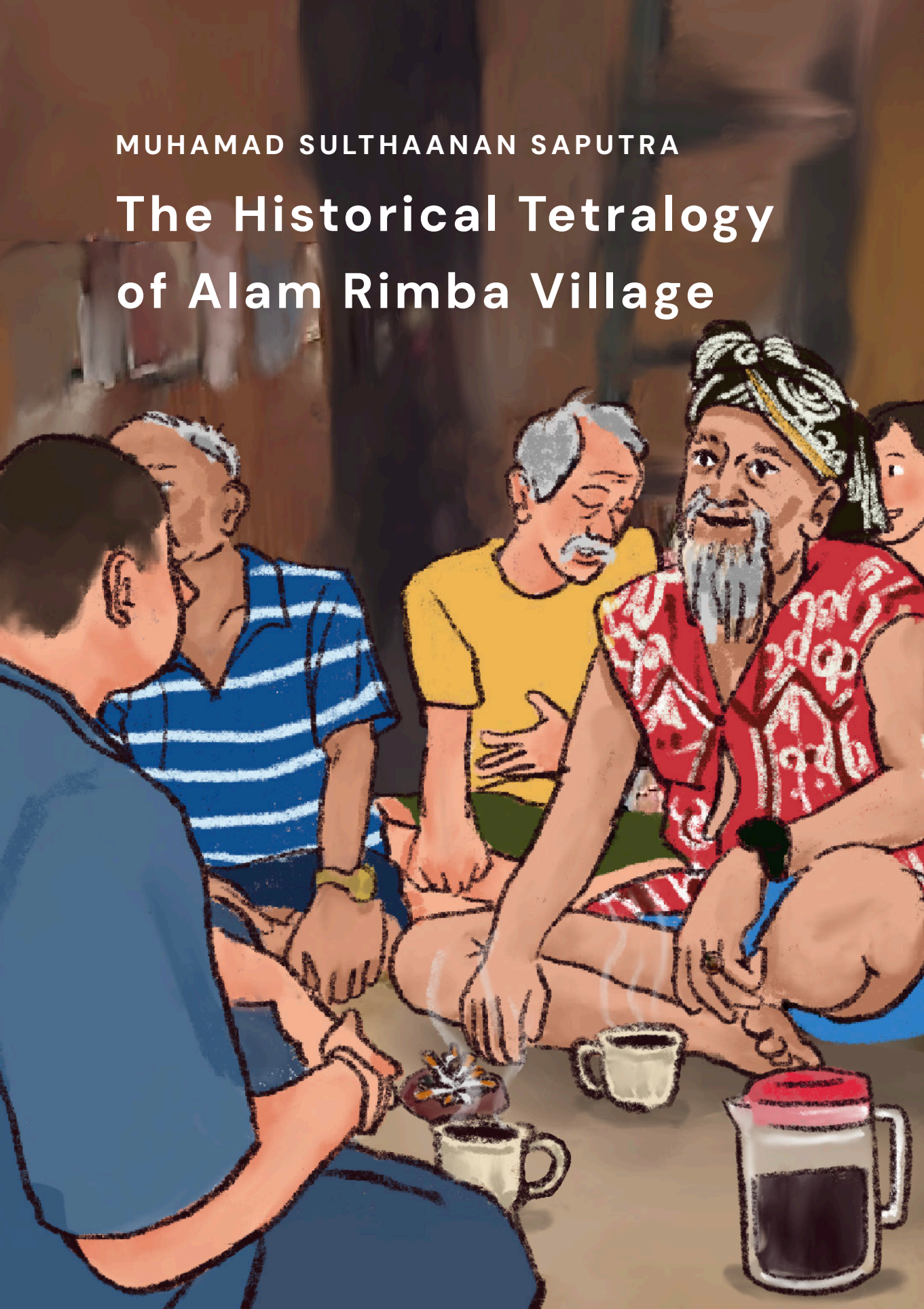
MUHAMAD SULTHAANAN SAPUTRA

The Historical Tetralogy of Alam Rimba Village



We often hear that history is a window to observe and understand past events. Herodotus, known as the Father of World History, described history as a study of the cyclical rise and fall of societies and civilizations, from the past to the present. Studying history can also help us understand current issues, as every event in the past contains threads that reflect what is happening today.

Since 2023, Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI) and the local community have been working to compile and collect fragments of the history of Alam Rimba village (a pseudonym). The village is divided into four sub-villages located relatively close to one another, but each holds a unique set of stories and histories, reflecting the diversity, culture, and origins of the people in each sub-village. Through the initiation and encouragement of the YPI team, a local youth group was formed to write a history book based on the perspective of the Alam Rimba village community. This village history reflects the community's long journey, including the traditions and social changes that have occurred over time. However, each sub-village has its own version of history and believes that their version is the most accurate. This difference of opinion is not just a sign but is part of the social conflict that occurs in this village, which also hinders my work as a field facilitator.

For example, regarding the origin of the community, the residents of Junjung sub-village believe that their ancestors were the first to inhabit the area because they came from a group of people who lived in the area, precisely at Gunung Manis, since Before Christ (B.C.). However, people from other sub-villages claim that their ancestors were the first to establish the village and were de-

scendants of a figure from the Majapahit kingdom. There are also some who believe that their ancestors were part of a Dayak group who migrated from what is now Malaysia, eventually settling in the mountainous areas and valleys surrounding the village. Even the identification of sub-ethnic groups remains a matter of debate. Some claim descent from Dayak Subgroup A, while others associate themselves with Dayak Subgroup B. These differences reflect the variety of perspectives within the oral histories passed down across generations.

In addition, the community has been involved in the practice of "*ngayau*" in the past. In Dayak culture and tradition, *ngayau* is a ritual of headhunting that was once considered a part of traditional ceremonies and important events, and a symbol of a man's maturity and courage. According to stories passed down from generation to generation, the practice of *ngayau* was not only practiced against other villages but also between settlements that have now merged into one village. Although this tradition has been abandoned following social changes and the prevailing customary law, tensions between villages are still felt today.

YPI began its presence in the village in 2019 by facilitating the formation of a community group known as Conservation Community Business Service (PUMK). From the outset, the process of forming this group was marked by significant tension and complex dynamics. During the early formation and election of PUMK leadership, the village head did not attend. The selection process itself was also coloured by differing opinions and strong individual egos within the community. Nevertheless, the group was formed, re-

sulting in the establishment of PUMK Asam dan Manis in Junjung sub-village. The members of these groups were mostly residents of Junjung sub-village.

The village government strongly criticised the naming of the PUMK groups, arguing that the name "Asam dan Manis" was closely associated with the people of Junjung sub-village, who believe that Gunung Manis is still inhabited by unseen ancestral spirits who appear when the people of Junjung face a crisis. In addition, the village government also expressed concern over the lack of visible activities or tangible impacts of the PUMK. According to the village government's perception, they were once promised there would be an effort to release the Alam Rimba village area from the Conservation Area status, which is considered an obstacle to village development. However, until now there has been no result. Although according to the PUMK there have been many efforts, these different perspectives have yet to find common ground.

The long history of Alam Rimba village plays an important role in the current conflict between the village government and PUMK. This history reveals that the village community has diverse backgrounds and has experienced internal conflicts that still influence the current social dynamics. In the context of conflict mitigation, understanding the root causes of these differences is crucial.

More broadly, this case demonstrates that without an appropriate approach, resistance to change will persist, especially in areas with a long history and complex social dynamics. As an organisation facilitating change, missteps during the initial stages can have serious consequences. Therefore, before initiating any activities in

an area, it is essential to deeply understand the historical and cultural context, which indirectly shapes how communities think and behave. This way, planned interventions and strategies will not only address existing problems but also align with local history and culture, enabling the community to embrace change as part of a shared journey towards a better future. ■

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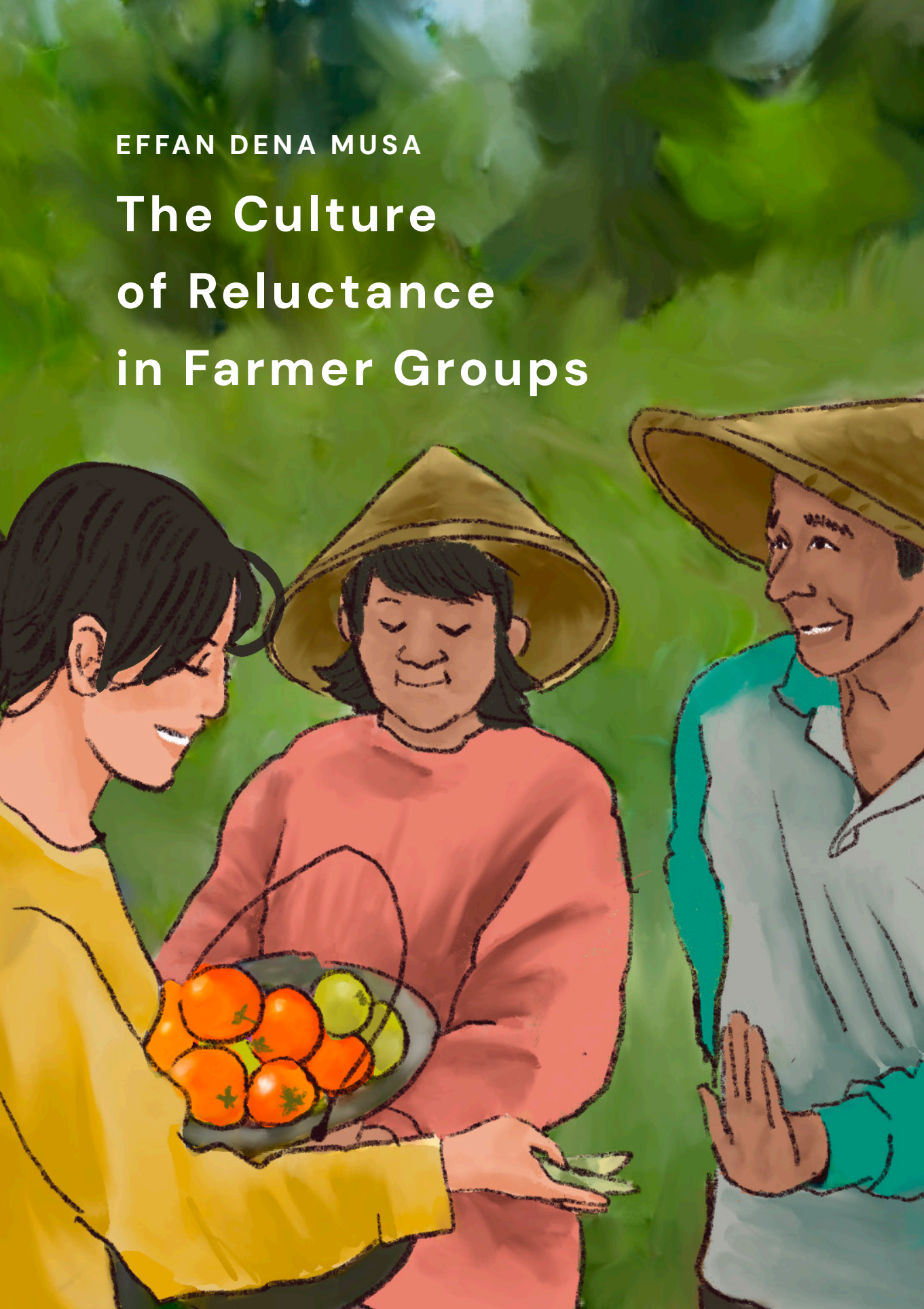
EFFAN DENA MUSA

The Culture of Reluctance in Farmer Groups



In a sub-district in Central Kalimantan, there is a farmer group assisted by Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS). The group was legally formed in 2022, but had existed long before that. YTS has tried to provide various trainings to increase the capacity of the farmer group leaders. Various topics have been taught, such as group management, marketing strategies, and how to manage business finances. In addition, we have also provided loans and venture capital to help the group become more independent in developing its business.

However, despite these various support efforts, the group's progress is still slow. One of the main obstacles is the inherent culture of "*sungkan*" (reluctance), or "*tidak enakan*" (discomfort), among group members. This term refers to the reluctance to offend others, which stems from the desire to make it seem like everything is well and avoid conflicts with others, especially with familiar people, such as neighbors or group mates. This culture is an unwritten norm, but it is practiced to this day and influences group dynamics.

The culture of avoiding offence makes most members prioritize social aspects over business. Indeed, the group has strong social ties, often gathering to stay in touch and share stories together. However, this very sense of harmony has become an obstacle that makes it difficult for them to run a successful business.

For example, when harvests are plentiful, leftover vegetables are often simply given to neighbors or others, without trying to sell them for additional income or process them into other goods. In addition, in buying and selling, members often increase the weight

of the product or give lower prices because they feel *uncomfortable* and want to show goodwill to customers. This does strengthen social relations, but on the other hand, it reduces profits that could have been used for the development of the group's business.

Another example that occurs is the issue of borrowing money from the group. According to the rules, group members are only allowed to borrow during monthly meetings. However, if someone comes to the group leaders to ask for help, it will usually create a feeling of discomfort if the loan is not granted.

Moreover, decisions related to the business are often delayed or not optimized due to feelings of discomfort within the group. Although the group gathers frequently, many members feel reluctant to express their opinions for fear of offending others. In group discussions, decisions are often dominated by the chairperson and a few outspoken members, while others remain silent even though they may have valuable ideas or inputs. It is not uncommon for input to be given only after the meeting is over. As a result, meetings are used more to stay in touch than to discuss joint business development. The conversations that occur more often discuss daily life, family circumstances, personal business, or just joking around to keep the atmosphere warm and friendly. When someone tries to be assertive to bring about change, such as requiring members to provide vegetables to the group, it is often considered too forceful. The group leader once expressed the fear that, if they were too strict, members would leave the group or not come anymore.

It feels wrong to be strict, but it also feels wrong not to be strict. Finding a middle ground so that members' ideas can be ac-

cepted without causing discomfort is complex and requires many considerations. On the one hand, a culture of reluctance creates a strong sense of solidarity and togetherness, but on the other hand, this attitude is often an obstacle to business development and making more decisive decisions about the business. Many are hesitant to speak up or propose changes for fear of being perceived as too prominent or not respecting the opinions of others. However, if they leave things as they are, the group will continue to be stuck in the same pattern as before.

This is where the biggest challenge lies: How to maintain a balance between social harmony and joint business development. As a group, they have great potential to grow if the business is better managed and more structured. With more solid cooperation, the results achieved will be maximized.

In order for the group to move towards self-empowerment and be able to determine their own future, YTS encourages reducing excessive feelings of reluctance. Although we do not directly intervene in group decision-making, we explain the importance of being firm within the group. Decisions that have been agreed upon need to be implemented promptly, including decisions regulating the borrowing of group capital by members. In addition, YTS plans to encourage group leaders to focus not on the number of members, but on those who are willing to engage and collaborate with the group. Policies that do not please everyone are sometimes necessary to nourish the group itself, even if the consequence may be that some members choose to withdraw and become inactive. The group leader needs to be brave enough to move forward even if not

all members like it. This is to ensure that the group is not only a gathering place, but also provides income to the members. Hopefully this will be the right first step and will be evaluated regularly with the group. ■

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ALFI SYAHRINA

The Tradition of *Ngintai Buruknng*

Some time ago, the team at Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI) conducted a baseline survey in a Dayak village in the interior of Kalimantan. In addition to visiting homes to inquire about the social, economic, and ecological conditions based on the community's perceptions, we also asked about the culture there. Culture and daily life are usually closely tied to human character, so I was interested in learning more about it. For several days, we gathered information from the villagers, especially the elderly who were over 65 years old. Usually, they know more about their ancestors' stories. After three days of asking questions, we obtained a lot of information about the customs in the village. Everything has its own tradition, from birth, medicine, farming, to death. One of the things that really interested me was the *ngintai burukng* tradition.

Ngintai burukng is one of the traditional customs carried out before clearing new fields for farming. The custom begins with a small ceremony, after which the community waits for three days to observe signs indicating whether the land is allowed to be cleared or not. The signs come from the sounds or appearance of animals close to the land selected for farming. If there are no sounds or animals within three days, it is believed that nature grants people permission to farm there. Conversely, if there are sounds or animals appear within three days, it is believed that nature does not allow them to farm at that location.

Following local beliefs, if this taboo is violated, the violator's family will experience disaster/misfortune. A respected public figure, who had violated this taboo twice, said he was struck by misfortune when his children died shortly after he had violated the ta-

boo. However, people usually feel that they are losing an opportunity if they heed the signs, and they still want to continue farming in that place despite the bad omen. If this is the case, the community must perform a traditional ritual with the aim of replacing the animal that appeared as a sign. Usually, the community will sacrifice a pig or chicken while praying for successful farming.

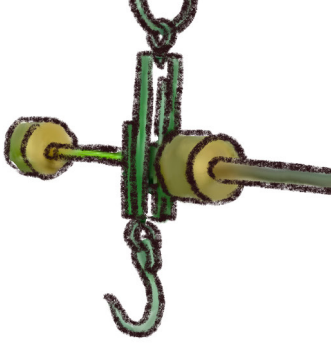
This story made me think that humans seem to realize that nature can also give signs that it wants to be protected. Our ancestors may have had a very close relationship with nature, both with plants and animals, knowing that their lives coexisted. They had already thought of how to protect nature so that their descendants could still enjoy it. Through these signs, they eventually established rules or traditions to protect nature. They held the belief that fulfilling human needs does not have to disturb other animals' habitats. It's as if nature emphasizes that it reflects the quality of life of the people who inhabit it. If nature is damaged, the quality of life of the people around it will also suffer, and vice versa.

However, over time, the *ngintai burukng* tradition has gradually been forgotten due to various factors influencing the lives of the villagers, including changes in mindset and technology. The fading tradition of *ngintai burukng* is also the result of the increasingly limited access of the community to nature, due to widespread land conversion and a growing population. Nevertheless, the values represented in the *ngintai burukng* tradition, such as respect for nature and the importance of maintaining environmental balance, remain relevant and need to be preserved.

Therefore, it is important for YPI, as an institution that assists the community, to design programs that not only accommodate the current needs of the community, but also promote principles of sustainability that build on the local wisdom that once existed in this village. Through the baseline survey, YPI learned that the villagers have been farmers since long ago. However, nowadays, most people of the community only farm to feed their family for a year. They no longer want to depend solely on farming for their income because of the risk of crop failure and losses due to the large amount of capital required to purchase fertilizers and herbicides or pesticides.

This is in line with the sustainable agriculture program that YPI has been implementing in other villages. This program focuses on teaching environmentally friendly agricultural practices, tailored to the needs of the community, such as the production of organic fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and other inputs, with the hope of reducing the capital investment of farmers in the village. This program collaborates with the local Agricultural Extension Center to facilitate community access to training, extension services, and mentoring in agriculture. Through this program, I hope that the community will no longer be overly dependent on oil palm plantations and will begin to develop the agricultural potential that they have had for a long time. That way, the family's food needs, such as rice, vegetables, or other staples, can be met directly by local farmers in the village, without always having to wait for sellers from the sub-district to come and bring produce.

When you think about it, the spirit of this program is not so different from the values embodied in the *ngintai burukng* tradition. This tradition teaches us not to rush into decisions and give nature space to speak. People's ancestors knew and taught us that in every step we take to meet our needs, we must still pay attention to nature and hold space to listen to its signs. That message is still very relevant. I hope that YPI's agricultural program can provide many benefits to the community while preserving the wisdom of their ancestors. ■

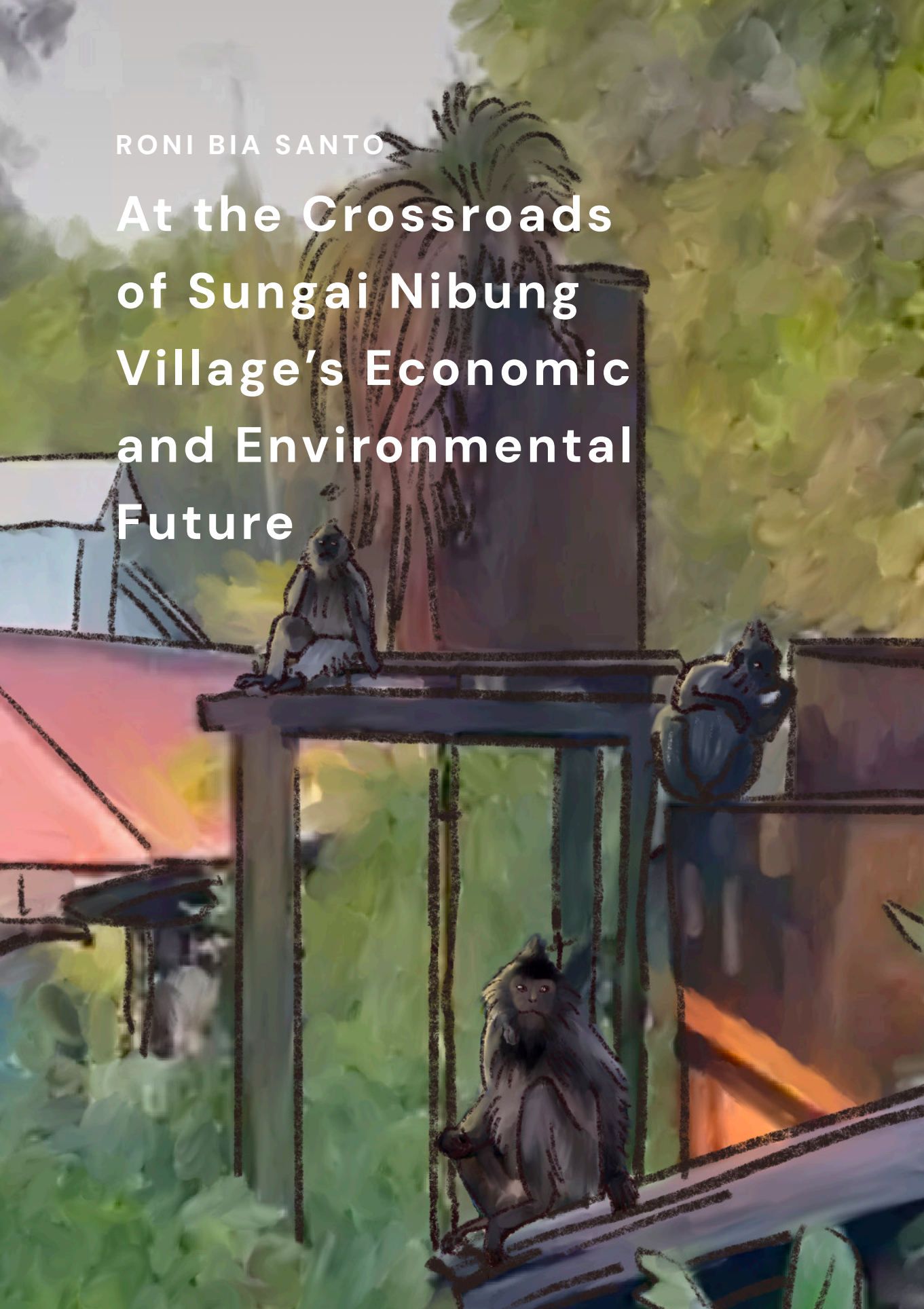


PART II

Livelihoods

RONI BIA SANTO

At the Crossroads of Sungai Nibung Village's Economic and Environmental Future



As I walked on the outskirts of the village, the sounds of birds and monkeys echoing from the thickets of mangrove trees became part of the rhythm of the people's daily lives. Sungai Nibung village, located in the Seruat Dua Pulau Tiga Nature Reserve area, Kubu Raya regency, is an example of how humans and nature can live side by side. Surrounded by vast mangrove forests, the village is home to around 200 families, most of whom work as small-scale fishers, and a variety of animals and plants that depend on the coastal ecosystem. However, this harmony does not happen naturally, but is a result of ongoing compromises, challenges, and adaptations by the community.

The life of the Sungai Nibung community is full of challenges. The village can only be accessed by water, resulting in high transportation costs, limited logistics, and uncertainties due to weather and natural conditions. According to Nur Aini, a facilitator in Sungai Nibung village, there are two transportation options: big canoes (*klotok*) with an eight-hour journey for 80,000 Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) or faster speedboats (three hours) for IDR 150,000. Apart from transportation, limited availability of electricity also becomes a problem. Electricity is only available at night using private generators in every house. According to Aini, one night's use can consume five liters of fuel, which costs around IDR 65,000. This does not only increase the villagers' economic burden, but also limits access to information, education, and digital-based business opportunities that are growing in the modern era.

Conservation policies are sometimes experienced as creating even greater burdens for lives that have never been easy. Accord-

ing to one of the villagers of Sungai Nibung who wished to remain anonymous, conservation policies often put villagers in a difficult situation between maintaining the ecosystem or making a living. For example, restrictions on fishing zones in certain areas for the protection of mangrove ecosystems cause fishers to seek fishing grounds further away, increasing their operational costs. In addition, the ban on clearing agricultural land around mangrove forests also limits the villagers' economic options, making them more dependent on the fisheries sector, which is facing many challenges.

To face these challenges, Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI) has been present since 2017 to facilitate various programs that aim to improve community welfare through a conservation-based approach. The SMART patrol program, for example, helps maintain mangrove and coastal ecosystems while giving the communities an active role in environmental protection through area patrols. Meanwhile, the community-based resilience fund opens up more stable finance and capital access for the residents, allowing them to build businesses without having to rely on methods that may damage the environment.

Along with the implementation of these various programs, changes in community mindsets and behaviors are starting to appear. A fisherman shared that he is currently using standard-sized nets to prevent small fish from being caught. "I used to use tiger trawls, but now I am thinking long[-term], I don't want to damage everything," he said. Some housewives have also started running small businesses such as grocery stores, using the capital from the resilience fund. They feel supported because they no longer have

to borrow money from loan sharks when income from fishing decreases.

However, success is not only measured by how well the programs are currently implemented, but also by the extent to which the community can take over the role and responsibility of managing the programs independently. Currently, although the institutional structure has been established, the community still relies heavily on external support for managerial and planning capacity. During a monthly board meeting of the Conservation Community Business Services group (PUMK), which coordinates the various YPI-assisted programs in the village, I heard concerns from some members that they still need direct guidance from the facilitator in developing work plans for the next month, and even for the next year. Some of them admitted that they were not used to prioritizing programs or calculating budgets independently.

This situation raises the question: What will happen if the support starts to decrease? Without a sense of ownership and the ability to manage programs independently, these initiatives risk being lost when facilitation stops. Therefore, the ultimate goal of PUMK is to develop a structure and build the capacity of the community so that they can run the programs independently, adapt it to their own needs, and continue to evolve to face the changing times. Only when the programs no longer rely on facilitation, but grow from local initiatives and collective awareness, can the harmony between humans and nature that I observed while walking on the outskirts of the village be guaranteed in the long run. ■

RAJA NAMMY PETRUS PURBA

Stepping Toward Self-Reliance: Treading the Path of Sustainable Economy

At the edge of Bengkayang regency, West Kalimantan, Cempaka Putih village lies hidden within the dense forest of Gunung Nyiut Nature Reserve with 297 families administratively registered as the residents of this village. To reach the village, people have to travel up steep, rocky, and muddy roads for three to six hours by motorbike or even two to three days by car during the rainy season. This extreme terrain, which is prone to landslides, used to hamper the development of the village. Yet, since 2021, a wave of change has begun to spread to this remote area due to the presence of Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI). The organization invites people who previously depended on forest products and subsistence agriculture to build economic independence through the Conservation Community Business Service (PUMK) group called Usaha Mandiri Sejahtera (UMS).

YPI started its assistance by working on four core programs: community organizing, resilience fund, healthy family, and sustainable agriculture. Of the seven assisted groups in Bengkayang regency, PUMK UMS, with 165 active members, is the most advanced. Nazirin, a local community member of Cempaka Putih village, proclaimed about the impact of the resilience fund program through its flagship activity, the Productive Business Fund (DUP): "We used to only farm rice and rubber. Now, with agricultural training and capital from the DUP, we are starting to gain new knowledge such as growing kernel corn!" YPI distributed grants to PUMK to then be redistributed to small groups called Productive Business Groups (KUP) to finance micro-enterprises such as kernel corn cultivation and freshwater fish farming. The results have not only improved

the economy, but also enabled many members of the community to develop new livelihoods.

However, PUMK UMS was not satisfied with merely being the beneficiary of YPI. They wanted to prove that villagers are capable of managing natural resources while preserving the forest. “We don’t want to rely on YPI forever. When the assistance ends, PUMK must be able to stand on its own,” said Zupriadi, the Chairman of the PUMK UMS group. “We want to be an equal partner, not only an aid recipient.”

To realize this commitment, PUMK UMS has taken several strategic steps. “Komidi”, the Head of the Freshwater Aquaculture KUP, emphasized that financial transparency is the key to success. “We learn to record every transaction and conduct regular evaluation. Group money must be managed accountably,” he said.

Then, in early 2024, PUMK UMS opened a BRI-Link (a financial transaction service of Bank Rakyat Indonesia) agent business. Previously, people had to spend 100,000–200,000 Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) and travel three to six hours just to send money to the city. “There’s no more need to recklessly cross the damaged roads just to get to the bank,” said Marlina, a mother who often sends money to her child in Pontianak City. Currently, the transaction fee has dropped dramatically to IDR 5,000 per transfer. The business even generates a profit of IDR 2,000,000–3,000,000 per month, some of which is allocated for the PUMK’s operations and additional incentives for the PUMK administrators who manage it.

In the future, egg-laying chicken farming could be one of the interesting breakthroughs. So far, there are no layer chicken farms

at all in Suti Semarang sub-district, meaning that eggs are bought from outside Bengkayang regency. The selling price at the community level is very expensive. Zupriadi explained this ambition: "The price of eggs here is IDR 3,000–4,000 per egg due to the high transportation costs. If an independent farm runs, we can reduce the price to IDR 2,000 and create new job opportunities." This idea is expected to be a long-term solution for the group's food security and financial independence.

Despite these achievements, many challenges remain. Human resource capacity is an obstacle, especially in managing modern farms. The damaged road infrastructure and the threat of climate change also loom large. "The unpredictable rainy season often ruins the harvest of the corn kernels that we cultivate. We are discussing how to increase the corn kernel yield, which is the main ingredient in laying hen feed," Zupriadi adds.

With an unwavering spirit, Zupriadi's vision is slowly coming true. From the soil that is starting to get fertile and the fish ponds that are cooperatively managed, to the careful financial calculations, every step they take is proof that self-reliance is not a dream hidden in the woods, but a real accomplishment carved with one's own hands. Today, Cempaka Putih village no longer carries the stigma of "the village at the end of the world". Through the PUMK group, they are writing a new chapter: from beneficiaries to sovereign benefactors. ■

MATHIUS S. NANYAN

Gold Mining Using Excavators Is Increasingly Rampant in Dulang Intan Sub-District

Recently, gold mining using heavy equipment such as excavators has become increasingly rampant in Dulang Intan sub-district (a pseudonym), causing severe and widespread damage to forests and the environment. The remains of formerly mined sites are extremely arid. There are numerous mounds of sand mixed with stones and gravel and the abandoned excavation pits have turned into large lakes. The polluted water of the river has become murky and yellow-brown in color, making it highly difficult to find clean water in the mining area. Large-scale dredging along riverbanks—and also forest clearing—has caused rivers to become shallow and flooding to occur more frequently in villages located along the river.

In the beginning, gold mining by the community was carried out using traditional tools such as hoes, shovels, crowbars, and pans, either on land or in the river. However, with the passing of time, they no longer use traditional mining methods, but diesel-powered engines known as "*dumping*" in the local Ngaju Dayak language. Mining is conducted along the riverbanks and even in the middle of the river using floating rafts (*lanting)* as a medium for the engine. Apart from the river, gold mining is also carried out on land. Gold is obtained by suctioning materials from the riverbed, such as rocks, gravel, sand, soil, and others. These materials are then discharged into a sluice box (*panggung*), made of wood covered with a porous carpet. This *panggung* allows water to pass through and holds the heavy gold concentrate. Suctioning continues until the carpet is filled and then washing is done

to separate the gold from other minerals such as zircon or "*puya*" (Dayak naming), sand, and other dirty minerals.

One of the factors contributing to the increasingly rampant gold mining using heavy equipment is the involvement from financiers, landowners, collectors of mining products, and providers of daily basic needs (fuel and groceries). This social network creates a conducive environment for mining development using heavy equipment. Community solidarity is also used as a mechanism to share risks and resources, such as mining equipment or information on gold locations. Although this solidarity helps communities survive difficult economic situations, it also reinforces dependence on gold mining activities.

Gold mining activities using heavy equipment do not only damage the environment, but also disrupt the social harmony that characterizes local communities**.** One striking change is the emergence of a new social stratification based on the involvement in mining activities. Mining actors who succeed in making large profits often gain higher social status in their communities. On the other hand, individuals who are not involved or negatively affected by these activities tend to experience marginalization. In addition to changes in social structure, community solidarity, which was previously strong, began to erode due to emerging conflicts such as disputes between individuals or groups regarding the mining land and gold product distribution.

Another socio-cultural impact is changing work patterns and lifestyles. Mining activities, which demand more time and energy, cause miners to rarely be in the village, especially men. Some of

the miners also bring all their family members to live at the work site. Traditional cultural values are also shifting. People are starting to prioritize economic gain over preserving traditions or customs. This also increases individualism within the community. The competitive nature of mining activities encourages individuals to focus more on personal interests rather than shared interests. The miners have to compete with one another to maximize profits.

These changes have led people to not attend activities that do not generate money because they are busy with mining work. Even if a family member dies, sometimes they also do not come to mourn or they merely attend the funeral. This also affects the village government in implementing development programs in the village. From development planning meetings to program implementation, there is very limited community involvement. It is not uncommon, in village consultation meetings, that only the village government is present.

Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS) also faces the same situation in its community assistance activities in Dulang Intan sub-district. Community presence at meetings organized by YTS is minimal. Meetings are often only attended by a few village officials, as other village officials are also gold miners. If community members are present, they are few and usually women. Based on this experience, and due to the staff's limited time in the field (only one to two days per village per month), in the future, YTS needs to communicate the schedule of the activities to the participating communities at least one month in advance, so that the community can make time to attend the activities.

One activity that YTS has undertaken for small-scale gold miners is raising awareness about the dangers of mercury pollution, known locally as "*air raksa*", and its impacts on health and the environment. In addition, YTS has also sought to provide alternative livelihood options that are environmentally friendly and sustainable. In Dulang Intan sub-district, YTS provides assistance with the social forestry program to villages and groups that have already obtained legal management rights from the government. In implementing this program, YTS tries to invite and encourage the active participation of the community, village government, and other stakeholders, so that the remaining forests can be managed sustainably. It is hoped that this can help maintain environmental quality and socio-cultural dynamics so that they remain optimal in supporting the needs of future generations. ■

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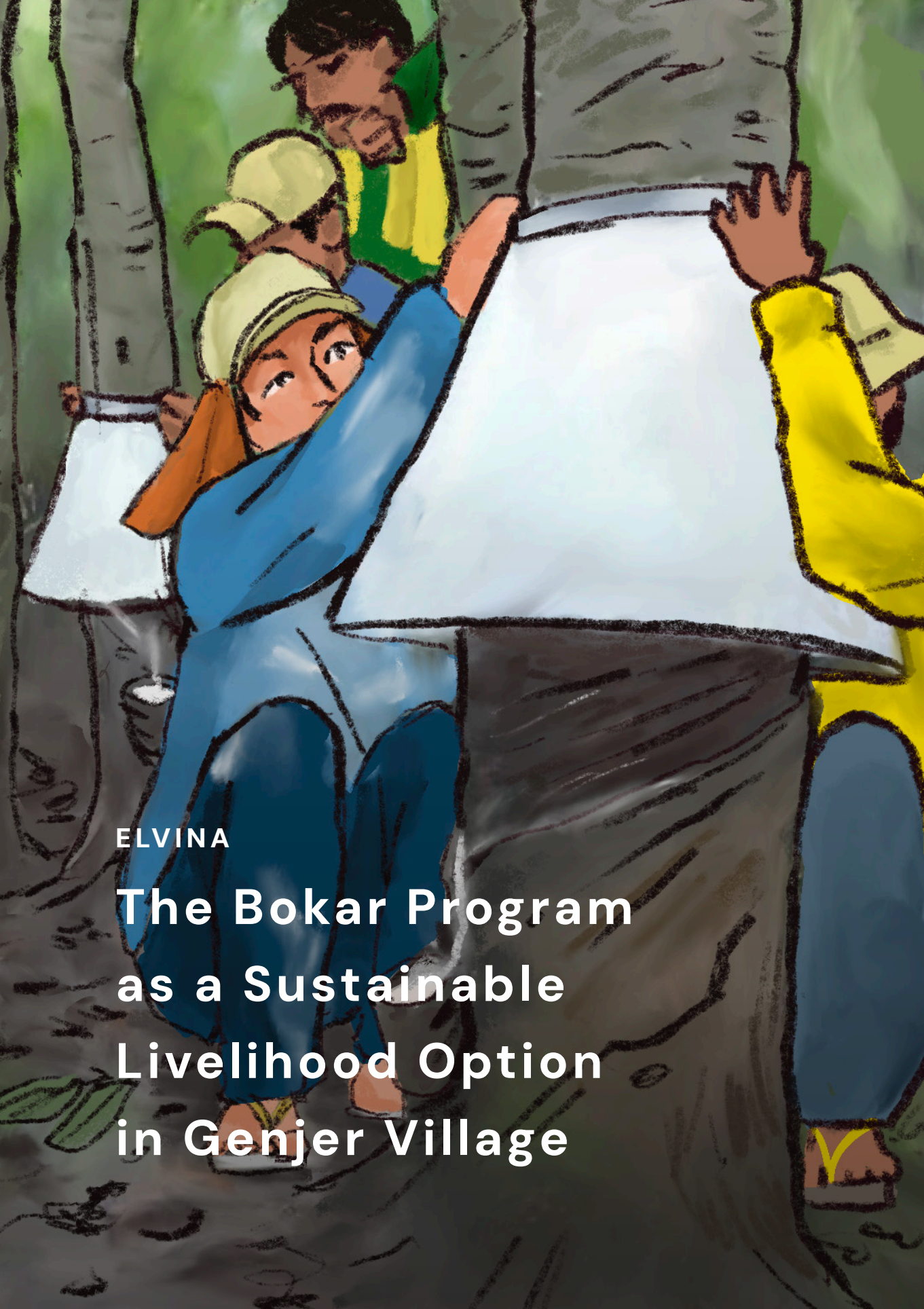


ELVINA

The Bokar Program as a Sustainable Livelihood Option in Genjer Village

"Bokar makes us lose money" is what farmers in Genjer village often say. Bokar (*bahan olah karet* or processed rubber materials) is a production method in which the rubber is not soaked and may not be exposed to sunlight for too long. Bokar must be air-dried for seven to fourteen days to produce a good quality of dry rubber content. Although bokar has economic potential, many farmers consider the bokar program a "doctrine" because they feel this program is forced upon them and they don't see the immediate benefits. A full sack of bokar weighs 100 kg, while the same sack of wet rubber is usually 15 kg heavier. However, bokar actually generates more profits because it has a higher price per kilogram. The price of wet rubber is reduced according to the weight of the water content and this is where the price is sometimes manipulated by middlemen in the village. Meanwhile, bokar is dry and compact.

Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS), with funding from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), introduced the bokar program in Genjer village. In 2022, YTS facilitated a community-led analysis and planning, which found that 60% of the community relied on rubber farming as their main livelihood**.** There were several challenges in the rubber farming industry, including the impact of rain and flooding, the presence of termites and diseases, as well as unstable prices. To address these issues, in 2023, YTS formed a rubber program interest group consisting of 20 people and obtained a decision letter from the village government. YTS also provided training to the group and other interested villagers on rubber quality improvement using the bokar system, as well

as on pest and disease management. Approximately 30 people in total participated in these training sessions.

In addition, YTS continuously monitors farmers to support them in producing high-quality bokar. At first, they only achieved a 65% of dry content, but now they have reached 69%. The current price they receive is 18,000 Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) per kg, compared to only IDR 10,000 per kg for wet rubber. Through participatory technology development, YTS also helped farmers develop rubber tapping rainguards to prevent their harvest from being wasted when it rains. Furthermore, YTS has established a partnership with PT Kahayan Berseri and brought people from the factory to the village to share knowledge with the village groups. In addition, the factory often supports the sales process by increasing farmers' rubber quality. For example, the factory helped increase the quality from 68% to 69%, even when the rubber sold was not completely dry. The factory also provides free latex thickener to farmers.

However, it turned out that all the support provided wasn't enough to make the program run well. Initially, the community was enthusiastic to learn how to produce bokar. They also attended every meeting. Even some people who had never received the training were interested in producing bokar, as bokar fetched a better price. However, while they were enthusiastic to learn, in reality the farmers were not enthusiastic to adopt the bokar system.

YTS field staff monitored the program and found that some farmers believe bokar makes them lose money because its dry weight is lighter than wet rubber. In addition, they consider bokar

too complicated because it cannot be soaked or dried in the sun, but must be air-dried. Farmers' busy schedules also hinder bokar production. Some are involved in rehabilitation programs, while others spend their time gathering a local water plant known as "*genjer*" that has become a popular vegetable. They call this activity the "genjer project".

Furthermore, interactions between group members were sometimes difficult. Some farmers said that they felt neglected by other group members, as their interactions had become less frequent than usual. There were also farmers who believed that their high-quality rubber was being used as a sample to boost the group's dry rubber content rating with the factory, while other group members continued to sell their rubber in wet condition. A sense of discomfort also arose because several members did not receive the latex thickener given by the factory.

Another challenge is that some farmers cannot sell bokar through the group because they are tied to middlemen. The farmers need cash for their daily needs and also for their rubber production, including buying fuel for their *alkon* (small motorized boats) and food to bring to their rubber gardens. These needs force them to borrow money from rubber middlemen. Therefore, they are tied to selling rubber to the same middlemen as a way of repaying their debt. YTS has tried to provide loans to support rubber production and make farmers less dependent on middlemen. However, some farmers feel that the amount of money provided by YTS is insufficient. One farmer told me, "*Jia cukup duit ah, Vin. Dia cukup akan mili anak bawui.*" "The money is not enough, Vin.

Not enough to buy a piglet." This situation can sometimes be very confusing for us at YTS. During the meeting about the loans, they claimed that they understood the loan mechanism. However, by the end of the meeting, they seemed to have forgotten. We wanted to help farmers with the bokar production costs, yet there are still some of them who still insist on buying a pig instead because the price of pigs is currently very high.

In the end, from the group that had been formed, only five people continued producing clean processed rubber. Despite their busy schedules and the challenges they faced, these farmers remained passionate about producing bokar. Even though it rained frequently, they still continued to tap the rubber. Some even had to move their tapping paths to higher ground because their rubber plantations were flooded. With the muddy condition of the rubber plantations and water levels reaching an adult's waist, they often said that they could tap rubber while swimming in the rubber plantations. Even when they were ill, they still went to their gardens to tap. One farmer accidentally drank latex thickener when he was thirsty. It probably happened due to his old age, declining health, and exhaustion. The thickener bottle he used looked identical to his drinking bottle. I could not help but feel sympathy for the rubber farmers' struggle to meet their family needs.

Building groups among local Dayak farmers can be quite challenging, highly different from the experience with transmigrant farmers assisted by YTS in other locations who have strong associations. However, as village facilitators, we must remain neutral and patient with all the social dynamics that occur. We want the

groups to unite so that they can help improve their own economy. There is great hope that rubber farmers will continue to produce bokar, even when YTS is no longer present in the village. As long as rubber is still needed in daily life, bokar can be a sustainable livelihood option for the community, even when other new livelihood opportunities come into the village. However, before implementing the bokar program or any other initiatives, we need to properly identify which farmers are genuinely interested and committed, to ensure that the program is well-targeted and has a positive impact on the community. Furthermore, as an organization, we also have to accept and realize that not all program expectations can be fully achieved, as local Dayak farmers highly value flexibility and autonomy in carrying out their work. ■

ELSINAWATI

One Pair of Scales, Two Hopes: The Relationship Between Farmers and Collectors

One transmigration village has developed into a small-scale agricultural center, especially for vegetable cultivation. Using an ethnographic approach during community support activities, I documented the social and economic relations between farmers and collectors, focusing on Ibu Cantik (a pseudonym), an extraordinary young farmer, and Pak Ganteng (a pseudonym), an experienced vegetable collector. At first, I came as a facilitator, trying to write, record, and understand. Yet, the longer I spent time with them, the more I felt immersed in the middle of fragile yet strong relationships. I saw how the system of local agribusiness operated in daily practice, colored by relationships of dependency, trust, and kindness that quietly also turned into pressure.

Ibu Cantik, 40, is a young farmer, who manages 0.5 hectares of land behind her house to grow long beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, chilies, and some other types of fruit and vegetables. She is known for being active, enthusiastic, and open both in social life and agricultural activities. Pak Ganteng, 55, is a local collector, who has worked for ten years in the village. He owns a pickup truck, has connections with city middlemen, and has the experience to "read" market conditions. For some farmers, he is a market connector. For some others, he is a price controller.

I often followed Ibu Cantik to her vegetable farm and observed the weighing of her products. When harvest time came, Pak Ganteng's pickup truck stopped in front of Ibu Cantik's house. The fresh vegetables, freshly picked and neatly wrapped in plastic bags, were immediately weighed. There was little small talk, just num-

bers and notes written in a notebook. Yet, their relationship was not that simple.

During last year's tomato harvest season, prices suddenly plummeted. Pak Ganteng somehow kept buying, but at prices far below the production costs. Ibu Cantik once tried selling directly through social media and WhatsApp groups, but demand was never enough. "I know he also needs to make a living," admitted Ibu Cantik. "But sometimes I feel like he has too much control over what I grow."

She realized the relationship was unequal, but she also tried to be realistic. "If I don't sell to Pak Ganteng, the vegetables will rot and he might be upset because he has helped me a lot. So, I should also sell my harvest to him. I can't reach the market in the city on my own," said Ibu Cantik. "But if everything depends on Pak Ganteng, then he is the one who sets the price."

Pak Ganteng also shared his version of the story. In a brief interview, he said, "I'm not a big collector. I also borrow money from bigger vegetable shops in and outside the city. If prices fall, I am also affected. But sometimes the farmers forget that."

What I realized from being involved in this story was the subtle tension underlying every seemingly simple transaction. This tension revealed that the farmer and collector relationship is not merely about transactions, but also about trust, suspicion, and bargaining positions that are sometimes unequal. The scales, which appear neutral, in fact carry social burdens for every kilogram of vegetables placed on them. They both needed each other. Pak Ganteng needed a regular supply, while Ibu Cantik depended on market access and capital that she could not obtain on her own due

to limited logistics and price information. However, the bargaining position was unbalanced, as control over prices and distribution remained in the hands of the collector.

The relationship between Ibu Cantik and Pak Ganteng reflects the economic reality of a village on the outskirts of the city, a relationship that is interconnected, fragile yet strong and unequal yet at times full of solidarity. They need each other, even though they sometimes also doubt each other. The relationship between them is like a rope: it can be tightened, it can be loosened, but it is not easily broken. Ibu Cantik, despite being young and innovative, is still trapped in that cycle. She is slowly trying to step out by learning to do direct marketing, forming a women's farmer group, and beginning to weigh her own harvest. Yet she cannot immediately cut off her long working relationship with Pak Ganteng. "As long as I keep planting vegetables, he will keep coming. But one day, I want my vegetables to be valued according to the quality of my work, not just according to the price of the market," said Ibu Cantik at the end of our interview.

I came to understand that Ibu Cantik's feelings were not merely complaints. They were the voice of a woman farmer caught between gratitude and helplessness. On the one hand, she appreciated Pak Ganteng's presence in helping her to market her crops. On the other hand, she knew that her dependence limited her ability to freely determine the price and direction of her hard work.

I also began to see Pak Ganteng in another light, not as an oppressor, but as part of an agribusiness chain that is also full of pressure. He is not a big collector with absolute power. He is also

someone who bears risks, faces pressure from the urban market, and sometimes even has to provide capital to the farmers. He stands in the middle as the lubricant for the wheels of local food distribution that keep turning, even though the system is not always fair.

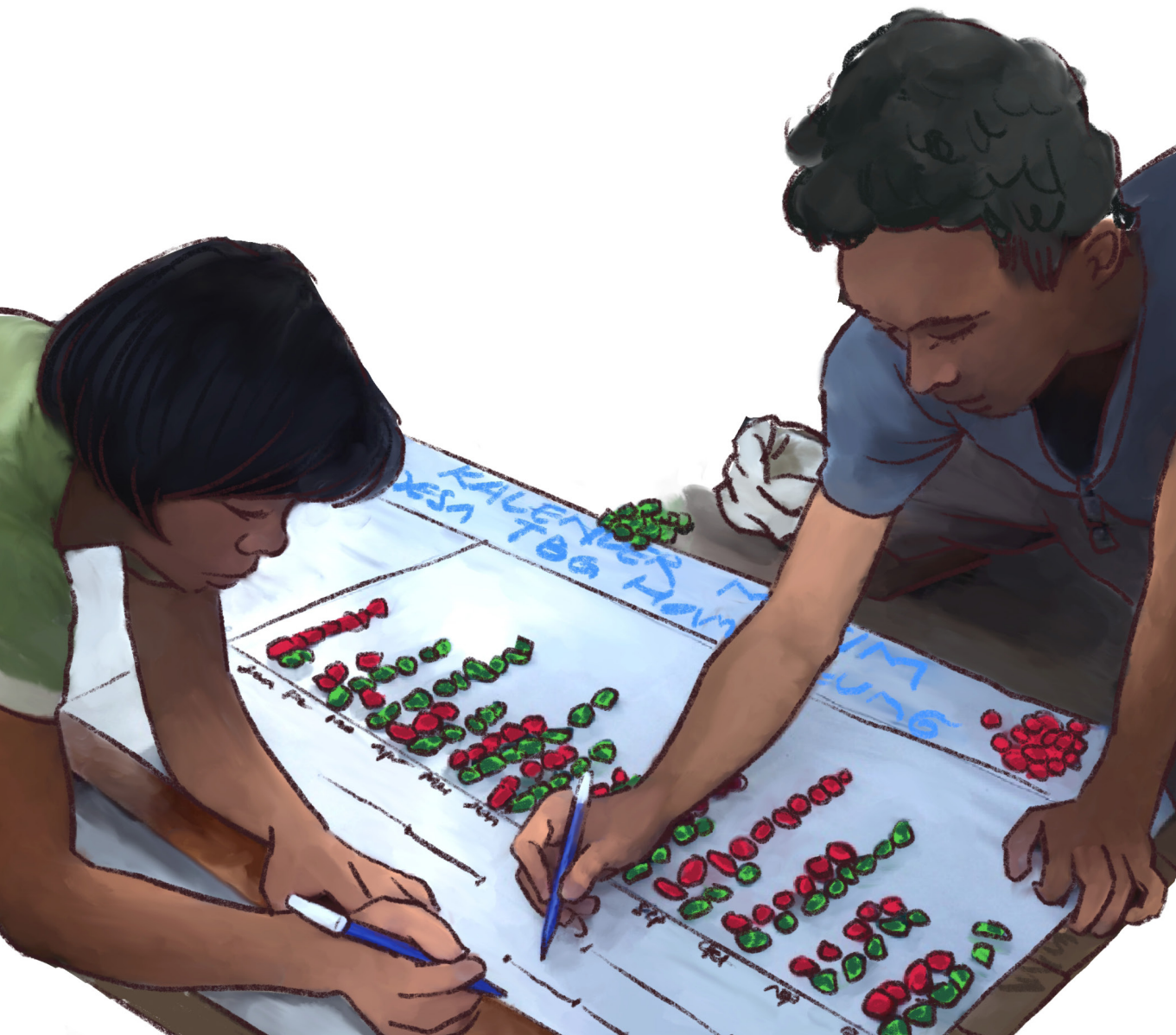
And I am torn. Should I take sides? Or is it enough to remain a witness?

In that dilemma, I realized that community engagement is not only about providing solutions but also about creating space for farmers like Ibu Cantik to realize that they are not alone, that their experiences and voices matter. That change does not always have to be revolutionary; it can begin with speaking up for fair prices, forming women farmers' groups, and weighing their own harvests as a way to strengthen control over their production.

Diving into this story made me realize that the local agribusiness system cannot be changed through technical intervention alone. It requires shifts in power relations, information distribution, and stronger solidarity among farmers. And perhaps my small role here is to ensure that stories like this one are not lost, that voices like Ibu Cantik's continue to be heard, and that one day, the scales can truly reflect the value of labor, not just the price of the market. ■

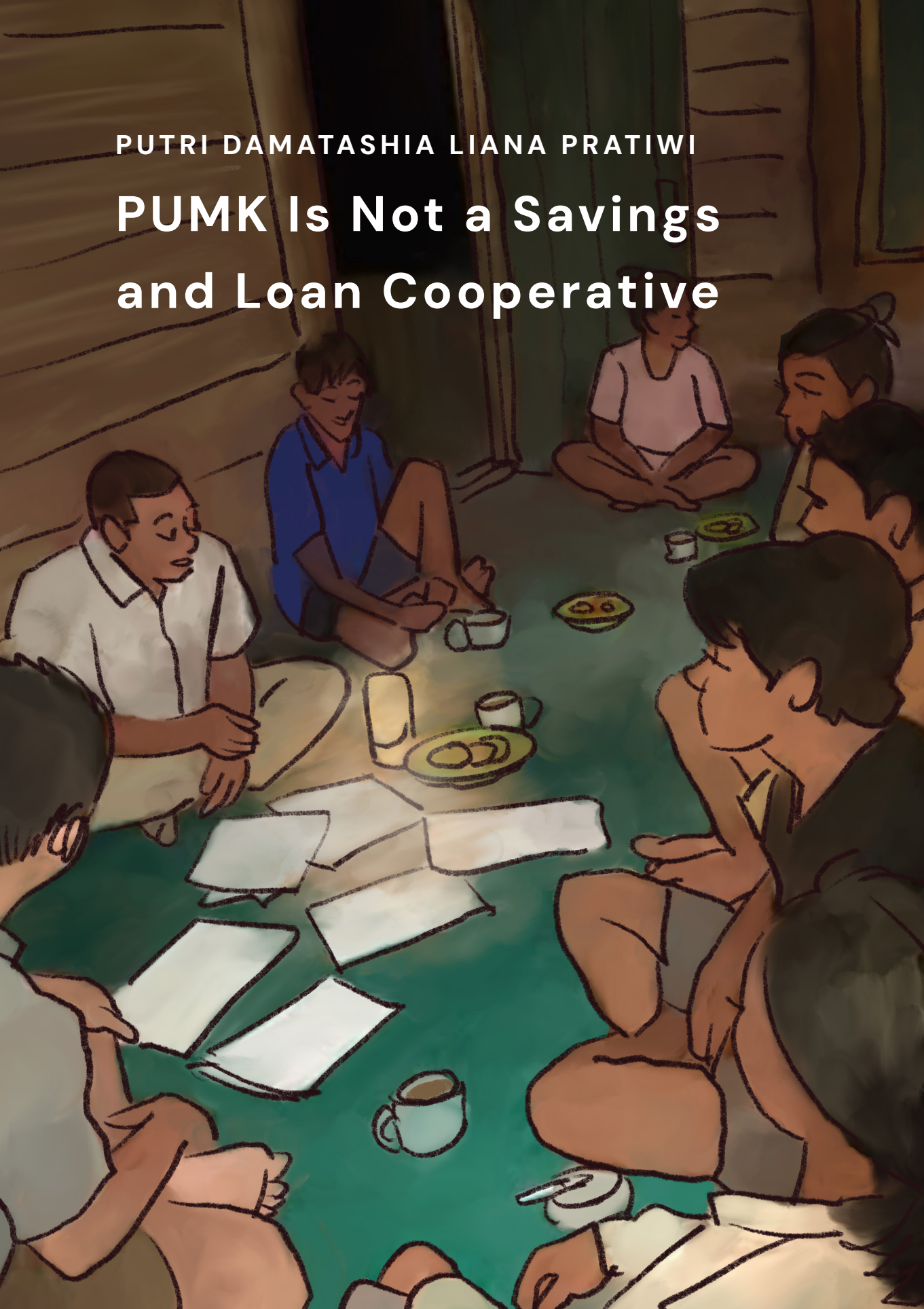
PART III

Governance



PUTRI DAMATASHIA LIANA PRATIWI

PUMK Is Not a Savings and Loan Cooperative



In the world of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), facilitating organisations are often viewed as providers, while communities are positioned as recipients. This relationship pattern is not only shaped by long-standing practices, but also by the expectation that NGOs possess the resources and capacity to drive change. It has nearly become a norm in various organizations working with communities, including Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI). However, the dynamics are actually far more complex. An effective community engagement process should not only be one-way, as this can create various challenges in the process of building community self-reliance.

YPI is now ten years old and has grown rapidly. However, that does not mean we do not have our ups and downs in working with communities. One significant challenge, which quite significantly impacted the way YPI works, occurred in the early years of YPI's engagement with communities. To get into and work within one location, YPI has to encourage communities to form groups led by their own members. Are you familiar with Joint Business Groups (KUB)? The groups established by YPI are based on a concept from KUB. What makes them different is that these groups address not only economic issues, but also social and ecological concerns. This has become the core principle of the groups, which YPI calls Conservation Community Business Services (PUMK), which contain a variety of activities, such as savings and loans, healthy families, literacy programs, agriculture and agroforestry, fisheries, forest patrols, and wildlife monitoring.

The similarity between the PUMK and KUB concepts has become an issue that is quite difficult to overcome. KUBs in West Kalimantan, in particular, usually have savings and loans activities as their primary service, in the form of Savings and Loan Cooperatives (KSP). This has made the community very familiar with the concept of savings and loans in cooperatives, leading to the widespread perception that PUMK activities are savings and loans, while other activities are considered separate and not truly part of the PUMK. We recognized this misunderstanding in 2020, three years after the first PUMK was established.

After having many discussions with the group members to understand their perspectives on PUMK, we realized that the way we assisted the groups actually reinforced this misunderstanding. At the time, we placed the responsibility for implementing savings and loan activities on the core management of PUMK, while the only YPI team that coordinated with the PUMK management was the savings and loans program team. Meanwhile, other activities were carried out by other PUMK members and supported by other YPI teams. Many members involved in other programs raised concerns about the situation back then. They questioned whether the programs they were implementing were part of PUMK, as there seemed to be no coordination between the core management and the other people, who implemented the programs.

Seeing this situation, we carried out an internal evaluation involving the entire YPI team. In this meeting, we agreed to change the working method, from previously having separate teams for every program to area-based teams, so that our assistance to the

communities was no longer separated by program but coordinated by integrated area teams. PUMKs also underwent structural changes, creating small working groups to act as program implementers at the ground level. The seven programs under PUMKs would now be implemented directly by those working groups. Savings and loans activities, which were previously carried out directly by the core management, are currently handled by financial security working groups. However, this raised a question from the PUMK management: if savings and loans were no longer their responsibility, what would they do? In response, YPI strengthened the role of the management in coordinating all activities and required all YPI staff to always involve the PUMK management in all activities within PUMK. The role of PUMK treasurer, which previously only focused on managing savings and loans, is now covering the PUMK's organizational finances. Institutional capacity was strengthened through a program called "organizing", which focused on PUMK management and oversight. All these efforts aimed to transform the image of PUMK, which was previously considered similar to KSPs, into an inclusive governance body with autonomous decision-making, administration, and financial management.

To this day, YPI cannot claim one 100% success in changing perceptions across all groups. However, we keep explaining to the administrators and members that the function of PUMK in the village is to provide a forum for the community to discuss, learn, and solve problems together and to function as a governance body that serves all community members equitably. One party cannot achieve the success of this program. It requires both parties to sup-

port each other, provide criticism, and learn together from past mistakes. There are neither givers nor receivers here. What exists is mutual support. ■

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CUWITA

Untransparent Financial Management Sparks a Loss of Trust

Conservation Community Business Service (PUMK) is a type of governance body based on community needs in three aspects: social, economic, and ecological. Responding to these needs, a PUMK was established in Village A on the coast of West Kalimantan. It doesn't feel like it, but this PUMK has been running for six years and has already undergone one change in management structure. In its initial years, the financial security program, in particular the savings and loans activities, ran well and smoothly. According to several management staff and members, the community has felt tangible benefits from the program to access savings and loans since the establishment of the PUMK in the village.

In 2019, Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI) provided a grant to the PUMK in order to allow access to capital. Then, in 2022, YPI once again provided a grant to the PUMK. This grant was provided under two schemes: Profit-Sharing Business Capital (PUSIBU) and Productive Business Fund (DUP), which were entrusted to and managed by the PUMK management. The PUSIBU fund was used for an LPG gas distribution business with a profit-sharing system with local partnered shops. Meanwhile, the DUP fund was distributed as loans to PUMK members who had formed small groups, providing financial support to productive enterprises. Not long after, the LPG gas distribution business managed by the PUMK management encountered an unexpected challenge: Their gas cylinders stored in the warehouse went missing, leaving only a few remaining in the partner shops owned by the villagers. The PUMK management has since suffered significant financial losses.

At the beginning of 2023, after many discussions with PUMK management and myself as the facilitator in Village A, the management saw that the situation was no longer conducive. As a step to resolve the problem, they withdrew the remaining LPG gas cylinders from the shops partnered with the PUMK management. The withdrawn gas cylinders were then sold to other parties to cover the financial losses. Unfortunately, the money from the sales was used by one of the PUMK management members for personal benefit without the knowledge of the other management members. In response, as their facilitator, I tried to dig deeper into the problem during the regular monthly meetings of PUMK management. After numerous discussions with the management, it turned out that not only PUSIBU funds were being misappropriated, but also a very large amount of funds from the members' savings. This was done by an individual member of the PUMK management, without the knowledge of the others. All these transactions violated the PUMK's loan procedures.

This financial problem began to be known by PUMK members in mid-2023. As a result, many members who had saved their money wanted to withdraw their deposits. However, the members' savings were no longer available with the treasurer, because all the members' savings had been misused by an individual in PUMK management and, up to this day, have not been returned. Many members were unable to withdraw their savings for a very long time and this problem persisted without any resolution from the PUMK administrators. Many members felt anxious and chose not

to save money at PUMK anymore. They were afraid that the money they had saved would be used again by this individual PUMK administrator. Furthermore, some members who had taken loans also refused to repay their debts to PUMK. They referred to the example of the administrator who had borrowed money for personal use, but had not repaid his debt.

In early 2024, after extensive discussions with the core management and through an annual membership meeting, the savings program at PUMK was ended. It was decided that the focus would be solely on collecting loans from PUMK members who still had debts. A year after the deal, loan repayment progress at PUMK was still very minimal. Over time, the PUMK management has also become increasingly passive in running their programs. Many PUMK administrators were absent, running away from their responsibilities and thus causing the PUMK to decline. Many members began questioning whether PUMK was still active or not and some members even suggested replacing the management. According to them, the current PUMK management could no longer be trusted, yet they still wished PUMK to survive and continue its savings and loan activities like in other villages.

As a field facilitator, I tried to explain things to PUMK members who asked about the status of the PUMK. While waiting for the PUMK management to make changes, I also discussed with stakeholders in the village, such as the acting village head and the Village Consultative Body, to find solutions to the problems of the PUMK at that time. The village authorities responded well and de-

cided to facilitate a meeting between PUMK management and members, who had loans, to reach a mutual agreement on resolving the financial issues.

From this story, I conclude that the funds became a source of personal gain because of a lack of financial control from YPI over the PUMK management and a lack of transparency in PUMK management. This incident taught me that, as a field facilitator, I need to strengthen financial control by monitoring the monthly financial reports in detail and thoroughly with the PUMK management. I also need to encourage and open up room for participatory discussions with all PUMK administrators to strengthen their understanding of transparent financial management. ■

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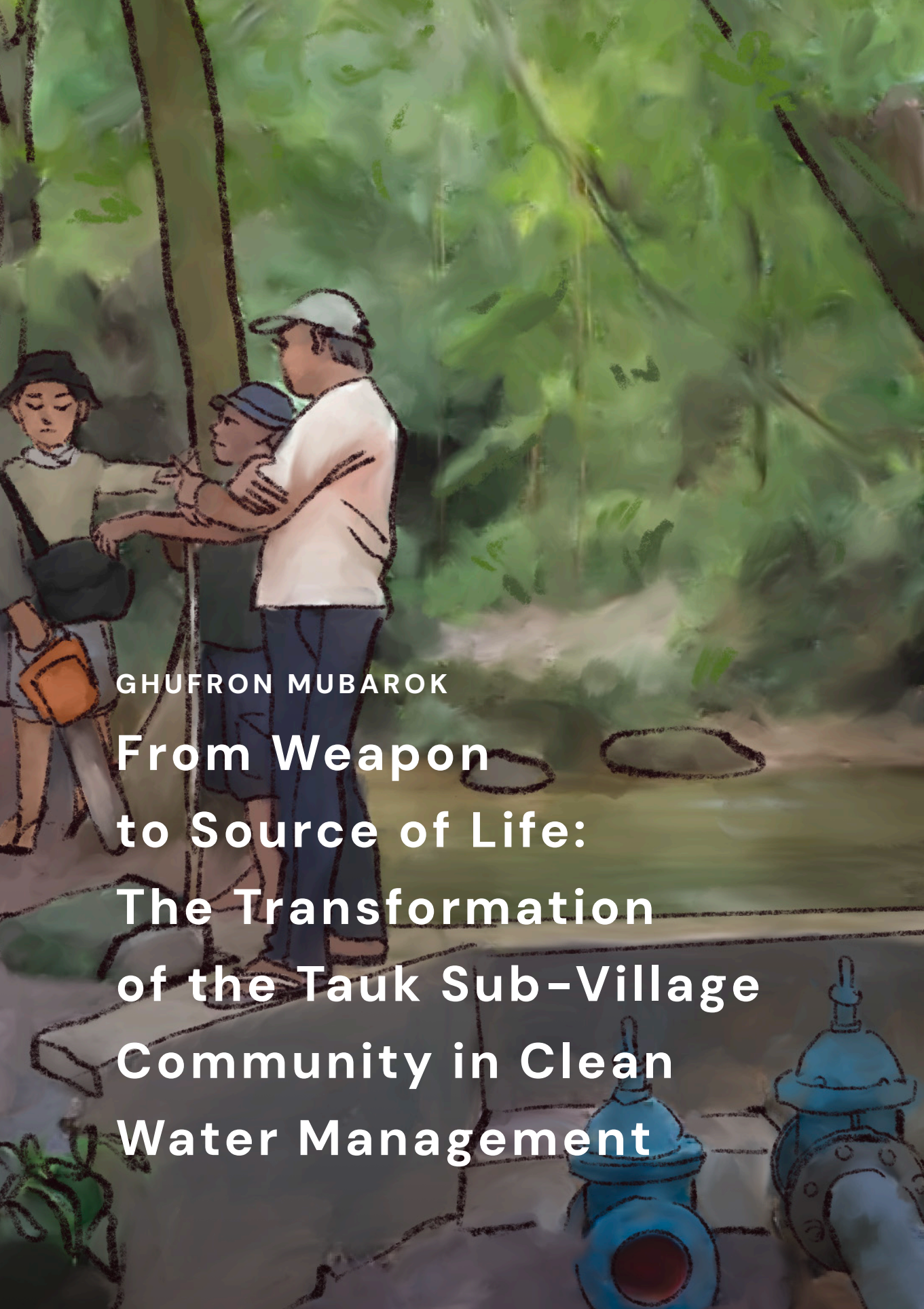

GHUFRON MUBAROK

From Weapon to Source of Life: The Transformation of the Tauk Sub-Village Community in Clean Water Management

Tauk sub-village, Engkangin village, is administratively located around, and partly within, the Gunung Nyiut Penrisen Nature Reserve. All community activities generally rely heavily on the forest, from farming, hunting, to collecting building materials. Since 2017, Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI) has been active in Tauk sub-village, partnering with the West Kalimantan Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) through the Wildlife Monitoring Unit (WMU) program. Then, in 2018, the Conservation Community Business Service group (PUMK) Samben Jaya was established, functioning as a governance body that manages several programs including SMART Patrol. Monitoring activities from the West Kalimantan BKSDA and the PUMK Samben Jaya SMART Patrol team in the Gunug Nyiut Nature Reserve area revealed frequent wildlife poaching activities. Therefore, there was an urgent need to reduce the level of wildlife poaching within the area.

YPI, together with the West Kalimantan BKSDA, identified a recurring challenge faced by the community of Tauk sub-village, presenting an opportunity to address wildlife poaching. This challenge arose during the dry season, when residents struggled to access clean water for daily consumption. The community had long relied on rainwater as its primary drinking water source. The village government had actually attempted to address this issue by building a clean water dam, yet it did not last long and the same problem resurfaced.

In 2019, YPI, along with the West Kalimantan BKSDA, Leadership Communication Forum of Air Besar Sub-District, the village government, traditional leaders, and Samben Jaya PUMK, collab-

orated to initiate a firearms exchange program. This program was designed as a solution to the community's clean water shortages, while simultaneously reducing wildlife poaching within the area. The program offered a solution whereby the community was encouraged to voluntarily surrender their firearms to the Air Besar Police. In return, each surrendered weapon would be exchanged for basic necessities to support the construction of a clean water dam.

This program received mixed responses. Some villagers were pessimistic about the construction of the clean water dam because the previous construction project funded by village funds had failed to meet expectations. Despite these negative responses, the majority of the community responded positively to the construction of the clean water reservoir, enabling the project to run successfully. The construction of the clean water dam and storage tanks was carried out collectively by the community, along with the Engkangin Village Government and the Samben Jaya PUMK. Due to limited funding, the Engkangin Village Government contributed by providing additional support for the purchase of pipes and water meters. This represents a well-functioning collaboration, in which each party complements the other.

After the dam construction was completed, the storage tank and pipelines were installed and water began flowing into the villagers' homes, several challenges emerged, including sand clogging the dam, leaking pipes, and excessive water use by some villagers. These issues raised awareness among the community and village government about the importance of establishing clear regula-

tions for clean water management. In May 2023, the Tauk sub-village community conducted a meeting attended by the village head, the Village Consultative Body, the sub-village head, and local residents. This meeting resulted in an official Agreement Document on a Clean Water Management System. The agreement covers regulations on clean water usage, a prohibition on logging or clearing fields within a 1,000-meter radius of the dam (in accordance with Village Regulation No. 01 of 2022, Article 9 Clause 1), and the formation of a working group responsible for the management of clean water. Violations of these agreed-upon regulations are subject to sanctions based on local customary law.

This program has not only had an impact on the availability of clean water for the community but also brought benefits to environmental sustainability in Tauk sub-village. Community awareness about ecosystem protection has increased, leading to a gradual abandonment of hunting practices that previously posed a serious threat to wildlife. Essentially, a change in community habits can occur if there is a clear goal and a tangible positive impact. Even though leaving old habits is not an easy thing to do, the people of Tauk sub-village were able to change. The community's initiative to wisely protect natural resources has proven this. This change emerged because the community was aware of the importance of water in life. With a spirit of mutual cooperation and collective awareness, the people of Tauk sub-village have demonstrated that environmental preservation and the fulfillment of basic needs like clean water can go hand in hand to create a better future. Another lesson we can take as program facilitators is that when addressing

a challenge within a program, feedback is needed from beneficiaries, so that the solutions offered can be accepted and have a positive impact on the community. ■

PART IV

Education and Capacity Building

LIA SYAFITRI

Caring for Wildlife from an Early Age: Learning to Protect in Fun Ways

The joyful noise of children at the Public Elementary School (SDN) 19 Rambai in Sahan village, Bengkayang regency, West Kalimantan filled one enthusiastic morning, when the children were introduced to protected plants and wildlife during the "Visit to School" activity. The "Visit to School" activity was introduced by Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI) as a knowledge-sharing concept to raise awareness about wildlife and forest ecosystem protection, especially among young children who live in or near conservation areas or protected forests. This activity was carried out in collaboration with the West Kalimantan Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) and also involved teachers, village officials, and sub-district authorities.

The greatest threats to wildlife often occur in their own habitats, whether these are natural causes or illegal human activities that disregard the principles of sustainability, such as illegal hunting and trade, forest encroachment, illegal logging, etc. Rural communities, who live closest to wildlife habitats and rely heavily on forest ecosystems for their livelihoods, often still have a limited understanding of the importance of protecting wildlife and their habitats for human survival. Often, they are unaware that the patterns of livelihood inherited and passed down through generations, including those that are a part of their unique identity, can actually be continued in more sustainable ways by implementing conservation values.

It is not because they do not care, but due to limited access to accurate information, including for young school children. The exchange of information and learning from parents to children about

the importance of protecting wildlife almost never occurs. Children simply observe and inherit their parents' livelihood practices, but lack sufficient conservation knowledge to effectively protect or preserve the sustainability of forest ecosystems.

This is the gap we are trying to fill through the "Visit to School" activity, by equipping the young generation with facts about wildlife conservation: What species are protected by national law? What is their role in nature for ecosystem sustainability? And why must they be protected? At the same time, we are trying to build awareness through fun and memorable experiences for the children through competitions and games. Our hope is that after learning and understanding, the children will share the information and knowledge to the wider community, which will have impact on behavioral changes and increase participation in protecting and preserving wildlife and their habitats.

When we arrived at SDN 19 Rambai to play and learn together, the students were already eager to participate in the "Visit to School" activity. Once the event started, they were very enthusiastic. Their little hands shot up quickly, competing to answer questions and win small prizes. They often expressed amazement when they learned facts about wildlife they had never heard of before.

Several questions were asked to encourage students to interact with knowledge regarding conservation. "Did you know that some animals commonly found in the forest are protected and even endangered?" The answers were often surprising. Many of them did not know. Even the words "protected" or "endangered" sounded completely unfamiliar to them. They saw these animals as part of

everyday life, not as endangered species, such as pangolin (*Manis javanica*), helmeted hornbill (*Rhinoplax vigil*), rhinoceros hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros*), gibbons *(Hylobates sp.*), Javan porcupine (*Hystrix javanica*), sambar deer (*Cervus unicolor*), barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*), mouse deer (*Tragulus javanicus*), and so on.

During the activities, the children were excited, learning while playing and competing. These included competitions and puzzle games, coloring pictures of helmeted hornbills and pangolins, making collages of gibbon and deer from natural materials, and watching conservation films. All activities were designed in a way that the children did not only engage with information but also emotionally and intellectually.

As I left the school, a sense of hope grew in my heart. Perhaps we still have a chance to keep nature thriving. By the end of the activity, the children had begun to understand that they too have a role to protect wildlife—by not consuming, capturing, or hunting endangered species and by sharing this information with their parents, siblings, family, and friends. If from only one visit we can already spark an increase in awareness, perhaps with more visits we can have a significant impact on changing people's behavior.

From the "Visit to School" activity, I learned the importance of language use, the choice of methods, the delivery of materials, and alignment with the local context and cultural values to ensure that the message is appropriate and easily understood by children. Furthermore, we cannot simply convey rules and prohibitions. What matters more is fostering a sense of belonging and emotional connection with nature, so that the younger generation understands

that nature is a part of their lives and that we must preserve it together.

However, I also still keep a question in mind: To what extent do we truly understand the connection between wildlife, forest conservation, and human survival? It could be that I, or even many of us who live far from forest areas, despite having access to information about the importance of forests and wildlife conservation, do not fully understand forests or the wildlife that inhabit them. Because we do not directly use the natural resources from the forest, perhaps our sensitivity or concern for the forest remains limited. In the end, all actions of every human being, whether we live far from or near forest areas, whether it is good or bad, have an impact on forest and wildlife sustainability.

Therefore, education about wildlife protection must continue not only in schools but also in everyday life, reaching a wider audience. The "Visit to School" activities and other awareness-raising activities can serve as a strategy to address the challenge of the gap in mindset between urban and rural communities regarding wildlife and ecosystem conservation. For sure, conserving and protecting wildlife and their habitats is neither an easy nor short-term task. Furthermore, it is not the work of an individual. What is needed is a collaborative effort from all elements within the global society, from local communities, Indigenous Peoples, governments, and conservation organizations like YPI, working together in mutual support. We all have a role to play in ensuring that this awareness does not remain an activity, but develops into a growing and thriving movement. ■

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FERONIKA DESY

KKC Scholarship Program: From Limitation to Opportunity

The journey of Kalimantan Kids Club (KKC) began in 1986, long before the program became widely known. At that time, PT Kalimantan Surya Kencana (PT KSK) informally began supporting several school children so that they could continue their education. This simple initiative grew out of a concern for the future of children living around the company's operational area in Gunung Mas, Central Kalimantan. Over time, after Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS) was established in 1998, the management of this program was officially entrusted to YTS. The goal was clear: to broaden access to education for children from underprivileged families in villages surrounding PT KSK through scholarship programs from junior high school, senior high school, to university level. YTS also encouraged the development of children's potential through training, mentoring, and opportunities to participate in various social activities. This approach was expected to help children increase their self-confidence, enthusiasm for learning, and broaden their horizon of the outside world and their roles in society.

Every year, prospective recipients have to go through a selection process to ensure they truly need support and demonstrate a strong motivation in learning. Those who are selected then receive an educational grant once a year. In 2024, KKC received 186 scholarship applications. Of those, 150 students successfully passed the selection process and received scholarships. They came from 36 villages across five sub-districts. The scholarship recipients included 84 junior high school students, 68 senior high school students, and

34 university students. This number reflects the high enthusiasm and need for educational support in the assisted areas.

To this day, hundreds of children from Gunung Mas regency, Bukit Batu sub-district, and Sanaman Mantikei sub-district have benefited from this program. Many of them have successfully completed their education and taken a further step to pursue their dreams. One story illustrating this comes from Pak Hamzah, a KKC scholarship alumnus from Tumbang Maraya village, Damang Batu sub-district. He shared his story:

> "The KKC scholarship has encouraged me to continue my education. We used to compete eagerly to get it due to the financial constraints. I hope that the current KKC scholarship recipients will be even more enthusiastic to study, as this scholarship is very beneficial for their future and serves as a stepping stone to secure greater job opportunities."

With this support, Pak Hamzah successfully completed his education to university. He is now trusted by the community to serve as the Village Head of Tumbang Maraya, an achievement that demonstrates that education can open the door to better opportunities and change.

However, the educational journey of scholarship recipients is not always easy. Many of them face significant challenges. Economic constraints have forced some students to work to help their parents, requiring them to carefully balance their time between studying and working. For children living in remote villages, access to

schools or educational facilities is not always easy. Long distances, difficult road conditions, and limited transportation options pose additional obstacles for them to study. After graduation, many students lack information about further education pathways or other scholarship options they can apply for. Other challenges include limited access to work experience, low self-confidence, and poor communication skills.

To address the challenges students face in the assisted areas, YTS created learning opportunities through internship programs and active involvement in YTS activities. Some students acted as facilitators, teaching elementary school children and village officials how to use computers, introducing them to basic technology, which is an essential need today. Furthermore, some served as translators to assist women from the Joint Business Group Forum (FKUB) when they sold their products at the Subud World Congress (SWC), which was attended by many international participants. Through the internship programs, many scholarship recipients have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their communities while gaining real-world work experience. Through the internships, the students not only gain practical skills such as administration, communication, and activity planning, but also develop important soft skills such as teamwork, time management, and initiative. KKC is not merely an assistance program, but has become a bridge towards broader personal development.

YTS also actively maintains communication with scholarship recipients and alumni through the KKC Forum, a platform for sharing ideas, experiences, and motivation. This forum also serves as a

source of information about further education opportunities, scholarships, and capacity-building training. Through this forum, networks among members are continuously strengthened, creating a community of mutual support, both academically and socially. Furthermore, the KKC Forum serves as a hub of innovation. Through collaborative discussions, we can design more creative mentoring strategies or develop small-scale projects that have a meaningful impact on the community.

Being a KKC officer has taught me many valuable lessons. One of the biggest is that a personal approach is highly effective in gaining information, support, and active participation from various parties. I realized that strong relationships are key to success in mentoring and program development. When I make time to listen directly to the needs of scholarship recipients or engage in discussion with village officials, I feel a growing sense of trust and openness. It makes the coordination process easier and ensures that the programs implemented truly align with community needs.

With ongoing support, YTS hopes that this program will continue to pave the way for village children to dream bigger, get quality education, and give back to their communities. ■

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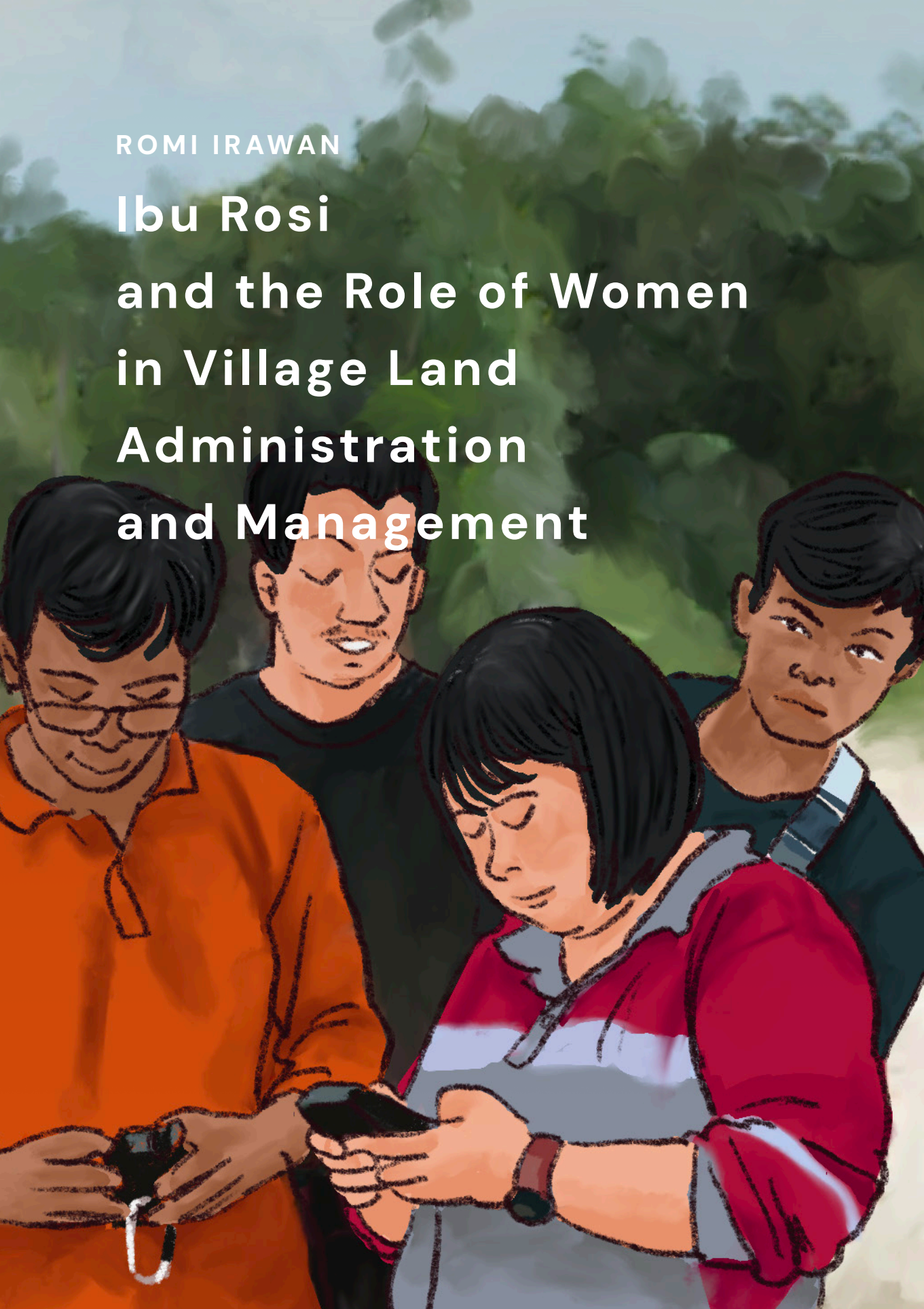
ROMI IRAWAN

Ibu Rosi and the Role of Women in Village Land Administration and Management



Tumbang Manggu village in Central Kalimantan was once a small settlement whose people relied on the forest for their livelihood, including hunting, gardening, farming, and gathering non-timber forest products. Land ownership was based on customary law, with boundaries marked by natural features such as rivers, large trees, or hills. There were no official maps, but each villager recognized their land boundaries based on stories passed down through generations.

When logging companies started to come to the village around 1970 and cleared the land for industrial use, major changes occurred. Migrants from various regions lived in the village, the number of neighbourhood units (RT) increased from five to fourteen, and the village economy expanded rapidly. These changes also brought new challenges, particularly related to land ownership. Many residents lacked official documents, land boundaries became unclear, and conflicts from land disputes began to emerge. The village government at that time focused more on infrastructure development, such as building bridges and buildings, while population administration and village spatial planning were poorly taken care of, resulting in continued land conflicts without clear solutions.

In 2020, Tumbang Manggu village underwent a change in leadership through the election of a new village head, who then established a village government structure with six staff members, consisting of two women and four men. The new village head began restructuring the government system by mapping out the key issues happening in the community. In the same year, Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS) came to the village to conduct a social study

aimed at understanding the community's conditions before project implementation. The findings of this study served as a reference for the village government in its development planning, which highlighted land conflicts as the most pressing issue.

One of the new village officials was Ibu Rosi, who served as the Head of Village Government Affairs. She was 43 and a mother of two children. Besides being a village official, she also played a role as a housewife. In her position, Ibu Rosi was responsible for population administration, village administration, and village spatial planning. In Sanaman Mantikei sub-district, the position of the Head of Village Government Affairs is generally held by men because the task demands frequent fieldwork and because community perceptions still limit women's roles in village government. Women are often considered only suitable for handling village administration, while responsibilities involving fieldwork are more often entrusted to men. As a result, few women enter roles like Ibu Rosi.

As a YTS field facilitator assigned to assist Tumbang Manggu village, I live closely with the community to help them understand and resolve the challenges they face. I often stayed at Ibu Rosi's house, allowing me to witness firsthand how she carried out her duties in the village government while still taking care of her family.

One day, while I was staying at her home, Ibu Rosi told me that she and other village officials had received training on the use of GPS and mapping from the Department of Housing, Residential Area, and Land of Katingan regency. This training aimed to assist

the village government in developing spatial planning to resolve land management conflicts. Initially, the training was scheduled for three days, but in reality, it was only conducted for one day. As a result, the materials presented were insufficient to support Ibu Rosi in conducting her responsibilities in the village government. In response, I suggested that Ibu Rosi should express her needs during YTS program planning at the end of the year, so that additional support could be provided to increase the capacity of village officials in mapping and spatial planning.

In November 2022, YTS conducted a village review and planning meeting by inviting all assisted villages to evaluate the ongoing programs and develop a joint work plan. On this occasion, Ibu Rosi proposed additional training on GPS and mapping. Her suggestion gained support from other village officials because they also felt the previous training was too brief and ineffective.

In response, YTS and its program division designed more in-depth mentoring, focusing not only on theory but also on hands-on practice in the field. Village officials, including Ibu Rosi, were trained in utilizing GPS, creating coordinate points, and accurately measuring residents' land boundaries. Over time, the impact of this mentoring began to be seen. The village government now has more accurate land data, the land disputes have become less, and village development planning has become more focused. The village profile, which previously was poorly documented, has been updated with more comprehensive information.

Besides bringing technical benefits, this program also fostered social change. The roles of women in technical tasks such as map-

ping and land surveying began to be recognized. Ibu Rosi, who was initially doubted, has now become one of the most skilful village officials in using GPS for village development. Her case demonstrates that women are equally capable of contributing to the technical tasks of village governance. She continued to perform her responsibilities well, including in preparing village profiles and spatial planning.

On one occasion, Ibu Rosi once said to me, "I used to think that women were not suited to this kind of training, especially since this task requires us to go to the field and even into the forest with a GPS. But if we don't learn, who else will help the village improve? After being coached, I felt I could do it. Even though in the village government I am a woman and responsible for the village spatial planning, I've actually come to understand the importance of having clear data to avoid constant disputes over land boundaries." Not only did these words reflect her growing confidence, but also a new spirit that women can also be agents of change in better governance and development.

For me personally, and even for YTS, this mentoring process provided an important lesson: The success of a program does not solely rely on the technical methods applied, but also on the acknowledgement and empowerment of individuals' roles, especially women, in the village government system. When learning opportunities are provided equally, women have proven capable in both technical and administrative matters, which have long been dominated by men. This story proves that with the right mentoring, women can master new skills which are previously not considered

part of their role. Ibu Rosi's success has also inspired other village officials showing that openness to new knowledge is key to progress. With a better land administration system, Tumbang Manggu village is now more prepared to face development challenges, ensuring that residents' land ownership rights are protected fairly and transparently. ■

ADINUGROHO PURBO

The Importance of Writing Skills for Program Officers

I have been working at Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS) for one and a half years as a communications and research assistant. I think I am still in the honeymoon phase because I get glimmers, a feeling of joy and gratitude for having a job that I love. I get paid to write, which I really enjoy. On top of that, we deal with issues which I have an affinity for, like peatlands, climate change, and conservation. I have been wanting to join YTS since I moved to Kalimantan in 2018, but I wasn't confident in my skills so I didn't apply then. The jobs I had before joining YTS in October 2023 were just stepping stones that led me to work at this acclaimed non-governmental organization (NGO). I knew that my skill set was needed in the organization and it would lighten the workload of the director at the time because I could write well in English. My responsibilities at YTS include assisting in research, editing reports, translating, reporting to donors, writing stories and managing our social media. Much of that work involves repackaging reports written by the field staff into something attractive that our donors and general public can understand. The problem is that I myself often struggle to understand the information in the reports.

All organizations have an obligation to write reports of their activities, whether it be for record-keeping or distribution to specific audiences. YTS has a responsibility to produce two reports a year, one mid-year report and an annual report. These are distributed to our board members and donors. There are also project-based reports for specific donors. Upper management oversees the publication of those reports, whereas I mostly review reports that are circulated internally. As I reviewed and edited numerous reports, I'd

notice common mistakes that were repeated. That's when I began to realize the severity of the problem. There is a general need to strengthen writing skills among the field staff because they would often write incomplete sentences, paid no attention to detail, and were inconsistent in formatting. Those are just a few things among many that needed improvement.

The level of writing proficiency among the field personnel does not vary much. One thing that often happens in their reports is unnecessary repetition. Take, for example, these sentences:

> "The resource person then handed over to the facilitator to close the session. The facilitator closed the session by thanking the participants for their active involvement and gave a motivational message for them to continue developing the knowledge and skills they had gained during this training."

A good writer would combine the two sentences to avoid repeating the words "facilitator", "close", and "session" and he'd specify what the resource person handed over to the facilitator. Another poor habit of the field staff is that they would write incomplete sentences in terms of the three parts of a sentence: subject, predicate, and object. Take the example below:

> "Encourage students to delay early marriage and complete their education, and raise awareness about the importance of health in preventing stunting when they get married."

What is written above is missing a subject and it cannot stand alone as a complete sentence. The reader would want to know "who" or "what encourages students to delay early marriage and complete their education". Therefore, the sentence is also missing vital information, which significantly affects the quality of the report. This demonstrates that grammar is just as important as the information being conveyed and it can completely change the meaning of a sentence. This is why I struggle to understand field reports.

In my editing work, I am only supposed to fix the grammar and language in a document, while the program coordinator or program manager is responsible for reviewing the content. However, there was one occasion where it fell to me to revise the content of a report. In one section of the report, there was a graph of livelihood statistics over three time periods and below it was a summary of each period. The same words were copy-pasted for each period. So, I wrote a fitting summary for each time period based on the information in the graph. I came across something similar in another report where the same activity was done for two different villages. In the minutes of the discussion, the same thing was written for both villages, word for word. There could be important information that was left out in the discussion minutes of the other village. I am willing to give the people who wrote those reports the benefit of the doubt and assume that they did it to save time. The program officers are constantly jumping from one program activity to the next and they might not have the time to be detailed in their reports be-

cause they might be spread too thin in their work area. Our Area 1 program has one coordinator and eight officers who work with 32 partner villages in the regencies of Gunung Mas and Katingan. Four teams of two are each assigned one sub-district that has seven to nine villages. With the amount of field work and planning that they do, it's difficult to make time to pay attention to grammar.

I keep reminding my colleagues to always read over what they wrote or have someone else read it. If they made time to do that, they would notice most of their writing mistakes and fix them. I made the initiative to conduct a few training sessions for the program officers to address these grammar mistakes, but they need to be done regularly to make any lasting change. My predecessors have provided writing workshops for different staff, but I cannot say if they were effective or not. Let's say there was one person whose writing improved considerably from that training. He or she could leave YTS after a year because their contracts only last that long and YTS loses a good writer. It's a common fact that NGOs have high turnover. Every third week of December, we dread the appearance of a pizza box on the pantry table because it means we are commemorating someone's farewell with a pizza party. Regardless, I believe it would benefit the organization significantly to hold regular sessions where the program officers have a chance to learn how to improve their writing.

YTS's program officers are 85% local Dayak. I've presented a couple examples above as to why their writing skills need improvement. If I had to guess why it is like that, I would say it is because

of their education and maybe also because of their culture. Traditionally, reading and writing in Dayak culture was not very developed, as stories were handed down orally from generation to generation. Not to say that it is good or bad, but it's just the way it is. And I don't mean to generalize that Dayaks don't read or write well. The word "Dayak" itself is a collective term for all the various ethnic groups that live in Borneo. It's just that the program officers in YTS, who happen to be Dayak from Central Kalimantan, struggle to write with proper grammar. Even with the technology of information today, it is difficult to instill the behavior of reading and writing if it is not passed down through culture. It is a known fact that reading improves your writing. Compared to the rest of the world, Indonesia ranks pretty low in reading interest. Almost all Indonesians are able to read, but most only do it out of necessity, not for enjoyment. The educational environment does not support it, with limited access to libraries and good quality books.

In YTS's work, behavior change in the community is one of the indicators of progress, which can take a long time. The first step in that process is learning. I remember saying to my boss: "We can't expect to change a community's behavior if we can't change our own." YTS can set an example to other organizations by continually improving its human resources. And, who knows, it could inspire the village communities to do the same, outside of YTS's capacity building programs. To do that, we can begin by establishing a culture of learning, internally and externally, and start with institutionalizing writing sessions. ■

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Afterword

LIANA CHUA
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In recent years, there have been mounting efforts to understand and address the social dimensions of conservation, whether through education and community development programs, scores of articles about "conservation social science", and the emergence of numerous social science resources for conservation practitioners. All these have drawn unprecedented attention to the lively, complex interface between "communities" and "conservation".

But "communities" and "conservation" are not, of course, clear-cut, coherent units, even if they're often written about as such. At base, they are collections of individuals with varying backgrounds, interests, personalities, concerns, and ways of working. Moreover, these collections are neither fixed nor uniform. Conservation staff can also be members of the communities with whom they work; and people within the same community may have different accounts of local history (Muhamad Sulthaanan Saputra) or respond to new initiatives in contrasting ways (Ghufron Mubarok). For conservation scientists and policymakers, such variability can be confounding. But for keen observers of social life (including the contributors to this volume), that's just part of the messiness, unpredictability, and beauty of being human.

A careful attentiveness to the human condition is what makes the present collection so inspiring. These reflections don't try to solve or explain away the problems and dilemmas that emerge when communities and conservationists interact. Instead, just as Elsinawati holds space for her interlocutors' stories and struggles, each author in this volume holds space for complexity and contradiction. Rather than judging or prescribing solutions, they reflect on and bear witness to very human voices and experiences. Their ability to do so stems from their own experiences as frontline workers who do the actual work of approaching, interacting with, and gaining the trust of people on the ground. These authors are the real social experts: professionals whose insights stem from direct engagement with flesh-and-blood humans (and not just abstract units) in Kalimantan. In this capacity, they deserve to be taken every bit as seriously as the ecologists, economists, and other experts whose names tend to dominate academic articles and policy papers.

So, what does this collection bring to our understanding of the community–conservation interface? I'd like to highlight three things. First, these reflections are ethnographic in the sense that they illuminate the social, cultural, political, economic, and other contexts in which community–conservation interactions unfold. A good example of this is Elvina's discussion of how the ideals of autonomy and flexibility embedded in Dayak farmers' practices did not align well with a new air-drying rubber scheme that Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS) sought to implement. Rather than simply blaming the recipients of the scheme (as some conservationists are

wont to do), Elvina draws attention to how wider contextual factors over which non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have little control can shape how conservation initiatives play out. She concludes that sometimes, NGOs have to accept their limitations and the fact that things don't always work as they'd hoped. In a similar move, Effan Dena Musa and Alfi Syahrina write about local cultures of avoiding discomfort and reading omens before starting to plant new fields respectively. Rather than treating these practices as oddities, Effan and Alfi highlight their social significance, and consider how conservationists can work with and/or learn from them (see also Sahril Novian Pratama). Like other contributions, their narratives are animated by a deep respect for local lifeways, and a commitment to taking them seriously rather than just trying to change them.

But of course, these communities are not trapped in timeless, static worlds. As other contributions reveal, they've done plenty of adapting to shifting circumstances and devising visions for their own futures. Roni Bia Santo points out that the forms of human–nature coexistence that exist in Desa Sungai Nibung haven't just always been there, but are the result of years of compromise and adaptation by the local community. Raja Nammy Petrus Purba movingly describes how a remote village "at the end of the world" doesn't only want to remain a beneficiary of aid, but is taking ambitious steps to become properly independent and self-reliant. On a smaller scale, Elsinawati's evocative narrative reveals how one farmer's struggle to reduce her reliance on middlemen is driven not only by economic concerns, but by a desire for fair recognition

of the work she has put into growing her vegetables. Cumulatively, these reflections underline how communities are not just blank slates, but complex socio-political assemblages of people, values, relations, and aspirations that NGOs need to work with.

Secondly, these reflections yield critical insights into how conservation programs play out in practice and not just in theory. In this respect, they offer useful ideas, tips, and cautionary notes for field teams working in similar contexts. I especially appreciate the honesty and humility with which the authors discuss the challenges they've faced. Take, for example, Abdul Kadir Jailani's frank reflection of the way programs designed to help rural communities can inadvertently create new dependencies and inequalities, and leave behind problematic memories that later generations of NGO workers have to deal with. Similarly, Cuwita recounts how corruption and financial mismanagement in a Conservation Community Business Services (*Pelayanan Usaha Masyarakat Konservasi*) village led to the loss of funds and trust among villagers, forcing Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI) to rejig its entire system to deal with the resultant problems. Such candour is refreshing in a sector that's constantly under pressure to produce feel-good success stories. These stories reveal how acknowledging what went wrong is not in itself a failure, but a way of figuring out how to do better. Thankfully, several contributors also share lessons from schemes that succeeded, among them Ghufron Mubarok, who notes the importance of soliciting local feedback at an early stage, and Feronika Desy, who highlights the importance of personal relationships in ensuring the success of conservation projects.

Cumulatively, these analyses of how conservation works (or fails) point to the collection's third key contribution, which is to demonstrate the value of reflexivity as an organizational and strategic tool. Sharing and analysing lessons from the field (as this volume does) must be an ongoing process, not a one-off exercise. To keep those lessons coming, it is vital for NGOs to sustain an organisational culture that prizes regular self-reflection and self-evaluation. This means building reflexive tools into their own internal structures and procedures, and empowering everyone in the organisation—whatever their position—to share their thoughts and experiences, however challenging or uncomfortable these may be.

Regular reflexive discussions can be great troubleshooting devices, enabling NGOs to identify problems, challenges and solutions. But they can also be potent openings for change *within* organisations and the conservation sector itself. This requires a collective readiness for self-transformation—one that both YPI and YTS already recognise and are working on (see, for example, Putri Damatashia Liana Pratiwi's and Adinugroho Purbo's reflections). This collection is itself proof of their commitment to working critically but constructively on themselves in order to bring about more just, successful outcomes for the humans and environments around them. Such reflexive, transformative processes can be frustrating and take time, perhaps more time than conservationists feel they have to spare. After all, conservation is an urgent business. But as these authors are well aware, social engagement for conservation cannot be done in haste. Sometimes it pays to slow down, go back to basics—maybe even shake up those basics—in order to gain

fresh perspectives and generate long-term impacts. This is exactly what the voices and field experiences collated in this volume invite us to do. ■

Author Profiles

Sahril Novian Pratama

Sahril Novian Pratama joined YPI in 2024 as a Field Facilitator for the Ketapang area. Beyond his role in community engagement, he enjoys the world of writing, with a deep interest in social, environmental, and humanitarian issues. Through his works, he strives to bring voices from the margins to life in warm and reflective narratives. He believes writing is a bridge between experience and change, and he often shares these stories through social media platforms.

Abdul Kadir Jailani

Abdul Kadir Jailani is a forestry graduate who has been working at YTS since 2018. He has six years of experience as a Program Officer for Areas 1 and 2 and is currently a Program Coordinator for Area 2. Abdul has a keen interest in community empowerment because it allows him to learn many things from the many people he meets in this work.

Muhamad Sulthaanan Saputra

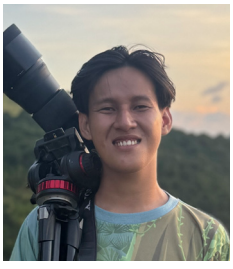
Muhamad Sulthaanan Saputra is a researcher and conservation advocate from Kalimantan who views people and nature as parts of a single, interconnected relationship. He joined YPI in 2024 as a Field Facilitator in the Landak regency. Through his community-based work, he fosters collaboration grounded in local knowledge and empathy. For him, conservation means nurturing memories, living spaces, and the future so that they may continue to breathe.

Effan Dena Musa

Effan Dena Musa has been a Program Officer in the Bukit Batu area at YTS since 2021. He is passionate about social issues and community empowerment. Despite having a background in education, he is committed to driving change at the community level and channeling his creativity through music and video production.

Alfi Syahrina

Alfi Syahrina holds a degree in nutrition with a strong passion for public health and environmental issues. Since January 2020, she has been part of YPI, contributing as a Technical Assistant for Health and Education, particularly in the healthy families program, an initiative that bridges community health with nature conservation efforts. Through this role, Alfi has learned that caring for people and caring for the environment are inseparable.



Roni Bia Santo

Roni Bia Santo is a visual communication specialist who sees media as a bridge of empathy. For more than five years in the non-governmental sector, he has created works that are not only visually captivating but also emotionally stirring. Through documentary projects such as “The Guardian of Tagong” and “Voices of the Vezo”, Roni has learned to voice the realities in the communities. In his current role at YPI as Communications and Outreach Staff since 2022, he views visuals as tools of advocacy—sharp yet gentle, touching without preaching. He is also active as a communication facilitator and consultant, helping strengthen community messages.

Raja Nammy Petrus Purba

Raja Nammy Petrus Purba is a humanitarian who drives change through local empowerment and conservation. He has been working with YPI as a Field Facilitator in the Bengkayang area since 2023. His field narratives—an interplay of realism, hyperbole, and satire—portray socio-cultural issues with emotional depth. He serves as a bridge between local spirit and universal impact.

Mathius S. Nanyan

Mathius S. Nanyan has been a Program Officer at YTS since February 2024. With a background in forestry, he is active in community empowerment and sustainable natural resource management. His field experience has taught him a great deal and encouraged him to share his knowledge so that communities can reap tangible benefits.

Elvina

Elvina has been a Program Officer at YTS since 2021. With an education in forestry, she has been involved in various social research and community empowerment activities, including the development of sustainable livelihoods in the Pulang Pisau peatlands. Her experience working with communities has strengthened her love for local cul-

ture, which she expresses through Bakung Shop, a small business that promotes local products.

Elsinawati

Elsinawati has worked at YTS since 2011 as a Program Officer in Area 1 and since 2019 in Area 2. With a background in government studies, she enjoys her work as a field staff in community empowerment, which has taught her many lessons on how to become a better person and be of service to others.

Putri Damatashia Liana Pratiwi

Putri Damatashia Liana Pratiwi is a socio-economic practitioner at YPI, focusing on community empowerment in conservation areas. Since 2019, she has served as the Technical Lead for Social-Economy, she believes that lasting change is born from collaboration and empathy. Through social research, group facilitation, and strengthening community financial systems, she works to bridge the values of economy and conservation.

Cuwita

Cuwita has a degree in forestry and has been working with YPI since 2023, after previously volunteering with the organization from 2021 to 2022. She has a deep love for nature and a strong passion for conservation. This passion strengthens her role as a Field Facilitator in the Kubu Raya regency, where she works closely with local communities and finds joy in seeing people gain new knowledge.

Ghufron Mubarok

Ghufron Mubarok has been part of YPI since 2023 as a Field Facilitator in the Landak regency. He is passionate about his journey in social community work, engaging directly with people and learning from their stories. Through his writings on social, economic, and environmental issues, he seeks to offer more meaningful perspectives to readers.

Lia Syafitri

Lia Syafitri holds a background in forestry and has been actively involved with NGOs and conservation in West Kalimantan for seventeen years. Since 2020, she has worked in the Communication Division of Planet Indonesia as the Communications and Outreach Manager, from 2020. Lia en-

joys working on visual communication design and mass communication.

Feronika Desy

Feronika Desy joined YTS in 2023 as a KKC (Kalimantan Kids Club) Officer. She has a background in international relations, but previously worked in finance and administration. Her interest in education and youth empowerment issues motivates her to work directly with communities through the KKC program.

Romi Irawan

Romi Irawan joined YTS in 2019 as a Program Officer. Although his formal background is as a mathematics teacher, he has a strong interest in social issues and community empowerment. Since 2025, he has taken on a new role as Training and Capacity Building Officer.

Adinugroho Purbo

Adinugroho Purbo began working at YTS in 2023 as a Communications and Research Assistant. Although he has a background in environmental science, his previous work experience was in hospitality and tourism. In his spare time, he works as an ecotourism guide in the forest near his home.

Paul H. Thung

Paul H. Thung is the Director of Conservation Social Science at Planet Indonesia, where he integrates ethnographic and other social science methods and insights to support community-led conservation. He grew up in the Netherlands and now divides his time between Indonesia and the UK.

Viola Schreer

Viola Schreer is a social anthropologist with a long-term interest in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesian Borneo. Her research has explored human–environmental relations, conservation issues, frontier dynamics, and people's aspirations for development. In recent years, she has adopted an applied research approach to put anthropological methods, insights, and perspectives to use for a more sustainable and equitable society.

Liana Chua

Liana Chua is a social anthropologist and Tunku Abdul Rahman Associate Professor in Malay World Studies at the University of Cambridge. She has long-term research interests in religion, indigeneity, ethnic politics, displacement, and environmental change in Malaysian Borneo, and recently

led two projects on the global nexus of orangutan conservation.

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Organization Profiles

Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta

Established in 1998, Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta (YTS) is a community development foundation based in Central Kalimantan that currently supports 37 villages across the province. YTS helps rural communities in identifying their needs and preferences, linking them with government and the private sectors, and providing technical expertise. To ensure villagers' participation in development activities, YTS has developed a Community-Led Analysis and Planning (CLAP) methodology that uses different participatory tools to understand various aspects of community life, including livelihoods, education, health, culture, governance, and infrastructure. While the organization's main focus is community-based development, in recent years YTS has also become more active in carrying out research activities, including for conservation organizations.

Yayasan Planet Indonesia

Yayasan Planet Indonesia (YPI) was established in 2015 and supports locally-led natural resource governance in Indonesia, primarily through partnerships with communities whose livelihoods depend on ecosystems that are at risk of degradation. Distilling a long process of listening to and learning from these community partners, in 2022 YPI formalised a core model to guide its work. This model rests of four pillars: (1) helping communities secure rights and access to natural resources; (2) providing technical and financial support for community-based natural resource management; (3) strengthening good governance within community organisations; and (4) improving human and environmental well-being by facilitating access to education, finance, and health services. YPI currently supports 55 community organisations across 31 villages in West Kalimantan, in addition to providing partnership support to 8 NGOs in other parts of Indonesia.

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Field Reflections **contains seventeen accounts from staff of two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Indonesian Borneo, who facilitate conservation and development programmes in partnership with local and Indigenous communities. Guided by two social anthropologists, the authors document personal and organisational learning about local history, social change, economic relations, and institutional dynamics. Community engagement, in these stories, is characterised by moral ambition, personal relationships, and complex dilemmas.**

The voices of those carrying out community engagement on the ground are often absent from policy forums, academic journals, and the boardrooms of NGOs and funding agencies. Consequently, new targets and approaches are frequently developed without optimally considering the insights of and burdens put on field workers. By making their perspectives more visible, *Field Reflections* encourages practitioners, researchers, and donors to learn from and support this crucial form of expertise.

Authors: Sahril Novian Pratama, Abdul Kadir Jailani, Muhamad Sulthaanan Saputra, Effan Dena Musa, Alfi Syahrina, Roni Bia Santo, Raja Nammy Petrus Purba, Mathius S. Nanyan, Elvina, Elsinawati, Putri Damatashia Liana Pratiwi, Cuwita, Ghufron Mubarok, Lia Syafitri, Feronika Desy, Romi Irawan, Adinugroho Purbo, Liana Chua, Viola Schreer, and Paul H. Thung.

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