

Natural Resource Management and Livelihood Strategies of the Iban of Nanga Talong, Ulu Engkari, Sarawak

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper discusses the livelihood strategies among the Iban of Rumah Bada, Nanga Talong, Ulu Engkari, Sarawak as well as the uses and management of natural resources. The livelihood of the remote Iban community in Rumah Bada relies heavily on natural resources for survival, thus management of these resources is important to the community.

Design/methodology/approach: Through in-depth interviews, the information about local knowledge on the uses and management of natural resources were identified.

Findings: Agricultural activities such as cultivation of cash and subsistence crops are the primary economic activities of the Iban community in Nanga Talong. In addition, villagers periodically harvest freshwater fish from Sungai Engkari as well as wild vegetables and fruits to supplement their food and income. The dependence of this rural community on the surrounding natural resources for their livelihood leads to their careful management of these resources as seen in the community's participation in the *tagang* system that was introduced by the Sarawak Forestry

Department. Despite the fact that the villagers in the rural Rumah Bada, Nanga Talong do not enjoy modern facilities and infrastructure such as road access like those in the urban areas, they are able to survive by relying on the utilisation and management of the land, river and forest resources that surround them.

Research limitations/implications: As this is a case study in Rumah Bada in Nanga Talong, the findings are unable to be generalized in all rural Iban communities in Sarawak.

Practical implications: The findings can provide useful insights for the policy makers in developing regulatory and institutional framework or even social capital support to ensure a more sustainable use of natural resources in Sarawak.

Originality/value: The paper provides insights on the utilization and management of natural resources by the local Iban community particularly in Nanga Talong, the headwaters of Batang Lupar in Sarawak.

Keywords: Livelihood Strategies, Natural Resources Management; Iban

Introduction

The environment shapes the society that lives and depends on it, and in turn is also shaped by that society. Human and environment interaction is how people depend on, adapt to and modify their environment. In developing countries, nearly 70% of the communities are subsistence-based living in the rural area, thus the pressure on natural environments is more acute (World Bank, 2004). People who rely heavily on natural resources for food and energy will be naturally driven by basic survival instinct and derive their diet from their surroundings to sustain individual, household and community livelihoods (Hartert & Boston, 2007).

Indigenous communities in Sarawak have always relied on natural resources found in their surrounding environment and their indigenous knowledge on the uses of these resources to sustain their livelihood (Baumann, 2002).

However, the rapid exploitation of forest areas for development and agricultural activities has resulted in the diminishing of flora and fauna. Therefore, proper management of these natural resources is important to ensure sustainable use.

Natural resources such as land, water, air, minerals, forests, fisheries, wild flora and fauna provide the necessary ecosystem services that support human life (Bromhead et al., 2000). Access to primary natural resources is important for many rural households, particularly the rural poor. This is due to the fact that their livelihoods are inherently dependent on land for agriculture and other natural resources such as forests and fisheries as well as the underlying environmental services that sustain these resources (Lee and Neves, 2009). Several studies have shown that the economic activities of the rural communities still rely heavily on natural resources, depending on their location (Intan, 2014; Johnny, 2014; Salleh, 2006).

Based on these studies, it is shown that the economic activities of the rural communities still rely heavily on natural resources, and the livelihood strategies from these different communities in different areas are related to their surrounding environment. Therefore, proper management of these natural resources is an important factor in the sustainability of their livelihood.

The purpose of this study is to identify the uses of natural resources by the community of Rumah Bada, Nanga Talong, and their management strategies in the context of sustainable livelihood and the environment.

Rumah Bada, Nanga Talong of Ulu Engkari is a small Iban riverine community in Sarawak. The current longhouse was built in 1988 and is one of several Iban settlements situated along the