



For Immediate Release

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## **Mangkuwagu To Help Sabah State Scale Up Community Forestry Management**

*Kota Kinabalu, Mar 24* – The Sabah government is poised to incorporate community forestry into the state's development agenda to improve the livelihoods of local communities while protecting the environment, as is demonstrated in the Mangkuwagu Forest Reserve.

The Mangkuwagu Social Forestry project, a joint effort between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Sabah Department of Forestry, is an 18-month project which aims to set the standard for sustainable forestry management as well as to address the socioeconomic challenges faced by the four villages in and around the 8, 335-hectare Mangkuwagu Forest Reserve in the Tongod district.

"In the past, there was a certain degree of disconnect between forestry matters and wider development objectives, such as poverty alleviation. Efforts to promote forest conservation, for example, did not adequately take into consideration the welfare of forest communities," said Dr. Richard Leete, UNDP Resident Representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, at the launch of a report titled, "*Sustainable Community Forest Management in Sabah*" here.

According to the report, the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) conducted in October 2007 to assess the needs of the villagers revealed that there are about 260 households living in the area, with a total population of about 1, 610. Among the hardships faced by the four villages include the absence of formed roads or viable transportation infrastructure, reticulated water, electricity and sewerage, and other basic amenities and services.

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The report also indicated that the Mangkuwagu communities are striving to adapt to the impact of environmental degradation, brought on by logging and other extractive industries. In addition to hunting and gathering, traditional farming forms the backbone of the communities and constitutes the main source of income.

“Previously the villagers lived off the bounty of the forest and were self-sufficient in their food needs, but that is becoming increasingly difficult. The lack of livelihood opportunities hampers their ability to lift themselves out of poverty.”

The Mangkuwagu Social Forestry project is tapping agroforestry as its main strategy to provide sustainable livelihoods for the Mangkuwagu villagers while rehabilitating logged-over land. In the first phase of the project, 340 hectares have been earmarked for the planting of rubber seedlings by the communities.

To encourage the active participation of women in income-generating activities, the project has also initiated the planting of fast-growing crops such as yam. The next phase of the project will see continued commitment from the Sabah Forestry Department to expand the acreage of land allocated for income-generating crops within the forest reserve.

“Agroforestry has the potential to deliver double dividends, providing communities with livelihood opportunities while at the same time providing incentives for conservation and stabilizing forest cover in the reserve,” Datuk Sam Mannan, Director of the Forestry Department, said in his speech.

Datuk Mannan added that the Sabah Forestry Department was currently working toward shared management of the Mangkuwagu Forest Reserve by local communities, which will allow the villagers to continue reaping benefits from the forest while playing an active role in conservation.

“We believe that effective and meaningful involvement of local communities in community forestry is the most effective approach to address the long-standing problems of deforestation and land degradation.”

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Lauding the efforts by the Mangkuwagu communities, Dr. Leete said, "We hope to transform the traditional adversarial relationship into one of mutual cooperation and partnership. We need to join hands to conserve and preserve forests in Sabah.

"Key to this is solving the issue of land status in relation to the villages, which will provide security of tenure for their homes and their landholdings."

According to official estimates, 60 percent of land in the state is currently under forest cover. There are about 20, 000 people living within forest reserves state wide, and an undetermined number on the fringes of the forest. Most of these communities are identified as "hardcore poor", having little or no access to facilities or amenities generally regarded as basic and essential to daily living, and experiencing below average health and educational standards.

Under current regulations, communities located within forest reserves do not have a legal right to land, although in many cases, the existence of the settlements predates that of the creation of the reserves. One of the objectives of the Mangkuwagu project is to provide an amicable solution to the issue.

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