



PRESS RELEASE

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State Government of Sabah and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malaysia Launch New Social Forestry Project in Sabah

Kampung Mangkuwagu, 7 November 2006 – Residents of some 320 households residing in and around Mangkuwagu Forest Reserve in Sabah can look forward to a brighter future with the implementation of a new social forestry project in the forest reserve.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malaysia and the Sabah Forestry Department (SFD), on behalf of the Sabah State Government, have joined forces to launch the Mangkuwagu Social Forestry Project at the Mangkuwagu Forest Reserve.

The 18-month project (June 2006 – December 2007) aims to address the challenges faced by the communities living in and around the Mangkuwagu Forest Reserve, by expanding upon an existing model of community forestry that was previously implemented in the Kelawat Forest Reserve in the state of Sabah.

Community forestry is a model of forestry management that allows for shared responsibilities of managing forest areas between forest communities and forest management authorities. It is seen as a ‘win-win’ solution that empowers forest communities to improve their livelihood by utilizing forest resources in a sustainable way, thus also helping to conserve the forests.

Compared to the model employed in Kelawat, the Mangkuwagu model will be implemented in a wider scope, involving a larger area and a higher number of households

“The effective and meaningful involvement of local communities in community forestry is now being looked upon as an effective approach to address the longstanding problems of deforestation and land degradation,” said SFD Deputy Director for research Dr Lee Ying Fah, who represented SFD Director, Y. Bhg. Datuk Sam Mannan to officiate the launching of the project in Kampung Mangkuwagu.

"The linking of socio-economic incentives with forest development has been singularly instrumental in eliciting community participation," he said.

According to Lee, the Mangkuwagu Forest Reserve is situated in the centre of Sabah, and economic development of the communities residing in the region is lagging behind the rest of the state due to the remoteness of the region.

Lee said that the Mangkuwagu Social Forestry Project not only helps the state achieve its objective of achieving sustainable forestry management, but is also highly relevant to the state's development agenda of poverty alleviation.

"Based on the experiences and lessons learnt from the Kelawat and Mangkuwagu model, the state government plans to expand community forestry concept to relevant forest reserves in Sabah in the future," Lee said.

Dr Richard Leete, the UNDP Resident Representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, said that the project is a reflection of UNDP's and SFD's commitment towards community forestry as a way to address the issues of poverty and sustainable forestry.

"Malaysia has made tremendous progress in reducing absolute poverty. Yet there are still about 1.2 million Malaysians living below the national poverty line ," said Dr Leete.

"And poverty rates are much the highest in Sabah, where some 23 percent of households are living below the national poverty line. The bulk of these persons are rural dwellers, and among the poorest of the poor are those who live on the margins of the nation's forests – that is the indigenous communities," he said.

Agro-forestry would be carried out as a main activity of the project, where plots of land in three demonstration sites – Kampung Mangkuwagu, Kampung Saguon and Kampung Tampasak – would be allocated to villagers to cultivate cash crops such as rubber, ginger and others.

The project also aims to empower women by identifying cottage industries which are suitable for them and training villagers in business development, management and communication skills.

Other activities include the zonation of forest areas, baselines surveys, social impact surveys, a study on possible legal framework and options on land ownership, as well as public awareness initiatives to increase awareness about the challenges faced by communities

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NOTE TO EDITOR

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