



Inter-Agency Task Force on  
**Social and Solidarity Economy**

# **Community Forestry Projects in Malaysia: People Participation in Implementing the SDGs**

*Denison Jayasooria*

*Institute of Ethnic Studies, National University of Malaysia (UKM)  
Malaysia*

May 2019

Draft paper prepared in response to the  
UNTFSSSE Call for Papers 2018

**Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals:  
What Role for Social and Solidarity Economy?**

Presented at UNTFSSSE International Conference in Geneva, 25-26 June 2019

The responsibility for opinions expressed in this document rests solely with their author(s), and availability on the SSE Knowledge Hub for the SDGs ([unsse.org](https://unsse.org)) does not constitute endorsement by the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE), or its institutional members, partners or observers, of the opinions expressed in it. No publication or distribution of this document is permitted without the prior authorization of the author(s), except for personal use.

This document is made available on the SSE Knowledge Hub for the SDGs in the form and language in which it was received.

## Abstract

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) articulate a comprehensive range of development agenda encompassing economic, social and environmental concerns. This synergy of policy and practice is best illustrated in community forestry projects where grassroots people participation is most essential not just for conservation but also income generation and livelihood support. In this paper which is divided into two main parts, there is an attempt to define the policy environment, as well as through a case study from Malaysia to illustrate the implementation through dynamic collective action by local communities. This further illustrates the potential of social solidarity economy in the implementation of SDGs. Part One, sets the context of development planning and policies including sustainable forest management. Part Two, is the Malaysian case study where the native indigenous local communities are directly involved in conservation and income generation in a sustainable way. There are many lessons from the Malaysian case study for SDG implementation, drawing principles and relevance of SDGs, targets and indicators in an innovative and people-centred approach with a strong collective ownership reflecting solidarity economy.

## Keywords

Sustainable Forest Management, indigenous people, participation, SDGs, solidarity economy

## Bio

Denison Jayasooria (PhD) is Practice Professor for Public Advocacy at the Institute of Ethnc Studies, National University of Malaysia (UKM), Chair of Asian Economic Solidarity Council (ASEC) and Board member of RIPESS - Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy. He is the Co-chair of the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance. (Email: denisonasec@gmail.com)

# INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, forests still cover about 59.5% of the total land area. However, deforestation is a major concern as the country is still rapidly developing. According to WWF, in the past 20 years (from 1983 to 2003), there was a reduction of about 4.9 million hectares of forest cover in Malaysia with an average of 250,000 hectares of forest being lost annually. Apart from deforestation, the remaining forests face threats from unsustainable logging, illegal removal of forest products and encroachment (WWF 2019).

In this context, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) has recognised in its Land Inquiry Report, the importance of land to indigenous people (IP). The report states that there is “the unique relationship that indigenous peoples have with their land, which is central to the way of life and collective identities” (SUHAKAM 2016: xii). The inquiry found “that there is a high level of frustration, anger and desperation among the indigenous communities because of the non-recognition of the rights to land, resulting in the venting of dissent or threats, and lately open protests” (SUHAKAM 2016: xii). The Commission recommended the active involvement of IPs in Forest Management. “A new policy directive is needed for enhanced and active involvement of indigenous communities in forest management programmes especially in forest reserves. Proactive efforts to encourage community-based forest management, where clear structures, functions and decision-making processes for indigenous peoples, are recommended”. (SUHAKAM 2013: 171).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive strategy for managing social, economic and environmental concerns and dimensions including a thrust towards sustainability and human rights. Furthermore, community forestry or sustainable forest management (SFM) strategy encourages the active and dynamic participation of local people. Three objectives are significant for our review of SFM. The first is their objective to develop means of livelihoods and to generate opportunities. Second, to promote and protect the rights of community forest users and finally to uphold the values of inclusive democracy, gender balance, and social justice.

## 1 POLICY ENVIRONMENT

In the Malaysian context there are two national development policy documents in recent years. The first is the Malaysia’s Voluntary National Review Report (VNR) which was presented at the July 2017 High Level Political Forum on SDGs in New York and the second is the Mid Term Review of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan which was tabled in the Malaysian Parliament in Oct 2017. Both these will provide a useful policy context and note the enabling policy environment in Malaysia.

### 1.1 Malaysian VNR Report (2017)

Malaysia presented its VNR report at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2017. While the theme of the 2017 VNR was addressing poverty, the Malaysian VNR also made a reporting on SDG 15 “Life on land” with specific reference to sustainably managed forests and the National Policy on Biological Diversity. It highlighted two success factors namely “the increasing the

gazetting of terrestrial protected areas (and) implementing the sustainable forest management and the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme” (Malaysia 2017: 35). In addition it recognised the need in the future to strengthen partnerships with indigenous and local communities. This is a significant National commitment at the global stage in line with the implementation of SDGs.

## 1.2 Malaysia’s Development Plans (2016-2020)

In the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020) there is a specific chapter on ‘pursuing green growth for sustainability and resilience’. Here too there is a strong thrust on enhancing alternative livelihood for indigenous and local communities through active community and civil society participation. This is further illustrated with the case study on community involvement in conservation citing the Kelawat Forest Reserve joint forest management initiative (Malaysia 2015: 6-24).

More recently, the new Government of Malaysia released on Oct 18, 2018, the Mid Term Review of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2019-2020) in Parliament. Here the government has integrated more clearly, the seventeen SDGs into development planning. Here too there is a dedicated chapter entitled ‘Enhancing Environmental Sustainability through Green growth’ (Malaysia 2018:14-1 to 14-17). There is a dual strategy of conserving existing protected areas on the one hand and on the other to enhance the livelihood of indigenous and local communities (ILCs) in and near the forest areas. There is need for shared responsibility as well as stakeholder involvement. (Malaysia 2018: 14-9). In addition, there is a specific section on enhancing livelihood and capacity of the indigenous and local communities. Here the thrust is on promoting “alternative livelihood for ILCs to reduce dependency on natural resources as well as encourage conservation efforts among the ILCs” (Malaysia 2018: 14-12).

While this reference to local community involvement in forest conservation and livelihood is encouraging, however it could be viewed a major short coming, as the stated strategy and initiative. This is because the rationale for the initiatives seems to imply that local communities are one of the major causes for the illegal extraction of natural resources, as it is stated that local communities are highly dependent on natural resources. In contrast, the Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia (JOAS), affirmed that local people are no threat to forest preservation. According to JOAS, livelihood initiatives must adopt effective community engagement by adopting Free, Prior and Informed Consent, as well as “the need to respect the tenure and access rights of indigenous communities to their lands” (JOAS 2014: 2).

## 2 LESSONS FROM A MALAYSIAN CASE STUDY

In this part two section, a local community forestry initiative is discussed from SDGs, Social Solidarity Economy (SSE)<sup>i</sup> and Sustainable Forest Management (SFM)<sup>ii</sup>, principles and perspectives. We can note that SDGs promote a balanced approach to economic, social and environment concerns with a focus on human rights and sustainability. This has great relevance for sustainable forest management and ensuring the rights of indigenous people in securing their land rights. In the SDGs, forests are not seen in isolation but in direct relation with other aspects such as sustainable forest management, protection of bio diversity, water sources and flood control measures, sustainable tourism, management and lifestyle.

The Malaysian case study is a community forestry initiative which serves as a concrete example of community social forestry. Here, there is conservation, income generation and local community participation in the management of the forest. They illustrate the fact that indigenous people have a close affinity to the land and display the right picture that indigenous communities do not destroy the environment but will protect and care for it. The attempt here is to undertake an assessment of these communities based on the principles set by the SDG goals as well as drawing from both the conservation principles by global standards including community ownership and local community participation. An SSE approach will also serve as key indicators to review this case study to draw a balance thrust towards five key features such as people, prosperity, planate, values and governance.

## 2.1 The Context

This initiative is the Gumantong Hill which is located in the sub district of Matunggong, Kudat, in the State of Sabah, East Malaysia, in the Borneo Island. This location is 100 km north of Kota Kinablu and 40km south of Kudat.

The Gumantong Hill is 255 meters or 837 feet high and is 590 hectares of forest on the hill. About 350-400 hectares are primary rainforest. It is a water catchment area for all the villages of indigenous people of the Rungus tribe. This hill is surrounded by 13 villages and there are about 3,000 people living here. The sizes of the villages differ between 40 houses to later ones with 200 houses. Of these, four villages are significant and at the heart of this study. They are located within five kilometres from each other and the Gumantong Hill. The four villages<sup>iii</sup> which have a strong tourist appeal are:-

**Tinangol Village**, is the largest of the villages with about 200 houses and families. It has become the centre of Christian mission activities by the Basel Mission back in 1951. It is noted as a model village. There are three long houses with 25 family house units in each.

**Bavanggazo Village** is located by the Bavanggazo river. There are about 30 families living here. They were originally involved in rubber planting but later to traditional Rungus long-house homestay.

**Gombizau Village** has about 33 families and 160 people. It is located on the high ground surrounded by the thick forest and home to a variety of species. Originally padi planters.

**Sumankap Village** is a break away village from Gombizau. There are 43 families living here. All families are here involved in gong making. There are no long houses but individual houses in the village

The ethnic native group are Rungus which is one of the indigenous natives of Sabah who belong to Dusunic linguistic group. Based on the 2010 Census, there are about 60,000 Rungus in Malaysia. By religion a majority of them are Christians with the Protestant Church of Sabah, which is Basel Missions. The Rungus like other indigenous native groups have a very close affinity to their forest and their native lands.

## 2.2 Contestation for Land Ownership

At the national level there is much contestation of land and many indigenous people feel that their customary lands are being taken away. A comprehensive report on this matter is the Land Inquiry report by the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM). Based on this 2013 Report, SUHAKAM received 892 complaints of land encroachment from Indigenous people throughout Malaysia during the period of the inquiry (Dec 2010 to June 2012). The local communities have a very strong affinity to the land. The indigenous people have lived on their lands for generations but do not have specific land titles or documentation which make their claims vulnerable before State actors who tend to allocate land for plantation development, timber harvesting, dam development or other development like golf courses and resorts.

In the SDGs too for the first time in global development policies, there is a specific reference in SDG 1.4 on ownership and control over land linking this to ending poverty (SDG 1). The matter of land rights and security of tenure (SDG 1.4.2) is now linked with ending poverty as many poor people's land claims are being denied. Forest based communities who have traditionally lived in the forest or near the forest very often do not have land titles. All over the world there is contestation on this matter of ownership and there are many disputes which have not been resolved. The SDGs clearly identify a clear co relations between poverty eradication and land ownership. Other relevant SDGs are SDG 2:3 & 2:4 on indigenous people & suitable agriculture, equal access to land, and small-scale food production.

Gumantong Hill top was gazetted as a Forest Reserve in 2007 without informing the village chiefs or native court chiefs representing the 13 villages which surround the hill. According to the Daily Express the villagers were reported to be unhappy (Daily Express 2011) and they "proposed Gumantong to be recognised as an Indigenous Peoples and community conserved Area (ICCA)" (Massey et al 2011: 7). The village protested prior to the elections and their threatened to use the ballot box in the 2013 General Elections as their democratic rights. Natives as citizens and hereditary custodian of the Gumantong made a collective demand for the recognition of the cultural rights. Democratic protest alongside direct appeals through the Member of Parliament were strategies adopted. One major point of this protest centred on the efforts to replant the area with *Acacia mangium* which the locals felt will have an impact on local species and would eventually dry up their water sources. To conserve the hilltop, these communities partnered with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on Climate Change (Massey et al 2011: 6).

The hill was eventually de-gazetted in 2012 by the Sabah State government due to political pressure and just before the General Elections. Now the forest land is under a community heritage trust with representative from the 13 villages managing the committee. There could be a gender imbalance in the composition of the trustees as it comprises of village heads which is male dominated. This would be the next phase of the democratic reform for accountable local governance namely gender balance and participation in community leadership.

## 2.3 Community Forestry

Ashley Massey et al (2011) documents the cultural affinity of the indigenous people with their land and narrates the traditional belief of dancing animals on the top of the hill. Natives believed that if they went on top of the hill and saw these dancing animals they would die. This kept

villagers from going up the hill which was also the water catchment areas. It therefore concluded that this cultural practice had an unintended outcome for conservation. This forest is directly managed by a community forest trust and now involves local communities living by the forest. Although some traditional beliefs were lost through conversion to Christianity, there is still a strong cultural bond with nature and the forest.

The SDGs also makes specific reference to sustainable forest management (SFM). In SDG 15.2, we note that the “implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally”. This is significant as SFM is now listed as a global agenda for all nations to abide by. In the case of SDG 10.2.1 the indicator is for a measurement of the process made towards SFM. This is a specific quantifiable indicator where a nation could state how it has progressed in this area in terms of actual land coverage. This SFM approach is further strengthened by clearly declaring “official development assistance and public expenditure on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem” (SDG15.a.1).

This matter of SFM is related to a number of inter related aspects. These include: SDG 6.6 on protection of water related ecosystem as well as Sustainable tourism (SDG 8.9) that creates jobs and promote local cultures and products. Sustainable management (SDG 12.2) on sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources. Sustainable lifestyles (SDG 12.8) people are aware of sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

In this community forestry initiative, the 13 villages have set up a heritage committee and they try to conserve the forest, as well as seek to generate income for the common good. Villages are responsible to protect the forest and the resources. No outsider can enter the forest except through one of the 13 villages. This collective ownership, oversight and supervision brought a halt to poaching and illegal logging. Protection of the water sources has been a major responsibility of the Community Trustees.

The locals have a strong affinity to the mountain, forest and their lands. Traditional bonding and conservation practices can be noted. Villages also undertake community based socio-economic development projects. The local Churches have become one of the community centres where there the promoting of holistic development and transformational agenda is common place. Poverty and low income are major issues among this community. Areas such as Pitas in this region is noted to be one of the poorest districts. Among the various geographical locations Sabah has the highest poverty rates.

## 2.4 Community Based Economic Activities

The SDGs with its five foundational principles of people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership corresponds closely with the five guiding framework of Social Solidarity Economy (SSE): people, planet, profits, governance and values. In addition there is a need to not just view each economic entity as an individual enterprise but as a whole supply chain, a theme developed by Dr Ben Quinones<sup>iv</sup>. Here too we can note the close co relations between SDGs and SSE especially in terms of ensuring that people collectively are at the centre of development. In the theme of ‘leaving no one behind’ SSE tools can contribute positively towards the effective implementation

of SDGs. The collective economic and community activities of the villages surrounding Gumantung Hill illustrates this.

The State government introduced a special economic activity called ‘One Village, One Industry’ which are income generating activities using the cultural and ethnic strength of the Rungus people. Each village noting its strengths focused on one or two tourist related trades which sublimated their traditional agricultural work. Ong Puay Liu (2008) calls this the ‘commodification’ of Rungus cultural traditions a tourism brand promoting ethnic and cultural tourism.

The local communities promote community based economic development projects such as income generation for the common good. Furthermore micro and small business development has tremendous potential using the land and agricultural resources among the poor. There is an entry charge to four of the villages where they collect two Ringgit Malaysia (USD 0.48) per person.

Six micro income projects which are undertaken at the village level are:

### First, Nature Walks up Gumantung Hill

Regular guided walks up the hill is organised for a fee of one Ringgit Malaysia for each person by local youths who act as nature tour guides . This is educational and local school students and others make regular visits to up the hill. It takes between 40 minutes to an hour of jungle trekking to the top and it is said that there is a breath-taking view of Kudat.

At the top of the hill there is a gathering place or small trekking camp which is a rest area. This was collectively built by Arkitrek interns, local residents and volunteers for a budget of 20,000 ringgit Malaysia (USD 4,800.00). The objective is to enable the locals to protect their rich forest environment and also to make sure the ethno-botanical knowledge is handed down from the local elders to the younger generation (Arkitrek 2015a, 2015b).

### Second, Tinangol village economy – Beads & Handicraft

At Tinangol village a traditional Rungus handcraft centre was established. This was first started in the early years by the Basel Mission which was further developed in recent years as part of the “One Village, One Industry” project. This includes stringing beads, shells, seeds from plants, weaving Rungus sashes and cloths and weaving baskets. The products made are sold at the village shop (at their community hall) and also sold in other places through agents.

### Third, Sumangkap Village economy – Gong making

The gong is the most important Rungus musical instrument which is played during festivities and grand occasions such as weddings. The gongs that are sold in Kampung Sumangkap vary in sizes—visitors can expect to find tiny souvenirs ones with different shapes and unique designs (price ranging from RM25 (USD 6.00) to RM37 (USD 8.90) as well as large ones that can reach up to 2 meters wide in diameter. They spend less time on paddy or maize planting. The whole village of 28 families are involved, both men and women. They have some traditional skills which is now being handed down from one generation to another. They now earn between RM700 (USD

168.00) and Ringgit Malaysia 3,000 (USD 723.00) a month. Each gong maker has his own work place.

#### **Fourth, Gombizau village economy is bees & honey**

At this village they have the Gombizau Honey Bee Farm which is one of the economic activities and they bottled the honey. There are over a hundred bee cages in the bee farm. Founded in 1992/3, this bee farm produces honey both for the consumption of the local people as well as to be sold in bottles for those who are akin to the sweet taste of raw honey. For many generations, the people of Kampung Gombizau have been consuming raw honey as it is believed and has been proven to possess remedial properties; other than being able to lend its superior taste to food when used in cooking. Each family has between 50 to 100 bee hives. If sales are good they can earn between RM1,400 (USD 337) and RM2,000 (USD 482), per month.

While bee farming and bottling of the honey is done individually by each family, the sale of the honey bottles is done collectively in the village shop. The women take turns to manage the shop. At the village the tourists are able to see bee keeping and the process of harvesting the beeswax and royal jelly. The village has collectively set up the Apis Cerana Bee Rearing Association.

#### **Fifth, Bavanggazo Village Eco-tourism & Long house- home stay program**

In this village homestay is the income generating project: villages provide homestay and an exposure to rural- native life. This is an attraction for foreign tourists as it provides a taste of real Rungus living through their food, daily rituals, music and dance. Tourist are charged for entry, food and dance (RM200 (USD 48.00) per session). These facilities are provided for day visitors or stay in guests.

There are some complaints from homestay operators that the tour companies are making the most money which might require the village team to undertake direct marketing and recruitment. At this village they have a cooperative which could in the long run develop a better business plan and thereby draw more profits from the initiative.

#### **Sixth, Birds nest – Swiftlets**

The swiftlet bird nest farming has become a very lucrative business venture in the lands surrounding Gumantung hill due to the cool weather and insects. As these forests are still untouched by development and due to the conservation efforts of the native population, these migratory birds are coming in the hundreds and thousands to nest in this area. The edible-nest swiftlet is a small bird of the swift family which is found in South-east Asia. The birds come and lay eggs. Its nest is made of solidified saliva and is used to make bird's nest soup which is an expensive delicacy especially to the Chinese who pay high prices for the nest.

There is now local technology to attach the birds to concrete houses built in order for them to lay their eggs and once the eggs are hatched and they fly off, it is the birds nest which is harvested.

In 2012 there were only two bird houses but now there are currently over 100 swiftlet bird's houses (20 x 30 sq ft) which are built for about Ringgit Malaysia 45,000.00. The projected net

income per month is between Ringgit Malaysia 3,000 to 4,000 (USD 718.00 – 958.00 for each bird house. As long as the birds are not disturbed, the weather is cool and there are insects (food source) via conservation the funds will keep falling from the sky. The swiftlet - birds nest complements the income of the local people. Sustainability of this economic project rest on conservation of the forest.

## Collective Impact

These six projects are effective income generating projects and they complement each other in the supply chain effect. The tourist leaflets highlight the inter link of all the projects such as homestay program with traditional stay, food and local native dances, then the nature walk up the hill, the visits to the gong, bees, beads and handcraft centre. There is a supply chain impact on all the villages and the people. This could be referred to as community-based tourism and there are efforts to promote the rural tourism industry by the Sabah Tourism Board.

Overall there are good opportunities to earn a basic living wage through these micro businesses with lower cost as one is living in the rural location. In Malaysia the Poverty line income is household income below RM980.00 (USD 236) a month. The medium monthly income is RM 2,614.00 (or USD 631).

There are some local issues pertaining to the community and solidarity nature of their economy which has been identified. One is access to credit and need for micro loan schemes. There are production issues such as ensuring quality as well as marketing and sales issues to ensure that there is a sustainable flow of consumers and tourists to this region. There is a need for further capacity building programs including business development, good governance and management concerns. There are good interconnections between people development, economy & environment. There is also a strong conservation dimension - environment element as well as income generating through the various community projects. The rights of the natives of Sabah to take ownership of their customary lands is central in this project which is already built on human rights and community collective empowerment.

However, there are concerns raised with changes to the landscape such as forest being cleared for rubber and oil palm which can affect the eco system and the cultural-economic activities in this region.

## 2.5 People Participation in Local Development

As indicated earlier the Gumantong Hill was gazetted in 2012 as a community conserved area with a community trust made up of villages' leaders from the 13 villages surrounding the hill to manage it. They take custodial collective responsibility for the hill. Their main responsibility is the conservation and the passive management of the forest. They are to ensure no destruction of the forest or any development on the roof top of the hill as well as protection of the water sources. They have agreed to provide free access to the local university lecturers to study the biodiversity including the flora and fauna.

In addition each of the villages have their own village development and security committee with a village head recognised by the district office. In addition there are a number of local

cooperatives and associations pertaining to local tourism or the sale of local products. By forming an inter-village committee among the local leaders, the communities are now actively involved in ensuring conservation, prevention of poaching and theft of timber in the area. They also undertake forest-friendly social enterprises such as guided mountain climbing and study of biodiversity, bee rearing in the forest for wild honey as well as homestay eco-tourism projects. The study illustrates an example of how conservation and economic generation is being undertaken by the local communities in a sustainable way.

Mohd Shahwahid, in his review of both the FSC and MTCC, affirms that indigenous peoples especially forest dwellers “are not just another stakeholder in forest management. They are the rightful stewards of the forest and thus there must be protection of their way of life” (Mohd Shahwahid (2004: 93). He goes on further to affirm “participation of indigenous and local forest communities must not be limited to just a few appointed leaders or members of the community. The entire village must be informed, consulted and involved in decision-making processes in order to have meaningful participation before they give their informed consent to the planning or implementation of development on their land or forest areas” (Mohd Shahwahid 2004: 93).

People’s participation is a key feature of the SDGs, not just from a human development aspect but also from a human rights perspective. In the context of the forest, the communities most victimised and discriminated are the indigenous people. In the SDGs on people especially that of grassroots communities it is significant that the SDGs make several references to this. In SDG 15.c there is a target to increase “the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities”. In SDG 6b there is reference to the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management. We can also draw from SDG 16 & 17. In SDG 16.7 involvement in the decision-making process at all levels – responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative. SDG 16.10 on access to information is more essential. SDG 17.16 & 17 is important for inclusion in multi stakeholder partnerships.

Daniel Gustafson (2016) wrote: “in 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, recognizing their rights and making specific mention of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a pre-requisite for any activity that affects their ancestral lands, territories and natural resources”. He goes on to state that “indigenous peoples [are] the stewards of natural resources and guardians of biodiversity and their right to development [is] a basic human rights based principle” (Gustafson 2016). This principle is fundamental for a good working relationship with grassroots communities.

According to Rohaida Nordin and Mohd Syahrill Ibrahim, (2013) “although the UNDRIP is stated to be nonbinding, Malaysia’s vote in favour of the UNDRIP creates a moral obligation and genuine expectation for it to pursue the standards contained in the UNDRIP in the spirit of partnership and mutual respect” (Nordin & Ibrahim 2013: 195). They concludes their article by stating that “the right to FPIC must be respected by all parties, as it is in line with the principle of human rights and the sustainable development of indigenous peoples” (Nordin & Ibrahim 2013: 200). Therefore, we can recognise that people participation is a key component of SFM and there are emerging trends in the Malaysian context.

Furthermore, Paul Porodong<sup>v</sup> states that the forest conservation at Gumotong Hill has created greater inter community cooperation. He notes that previously the families acted individually but now they are acting collective for the conservation of the hill.

## Conclusion

The SDGs provide clear goals, targets and indicators for grassroots communities to be actively empowered to be involved in conservation as well as income generation. There are clear guidelines for action which address economic, social and environmental concerns including human rights. In the Malaysian example we noted that indigenous people made a claim to their land rights for collective ownership as a community heritage and they managed to secure the forest under their stewardship. Contrary to the views that local natives exploit and extract natural resources we note that with collective ownership comes responsibility as good stewards to protect nature and be active in conservation. They have attempted innovative income generation projects such as bee rearing and bottling the honey for sale. Nature walks and home stay programs enhances eco-tourism as alternative sources of income compared to logging and extraction from nature. We also observed while there was a cultural belief which restrained them from encroaching the water catchment areas, now with changes to culture they recognise this importance and are preserving them.

While this assessment notes the policies, values and principles that undergirded sustainable use of the forest, there is still a need for a more quantifiable analysis of conservation as well as the income generated so as to effectively measure poverty eradication and addressing issues of inequality. One thing for sure is that policy makers must review their understanding of partnership and participation of the grassroots. The local natives can be seen as an asset and partner in conservation and income generation.

---

<sup>i</sup> SSE theme is well articulated by Benjamin Quinones and cited by Denison Jayasooria (2016). Quinones highlights five major attributes of SSE which could also serve as the common framework for measuring & evaluating solidarity economy performance. The five features or five dimensional framework are:- the popular triple bottom line approach of people, planet, profits and two others namely socially responsible governance & edifying values.

<sup>ii</sup> This discussion on Sustainable Forest Management in Malaysia is enriched by three standard setting benchmarks for sustainability. Malaysia as a whole has now become aware of fulfilling and abiding by global standards on sustainable management of the forest and well as ensure indigenous people are not alienated. The three organisations are Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme (MTCS), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO).

<sup>iii</sup> Background information of the villages we gathered from the field visits made to the villages in Oct 16, 2016 & May 6, 2018. In addition Ong Puay Liu (2008) also provided information on the villages and tourism initiatives in her book which is utilised. Also appreciated her feedback on this article,

<sup>iv</sup> Dr Ben Quinones notes that there is a new way of viewing an enterprise - not just as one individual enterprise but on the whole supply chain which will include much different social business (inter-connected nature – supply chain analysis. In most cases the enterprises are seen as single units and when they are evaluated they are too micro. However when we approach this from a supply chain perspective it enlargers the outreach and makes an impact to the local economies. (Jayasooria 2016:161).

<sup>v</sup> Paul Porodong, an anthropologist is a former lecturer with the University Malaysia Sabah. It is he who introduced me to Gumotong Hill and the community forestry project. He is a native from Tinangol Village where is father is the village head.

## REFERENCES

- Arkitrek (2015a) A prosperous future for The Gathering Place (Nov 2, 2015) <https://arkitrek.com/a-prosperous-future-for-the-gathering-place/>
- Artitrek (2015b) The Gathering Place <http://arkitrek.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/The-Gathering-Place-design-brief.pdf>
- Daily Express (2011) Matunggong villagers unhappy over the gazetting of 590ha. (November 15, 2011) <http://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news.cfm?NewsID=79774>
- Gustafson Daniel (2016) Foreword. Free Prior and Informed Consent An indigenous peoples' right and a good practice for local communities. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6190e.pdf>
- FSC (2019), The 10 FSC Principles, The 10 rules for responsible forest management. <https://ic.fsc.org/en/what-is-fsc-certification/principles-criteria/fscs-10-principles>
- Gombizau Honey Bee Farm (2019). <http://www.sabahtourism.com/destination/gombizau-honey-bee-farm/>
- Gong making at Kampung Sumangkap. <http://www.sabahtourism.com/destination/kampung-sumangkap-gong-factory/>
- Jayasooria, Denison (2016) Developing solidarity economy in Asia. Innovations in policy and practice. IN Ngai Pu et al Social Economy in China and the World. Routledge: New York.
- JOAS Press Statement: Orang Asal are partners, not threats, in forest conservation. <http://www.sarawakreport.org/campaign/joas-press-statement-orang-asal-are-partners-not-threats-in-forest-conservation/>
- Malaysia (2015) Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 Anchoring growth on people. <http://epu.gov.my/en/rmk/eleventh-malaysia-plan-2016-2020>
- Malaysia (2017) Sustainable Development Goals, Voluntary National Review 2017, High level Political Forum. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15881Malaysia.pdf>
- Malaysia (2018) Mid Term Review of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020) [https://www.talentcorp.com.my/clients/TalentCorp\\_2016\\_7A6571AE-D9D0-4175-B35D-99EC514F2D24/contentms/img/publication/Mid-Term%20Review%20of%2011th%20Malaysia%20Plan.pdf](https://www.talentcorp.com.my/clients/TalentCorp_2016_7A6571AE-D9D0-4175-B35D-99EC514F2D24/contentms/img/publication/Mid-Term%20Review%20of%2011th%20Malaysia%20Plan.pdf)
- Massey, Ashley; Bhagwat, Shonil A and Porodong, Paul (2011) Beware the animals that dance: conservation as an unintended outcome of cultural practices. [http://oro.open.ac.uk/36958/1/Massey\\_et\\_al\\_2012.pdf](http://oro.open.ac.uk/36958/1/Massey_et_al_2012.pdf)
- Mohd Shahwahid (2004) Forest Certification in Malaysia. (page 69-98). [https://environment.yale.edu/publication-series/documents/downloads/0-9/05\\_Malaysia.pdf](https://environment.yale.edu/publication-series/documents/downloads/0-9/05_Malaysia.pdf)

Nordin, Rohaida and Ibrahim, Mohd Syahrill (2014) Exercising the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) in land development: An appraisal with special reference to the Orang Asli in peninsular Malaysia. <https://ukm.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/exercising-the-principle-of-free-prior-and-informed-consent-fpic->

Ong Puay Liu (2008) Packaging Myths for Tourism, The Rungus of Kudat. Penerbit UKM: Bangi.

SUHAKAM (2013) Report of the National Inquiry into The Land Rights Of Indigenous Peoples. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6FQ7SONa3PRbUlnUGcxzdEWU0/preview>

WWF (2019) Forests. [http://www.wwf.org.my/about\\_wwf/what\\_we\\_do/forests\\_main/](http://www.wwf.org.my/about_wwf/what_we_do/forests_main/)