

Asli Jakun Heritage Garden

The pilot 'Traditional Asli Jakun Medicinal/Heritage Garden' (HG) Project in Kampung Simpai, initiated by the UNDP/GEF Peat Swamp Forest Project with the village committee, commenced early 2006 with an official launching of its first training workshop on community mapping by the Pahang Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA) Director Mr Bakar Unus.



Mr Bakar Unus (seated with blue jacket) surrounded by participants of the community mapping workshop, PSF Project officials, JHEOA staff and trainers from PACOS.

The HG Project is a pilot supplemental livelihood endeavour aimed at conserving the indigenous knowledge (IK) concerning traditional medicine and handicraft by ensuring sustainable use of the natural resources, with support from the EC UNDP Small Grants Programme for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests (SGP PTF). While the PSF Project facilitates the overall project coordination and the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) provides technical support on soil study, cost benefits analysis and medicinal plant cultivation, the HG Project is managed by the village committee and it has made much progress.

The following are some of the HG Project activities undertaken so far:

- **Setting up community guesthouse and HG Project administration office**

The Kampung Simpai folks had built a guesthouse, *Rumah Tetamu*, to accommodate trainers and visitors involved in the HG Project, as part of the community's contribution to ensuring the implementation of the project. The community had also helped set up the HG Project administration office next to the village head Tok Batin Marjan Aris's house.



Village volunteers building the roof truss of the 'Rumah Tetamu'

The FRIM team with the local community in front of the newly-built 'Rumah Tetamu'



- **Capacity building trainings for project sustainability**



Left (top): Simpai community members during one of the basic computing skills training classes.

Left (bottom): A local youth supervised on how to do video recording.

Right: Noussi, a PACOS trainer assisting the local community during the community mapping exercise.

Capacity building is a core element in the planning and implementation of livelihood projects for local communities as it is vital to the achievement of the project's sustainability. The first training on community mapping was conducted from 13 to 17 February, by trainers from Partners of Community Organisations (PACOS), Sabah. Attended by 23 participants from various age groups and educational background, the course was aimed at equipping the community with skills to map the boundary of the five-hectare HG. The course included lectures on basic mapping techniques and fieldwork.

Since then, more than 10 training programmes had been conducted for the Simpai community including a series of information and communications technology (ICT) courses such as basic computer skills, use of digital video camera, digital audio recorders, editing of images etc. for documentation of indigenous knowledge; basic book-keeping; handicraft training; and training on herbal plant cultivation, nursery management and maintenance, among others.

Exposure tours were also organised for the community members to other indigenous communities in the peninsula, and they also participated in various other workshops/seminars such as the National Workshop and Panel Discussion on Sustainability organised by the EC-UNDP SGP PTF in Miri, Sarawak (13–15 December 2006) and the Conservation of Biodiversity Workshop co-organised in Penampang, Sabah, co-organised by Jaringan Orang Asli SeMalaysia, PACOS and a Philippine-based international organisation for indigenous rights (9–11 October 2006).

- **Establishment of the Medicinal/Heritage Garden**

FRIM experts assisted the local community in determining a suitable location for medicinal plants cultivation for the Heritage Garden after conducting soil tests in February. They also assisted in the identification of medicinal plant species most suited for cultivation. The species identified include *misai kucing*, *pegaga* and *bunga melur*, selected based on the high commercial value, short cycle period and relatively low maintenance costs. During the second half of 2006, the cultivation plot was cleared while labeling of some medicinal plants in the

conservation zone was undertaken. The planting of 19,000 *misai kuching* seedlings was carried out early November, with the construction of the pump house and fixing of sprinklers and ground pipes.

In February 2007, some members of the HG Project visited FRIM to learn more about herbal plants, herbal products and herbal gardens. The participants were giving briefings by FRIM Medicinal Plants Division researchers. Among others, the delegation toured the FRIM laboratories and visited the ethnobotanical garden to learn the procedures of herbal garden management.



Parid and Zainon, being led to the HG site by Ade, a local guide



Dr. Adzmi and his team preparing their survey strategy at the entrance to the HG

- **Documentation of Indigenous Knowledge**

Documentation of the Asli Jakun indigenous knowledge (IK) commenced in December 2006 in Kampung Simpai. This is the final component of the four-fold objective of the HG Project, which includes setting up of a medicinal garden and conservation plot, and initiating a mini cottage industry. Village youth trained in ICT skills are assisting the HG Project to document folktales, the Asli Jakun belief system, their customs, taboos and a wide spectrum of knowledge associated with the forests from their elders. Data collection is still on-going and PACOS will be engaged as the documentation consultant to provide guidance in the editing and production of a 10-minute documentary on the HG Project. PACOS will also help to produce a booklet on the Jakun IK (for sale) and another book on traditional knowledge on medicinal plants for the community's safekeeping.

- **Revival Of Local Culture**

The HG Project implementation has sparked renewed interest in the practice of the Asli Jakun traditional customs amongst Kampung Simpai folks. The villagers had organised cultural nights cum farewells for some of the capacity building trainers and visitors. On such an occasion, the *Rumah Tetamu* would come to life as villagers throng to the customary house to feast on traditional cuisines, rarely prepared by the Asli Jakun nowadays. Prior to the event, the womenfolk would weave traditional headgears made from coconut leaves, called '*Jari Lipan*', used to be worn during traditional ceremonies. Older members of the Simpai community would perform a traditional musical recital, playing the '*gong*', violin and '*rebana*', which set the stage for the villagers to engage in '*berbalas pantun*' sessions. The young and old would take to the dance floor, doing the traditional '*joget lambak*', rarely ever performed anymore due to waning interest amongst the youth who prefer more upbeat music churned out by village rock groups. The growing

support of the younger generation at these events was heartening, giving a glimpse of hope for the preservation of their almost forgotten traditional practices.



Womenfolk weaving the '*Jari Lipar*'.

The fiddler and his band entertaining the crowd.



"Traditional 'joget lambak' can be fun too," says a village youth.

