

ANNUAL REPORT

2017

Empowering Communities



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www.bestsociety.org



BORNEO ECOTOURISM SOLUTIONS
&
TECHNOLOGIES SOCIETY

Introductory Message

Dear friends,

When we look back, we can see how far we have come; from a small foundation known as Sukau Ecotourism Research and Development Centre (SERDC) to a registered non-governmental organisation- BEST Society. We started our early years with charitable giving and have shifted toward sustainable approaches through various community projects. Sustainability encompasses the integration of three key value pillars: people, planet and profit. To even think of managing these issues require not just a broad approach, but an approach that transcends 'local matters'. When the basis of our works is placed alongside the notion of 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, our roles become clearer.

In 2017, we strengthened our conservation efforts through the Borneo Land Conservancy project whereby we acquired 7.7 acres of forested land in Kg. Sukau for the purpose of biodiversity conservation and preservation. Working with various partners, we are also setting up the Sukau Ecotourism Research Centre (SERC) on the same piece of land to facilitate future research project on topics such as environmental and wildlife conservation and ecotourism. Another area of our involvement is with SRI in Diniwang whereby Ulu Kiulu folks were introduced to this methodology aimed at increasing the yield of rice produced in farming. SRI is intended to help rural farmers to produce beyond self-sufficiency so they will have surplus to sell that generates additional income. Lifting families out of poverty.

At BEST Society, we believe in investing in people in order to see long term, sustained results. We partnered with local institutions such as INTI College Sabah, University College Sabah Foundation, Kolej Teknikal Yayasan Sabah in supporting the development of skills and assisting communities to provide or manage services for example in the context of Kiulu Farmstay, an integrated community-based tourism development.

Initiatives like these are critical toward the growth of community enabling transformational change in many aspects of the society. But we can't do this alone. We are calling out to like-minded people who share the same values to come aboard and join us on our journey. Together we can do what none of us can do alone.

Sincere thanks for your support!



Albert Teo
Chairman of BEST Society

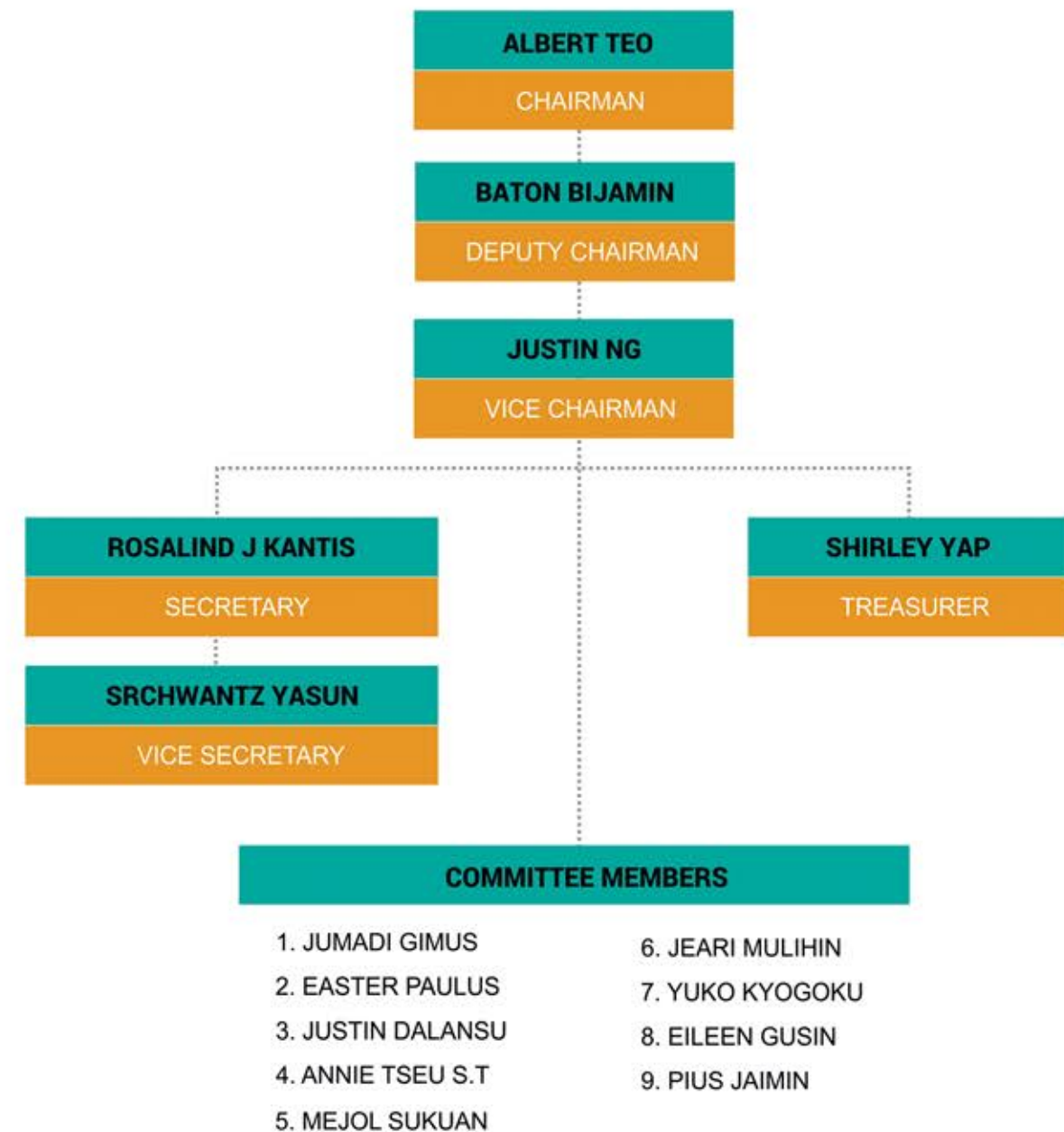
VISION 

Empowering Communities

MISSION 

To engage, empower and elevate rural communities in Sabah by implementing sustainable development initiatives to improve livelihood and quality of life and to conserve nature for the next generation.

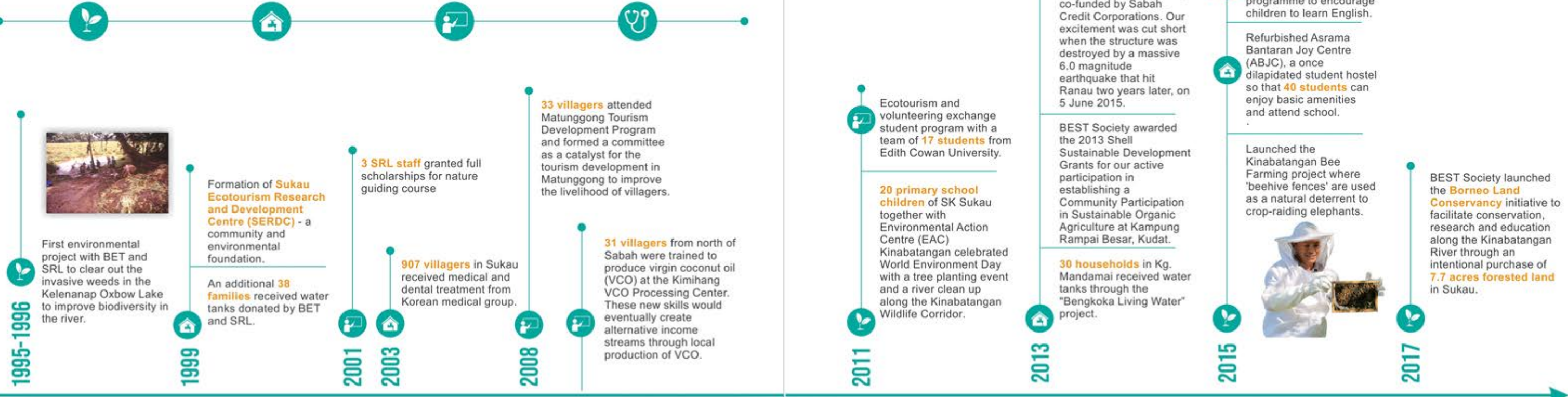
BEST SOCIETY COMMITTEE 2017



Impact Over Two Decades

1995

2017



1995-1996

First environmental project with BET and SRL to clear out the invasive weeds in the Kelenanap Oxbow Lake to improve biodiversity in the river.



1999

Formation of **Sukau Ecotourism Research and Development Centre (SERDC)** - a community and environmental foundation.

An additional **38 families** received water tanks donated by BET and SRL.

2001

3 SRL staff granted full scholarships for nature guiding course

2003

907 villagers in Sukau received medical and dental treatment from Korean medical group.

2008

33 villagers attended Matunggong Tourism Development Program and formed a committee as a catalyst for the tourism development in Matunggong to improve the livelihood of villagers.

31 villagers from north of Sabah were trained to produce virgin coconut oil (VCO) at the Kimihang VCO Processing Center. These new skills would eventually create alternative income streams through local production of VCO.

2011

Ecotourism and volunteering exchange student program with a team of **17 students** from Edith Cowan University.

20 primary school children of SK Sukau together with Environmental Action Centre (EAC) Kinabatangan celebrated World Environment Day with a tree planting event and a river clean up along the Kinabatangan Wildlife Corridor.

2013

A Successful Failure: The development of a community-based ecotourism destination known as Camp Lemaing co-funded by Sabah Credit Corporations. Our excitement was cut short when the structure was destroyed by a massive 6.0 magnitude earthquake that hit Ranau two years later, on 5 June 2015.

BEST Society awarded the 2013 Shell Sustainable Development Grants for our active participation in establishing a Community Participation in Sustainable Organic Agriculture at Kampung Rampai Besar, Kudat.

30 households in Kg. Mandamai received water tanks through the "Bengkoka Living Water" project.

2015

Medical camp at Kiau reaching out to **190 villagers** and introduced the Reading Bus programme to encourage children to learn English.

Refurbished Asrama Bantaran Joy Centre (ABJC), a once dilapidated student hostel so that **40 students** can enjoy basic amenities and attend school.

Launched the Kinabatangan Bee Farming project where 'beehive fences' are used as a natural deterrent to crop-raiding elephants.



2017

BEST Society launched the **Borneo Land Conservancy** initiative to facilitate conservation, research and education along the Kinabatangan River through an intentional purchase of **7.7 acres forested land** in Sukau.

1997-1998

16 village households in Sukau received water tanks allowing them to enjoy clean water without having the risk of infection and diseases.



2000

Regenerated **64 acres** of land by planting **4500 tree seedlings** through Kinabatangan Wildlife Corridor Rehabilitation Program (KWICORP).

2007

SERDC outgrew its original vision and objectives. The foundation was renamed to **Borneo Ecotourism Solutions and Technologies (BEST) Society** and its vision remodeled to ensure greater sustainability in future community development projects. This new vision incorporates values of social entrepreneurship and empowerment, straying away from the traditional charity model.



2010

Medical camp in Sukau village reaching out to **561 villagers**.

Kick started a series of environmental education programs at SRL reaching out to students of SK Sukau.

BEST Society received Global Environment Facility Small Grants Program (GEF-SGP) for environmental conservation and community capacity building project in Kimihang, Kudat to address six critical threats to the global environment: biodiversity loss, climate change, degradation of international waters, ozone depletion, land degradation, and persistent organic pollutants.

2012

BEST Society with Skycommunity, Sabah State Health and Dental Department, KiTA, BET and SRL provided healthcare access to **565 villagers** in Sukau - our 3rd medical camp.

150 participants from 5 schools celebrated Hari Hutan Bakau Sedunia in Kimihang, Kudat to promote environmental awareness and the importance of mangrove conservation and its economic value and livelihood benefits to local communities.

"Bengkoka Living Water" project took off with **36 water tanks** donated to Kg. Lugu and Kg. Pandan, funded by Conocophillips.

2014

Additional **28 families** in Kg. Kobon received water tanks.

51 medical personnel, Skycommunity and BEST volunteered at a medical camp held at Kg. Desa Aman, Kundasang located in a remote area close to Mount Kinabalu.

2016

The "**System of Rice Intensification**" (SRI) cultivation method was introduced to farmers in Ulu Kiulu improving the harvest yield while reducing the use of water throughout the planting process.

30 villagers from Ulu Kiulu participated in a hospitality and tourism workshop conducted by INTI College Sabah.



Spotlight On 2017

Aligning with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit — officially came into force. The SDGs provide a significant opportunity for change in social, economic and environmental issues.

In support of this, BEST Society is putting efforts and tireless work to contribute to the achievement of these global goals. We work to empower communities' ability to conserve the natural resources they depend upon. We invest in capacity building and skills enhancement to strengthen their role as stewards of the environment, and improve their livelihoods. When we support people in our communities, we are helping to build sustainable, resilient communities.

BEST Society is working with academic institutions, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, community based organisations, local communities and private sectors to leverage on their resources for mutual benefits.



Restructuring Projects

BEST Society has come a long way since it was officially registered under the Registry of Societies Malaysia in 2007. We started as a charity organisation with traditional concept of giving back. However over the years, the organisation when through a paradigm shift and now approaches rural development with an empowering perspective. In 2017, BEST Society went through restructuring projects to fall under four categories.



Main Highlights

BORNEO LAND CONSERVANCY

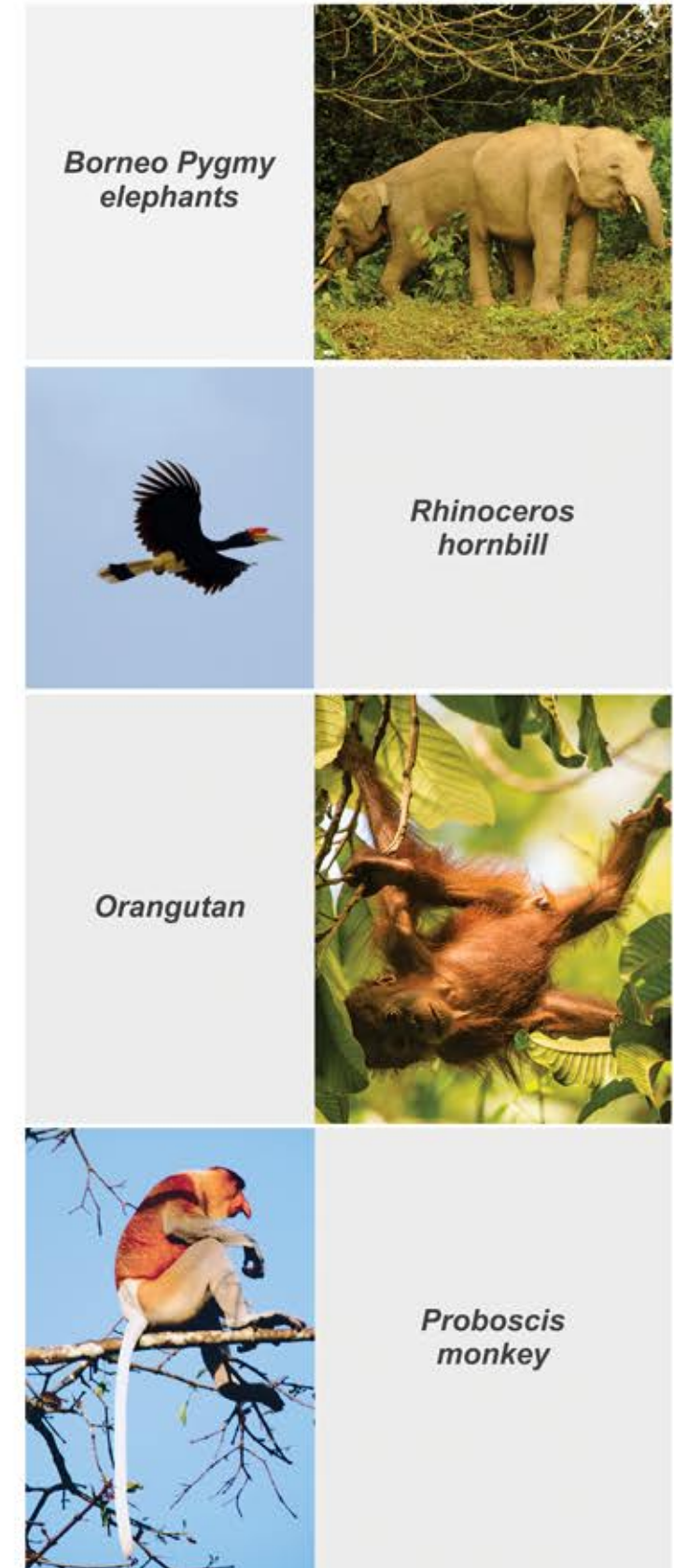
Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the flood plains of Kinabatangan covering over 30,000 ha and is renowned for its rich biodiversity. It provides home for wildlife such as the iconic **Orangutans, Borneo Pygmy elephants, Proboscis monkeys and the Rhinoceros hornbills**. It was initially proposed for 60,000 ha of land to be gazetted for conservation but the pressure was far too great that only 30,000 ha of the proposed land area was finally gazetted. The land was divided into ten lots that are not contiguous and separated by gaps, leaving it hard for elephants and other wildlife to move freely between them.

! Critical Needs

To prevent encroachment of the plantations, electric fences have been put up forcing the elephants to swim across the river as their migration route in search of food. As a consequence, human-elephant conflict has become more often with the local folks bearing the brunt as they cannot afford electric fencing. Crops being raided have left many of them feeling helpless causing unlawful acts of poisoning or killing the elephants. Additionally, the controversial Sukau bridge that was fortunately brought to a halt may have impacted the lives of our precious and endangered wildlife.



As more lands surrounding the sanctuary are taken over by development and agribusiness such as palm oil, the real problems began to manifest as elephants are being squeezed into smaller and smaller areas.





Our Action

An email was sent to Albert Teo by Belinda Roach of Trailblazers Travel Australia of the idea she had to start a campaign to buy back corridors of land that allow the wildlife to transit between palm oil plantations and farmlands to their pockets of forests they call home. Albert agreed it was a possibility and one he'd thought of himself. It was only a matter of time that we took matters into our own hands. That email started a chain reaction, and after much research and constant communication with our networks in 2016 that Borneo Eco Tours (BET) and BEST Society were able to identify a piece of land for such an initiative. **The land size is 7.7 acres and is located in Sukau, just five minutes upriver from Sukau Rainforest Lodge. The land was up for sale at RM280,000 and final negotiations went down to RM220,000 in March 2017.** Together with our supporting networks, the Borneo Land Conservancy (BLC) initiative will be the first of many more land conservation efforts around Borneo.

Borneo Land Conservancy
7.7 ACRES
RM 220 000

Impact and Result

The acquisition of 7.7 acres of land had more purpose than just habitat protection. We can't just go on thinking that if we set aside a bit more land and leaving the forested areas untouched, nature will take care of itself. We are already in our 21st century and we need to rethink our approach as well.



As such, we are in the midst of building the Sukau Ecotourism Research Centre (SERC), a physical platform to engage local and international academic institutions to conduct joint research to ensure that ecotourism will remain a key that provides sustainable employment and financial benefit to the local communities. Additionally, it can serve as a hub to facilitate research on the impact of ecotourism activities on wildlife.



For many in Ulu Kiulu, subsistence agriculture is their main form of livelihood, and most of them grow rubber trees or fruit trees such as durian, tarap, rambutan, pineapples to supplement their income. For short-term crops, they plant paddy for their household consumption. Due to shortage of labour and equipment, the rice farmers practice single cropping and start planting during the wet season with a long maturation period of more than 150 days. **In terms of income level, it ranges from RM 200 to RM 500 per month and varies depending on cropping seasons.**

Critical Needs

The present system of growing rice is using a non-sustainable method of production involving a large amount of labour, time, the use of chemicals and subsidies from various government agencies. Consequently, increasing the effects of climate change and causing people their health due to the chemicals used and decreasing nutritional content of the rice being produced. All these chemical inputs are constantly increasing while there is a decreasing output of rice in the world's rice fields. Notably, available land for rice cultivation is getting limited due to reclamation for dwellings and subdivision due to family inheritance practices.

Production of rice has shown a declining trend since year 2000 and expected to continue into the future leading to more youths leaving for the city looking for employment. The basics of traditional rice production which have developed over time are inefficient resulting in low productivity and high costs in terms of materials and labour. The basic yield from conventional rice practices range from 1 tonne per acre (t/acre), such as in Kiulu, to 4 t/acre in prime rice producing areas. SRI has been recorded in many countries since 2000 of achieving 5-6 t/acre.

CONVENTIONAL RICE FARMING
1tonne - 4tonne/yield



SRI FARMING
5tonne - 6tonne/yield



Our Action

With sufficient research, we introduce the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) to the local farmers. Farmers who have been cultivating rice for decades often greet the many new techniques proposed by SRI with scepticism. Therefore, farmers must first be convinced through demonstrations and training. Hence, BEST Society initiated a pilot project on Sikong's land (a villager residing at Kg. Dumpiring, Kiulu) in 2016. The results from observation have shown the increase in rice yields and quality. However, it is important to note that the result is inconclusive as the results obtained are only using approximately 60% standard of SRI methods. Nevertheless, this has proven beyond doubt that SRI method is far more superior in spite of the fact that the methods have not been fully implemented.

Impact and Result

The real challenge is to adopt strategies based on sound ecological principles and to intergrade traditional farming practices with scientific knowledge. Mid 2017, we invested in manual rice transplanters purchased from China to introduce SRI. We engaged an expert to train farmers in Kiulu Valley.

Following the initial pilot project, we went on a thorough site inspection in June 2017 to assess local ground conditions and came to an agreement with six landowners whereby 32 acres of under-utilised land at Diniwang, Kg. Mangkaladom has been identified and thereafter leased to BEST Society for the purpose of SRI and huge potential to become one of the sought after community-based ecotourism in future.

To date, the surplus yield of the SRI method has yet to be seen. Persistent rain make growth more difficult and there were infestations of *Kutu Beruang* which was brought under control using *Rumput Malaysia* and *Lantana* leaves as organic insecticides.

The success stories of many farmers abroad using SRI methods are producing surpluses beyond household needs. While most are selling the rice on their own without additional premiums into local markets, a growing number of NGOs, farmer cooperatives, and private companies are working with SRI producers to achieve a higher price, taking advantage of increasing consumer demand for food grown without chemicals. We sure hope by introducing this innovative method, similar effort can be replicated in other communities.

2.5 acres of land was cleared to prepare the rice field for planting. The field was divided into 12 plots with the first three being planted with local rice variety known as Gunsiriba and the succeeding two plots planted with Somilin.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH FARM TOURISM 101

The decision to adopt three villages back in 2015 Kampung Mantob, Kampung Dumpiring and Kampung Pinagon Baru was with the intention to develop an integrated community-based ecotourism model to be branded as Kiulu Farmstay, comprising a farmstead, homestays and outdoor adventure activities.

Critical Needs

The reason behind Kiulu Farmstay is to alleviate poverty among local communities by bringing economic transformation through diversification of income and creation of employment opportunities through development of additional tourism activities besides homestay. Communities need to be totally empowered for them to independently grow and capacity building is widely acknowledged as an important community development strategy.

Our Action

Investing in training can be an effective, visible and highly valued way to contribute to local development. There were four representatives from BEST Society of which two were villagers from Kiulu, Saidin and Eileen whom attended the Farm Tourism 101 with Farm Guiding course held at International School of Sustainable Tourism Campus, ISST Philippines. The course provided them with insights on putting two elements "farm" and "tourism" into farm tourism and experiential learning through farm visit to Diaspora Farm Resort.

Impact and Result

Yet, only by putting into practice what is learned- we are going from knowing about something to really growing and developing skills. The sharing of best practices and success stories from the course opened up our minds to unleash the potentials Kiulu Farmstay has. Farm tourism is the business of attracting visitors and providing farm experiences full of authentic, generally for educational and recreational purposes. This goes down to the nitty-gritty details such as welcoming guests at Kiulu Farmstay by serving freshly picked lemongrass tea. The recent addition to the farmstay; chicken coop, herbal and vegetable plot as well as obstacle course are the unique attractions offered by this community-based tourism development.



Human Stories



Saidin Bin Tupas

Being the pack leader, he's got his hands quite full as he oversees the maintenance and regular upkeep of Kiulu Farmstay- an integrated approach to community-based tourism. He coordinates activities by scheduling work assignments, setting priorities, and directing the work of subordinate employees, Berron and Aryl. On other days, Saidin can be seen impressing visitors, taking them on a tour around the village and sharing traditional stories that have been passed down for generations. He spent over 10 years working in Kuala Lumpur and the decision to come back in 2012 to the comfort of his home, not knowing what lies ahead has landed himself in doing odd jobs. His income was inconsistent having to depend on selling locally grown produce and rubber tapping, trying to make ends meet. Things took a turn for the better after he started helping out in the early days of Kiulu Farmstay. Not long after, Saidin was offered a job as Field Coordinator. The father of three school children who now earns a steady wage continue to work on his farm with the knowledge gained from BEST. Saidin is practicing a new way of farming that can potentially increase his household income.

"I am grateful to have this opportunity to be able to work with Borneo Eco Tours and BEST Society. I now have basic income and have been sent for several trainings to build my capacity on tour guiding and helped me understand the opportunities to improve community livelihood through tourism potentials."

Fondly known as Mincho, he has worked at Sukau Rainforest Lodge (SRL) for 4 years as the in-house naturalist. Mincho grew up in Kampung Sukau with the beautiful Kinabatangan river forest as his backyard instilling in him a love for nature and wildlife. His day-to-day routine includes river excursions, cave tours, educational talks on orang-utan and conservation, wildlife sightings and beekeeping.

Recently Mincho shared a grave insight on wildlife patterns along the Kinabatangan. He noticed that elephant sightings was becoming more frequent - while tourists delight in those sightings, Mincho explains that elephants are naturally shy animals and would prefer not to be seen, however due to rapid oil palm expansions, the forest have now become more fragmented, forcing the elephants to be nearer to river banks and squeezing them into tighter habitats. On the surface, more wildlife sightings mean a boost for tourism but at a closer look, animals are silently crying for help.

The Helmeted, Wreathed and Rhinoceros hornbills are also threatened as their breeding ground are reducing. Matured trees with big hollows are where they usually breed, but those are being bulldozed leaving only less matured trees in secondary forested areas.

His hope, as a father of three is for his children to experience the same wonder of wildlife he grew up with. He believes that ecotourism is an effective tool for conservation.

"Efforts are being made to restore and preserve forests through reforestation and buying land for conservation. With the current initiative through Borneo Land Conservancy, we are already doing our small part with the purchase of 7.7 acres of land and the building of Sukau Ecotourism Research Centre to ensure the work we are doing is being done in a way that moves conservation forward. Although we live in the 21st century, a handful of local folks are still taking conservation matters lightly. There is still so much to do."



Suhailie Kahar

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Basic Accounting and Bookkeeping



8 June 2017
INTI College
Kg. Mantob, Ulu Kiulu

Manual Rice Transplanter Practical Application



4 July 2017
Liu Xangli from China
Kiulu Farmstay

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

F&B Servicing



4 August 2017
Universiti College Sabah Foundation
Kiulu Farmstay

Program Penyediaan Makanan Sihat, Kembara Pengguna dan Melestari Alam Sekitar



5 October 2017
Kolej Teknikal Yayasan Sabah
Kg. Dumpiring, Ulu Kiulu

Basic Computer Skills



21 July 2017
University College Sabah Foundation
UCSF Computer Lab

Pastry & Baking



28 July 2017
Kolej Teknikal Yayasan Sabah
Kiulu Farmstay

Basic Communication English Workshop



25 October 2017
INTI College
SK Mantob, Ulu Kiulu

Garbage Project



30 October 2017
INTI College
SK Mantob, Ulu Kiulu

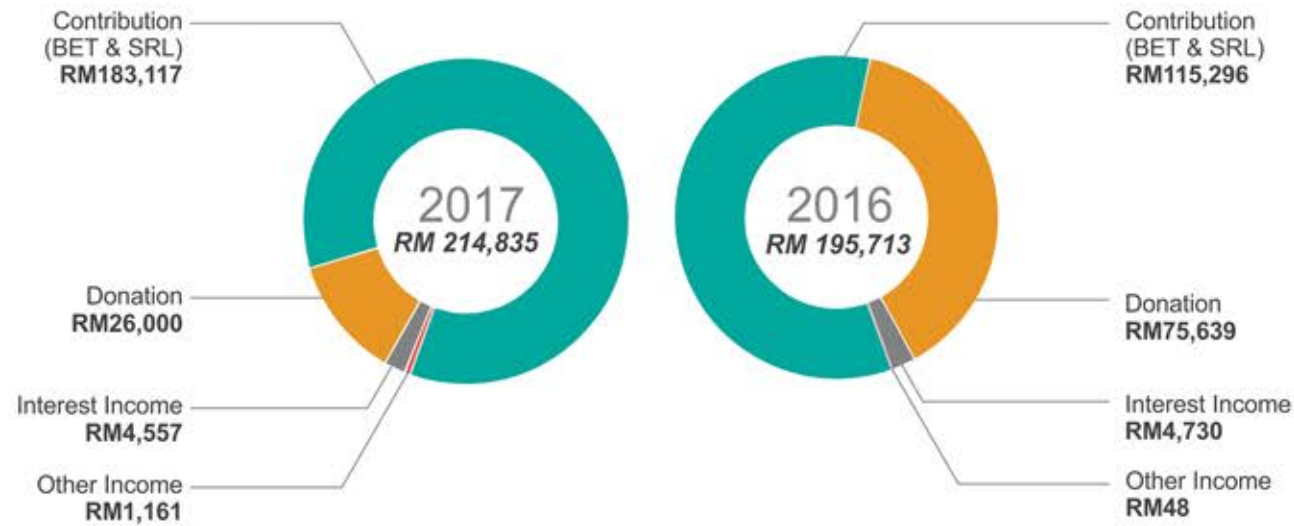
Farm Tourism 101 with Farm Guiding Course



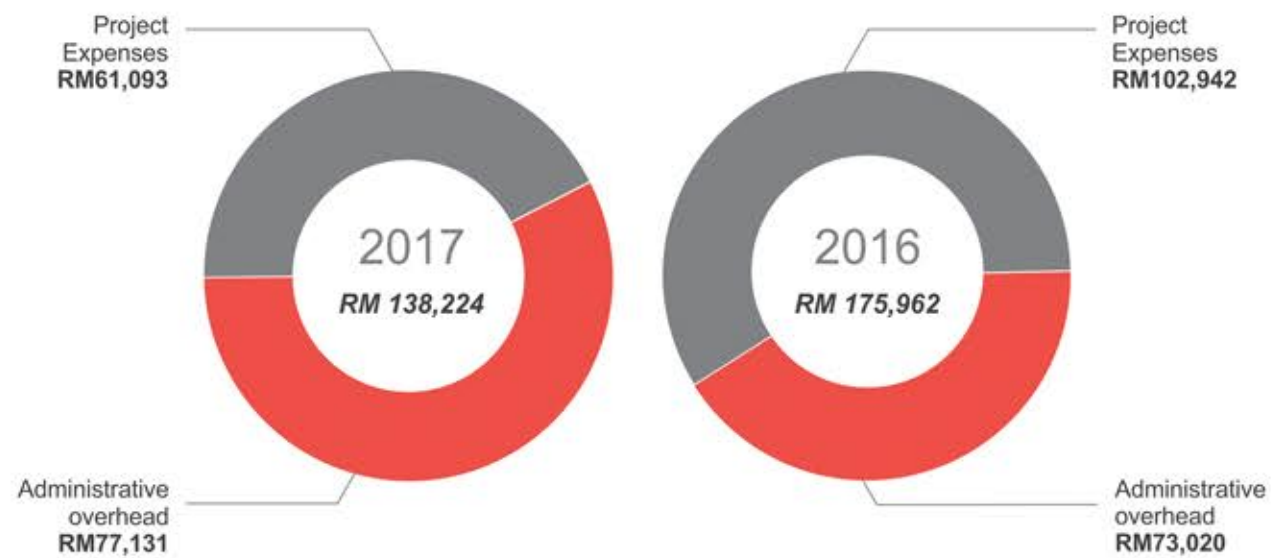
31 July 2017
Organised by International School of
Sustainability Tourism, Phillipines
ISST School

Statement Of Income And Expenditure For The Financial Year Ended 31 December 2017

INCOME



EXPENDITURE



Since the year 1996, BEST Society has received donation from individual donors and corporations amounting to RM 2,316,702.79. As of 2017, Borneo Eco Tours have contributed RM 857,185 and Sukau Rainforest Lodge with RM 602,643.08 out of the total amount.

BE INVOLVED!

Donate

Support our initiatives through generous giving. Contributions can be made in the form of cash, cheque, wire transfer, postal order or bank draft and all donations are tax deductible under Malaysian law. We also encourage you to consider different ways you can connect with us to better understand the impact your contributions have on local communities.

Volunteer

No amount of gold will buy you time and no job is too small to make a difference. Intern with us for a meaningful on-the-job training that will add great value to your CV. We would like to encourage you to give your time and skills through volunteering for worthy causes, simple acts of service, and ground-up efforts.

Expertise

BEST Society calls on a network of supporters near and far to help carry our work forward and upward. We are looking for experts in various fields - accounting, landscaping, furniture making, application of agricultural knowledge, hospitality and tourism management to name a few. Your expertise is invaluable and will help to grow and strengthen existing knowledge and skills as part of capacity building for community development.

Partnership

If you are working towards the same cause, get in touch with us. With like-minded partners, we are able to move more mountains. We work with our partners to find innovative solutions to socio-economic problems. Partnerships form powerful synergies that will lead to lasting impacts. Let's partner up!

SPREAD THE WORD!

You are already doing us a favour by spreading the word about the work that we do. Tell a friend, co-worker or family member. Every way and anyway to spread the word is important to us and we thank you for your support.

OUR PARTNERS

Government



Corporation



Academic Institution



Non-Profit Organisation

