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“Development on the margin”

Beyond Resistance: The Current and Potential Livelihood Strategies of Kampung Kujang Sain, Sarawak Malaysia

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Abstract

In the State of Sarawak on Malaysian-Borneo small rural communities rely on agriculture as a main source of food and income. While shifting cultivation of uphill rice forms the main source of subsistence farming, other activities, such as pepper and rubber cultivation, generate the necessary cash income. The strong modernisation ideology behind the Malaysian national Vision 2020 has put rural indigenous farmers under increasing pressure from the government and private companies to convert their land to large-scale commercial plantations. The village of Kujang Sain, Sarawak, has so far resisted such schemes; however, the reasons for and the dynamics behind the villages' resistance are deeply rooted and complex in nature. In order to investigate current and potential livelihood strategies in Kujang Sain, as well as the resistance to large-scale plantation schemes both social and natural science methods, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal and soil sampling techniques, were used. As the present livelihood strategies in Kujang Sain are based on natural resources, the research concluded that livelihood diversification is important if the villagers aspire to minimise the vulnerabilities associated with their current livelihood strategies. In addition, the findings reveal that the resistance to large-scale plantation schemes was linked to the villagers' negative perception of these schemes in combination with an ongoing internal social conflict. Thus, households in Kujang Sain have the potential to diversify and develop. However, this may only be plausible if the community addresses its most significant vulnerability, which is the absence of social cohesion.

Keywords: Borneo, livelihood diversification, livelihood strategies, livelihoods, Malaysia, palm oil plantations, plantation schemes, Sarawak, shifting cultivation, social conflict, subsistence agriculture