

Wild Asia Seed Grant Updated July 10, 2009

Project Team Members, Forest Voices



FOREST VOICES

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Project Title (July 09 update): Finding the Seeds

Introduction

Initially, this was a project that involved engaging local communities to document ecological knowledge as part of a US Fulbright project using photography. But it got way out of hand. We applied for a Wild Asia SEED grant, found team members, and started building a video system to capture the knowledge and conservation practices of forest communities in Middle Baram, Sarawak.

Project Background and History

I engaged in the every day activities of people living within and close to primary forests, cultivating trust by gathering and harvesting wild foods, collecting plants and seedlings. Our relationships and trust grew. I began a series of interviews with forest experts to collect stories surrounding forest management. To provide real examples to these stories, Forest Voices began giving both children and community members I worked

with small digital cameras donated to me. The images and stories developed into a photographic children's book that highlights forest food culture. This book, [A Dinner With Forest Friends](#) should be available in late 2009.

In forest communities where we have been working, these activities have brought momentum within and outside forest communities. In addition to gaining support and trust from within communities, researchers from Malaysian Universities, NGOs, tourism operators, and citizen volunteer organizations have all given me homework. In addition to adding more nuanced questions and contributing to my own work, they have offered friendship as we have gradually made Malaysian forest communities home and work to complete a long-term book project on people's forest knowledge and management about forests.

Original Project Proposal

Our original request involved putting local people's forest knowledge into wider practice through action in the form of workshops I intend to hold. In two Penan communities where I have worked I plan to hold regional seed and tree sharing workshops.

These workshops involve exchanging ideas on how forest experts collect, plant, and manage wild trees in their forest lands, farm plots, and hunting and gathering forests. These workshops will also discuss nursery design and management. One of these workshops will be in the Middle Baram. A second will take place in the Limbang area between Sarawak and Sabah. Due to the difficulties of travel in these areas and communication challenges, the SEED funds will be used to hold small meetings with forest experts in several different forest communities in the two regions I noted above. These meetings will be partially facilitated by community members and forest experts where I have worked.

While there are organizations that work in these areas, there is no systematic documentation that looks at how some forest communities collect and conserve particular native tree species. In addition, there have not been efforts to call forest experts together to discuss forest use and management strategies.

With these SEED funds, we also intend to finish two additional children's books on forest culture while in the communities. These stories will tell some of the stories of how local people conserve and use particular "community forests and tree areas" within forests.

Project Evolution

Forest Voices has grown and can use additional SEED funds to literally follow the journey of native tree forest seeds in Sarawak. We will document, through interviews,

images, and video the efforts of communities to collect, harvest, and transplant seeds and wildlings to community nurseries.

We will also finalize plans to establish community seed trade networks with neighboring forest communities. As part of this documentary and conservation project, we will make some of the first attempts to trade seeds with communities that are difficult to reach. This will also be an opportunity to reach out to communities that are difficult to access and record their own voices concerning seeds and native trees.

Timing

We intend to finish these workshop projects both before the rainy season and fruiting season over the course of late October and November. In between workshops, I'll spend additional time in the forest communities to finish the forest friend children's books with the help of the community. In scheduling of activities and workshops with forest experts, sensitivity to the daily lives and the work schedule of participants will be maintained.

Budget (Please note that this was the initial budget)

Subsistence, Living and workshop costs	2000 (RM)
Travel of forest experts to workshops (costs for traveling to other forest communities)	1000
Guides, Translators, Facilitators	1000
2 Workshops (Seeds and Tree Sharing)	1000
TOTAL	5000 RM

Outputs

- 2 additional Forest Friends books
- 2 new Photoessays that emphasize seed sharing and forest culture
- 2 workshops that focus on seedling and wildlings collections. Challenges to collecting forest products, trees, and seeds will also be discussed. Methods of managing and generating income from community forests will also be discussed.
- New material for Wild Asia newsletters (images, video and text deliverables)
- Fine Art photographic prints donated to Wild Asia office

The Bigger Picture, Next Steps

With funding from my art sales, we have built up a video system to document this journey of communities engaging in community forest practices. This is a major exercise for Forest Voices and a chance to establish ourselves as a dedicated organization to documenting community conservation practices and opportunities for collaboration.

Planned followup activities we have discussed with the community include setting up annual seed trading activities in the Middle Baram, Sarawak.

Additional funding from Wild Asia will enable us to make a documentation video production of our efforts. This will be the groundwork for all the projects and communities we collaborate with in 2010.