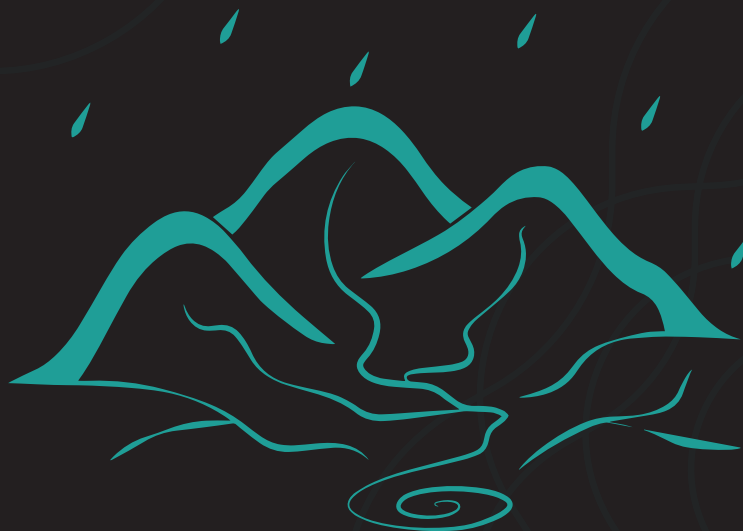


WATERSHED AND COMMUNITIES

Honouring Our Watershed





Overview

This publication shares conversations, reflections and highlights following Forever Sabah Institute's (FSI) final Valley Immersion for the year 2021 at the site of Forever Sabah's (FS) Payment-for-Ecosystems (PES) Pilot Project: Kg. Kolosunan, Kg. Babagon Toki, Kg. Tampasak and the Babagon Dam.

As with previous FSI Valley Immersions, the programme was planned as a field trip involving a physically arduous trek through the four locations, as well as an interface with residents from the three villages.

As a whole, the programme was designed to expand our minds to "think like a watershed" and help us understand the deep and irrevocable connection between humans, ethics, aesthetics and watersheds.

Acknowledgements

FS | Forever Sabah is a 25 year programme to support Sabah's transition to a diversified, equitable, circular economy. As a civil society entity, FS serves as a collaborative social movement rather than a bureaucracy or NGO.

We are an initiative rooted in local aspirations, built by an enthusiastic team who believe we can make our state better by utilising Sabahan knowledge and experience and working with others and across sectors.

FSI | Forever Sabah Institute is an integral part of Forever Sabah (FS): the transition towards a diversified, equitable circular economy in the Malaysian Borneo state of Sabah.

A significant suite of activities for FSI is "Forever Sabah Institute For Forever Sabah" (FSI4FS), under which FSI designs and offers learning activities for staff, teams and partners from the Forever Sabah web. Other programs are generated through formal and informal partnerships, requests or relevance for specific learning and offers of teaching/ sharing.

While "Honouring Our Watershed" was an activity designed to connect the experiences, challenges and needs across the Forever Sabah web, we hope this publication can spark conversations, as well as inform larger discussions about sustainability, community and livelihoods.

The immersion was co-designed and co-facilitated by: **Cynthia Ong, Noel Seanundu, Rizlan Morsit, Katrina Ong;** in partnership with community members **Nelson Maison Malon, Biniso Kasim, Jeffrey Abun, Junaidih Jipanis, Welkino Sikuil, Noristopher Mohamad, Azman Mohamad, Vailin Abun, Forlis Diun, Richie Rumin, Frankie @ Frank Asun, Walter Sikuil, Martha Dadingkis, Helen Kinggih, Balasius Saingun, Philip Gompodos** and **Darius Malon**.

Videos filmed and edited by: **Third Rice Culture Media Productions**

Published by: **Forever Sabah Institute (FSI)**

How We Got Here

The Babagon Dam provides 57% of clean water supply to the wider Kota Kinabalu population, but not including the resident communities of Kg Kolosunan, Kg Babagon Toki and Kg Tampasak, which still rely on traditional gravity water systems.



Unbeknownst to many, the construction of the Babagon Dam in 1992 had irrevocably changed the landscape and livelihoods of those living in the three communities. Residents faced despair as socio-economic activities became restricted, whilst some became dislocated as the [dam submerged entire homes](#).

We entered “Honouring Our Watershed” with one guiding question which was: where does our water come from? Thus, we sought to expand our understanding of the primitive value of water, and what it takes for whole communities to become guardians and stewards of our natural environment, including water. This publication is the culmination of that physical and spiritual journey of being at the watershed.

Watch: Introduction to PES Project | How We Got Here

<https://youtu.be/zxC1beEW8uA>

Regenerative Livelihoods



According to Wikipedia, regeneration means that an organism regrows a lost part, so that the original function is restored. Regenerative, in terms of livelihoods, can mean steps toward the restoration and renewal of wellbeing.

We began to unpack our understanding of livelihoods when we learned the way in which the resident communities of Kg Kolusanan, Kg Babagon Toki and Kg Tampasak were rebuilding theirs.

Through agroforestry initiatives like replanting trees, communities can now look forward to greener legacies. The resident communities, too, are moving towards food sovereignty by replanting previously lost or ignored paddy fields.

“

In another 10 years, we will have our own durian trees.
Philip, Kg. Tampasak

“

I love nature and I enjoy farming. Learning from the community, I am inspired by how their livelihoods have integrated “eco” and “agriculture” aspects.
Joannes, Certified Sustainable Palm Oil (CSPO) Team, Forever Sabah

“

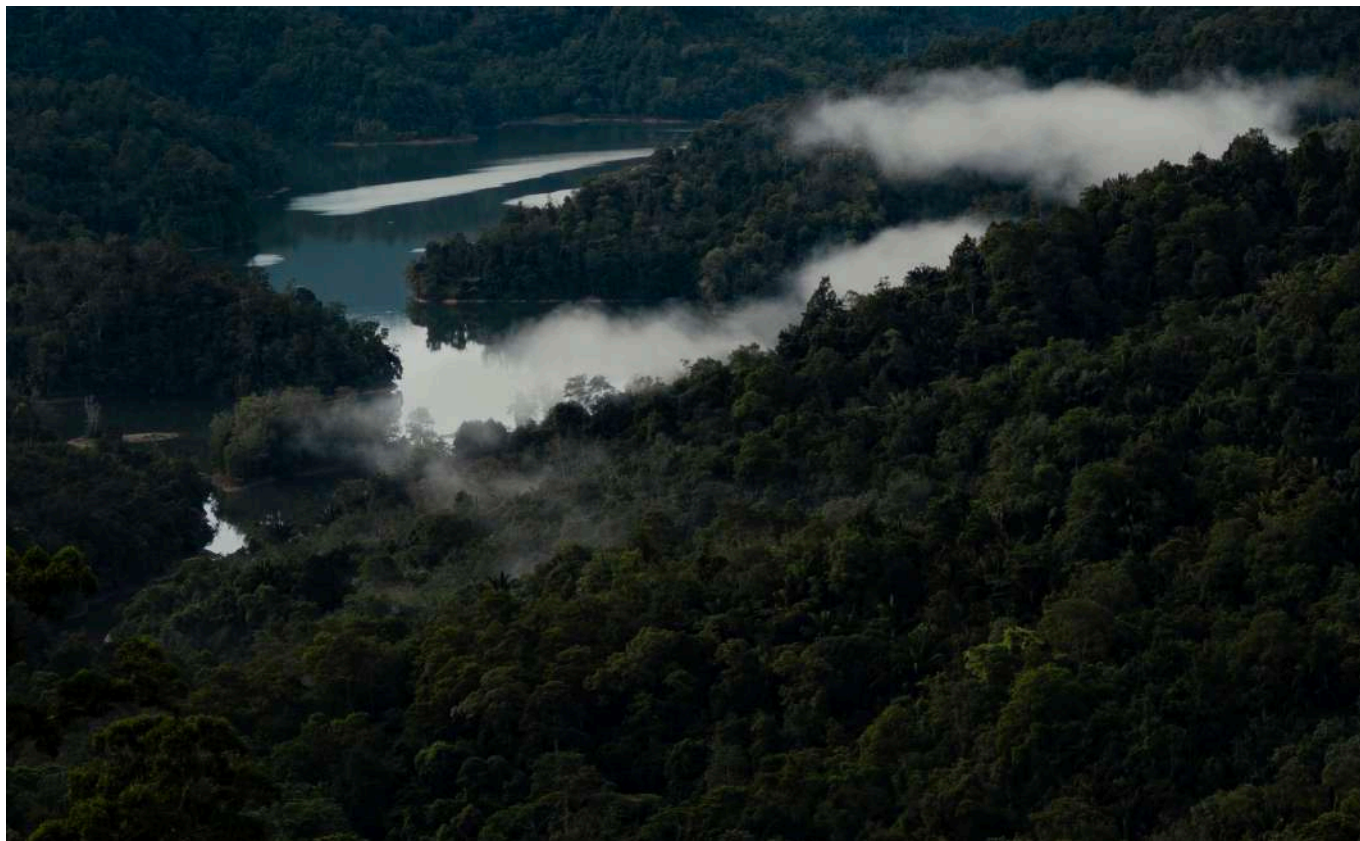
For me personally, [the activities] sparked an inner dialogue about the impact of individual contribution. I have always struggled with feelings of disempowerment, always questioning what kind of change one person can really incite. But these activities have rooted in me a sense of hope and optimism in the future, and a regeneration of our natural world and livelihoods.
Emily, Third Rice Culture Media Productions

By being a part of that process, some questions that emerged were:

- What does a regenerative livelihood look like?
- What if we strived to understand economies as a way that is life sustaining instead of extractive?
- How do we co-create an existence that is sustainable?

Watch:

- Tree Planting at Kg. Kolosunan, Kg. Babagon Toki, & Kg. Tampasak <https://youtu.be/nsVDtZthJE8>
- Paddy Harvesting at Kg. Kolosunan <https://youtu.be/UCjIBeyvAll>



Babagon Watershed Immersion

When the Babagon Dam was built, many residents from the three kampung communities felt affected.

We spoke to some residents of the community to gather their thoughts on the various issues surrounding the Babagon Dam.

The view from Kg Babagon Toki overlooking the watershed is beautiful and punctuated by cool mountain air.

But while the Babagon Dam may be an engineering marvel, and the first-of-its-kind in Sabah, the story behind its flowing water is mired by tragedy and intangible loss.

“

It didn't feel right. Our village was submerged by the dam water, which included basic amenities such as our school, church, farm lands and so on. I hope the government will provide more land for socio-economic activities. If we hadn't been moved, our village would have retained its uniqueness such as the paddy fields, orchards, fishes and forests. But it's more difficult now that we've been relocated.

Blasius, Kg. Tampasak

“

The dam really affected the economy of the *kampung*. There are now rules to the way we farm lands, whereas before we could farm wherever we chose. Farming is now restricted.

Martha, Helen & Kino, Kg. Babagon Toki

“

Before the dam, I had aspirations to open up a rubber estate and applied for the necessary land permits to do so. Then when the dam construction began, my applications were rejected, including that for small-scale farming.

Frankie, Kg. Babagon Toki

The three communities faced even more difficulties due to movement restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The challenges were deeply felt even more so as the three villages, connected by shared roads, relied on each other for income.

As we spent more time with the community, we came to understand more deeply their journey and struggles. Finally, we ended our immersion with a boat ride across the Babagon Dam—or over the sunken graves.

“

As a farming community, we would bring produce to sell at the *tamu* or *pasar malam* (night market). We sold our produce wholesale. But when the pandemic hit, the *tamus* were closed. The SOPs were burdensome to the community as a whole because we would often travel together. With the SOPs, only two persons were allowed in one car, so then we could only share the costs of transportation with one other person. Personally, my company deducted my salary to lower costs, and my annual and unpaid leave days were cut. My income was gravely affected during that time.”

Blasius, Kg. Tampasak

“

“As a whole, I understood better what the PES project at the Babagon watershed was about. Even though I’ve been with the PES team since 2017, it was through immersion that I finally understood their struggles. I felt really sad when I listened to the presentation from Cynthia about the PES project, and when I learned of the story about the community’s ancestral homes that became submerged in water.”

Dzulfikar Rosli, CSPO Team, Forever Sabah

Watch what regenerative livelihood looks like:

- Experience the Babagon Watershed: <https://youtu.be/wj7ZITNy10s>
- Listen to our Conversation with Communities: <https://youtu.be/RLIFxJjBVwl>

Stories of Water

Part of our approach is the understanding that building connections is central to wellbeing. The act can be as simple as sitting by the campfire and telling stories. Yet, the process involves attuning to our inner landscapes and allowing others to view that landscape.

Can we feel our whole selves and can we open that up to others? “Stories of Water” was a session where we were invited to share our closest memories and stories about water, and at the same time remember the life-giving nature of water.



“

I want to tell the story of how Kg Tampasak got its name. Before, there was a very long drought for six months. At that time, the river was known as *Sungai Babagon*, or the Babagon River. The river had many streams which flowed to our village. At that time of drought, there was one stream that did not dry up. In the Dusun language, we said about the occurrence “*amu arasak boh. Au arasak iih waig!*”

At the same time, within the stream grew many Tampasak trees. These were trees that could be used to build houses because the trees provided hardwood. So, the villagers named the stream Tampasak, and the community named the village Kampung Tampasak.

Coincidentally, our kampung is now submerged by the Babagon Dam. But at the same time, because the Tampasak stream that will never dry flows beneath the dam, and so it goes, the dam will never become dry.

Nelson, Kg. Tampasak

¹ The phrase “*amu arasak boh. Au arasak iih waig*” translates in English to “the water does not dry”, or in the Sabah dialect of Malay “*tidak kering bah, tidak kering itu air.*”

Watch: Stories of Water <https://youtu.be/LmVgbbXUaxk>

Try It Out: Offer, Release and Let Go

1. Before you start, take a moment to find any object that represents “weight” to you. If you can’t find an object, visualise an image that represents it.
2. Hold that object close to you.
3. Close your eyes to begin taking a pause.
4. With your eyes closed, take deep breaths in. Count 1, 2, 3, 4, then exhale. Repeat this breathing exercise for up to eight cycles.
5. Slowly open your eyes.
6. Once that moment has settled, take your time to reflect on the object you’re holding.
7. Share your thoughts to the circle you’re in. Or if you’re alone, perhaps journal or illustrate that reflection in a notebook.
8. Let go of the object by placing it in front or away from you.

Watch Offer, Release & Let Go: <https://youtu.be/maybcP1MDDg>



Citizen Science

Rivers at Kg Kolosunan, Kg Babagon Toki and Kg Tampasak are under *tagal*, the Dusun word for “prohibition”.

That means the resident communities are responsible for the management of the rivers and its natural assets like fishes.

Harmful activities such as fish bombing are penalised, and use of the river requires prior consent.

Meanwhile, communities use dragonflies as a bioindicator for water health and pollution levels. As part of citizen science activities, community members are trained to detect the presence of dragonflies and spot species. The number of dragonflies provide an indication of a healthy water ecosystem.

Citizen science, community science or “*Kampung science*” is a scientific research method which involves collaboration between members of the public and scientists.



Watch: Tagal & Bio-Indicators by the Communities

<https://youtu.be/9yp6re0jzEQ>

The Valleys We Trekged at Forever Sabah



To close Forever Sabah's three-day immersion, we shared our reflections and spent time remembering past valley immersions of the year. Meanwhile, the residents of the three kampungs shared their reflections on what the PES Pilot Project means to them and their livelihoods.

Watch The Valleys We Trekged:

<https://youtu.be/uAkAnx53FyA>

“

From a youth perspective, the PES Pilot Project has fostered cooperation because of a single dam, while I hope that the project can help the communities achieve equal income.
Kino, Kg Babagon Toki



“

The PES Pilot Project has opened up a lot of alternative routes for income generation through training. Now, there is training provided for organic farming and composting. PES has provided the funds to improve socioeconomic conditions for individuals. For example, mushroom growing in Babagon Toki. I hope the income from these efforts can be distributed equally.

Frankie, Kg Babagon Toki

“

The immersion was very challenging for me. I felt very tired but the experience was worth it. In my tiredness, I thought about how in our own privilege, someone else might be suffering. Because I thought about the community's story of how they lost their village because of the Babagon Dam.

Jascika, Community Elephant Ranger Team (CERT), Forever Sabah



