ANNUAL REPORT 2017
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SAHABAT ALAM MALAYSIA (SAM) - FRIENDS OF THE EARTH MALAYSIA

January - December 2017
Introduction

It was a fairly busy year for SAM working with various indigenous and rural communities, fisher communities, farmers and urban residents as well as having continuous dialogues with authorities and engaging with media and policy makers.

The SAM Peninsular Malaysia team handled the following projects:

- Supporting Community-Based Environmental Protection and Conservation Projects;
- Community-Based Conservation and Protection of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in Peninsular Malaysia;
- Empowering communities with innovative protection and advocacy methodologies;
- Welfare Issues of Laying Hens;
- Building the Capacity of Society and Communities to Care For and Conserve Coastal Ecosystems.

The SAM Sarawak team continued working with indigenous communities on agro ecology projects, raising awareness on rights to customary territories, conducting a research on the impacts of oil palm plantations on indigenous peoples customary territories for a publication on certification and how logging and plantations have caused environmental destruction in many areas inhabited by indigenous communities. In 2017 alone, there were many flash floods which brought devastation to rural communities. In 2018, SAM will monitor and find out if logging and the oil palm plantation expansion are indeed one of the causes for climate change.

Peninsular Malaysia

Issues

The major issues that SAM tackled in 2017 were:

- safeguarding coastal and marine ecosystems against huge reclamation works in Penang, Kuala Kedah and Teluk Muroh (Perak) causing impacts on the lives and livelihoods of fishers, coastal communities and the environment where mangrove areas have been severely destroyed; and
- the impacts of trawlers on coastal fishers lives and livelihoods and on marine ecosystems.
environmental degradation as a result of
development on hills and hill slopes which have caused major landslides and loss of
lives in Penang;
* floods caused by over development on the Penang island;
* forests conversion for large scale plantations and logging;
* pollution from palm oil mill; and
* pollution from the extraction of natural resources through mining, logging and
quarrying in a number of states in Malaysia.

* thwarting of wildlife and animal rights as a result of cruelty to animals in captivity and illegal
sale of wildlife.

* Poor welfare of laying hens.

**Activities**

SAM worked on the above issues by conducting various activities with different groups of people
including farmers, fishers, indigenous and rural communities and urban dwellers as well as meeting
with the local, state and federal authorities and the media.

Some of the key activities that SAM implemented with local communities were-

- Two capacity building training sessions on conducting surveillance through the sharing of experience and role play,
  explanation on fisheries laws, enforcement and communication mechanisms in Sungai Acheh, Penang on 9 July 2017 and Kuala
  Kurau, Perak on 30 July 2017. In both these trainings, we respectively had 25 and 21 participants and the presence of the
  Penang State Fisheries Officer as well as an officer from the Maritime Enforcement Agency.

- A workshop on supplementary livelihood project was conducted for fisher communities, mainly women in Sungai Acheh, Penang
  between 27 and 28 October 2017 where they taught other participants on how to make food products like jam, tea and cakes
  from mangrove fruits and leaves as well as constructing simple nets to catch prawns and crabs.

- Conducting on-site mangrove and tree planting activities at different wetlands area in Kedah, Penang, Perak and Johor for
  activists and volunteers to rehabilitate degraded mangrove areas and to help improve the wetlands ecosystems and to sustain
  livelihoods of fisher communities. Throughout 2017, there were six replanting programmes in mangrove forests and sandy
  beach areas with the involvement of 415 students, youths and
fishers as well as the fishers networks i.e. PIFWA and JARING. They planted the following:

- 200 tembusu and ambong-ambong trees were planted in Hutan Lipur Pasir Panjang, Daerah Manjung, Perak between 20 and 21 January 2017;
- 200 bakau minyak were planted in Hutan Simpan Byram, Seberang Perai Selatan, Penang on 29 April 2017;
- 400 bakau minyak saplings were planted in Sungai Acheh, Seberang Perai Selatan on 26 August 2017;
- 235 saplings of ambong-ambong, tembusu, balau laut and beruas were planted in Hutan Lipur Pasir Panjang, Daerah Manjung, Perak on 17 October 2017;
- 50 tembusu and ketapang saplings were planted at Hutan Lipur Pasir Panjang (sebahagian HS Segari Melintang), Daerah Manjung, Perak on 05 November 2017; and
- 200 saplings of bakau minyak were planted in the mangroves near Muara Sungai Labu, Tanjung Piandang, Perak on 28 December 2017.

SAM also held two exhibitions on the environment in USM and St Georges School in Balik Pulau, Penang on 19 - 20 April 2017 and 12 August 2017 respectively.

SAM also helped the fishers monitor and document trawlers operating within their inshore fishing areas.

**Dialogues / Meetings**

SAM also had multiple dialogues with state and federal authorities together. Many of these meetings were also held with the fishers network like JARING. SAM and JARING had met with the Minister of Agriculture in Kuala Kurau, Perak on 7 October 2017 and fisheries related authorities in Cyberjaya on 23 November 2017.

In 2017, SAM sent out the following memoranda to the federal authorities:

- Memorandum on the Need for Higher Welfare Systems for Laying Hens: No More Battery Cages, submitted on 24 October 2017
- Memorandum Masalah Sumber Perikanan dan Nelayan Pantai di Malaysia: Cadangan dan Gesaan, submitted end of November 2017
- Memorandum Haramkan Penggunaan Pukat Kenka Dua Bot (Apollo) submitted on 7 October 2017. SAM prepared for submission by JARING and coastal fishers of Kuala Kurau.
SAM also took part in a few solidarity protests with the fisher communities where the fisherfolk were protesting against massive reclamation projects. Prior to these protests, SAM had gone to the ground to conduct preliminary research work to document the impacts of land reclamation in coastal areas. In 2017, two environmental impact assessments (EIAs) of coastal reclamation projects were reviewed and comments were submitted to the Department of Environment.

**Sarawak**

SAM’s main work in Sarawak are with indigenous communities on the ground and being a conduit for communities to raise their problems to the government. Their issues remain constant year after year and there are many challenges as well as change is slow but that does not mean that the communities have no avenues to channel their problems.

**Issues**

- Non recognition of native customary rights by the government;
- Encroachment into customary territories by logging and plantation companies as a result of this non recognition and non respect for these rights;
- Government scheme like the *Konsep Baru* (New Concept) have crept into indigenous communities lands seeking to remove what remaining customary rights they have to invest in unclear schemes like this.
- Pollution caused by logging and plantation companies;
- Extreme weather conditions that are causing floods and droughts creating huge impacts on the lives and livelihoods of indigenous communities.

**Activities**

Some of the activities that SAM undertook in 2017 include -

- the continual strengthening of Residents Associations (RAs), of which thus far SAM has helped register 24 RAs in the Miri and Bintulu regions through frequent workshops and dialogues using rights based approaches.
- workshops and trainings promoting agro-ecological approaches amongst the residents’ associations in Sarawak to reduce dependence on agro-chemicals. Agro-ecology approach can contribute significantly to increased food production, as well as make a significant impact on indigenous communities’ welfare and livelihoods through diversified and integrated farming system. Some of the communities that have embarked on agro ecology projects are as follows:
In 2017, in Sungai Buri, Sarawak, 22 families were involved in the planting of *daun biruk* and *daun lung nyirik*, 2 types of palms which have various uses including wrapping food (sticky rice) and hats. They sell these in the markets.

In Long Miri, the community maintained the 1,000 kapur, engkabang and meranti trees that they planted in 2013. They plan to maintain the 2,150 hectares of communal forest within their customary territory. This community’s constant vigilance has stopped all logging in their area. The community of Long Miri has also benefited from the many agro-ecology trainings where they have begun making their own natural fertilisers and have begun selling them to outsiders.

The Long Miri community has built what is known as a *sulap* in Sungai Kelameh to start off their home stay project.

The Long Pilah community planted 100 trees of various species in 2017. They plan to preserve 3,000 hectares of their communal forest for the future.

The Sungai Balau community has just joined the project and they have set up their nursery with tree saplings which they will replant once these saplings can be replanted.

Upkeep of SAM’s agro-ecology and agro-forestry training centre in Kampung Lubok Nibong, Marudi, Sarawak. The centre supplies plant growth promoters, saplings of forest tree species, vermicompost and vermiwash for communities. In 2017, SAM carried out improvement works at the centre, built a shed which is used during training and reset the vermiwash unit.
SAM undertook a research project to document the impacts of two communities affected by oil palm plantations and to determine the efficacy of the certification process for oil palm plantations in promoting forest conservation and community rights. Much of the work went towards two surveys with detailed interviews and the writing of the report.

One workshop on the Konsep Barna under PELITA (a government oil palm plantation scheme) was held with three villages in Marudi to raise their awareness on how this huge project would affect 32 villages, the size of 28,400 hectares (both state and customary territories); where the main water source would be gravely affected.

Besides the above, the Sarawak office did not stop attending to daily complaints from communities seeking assistance on encroachment onto their customary territories, application for identity cards, birth certificates, financial assistance from the local government and subsidies for their farming activities among others.

Communication & media

SAM did a fair amount of media work in 2017 where we reached out to the public using media, both conventional and social media. SAM issued 58 statements and letters to the editor on various issues. The statements were followed up with letters to the authorities. Since the issues were highlighted in the media, we found that the local/state authorities were obligated to take action as their superiors want a report on measures that have been taken to resolve the problems.

SAM also used social media to actively engage with fishers networks. Many of their issues were also frequently shared on SAM’s Facebook page. SAM’s Facebook is also followed by a number of authorities which has helped us push issues at a quicker rate.

SAM also produced two videos which were published on its web and social media sites. One video was to showcase 40 years of SAM’s work to commemorate its anniversary and the other was on the call to ban trawlers. SAM also produced a set of infographics on Better Welfare for Laying Hens.

International Meetings & Networking

SAM continued to be active in the many networks it has committed itself to. In 2017, SAM staff travelled to Papua New Guinea to take part in the FoE Asia Pacific annual general meeting and to Bonn, Germany to follow the UNFCCC climate negotiations. SAM as part of the #breakfreefromplastic movement attended a meeting in Bali on July 2017. SAM staff also attended a training for trainers in Bangladesh organised by FoEI and FoE APac.
Threats to environment and communities

SAM has been monitoring threats to the environment and communities through field surveys and news monitoring. The issues followed up included environmental pollution; extraction of natural resources such as sand and ore mining, logging, quarrying; wildlife and animal welfare issues; violations of indigenous people’s land rights; floods; development on hill slopes; coastal erosion; etc. The areas covered is the whole of Malaysia.

SAM has also submitted comments on development plans, local plans and attended public hearing on RT Daerah Larut Matang, Perak 2035, public forum on RT Kuala Muda, Kedah. Since April 2017, SAM has been selected as one of three NGOs engaged in a partnership known as the Environmental Protection and Anti-Corruption Caucus (EPACC).

EPACC is an initiative by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) to tackle corruption and abuse of power in environmental management by joining hands with environmental activists and academics. We have briefed MACC officers on forest governance, potential conflict areas for example logging, conversion of reserved forests for plantations and encroachment into customary areas of indigenous communities.

In relation to wildlife issues, SAM had raised issues on the delisting of crocodiles in Malaysia, monitored the turtles under research study at Light Waterfront, Penang by IJM, called for the proposed Sukau Bridge Project across the Kinabatangan river in Sabah that would destroy the habitats of pygmy elephants and orang utans to be cancelled (this project was eventually cancelled after public outcry) and stopping the rapid shrinkage of forest cover and large scale encroachment on elephant corridors which are causing baby pygmy elephants to be orphaned and reduction of roadkills due no having no wildlife corridors.

Moving forward

SAM faced many challenges throughout 2017; the main being the lack of funds and having to squeeze as much as possible within the means of the organisation. Apart from that, SAM also faced the challenges of having to deal with the latest regressive Federal Court decision on indigenous peoples’ rights, having communities sustain their interest in long term sustainable development projects like the agro ecology project, lack of human resource and capacity to undertake more issues that are constantly brought to our attention and transportation into remote areas especially in the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and in Sarawak.

1 This project was eventually cancelled after public outcry. [http://www.theborneopost.com/2017/04/21/sukau-bridge-project-scraped/](http://www.theborneopost.com/2017/04/21/sukau-bridge-project-scraped/)

2 Director of Forests, Sarawak & 1 Other v TR Sandah Ak Tabau & 7 Ors & 2 Other Appeals [2017] 2 MLRA 91
The communities SAM works with have their own battles including having to deal with frequent harassment and impending arrests for defending their rights.

However, despite all of these, our community engagement work have added value to our advocacy efforts. Through the capacity building efforts we found that communities are now more vocal and vigilant of any threats to the environment and subsequently their lives and livelihoods. The communities are also finding solutions to their problems and moving from awareness to remedial actions.

SAM takes pride in the fact that a lot of our work were also highlighted to the public through media outreach including the Proposed Reclamation and Dredging Works for the Penang South Reclamation Project in Penang and the Aman Laut reclamation project in Kuala Kedah. The latter was halted by the authorities after SAM highlighted that the project had started prior to approval of the EIA. SAM followed up with calls and letters to the Department of Environment (DOE). Finally the DOE issued a stop-work order on 15 May 2017 in accordance with Section 34AA (2) of the Malaysian Quality Environmental Act 1974 (Amended) 2012 that no work (prescribed activity) can be carried out prior to getting the approval of the DOE.

SAM knows that it cannot find solutions to all problems but it remains optimistic and will continue to be the voice of the people and create that platform for all environmental issues to be continuously visible and taken forward.
Our visual work

Agro Ecology in Sarawak

Protecting the coastal & marine ecosystem in Peninsular Malaysia
Our visual work

Some of SAM’s work in the media