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DAYAK BIDAYUH OF THE BAU-LUNDU REGION: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF EDUCATIONAL AMENITIES

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INTRODUCTION¹

Of the 1.3 million people in Sarawak 8.4% of them are of Bidayuh origin, the second largest group of Sarawak natives (Monthly Statistical Bulletin, 1988). To Westerners, Bidayuh are also known as Land Dayaks, which should be distinguished from Sea Dayaks, the name given by Westerners to Ibans. The term Bidayuh, means "we, the people of this area (the hills)".

Based on 1988 population figures and the birth rate of 2% per annum (Wilson B. Dandot, 1989), we estimate the present Bidayuh population to be around 128,520 persons. The Bidayuh community are found in 291 villages (in Kuching and Samarahan Divisions); they speak four different dialects (Asmah, 1983; Stephen Jussem, 1989; Robert J. Ridu, 1989). However, the largest group of the Bidayuh community is concentrated in 126 villages in the Bukar-Sadong District. This is followed by the Biatah or Puruh group of Kuching District who are clustered in 81 villages; the third group of 43 villages is made up of the Bau-Jagoi group, who reside in the Bau District; and lastly is the Selako-Lara group living in 42 villages, concentrated mainly in the Lundu District.

There are several legends that tell the origin of the Bidayuh (Michael M. Aman, 1989). Some of these legends remain as oral literature, while others have been documented in book form (Sandin, 1980). The Bidayuh are believed to be among the earliest inhabitants of Borneo originating from Gunung Sangkong in Indonesian Borneo (Asmah, 1983). They were said to have migrated to Sarawak to finally settle at Rabak Mikabuh 20 generations before the Karakatoa eruption in 1883. This meant that they could have come to Sarawak in the year 373 A.D. (William Nais, 1989).

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Like other Dayak groups, majority of rural Bidayuh are subsistence farmers engaged in shifting cultivation of hill padi and cash crops like rubber, pepper and cocoa. Their significant involvement in organised agriculture or land schemes is a recent phenomenon and is limited to only three cocoa schemes developed by the Sarawak Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (SALCRA). These are located in Kampong Tae (Serian District), Kampong Bajo (Lundu) and Krokong (Bau) (William Jitab *et al.*, 1989). However, plans are underway to give the Bidayuh community a bigger share of the development pie in the current Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991-95) and the Seventh Malaysia Plan.

SALCRA is a state-level agency entrusted to rehabilitate idle land, especially Native Customary Rights (NCR) land, and help eradicate poverty among the NCR landowners. This paper reports a sub-section of a larger study conducted in areas in the Bau-Lundu region where SALCRA plans to develop NCR land for oil palm cultivation to benefit the Bidayuh community. The study

was under the sponsorship of SALCRA. The Bau-Lundu oil palm schemes had been proposed to be implemented in the Sixth and Seventh Malaysia Plans (1991-1995 and 1996-2000, respectively).

Altogether, 30 villages in the proposed Bau-Lundu oil palm scheme were sampled for this study. Fieldwork was carried out in June, 1990. The purpose of that larger study was to obtain baseline data which could be used for planning the social and economic development of the Bidayuh community of the Bau-Lundu region. A parallel study was also conducted on the Bidayuh of the Serian District and reported elsewhere (Ahmad *et al.*, 1990; Noran and Ahmad, 1992).

The objectives of this paper are threefold, namely (a) to describe the demographic and educational characteristics of the Bidayuh community residing in the rural areas of Bau-Lundu area who are potential participants of the proposed SALCRA schemes; (b) to gauge the perception of these people of the educational amenities available in their areas; and (c) to provide ranking of priorities held by the Bidayuh community of the Bau-Lundu region with respect to development of their children's education.

BACKGROUND

This section briefly describes NCR land development in Sarawak in general and the proposed Bau-Lundu Oil Palm schemes.

NCR Land Development

According to the Sarawak Land Code, NCR land means (a) land in which customary rights, whether communal or otherwise, have lawfully been created prior to the 1st of January, 1958, and still subsist as such; (b) land from time to time comprised in a reserve to which section of the Land Code applies; and (c) Interior Area Land upon which native customary rights have been lawfully created pursuant to section 10 of the Land Code.

NCR land comprises some 22% (27,379 sq km) of the land area in Sarawak (Foo Nyuk Kian, 1989). NCR land ceases to be classified as such when it is surveyed and issued with titles. If it is in a mixed zone area it becomes a mixed zone land once issued with a title. Otherwise, it might become a Native Area Land, which is similar in status to the Malay Reserve land in Peninsular Malaysia; it has a title, but cannot be sold to a non-native.

Since NCR land does not have titles and is passed on from one generation to another, institutions other than SALCRA find it difficult to develop such land. Financial institutions are hesitant to accept it as collateral in any loan arrangement. A solution had to be found to overcome the impasse.

In March, 1976, the Sarawak Legislature passed the SALCRA Ordinance to establish SALCRA for the task of consolidating, rehabilitating and developing land for agriculture. With its native status, SALCRA, the second state statutory body (the first being SLDB) to be entrusted with land development, is concerned primarily with the development of NCR land. This is because much of such land is under-utilised and most of its owners are socio-economically backward and suffer from malnutrition and high incidence of poverty (William Jitab *et al.*, 1989, pg. 32).