



IFAD

Investing in rural people

Indigenous communities in Malaysia building capacity for resilience through IPAF

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The Jakun people is the largest group of the Orang Asli Indigenous Peoples of Malaysia. They have an amazing partnership between people and the forest - looking after it and using only what they need to live. But their traditional livelihoods are at risk. The [Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility \(IPAF\)](#) funded a project to improve livelihoods by focusing on strengthening their social enterprise, improving access to fair markets, strengthening cultural values, and enriching the diversity of their sustainable agriculture.

The two-year project was approved in 2015 and implemented by the local [Foundation for Community Studies and Development \(YKPM\)](#). The regional implementing partner in Asia and the Pacific, [TEBTEBBA Foundation](#) coordinated the IPAF grant and provided support to the local recipient organizations. This project resulted in a diversification of the communities environmental and cultural economic activities. The Jakun Orang Asli community improved their livelihoods and nutrition by introducing sustainable agricultural practices with a focus on indigenous traditional knowledge.



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Maintaining the fields

The corn and spinach plants grow in a symbiotic relationship. The corn provides shade and helps retain water for the surrounding plants. The community has many different fields to maintain and harvest.



Traditional knowledge

Knowledge about how to braid baskets and traditional outfits by hand is passed down from generation to generation. The women in the community work together from their homes.



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Caring for the plantations and harvest

Youth in the community are also involved in the family farming activities. Community members check the health of the plants and signs of disease or pests before the harvest. Tropical regions are especially affected by climate change and plants can suffer badly. Shocks and seasonal changes may destroy the harvests even when native plants are used.



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Secure access to nutritious food

Farmers and their families are consuming twice as many vegetables as they were before as a result of growing their own food. Thanks to the project they now enjoy a greater variety and improved levels of nutrition. Fish constitutes an important source of nutrients and complements the vegetable rich diet. For indigenous communities, fish is often of critical importance. In fact, fish provides more than just vital proteins and nutrients – it also contributes to ceremonial traditions and embodies a symbolic tie between the community and the environment.

Improving the soil with compost

Making their own compost has contributed to soil improvement and improved growth in the fields. In plantations of this size the constant supply of improved soil is necessary, but not always easy to source, so making their own has had a huge impact.



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Access to fair markets

Vegetables produced by the community are sold in Jaya Grocer, a premium supermarket chain located in a nearby city and in other parts of Kuala Lumpur. The organic products are transported by community members to the supermarket, where they can describe their products to customers. Sales have been successful for the community – some have doubled and even quadrupled their incomes.



Income from collective farming

Earnings from the sales are divided between all the farmers. This not only brings the income to the community, it also provides the chance for the community association to strengthen its administration and management. Setting up bank accounts, governance and management systems strengthen the organisational ability of the community to better navigate the modern world.

The community culture of sharing is derived from the worldview that there is enough in the forest for everyone's needs. Unfortunately, modernisation has had negative impact on the culture of sharing and cooperation. The farm social enterprise ploughs some of the profits back into the whole community to strengthen the values of their rich and equitable culture.



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Stronger together: The power of farmers' organizations

06 February 2020

Small family farms make up 85 per cent of all farms worldwide, and smallholder farmers make up the majority of the world's rural poor. To mitigate the challenges that come with working in isolation – and to increase profitability and productivity – these smallholders often form organizations.

Working together makes it easier for small-scale farmers to access raw materials such as seeds, water and fertilizer and to aggregate their yields, enabling them to reach larger markets. This in turn allows them reduce costs and improve their bargaining power, better positioning them to improve their food security and move out of poverty. And when farmers thrive, other players in the food system benefit, too.

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But to fulfil this role, these organizations often need tailored attention and support. IFAD recognises the central role of farmers' organizations in smallholder development and is committed to supporting them in building their capacity and strengthening their ability to perform.

In 2005, IFAD established the [Farmers' Forum](#), a framework for the partnership between IFAD and organizations of smallholder farmers. The Forum facilitates the ongoing process of consultation between these producer organizations, governments and IFAD, with a focus on rural development and poverty reduction. Each global meeting of the Forum serves as an opportunity to reaffirm our mutual commitment to partnership and to coordinate our operations.



©IFAD/Francesco Cabras : A group of Jakun farmers gathers amongst some of their seedlings.

The Jakun people, a subgroup of the Orang Asli indigenous peoples of Malaysia, have long been conscientious stewards of the local forest. Today, their traditional livelihoods are at risk – but thanks to the IFAD-funded [Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility](#), they have a way to maintain autonomy. This unique financial instrument supports indigenous peoples by building on their governance systems, culture, identity, knowledge and natural resources. Local organizations of indigenous peoples submit project proposals based on their self-identified priorities and, after receiving funding, have full responsibility for implementation. The ownership of the initiatives is thus in their hands, with positive impacts in terms of sustainability as well.