

# RUBBER RUMOURS: AN ASSESSMENT OF PROCESSES OF CHANGE IN AN INDONESIAN FRONTIER AREA

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## ABSTRACT

The major focus of international media towards processes of change in frontier areas is the victimisation of the indigenous people. They are subject to macro changes and can only follow along. In Kiham Batang, a village in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, the villagers are coping with recent developments in the area due to the establishment of a logging concession. The concession owners, PT SBK, have opened up the area for the villagers to engage with new types of livelihoods like gold mining and rubber cultivation. At the same time, foreign traders create a high demand for rare animals that can be hunted close to the village. Due to a high demand for arable land and a highland scarcity, the villagers engage in a resource frenzy to ensure their place in the future. This paper argues that structural changes and agency of villagers are both responsible for change, and that rumours and future fantasies play an active role in the decision making of the villagers to engage in new market opportunities. © 2014 Journal of Rural Indonesia [JoRI] IPB. All rights reserved.

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## Introduction

In recent history, much attention has been focussing on the degradation of tropical rainforests and the indigenous tribes that inhabit these areas. A large amount of NGOs like WWF, Greenpeace and Oxfam Novib have been advocating against large-scale deforestation and for the protection

of forest areas and the people that dwell in these areas. These organisations argue that the inhabitants of these areas are subject and victims of large-scale operations and structural changes that destroy their livelihoods and their traditional culture. This approach, however, is a very top down approach and focuses mainly on the dynamics on macro level and seem to overlook

what is happening at the micro level such as the level of the village.

As Derek Hall (2011) argues, most of the research done on the effects of logging operations on local people is done on the level of governments, politics and policies. He further notes that published academic work has been focusing on large scale causes and questions of politics, while the actual trajectories and local level dynamics are being under- examined (Hall 2011, 838). This focus on a macro setting is usually paired with the negative consequences of these logging practices. Fuelled by NGOs like WWF and Oxfam Novib, much literature on the subject has a strong tendency to elaborate on the negative impact on the forest communities while leaving the positive effects out.

The problem with this approach, however, is that only the structural developments in the region are being discussed while the role of the villager in the process of change is overlooked. This article will argue for a different approach towards rural development in frontier areas by discussing the case of Kiham Batang.

Kiham Batang is a village of 76 households located on the western bank of the Senamang River in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. Although swidden cultivation is the most prominent occupation, other forms of activities such as rubber cultivation, gold mining and shop keeping are present. The expansion of these other types of livelihoods can be related to the resource frenzy that is observable in the village.

The resource frenzy forms a key concept in this paper. I argue firstly that it occurs in a period of drastic structural developments through external factors. Secondly, however, the agency of the villagers and their role in the processes of change present in the concession area are not to be neglected. The rumours circulating in the area play a very important part in understanding the villagers' incentives to act upon the new situation in the region they inhabit.

## Methods

I stayed in the village for two months and in these two months I had all day and all night to engage with the villagers of Kiham Batang in order to conduct my research. I had decided that the best way to get in touch with the villagers was to join them in their daily routines. This participant observation turned out to be the most important and valuable research method during the research. I joined five different families to their swidden rice fields, or ladang, I visited the two main gold mining sites of the villagers, I went fishing once and foraging for vegetables twice and I partook in town meetings and joined an election campaign of the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI). My participation in these activities gave me a good overview of what the daily life of the villagers looked like. It showed me the ladang, the gold mining locations, the rubber gardens, etcetera. It also showed me the limitations of the villagers concerning the presence of the company.

Handmade maps were made in corporation with some of the villagers to get an overview of the size of the village, the location of the ladang and other agricultural locations and the location of the gold mining *units*, the name the villagers use for the gold mining machines.

In total about 50 unstructured interviews were held with different respondents on topics that discussed the developments that were happening in the region on the social, economic and political level. The research was finalized with a survey on livelihoods and livelihood development among 25 of the 76 households in the village.

## Findings

### A Changing Environment 1973-2013

The densely forested area in which the village of Kiham Batang is located has seen a lot of development over the last 35 years. Although visitors to the area still have to rely on river transport from Central Kalimantan, the people inside the concession area have seen their mobility greatly increased. Furthermore, the developments in the area have widened the villagers' economic opportunities.

The logging concession rights to the area in Central Kalimantan where my research was based was given by the Indonesian government to PT Sari Bumi Kusuma (PT SBK) in 1978. The concession rights were given for a period of 20 years. After these 20 years, in 1998, the company received an extension of the period for another 70 years. This means that PT SBK holds the private rights to extract wood from the area until 2068. In order to extract the timber from the forest, the company has built several logging roads that connect the area to the company's logpond from where the logs are shipped to Pontianak via the Melawi and Kapuas River. The logging road gives not only the company, but also the local population access from locations deep in the forest up to the city of Nanga Pinoh in West Kalimantan.

The company's activity in the area has not only increased the villagers' mobility, but they have also started development programmes to increase the villagers' economic welfare. Another significant change in the region was the establishment of the Indonesian National Park Bukit Baka Bukit Raya in 1992. The national park borders the east side of the concession area. The establishment of the park might not be very significant for the concession area as a whole, but is certainly very significant for the village my research took place. Kiham Batang is namely located about four to five kilometres to the west of the border of the national park. This means that the national park's borders are overlapping with the villagers' five-kilometre adat zone. This zone indicates what lands the villagers can access and which is theirs to cultivate through customary law, or *hukum adat*. Furthermore, the establishment of the park means that the villagers of Kiham Batang have to deal with two different legislative powers surrounding their village; the government, and the company.

This section will discuss what strategies the company has employed for the development of the villages in the area and to manage the forest in a sustainable way.

### **PT SBK's Sustainable Forestry Strategies**

PT Sari Bumi Kusuma was given the new concession rights in 1998. By that time, the government of Indonesia had a decree put through that all new logging concession rights should be given out to companies that complied with the standard of selective cutting and strip planting system, or *Tebang Pilih Tanam Jalur* (TPTJ) (Chandrasekharan 2005, 328). With TPTJ the company cuts a small amount of trees per hectare, and furthermore create strips in the cleared areas in which seedlings of economically profitable trees are planted. The trees are planted in strips running fifteen to twenty meters apart from each other. Within these strips the company planters plant a *meranti* tree every five meters. The *meranti* is a fast growing, economically profitable tree species from the Dipterocarpaceae family.

In the concession period the company can have two full harvests from the newly planted trees. In the first 35 years, the company cuts the present trees and plants new ones, while in the second 35 years the company cuts the newly grown trees that were planted in the first period. Planting also continues in the second period.

The fact that the company is not just clearing trees in the concession area, but also selecting plots for replanting has a very big impact on the access to land for the villagers in the concession area. I use the term access here in the same way as Ribot and Peluso (2003) presented in their article, namely that access is the ability to benefit from things. The presence of the company alone has created a situation in which the villagers are not allowed to enter the forest to extract trees anymore.

Not only the fact that the villagers have become excluded from timber in the forest surrounding the village, but also the fact that the company is respecting the villagers' *hukum adat* is putting pressure on the villagers. The Company is namely accepting land claims by the villagers based on traditional rights. When someone plants something on a plot of land, he owns the land according to customary law. If the company opens up a strip of forest to cultivate their trees, they legitimize their claim through customary law. On the one hand, this fact

benefits the villagers. They can claim land as they used to do, while not being thwarted by the company. However, the villagers feel that because the company respects their law, they need to apply it to the company's activities as well. The village leader explained that this company strategy is very smart:

That the company respects our rights is good, but our rights are being used against us through this very intelligent strategy. The company plants trees, which means we have to stay away from that specific plot because it is claimed through our own customary law. Just like we claim land with Durian trees, they claim it with their own trees. (Pak Kades, February 2013)

If the company is claiming plots of land in the vicinity of the village, they decrease the amount of accessible land for the villagers. A big difference between the plantations of the company and the swidden fields of the villagers is that the plots claimed by the villagers are usually not bigger than one hectare, while those of the company are much bigger, sometimes over 100 hectares.

### **Community Development Programme (CDP)**

PT SBK is a logging company that has been putting itself in for the development and wellbeing of the people that live in the concession area in order to create a harmonious forestry enterprise (Chandrasekharan 2005, 330).

The citation above is from a research that took place in the concession area in early 2000. The company is trying to create a situation in which they work together with the local villagers to manage the forest properly. In order to do this, the company has created an office that is responsible for the communication with the villagers and who, in corporation with the villagers, looks for methods to develop the local community. The office is called *Pembinaan Masyarakat Desa Hutan*, or Development of the Forest Villagers (PMDH). The PMDH is located along the logging road, at camp km.54. This camp is located roughly in the middle of the

concession area and keeps contact with the village *mandor*, or foreman. Since there is no telephone network in the region, the mandor has a radio installed in his house to contact the PMDH and vice versa. The mandor is an employee of the company, and is usually employed from one of the villages inside or close to the concession area. The mandor is the one who communicates with the villagers personally. He is also responsible for the documentation of the villagers' activities, such as where who owns a ladang, how big, how many seeds, etcetera. This data, among others, is published every year.

### **Alternatives for Swidden Agriculture**

Life in the village of Kiham Batang has changed significantly due to the presence of the mandor. In cooperation with the mandor, the company is providing the villagers with alternative products to grow on their fields. Among these are foodstuffs like eggplants and chilli, and cash crops like rubber. Providing rubber seeds for the villagers to plant forms the heart of the CDP for the villagers of Kiham Batang. Providing the villagers with alternative products to grow is on the one hand a strategy of the company to develop the villagers economically, but on the other hand it is also a tool used by the company to avert the villagers' attention from their swidden fields. The company is hoping that the introduction of rubber will help the villagers develop economically. However, permanent agriculture would give the company a much clearer insight in the daily life of the villagers. This would mean that the company is providing alternative agricultural options in order to be able to control and monitor the movements of the villagers much more than today.

Rubber has played a very important role in the development of the people of Kalimantan in earlier years (Dove 1993). Although rubber was already introduced in Kalimantan Barat in 1909 (ibid, 137), it was only recently introduced in the area of Kiham Batang. Villagers argue that the government introduced rubber in 2003, while the programme of the company started in 2005.

The rubber trees currently cultivated in the Kiham Batang area are not yet grown to production size. Many problems are occurring while cultivating the trees, like destruction by mammals or ants. The villagers, however, are still very eager to cultivate the trees and seem to be willing to take the bet and spend time working the rubber gardens instead of their swidden rice fields.

The company is providing the villagers with about 250 seedlings per household per year since 2005. This amount is not enough for a sustainable income, but it gives the villagers an opportunity to test the cultivation and learn about its growing process. The company has provided a demonstration plot close to the village where the mandor grows rubber and other crops like eggplant and chilli peppers.

### **Education and Electricity**

Apart from the economically oriented part of the CDP, the company is also helping the villagers expanding cultural capital. The company has provided the villagers with a church, a school building and teachers, and with generators for electricity. The church and school are both build on the field, just outside of the village.

The school, an elementary school, is much too small for the children. There are two classrooms, but they provide classes for six different grades. Because of the large amount of children in the village, it has been transformed into a classroom in which the alter serves as the teacher desk and blackboard. The church is not used for sermons any more since there is no pastor in the village. The teachers teach the first and third grade in one room, the second and fourth grade in one room, the fifth in the church, and the sixth in the office. Luckily the sixth grade only contains two children, since the office is very small.

The level of education is also depressingly low. The children go to school at 7 o'clock in the morning, but the teachers do not show up until half past 7 or later. The children start their school day with cleaning up the field in front of

the school and enjoy maybe two full hours of actual class. At half past 9 class is dismissed and the children go back home. The teachers do not really seem to care about teaching. During my fieldwork, some of the teachers left the village for several days which meant that the children had no school.

The distribution of the generators also turned out to be a slight failure. Many of them broke down and the villagers do not have the money or expertise, or care, to repair them. The gasoline that the company is providing for the generators, 200 litres per month, is used for other purposes. Some villagers still have electricity, but they have bought their own generators. The church, the school, and the generators are not used by the villagers in the way the company probably had intended them to be. This can be explained by the fact that the company simply gave them to the villagers, but did not provide them with enough knowledge to maintain them.

### **Road Construction**

Road construction has been discussed by several authors as a driver for change in remote areas (Colombijn 2002, Rig 2002). Arguably this is the case in Kiham Batang. In this case, however, the road is unable to be accessed by people from outside of the concession area which makes that the road has a different character than in the studies by Colombijn or Rig. The crops and the rubber that the company has introduced to the villagers are produced by the villagers to be sold at the market. The non-rubber products can either be sold in Kiham Batang or the surrounding villages.

To sell the rubber, the villagers need to have access to a bigger market connected to the main Kalimantan road. The closest market for rubber from Kiham Batang is in Nanga Pinoh in West Kalimantan. In order for the villagers to reach this market, the company has connected each village in the concession area to the main logging road. The logging roads run close past all ten villages in the area. To make the CDP work, the company has attached all villages to the

logging roads. In 2001, Kiham Batang was connected to the logging road by a small feeder road that runs from the logging road about eight kilometres to the east.

### **The Road to Development**

The connection of the villages to the logging road has greatly increased the mobility of the local population inside the concession area. Before the establishment of the company there was no road in the area, and the only way to travel from village to village was by boat or by foot. The closest village with a regional market is Senamang, which lies three to four hours downstream by motorized canoe, or *kelotok*.

The company provides a monthly ride for the villagers to the logpond and Nanga Pinoh, to sell their products and buy goods such as gasoline and household necessities. Every second week of the month a big truck comes by Kiham Batang to pick up some villagers. The company's transport is very important for the villagers as many of them explained. The villagers who own a motorbike have the possibility to go to Nanga Pinoh themselves at their own time. The company does not allow this activity, but there is no regulation on this matter by the company.

Most products that the villagers have access to in Nanga Pinoh are also sold in Senamang, but the villagers argue that the transportation of gasoline, motorbikes, and engines is a lot more difficult by boat than by a company's truck. The road has not so much expanded their access to goods, but it has made it much easier to acquire goods in large quantities. It has also increased their access to an even greater market for their products, and has given them access to new customers buying non-timber forest products. Furthermore, the road has given the villagers easier access to the lands west of their village, along the feeder road. The road has also given the villagers easier access to modern technologies like the chainsaw and gold mining equipment.

Many villagers own a chainsaw today that they use to clear their swidden fields after

selecting the new plot for that year. This has greatly speeded up the progress of clearing and has made it much easier for the villagers. The introduction of the chainsaw in the village has given the people more time to spend on other activities since the clearing of the swidden takes much less time than it did before. This has given the villagers the possibility to mine for gold and the road facilitates them with new customers but also with easier access to the technologies needed to extract gold. The extraction of gold reaches its peak every year during the months the villagers wait for the rice to grow to harvestable size, and during the months after harvest and before clearing the new swidden. The introduction of the chainsaw thus complements the extraction of gold from the rivers.

### **Social Consequences**

One of the major consequences of the road is that the mobility inside the concession area has also increased for those that live in the more northern parts of the concession area. Many young men migrate across the concession area using the company roads. The migrants are young, mostly unmarried, men who are drawn to the area in search of a fortune. Most of the migrants coming to Kiham Batang are put to work in the gold mining units. The villagers of Kiham Batang have communally decided that migrants are not allowed to own any lands if they do not have permanent residence in the village with their family.

At the moment, the migrants are not threatening the land of the villagers, but they are a point of concern for the villagers of Kiham Batang. Many villagers believe that if the migrants find wealth in the gold mining units, they might marry a girl from the village, settle there and start claiming their own land. This is troubling the villagers because land has already become contested because of the company's presence, and they believe suitable land is already running out. Pak Doyo said: 'migrants are coming in every day, and if this keeps on going in the coming years there will be too much pressure on the land and its resources. Look

around! The village is already full! If we don't look out there will be no space for us anymore.'

### **Overstepping Customary Boundaries**

A second major force in the region that has changed the situation in the concession area is the national park Bukit Baka Bukit Raya. This national park was established in 1992 and is located to the east of the PT SBK concession area. Since Kiham Batang lies on the border of the park, its establishment has had an impact on their livelihoods.

According to adat, or customary law every village in the region has right to claim land in a circle with a radius of 5 kilometres. This is also the area in which the company has no rights and is not allowed to extract its resources from. Today, several forces are threatening the five-kilometre adat zone. One of them is the increased pressure on land and the permanent settling of villages in particular places. While once being a migratory village, today, the villagers have permanent cultivated plots like rubber gardens, and they are not very likely to resettle anytime soon, since this would mean the abandoning of the gardens. This can also be observed in other villages close to Kiham Batang.

The village of Rangan Kawit, an hour downstream from Kiham Batang, is located within the five kilometre adat zone of Kiham Batang, and vice versa. Villagers of both villages are forced to find lands outside the zone since all that lies inside is already claimed. The problem today is that because of population increase in the village and in Rangan Kawit, the village closest to Kiham Batang, the people of Kiham Batang have to make their swidden fields outside of the five-kilometre adat zone, or make their swidden within the national park's boundaries. To make a swidden within the boundaries of the national park means to run the risk to be arrested for trespassing, while expanding outside the five-kilometre adat zone means that the villagers cross with the company's regulation in the concession area.

### **An Intensification and Expansion of Livelihoods**

The structural changes that have been discussed in the previous chapter have led to a widening of opportunities for the villagers of Kiham Batang to spend their time and money on. Firstly, the entrance of the company and the government in the area has led to a contestation of land. The villagers have closely observed, and have been involved in, the changes during the past 35 years and this has created awareness among them about the scarcity of land. Secondly, the construction of the road has led to increased and accelerated access to a bigger market. The better access to the market has led to two observable changes within the village of Kiham Batang. Firstly, the villagers have gained access to new types of income such as gold mining and rubber cultivation. Secondly, it has led to intensification of old types of income such as hunting and swidden agriculture. Arguably there is a resource frenzy taking place in the village. In order to provide for a good future, the villagers are extracting great amount of resources for the commercial market.

The reactions of the villagers to the developments in the area give a very interesting view on the way forest communities control and maintain their access to land and natural resources in an area where these elements are contested.

Hunting and swidden agriculture have been the most dominant forms of food production among the forest dwelling people of Kalimantan. The cooperative aspect of swidden agriculture among the Dayak is very much compatible with occasional hunting trips. Hunting is a way to fund the expansion of other livelihoods like gold mining or shop keeping. At the same time, the ladang are used as a gateway to gain access to natural resources located further away from the village than the five-kilometre adat zone.

### **Hunting**

While traditionally hunting was focussed on catching wild boar or deer, today it is much different. In Kiham Batang men go hunting

several times per week, but hunting has lost most of its food gathering purpose. Instead, people hunt for rare animals that can be sold to traders outside the concession area. Pangolin and hornbill are particularly sought after since, a pound of pangolin meat would yield about Rp 3,000,000, or € 240,-, and the horn of a full grown hornbill would yield at least Rp 6,000,000, or € 480,-. These incomes far outreach those that can be gained by selling rice or rattan. Although hornbills have been hunted throughout history, the approach of the Dayak towards the animal is different. The hornbill represents a Dayak deity who was the ancestor of all good and friendly people (Mundkur 1983, 96), and its horns and feathers were used to decorate Dayak warriors. A hornbill's call would signal good fortune, while today it simply betrays its location, which might lead to its untimely dead for commercial purposes.

The villagers seem to be responding to the demand for these animals by the tradesmen in Nanga Pinoh. Nanga Pinoh is connected by road to Pontianak, Sintang and Kuching (Malaysia). There are large communities of Chinese living in these three cities, as well as in Nanga Pinoh and in the surrounding villages. Chinese communities have been home in

Borneo for at least 1,500 years (Lee 1965, 307) and have a firm position in the market of both Indonesia and Malaysia. The skins and meat of the pangolin and the horns of the hornbills of Borneo are all ingredients for traditional medicines made by Chinese crafters (Sodhi et al 2004, 657). These animals are endangered and protected which makes the hunting of them illegal. The animals are usually smuggled out of Kiham Batang and other villages via the logging road and sold in Nanga Pinoh. There were also stories about men who sold their catch to truck drivers or other personnel from the company who would sell the catch elsewhere. The company's employees thus seemed to be functioning as middlemen from time to time. This is in big contrast with the company's anti-hunting campaign that has started a few years ago by trying to raise awareness about critically endangered animals.

Due to excessive hunting the numbers of animals in the forests surrounding the village are growing smaller. This is causing the villagers to move further away from the village to hunt. Owning land plays a very important part here because without a land claim the hunting outside the five-kilometre adat zone is difficult to justify and legitimize. New land claiming strategies have emerged in order for the villagers to continue their expansion.

### **Rubber and The Expansion of The Ladang As Land Claiming Strategies**

Land has become a contested element in the area due to the presence of the company, the growing population and the establishment of the national park. However, now that the road has created openings for commercial exploitation of the area, the demand for land is higher than ever. Furthermore, land has become commoditized; people are willing to sell to or buy land from other villagers in order to survive in the cash economy when harvests are low.

The villagers of Kiham Batang have found a way to deal with the contestation of land in a very interesting way. Similar to other cases in Borneo, the villagers of Kiham Batang use customary law to claim their land. They claim pieces of land by planting crops on them or leaving cultural artefacts like totems behind. Today, the totems are not playing a major part anymore in the claiming of land. Most villagers have become Christian and are showing little interest in the traditional religions. Planting of crops, however, is getting more and more important in the race to claim their land. The villagers seem to have learned from examples of other tribes in Borneo that have been disposed of their land. Instead of letting this happen, they actively respond to the change in the region. The first thing that a villager does is opening up a ladang.



Making a rice field, however, is not sufficient to claim the land permanently. In order to claim the land over a longer period of time the villagers have been given an opportunity from an unexpected source. Similar to Iban communities in Sarawak (De Koninck et al 2011, 110), the villagers of Kiham Batang plant fruit trees or trees like rubber or rattan on their old ladang in order to keep it claimed over a long period of time.

As part of the Community Development Programme (CDP), the company hands out 250 seedlings of rubber to each household every year. The idea behind this is to give the villagers an alternative to swidden cultivation. The villagers are gratefully accepting the seedlings, but seem to have different plans with them. The yearly cycle of swidden activities has changed significantly since the company introduced rubber to the villagers in 2004. Instead of traditionally leaving the ladang fallow, the villagers plant rubber to lay a permanent claim on their old rice fields. This way, most of the old ladang are transformed into rubber gardens.

Villagers admit to use the rubber mainly to claim new plots of land to be used in the future. This has created a problem since most land close to the village has now been permanently claimed through rubber cultivation. The villagers are forced to open new fields far away from the village where it is still accessible. This means moving beyond the five- kilometre adat zone. Although this is illegal, the villagers have found a way to legitimize their claim. The village used to be a migratory village and moved every two generations or so to a new location with empty accessible land for cultivation. On all former locations of the village the villagers' ancestors have planted trees like durian or build artefacts. The villagers claim that these locations are also part of their legitimate land

since they have planted the trees and through customary law those who plant own the land. They thus have created a line of adat zones along the river north of the village, each with its five kilometre radius in which they can cultivate.

The newly claimed adat zones have given the villagers access to much more arable land on which they can grow rice, plant rubber and from where they can access new hunting grounds. A new development in the village, gold mining, also requires large amounts of land and this land is legitimized through these new land-claiming strategies.

### Gold Mining

A third development that has occurred in the village over the last decade is the increase of gold mining activities by the villagers. The villagers argue that with the money they make by hunting and selling rare animals, they can buy their own mining equipment and try to be successful in that. This is best illustrated in the story of Pak Lida, today one of the richest men in the village. Pak Lida started hunting pangolin in mid-2011. By the beginning of 2012 he had his first unit up and running and in April 2013 he planned to open his third one. Within one year he had become a very successful gold miner by investing his hunting money.

The first gold mining operation was set up by the present *kapala* desa, the village leader. He built his gold mining unit in 1996. For at least six years, his operation was the only one in the village. When the company road was connected to Kiham Batang in 2001 there has been a steady increase of the amount of villagers that own a gold mining unit, the amount of people working in them and the amount of time they spend working them.

The gold mining operations in the village of Kiham Batang are still on small scale. There are only fourteen units at the time of research, while in other villages like Kajamae more than 50 machines are operational. Nonetheless, the gold mining in Kiham Batang is already turning out to

be very destructive for the environment. The areas that are picked as a good site are transformed from a small river in a desolate wastelands with here and there the remains of old mining units and *pondoks*, the field huts of the labourers. The flow of the river is usually also destroyed since the churned river beds turns the remaining water in a dark brown muck which is not suitable for drinking.

Apart from the ecological problems that gold mining is causing, the operations also demand a large amount of accessible land. Visits to two of the main gold mining sites of the village showed that the area needed per unit is quite extensive. On both sites there were four units up and running. Each two units had one pondok for the workers to eat and sleep in. In total, the area that was needed for four units was on one site at least 150 meters long and 50 meters wide. At the other site, closer to the village, the area appeared smaller, but still very extensive. Moreover, whenever a site is running low on gold the units have to move to a better site. This means the operations also require accessible land surrounding the current location of the unit.

The gold mining is also causing a demographic shift in the region. There are not many young (15-25 years old) men in the village of Kiham Batang. For this reason the miners employ immigrants that have shown up in the village to share in the gold mining profits. These migrants are usually young unmarried men that are in some way related to the unit owner. Their employer houses these migrants. Usually the workers stay at the mining location for several days. They sleep in the pondoks there and work from sunrise till sunset. The units need five men to be operated. These five men share the gross yield of gold with the owner. This is arranged through a 50/50 deal; the owner receives 50 per cent and the workers get to share the other 50 per cent. All the expenses of the gold mining operations go to the owner of the unit. These costs are subtracted from the total amount of gold that is found, after which the money is divided.

Because gold mining is a very expensive business, the units have to yield a very high amount to be profitable. Not only the purchase of the machine is expensive, but also the upkeep. Oil costs, for its lowest price, Rp 10,000 per litre. The miners work per drum that holds 200 litres and costs thus Rp 2,000,000. A drum usually lasts one week. This means that per drum the workers have to find gold worth at least Rp 4,000,000 to break even. They thus need ten grams of per drum since a gram of gold is worth Rp. 400,000. However, to make some cash they need to find far more; possibly at least 20 grams per drum.

Even though the gold mining is such an expensive business and the workers need to have a lot of luck finding enough to make them earn a substantial amount of money, the wish to own a unit is growing strong with most of the villagers. Furthermore, the amount of young migrant workers does not seem to decline. During the two months of research I have seen eight new men arriving from villages along the logging road in West Kalimantan. The total of migrant workers number present during the time of research was 30, which makes up more than ten per cent of the original inhabitants. When asked if there is no work available in their village they simply respond that in their old village they can only work on the ladang. They believe that is work for their parents. The young men want to work for money, get rich and be able to live a comfortable life unlike their parents that have to do hard manual labour on the ladang year in, year out. The way to achieve this is to take the gamble, move east and work hard in the gold mining operations.

The steady rise of the amount of gold mining units and the people that work in them are directly related to the drastic change that has occurred in the environment of Kiham Batang over the last few decades. The opening of the road has given the people access to a larger market on which they can sell their products like vegetables and rare animals. Some invests the income from these sales in the opening up of a gold mining operation in the hope to generate even more money. The goods that are shipped

from logpond to the village by the monthly company truck are predominantly machinery and oil that are employed in the gold mining operations. Furthermore, the road has opened up the opportunity for gold mining even more since it has given access to forces of labour that are needed to operate the industry. The young men in the villages further west on the logging road hear the stories of the gold mining yields and respond to that by heading eastward in pursuit of wealth.

## **Rumours and Fantasies As Drivers for Change**

### **A History of Rumours**

The previous two sections were on the developments in the area and the response of the villagers to this. They engage with new market opportunities on a very intensive level in order to benefit financially from the opening up of the concession area. What the previous sections did not underline is the question what drives people to engage with the new opportunities in such an intensive way and why is this resource frenzy taking place?

What was striking in the village was the amount of rumours going around and the intensity of which they were being told by the villagers. Rumours on economic welfare in other parts of the province, rumours about high gold mining yields, high rubber yields and so on. These rumours seem to be feeding the interest of the villagers of Kiham Batang to follow and engage in these new livelihoods.

The region in which Kiham Batang is located has been subject to rumours for a very long time. Usually, these were rumours on kidnappings or headhunting. There are documents from the beginning of the 20th century that try to explain and understand the way these rumours come to life and what role they play in the life of the societies. The impact of these rumours is significant. Terror stricken communities are held up in their homes for days or weeks by the precautions taken to avoid the treat (Drake 1989, 269).

Authors that have tried to tackle the phenomenon and explain why they spread so fast and are so dramatically responded to cannot find a common answer that satisfies them. Drake (1989), Erb (1991) and Forth (1991) seem to agree that the rumours are a relatively new phenomenon in the 20th century. They believe the rumours come forth from intensive negative contact with the Dutch colonizer that feeds a fear among the Dayak. This results in the depicting of the Dutch as evil and fear instilling which can explain the stories about sacrifice when the colonizer is starting a construction. However, Barnes (1993) explains that the phenomenon of rumours is much older and perhaps an ‘ancient feature of Indonesian live’ (Barnes 1993, 155).

The rumours are generally spreading fast throughout Kalimantan and tend to have long lasting lives. Every now and then a rumour pops up and disappears over time. These are what Drake (1989) called a ‘diving rumour’, which are still present today. I was warned not to venture into the forest alone since it was *musim kayau*, headhunting season. In other places there were rumours on kidnapping, which escalated in West Kalimantan where three government officials were murdered because people thought they were kidnappers.

The question is who benefits from these rumours. According to functionalist theory, the rumours are a reaction to social strain and results in the creation of social mobilization. Rumours might be a result of endemic headhunting in which an imminent attack on a village was met with a kind of model of response (Drake 1989, 273). This explanation, however, has a much too structural approach. This would also not explain why rumours like headhunting and kidnapping are still alive today.

### **Rumours in KihamBatang**

In Kiham Batang I discovered rumours on three different subjects that led to people changing their livelihoods. These rumours were on rubber cultivation, gold mining and a third one concerning fantasies of city life in contrast with the villagers’ ‘primitive’ lifestyle. The

difference between rumours and fantasies is noteworthy. I defined a rumour as the stories that circle around the village, while a fantasy is trail of thought created by the villagers based on the rumours. For example, a rumour would be a story about the construction of a state road in the south of the concession area. The fantasy that generates from this is that this means that the land surrounding the logging road will soon be worth a lot of money.

### Rubber Rumours

The majority of the villagers have been planting rubber for a while now. Every year, the company provides them with 250 rubber seedlings per household. Although, according to the villagers, the quality of the gifts from the company is very low and most die, they plant it anyway. The rest of the rubber seeds or seedlings can be gotten for free in the right season in nearby Dehesasem or are for sale in Senamang or Nanga Pinoh. Rubber is a very hot topic in the conversations of the villagers and everyone seems to be in on it. When I asked Pak Kupo, however, why he was planting rubber he replied: 'everyone is doing it, so I just follow along.' Pak Kupo was not alone in his reasoning. A majority of the villagers I asked responded in similar fashion.

Knowledge on the cultivation of rubber, however, seems to be limited among many villagers. While the growing process is steady, some villagers argue not to be sure what to do next. The villagers are thus responding to a rumour without proper knowledge about how to make it to a good end. The stories spark the villagers' interests; they have heard from other places in the province where rubber is highly profitable and want to try it themselves. However, there is no information or knowledge available on how to deal with the trees when they are fully grown. This leads to a strange situation in which many fields are planted with rubber trees, the trees die, but the villagers keep planting.

In the meantime, however, the rubber 'craze' is picking up speed. More people are cultivating and almost every ladang is turned into

a rubber field after the harvest. Of the 25 people I interviewed for the survey 23 responded positive to the question whether they would plant rubber on their ladang after the harvest. The other two respondents did not have a ladang this year, but had already planted a considerable amount of rubber trees.

The fantasy about a richer future due to rubber cultivation is very significant in the village. Because of the rubber 'craze' land is becoming scarcer around the village. The larger and richer families are usually the ones that have claimed the land close to the village. They had the resources and people to cultivate large amounts of rubber and permanently occupy the land, while others could not abandon their work on the ladang, especially not for 250 small rubber seedlings which is a very small amount considering the amount of trees that die and considering the 500 mature trees that are needed to provide for food for one whole year.<sup>1</sup>

### Gold Mining Rumours

The rumours that precede the gold mining are mostly concerning high monthly yields and wealth in other areas. Gold is, like rubber, one of the favourite topics of the villagers to discuss. There is a wide array of stories about incredibly large gold deposits and findings throughout the area. According to the villagers, the largest amount of gold ever found in one month was three kilograms. This was found in Kerouai, a village on the bank of Katingan River which has transformed from a predominantly agricultural village to a predominantly gold mining village. Three kilograms of gold is an enormous amount of money. One gram of gold yields Rp 400,000 or € 32,-, which means that three kilograms yields a gross worth of € 96,000,-. Stories of high yields also come from inside the village and play an important role.

The stories about big gold yields are very important for the miners' social capital in the village. They depend on this for their labour force. Because most of the labour comes from

<sup>1</sup>As Pak Unde, my neighbour in the village, explained

outside of the village, the miners depend on the labour through story telling. Because of the absence of a telephone network, the only way to get the story out is by face-to-face communication. Young men in distant villages hear stories of high yields of a particular miner and try to get a job at his unit. The rumours are not only driving the villagers to start mining, it also drives migrants to the village who seek work in the gold mining operations.

The stories that race around in the village are resulting in two distinct phenomena. First of all, the men that work in the gold mining industry are receiving a high amount of esteem and are well respected in the village. If the gold yields are high, they give feasts were pigs are slaughtered and a lot of arak is drunk. These feasts are usually attended by large groups of villagers from inside and outside the village and tend to be retold over and over in the following weeks. Secondly, the stories about gold mining are interesting others in the business as well. Pak Hata said: 'who would not want that much money; you can do anything with it!'

The gold mining rumours also have an effect on a different sector. Gold mining fuels stories, rumours and fantasies about a rich future. These stories in their turn influence people to join in with the gold mining operations. In order to finance this they need money which they can obtain through hunting and selling rare animals. The money made from hunting is then invested in gold mining operations and this process is continued.

### **A City Lifestyle in A Forest Village**

The large amount of money some people are making in the village has changed the way they look at themselves, their lifestyle and the people surrounding them. Their mobility has increased greatly and they have seen the larger cities surrounding the area. They also discovered that some of them are making much more money than the people in the city. However, the villagers still live in an area where there is no phone network, no internet and no steady power supply. This is leading to a conflict of interest

when it comes to the question about how to develop the village.

During one of the town meetings in March the developmental programmes of the village were discussed. These programmes would be offered to the local government in order to receive subsidies for the realisation of them. The topics that they discussed were; setting up a kindergarten school next to the primary school, reconstructing the village concrete path and building a stone toilet. Especially the last topic got a lot of attention during the meeting. A stone toilet would be more suitable for high ranked visitors like government officials. It appeared that the villagers were ashamed about their small wooden toilets that are built on a raft on the river. Pak Teras explained that those toilets are not suitable anymore for the life that some of the villagers are living.

The villagers that were present in the meeting were all men from rich families. Although they seem to have an empirically based idea about city life, only one of the twenty men has ever been in a city beyond Nanga Pinoh or Palankaraya. The rest of them have based their idea on the village of Senamang, Samba or Nanga Pinoh. The images of these places, fuelled by images from TV are creating fantasies about city life. Their idea about city life is mainly focused on material wealth, of which the stone toilet is a good example. Because of their economic position they can focus on material wealth, but this goes against the ideas of most of the villagers who are mainly relying on their ladang for food.

This story indicates that there is a change in mind set going on regarding the forest lifestyle of the villagers. Some see themselves as rich and modern while they are forced to live a primitive life. They believe their village should be more like the city, without overseeing the problems that come with this. Already there is a major waste disposal problem and a stone toilet would make it worse. The water pipes that run through the village are leaking so a large part of the village is just one big, wet muddy mess.

Some of the poorer villagers complain that those in charge only care about themselves and do not look at the real problems in the village like for example the decreasing amount of accessible land and the amount of fish in the rivers. The fantasies of the rich men about a city lifestyle have the potential to create big differences among the villagers from different social classes.

## Conclusion

The structural changes in the area such as the establishment of the company, the construction of the road and the introduction of new livelihoods for the villagers have created a situation in which the villagers have access to a lot of new opportunities for cash income. These opportunities have been grabbed with both hands by the villagers of Kiham Batang. Hunting, gold mining and rubber cultivation has picked up pace in the village. The problem is that the land necessary to practice these occupations is getting scarcer. Not only because the company has the right to harvest trees, but a growing population, increasing migration and the changed swidden cycle are complementing to the pressure on land.

In order to keep access to the natural resources, the villagers are claiming new pieces of land further away from the village. This land is claimed by opening up a ladang, plant rice, harvest the rice and plant rubber after the harvest. By planting rubber trees they permanently occupy the land which is the criteria for legitimating land through adat law. The new land they access by doing this can be used as departure point for a hunting trip or for gold mining.

The role of rumours is very important in the way the people decide what action they take and what market opportunity is right for them. Talks about rubber incomes and gold mining yields are influencing the villagers. They believe these new forms of income have the possibility to make them rich and provide for a good future for their children. Fantasies about the future, such as the construction of a state road in the

area, are also being responded to by the villagers and have their effect on the social structure of the village.

A problem arises from these responses to rumours and fantasies. The rumours about rubber, for example, are about economic benefits in other regions. However, for the villagers to get these benefits too, they need to wait at least eight years from the moment they plant their first tree for it to be ready for harvesting. This means eight years of uncertainty, since most villagers are unsure how to cultivate and how to harvest the trees. This uncertainty about the new livelihoods can be seen as the reason why the villagers are engaging in a resource frenzy in the way they are doing today. The villagers are simply extracting as much as possible in order not to miss out on the profits of the natural resources surrounding them, without a clear strategy. They legitimize this frenzy by saying it is for a better future for their children, but the future they are talking about is very unpredictable and still shrouded in fog.

What follows is that the resource frenzy is creating a situation in which some of the villagers are gaining great amounts of money, while others are left standing. Because of several factors; luck, money, family, etc. some villagers have better access to natural resources than others. These were also the first to join in the company's programme to cultivate rubber. Consequently, the land surrounding the village has been bought up by these families where they cultivate rubber. Rubber is permanently occupying this land and it forces people to look for accessible land further away from the village. Some have already left the village and settled elsewhere, while others make the long journey from the village to the ladang.

These developments have the possibility to disrupt social life in the village of Kiham Batang. The rich families are getting richer because they have the tools and power to claim valuable land for gold mining or rubber cultivation. Poorer families do not have this possibility because of the time they need to spend on the ladang which is their primary source of income.

The processes of change in the village of Kiham Batang are the result of three facets that are interdependent and complementing to each other. First of all, there are the structural changes that have occurred since 1978. The establishment of the company, the establishment of the national park in 1992, the Community Development Programme and its strategies to suggest new forms of livelihoods to the villagers and the access to the road and to the bigger city. The second facet is the way the villagers deal with these changes. They have been given access to a greater market and with this access came plenty of market opportunities. These market opportunities are grabbed by the villagers and have given them a cash income and expanded their livelihoods. Finally, the villagers respond to the market opportunities because of rumours about successful enterprises like rubber and gold mining elsewhere in Kalimantan. These rumours shape their life and dictate to what extent the villagers make use of the market opportunities.

The ways the villagers are acting are a clear indicator of their active role in the process of change in the concession area. They are not victims of great structural changes, but play an active part in the whole process. The villagers are being influenced by cash economy and the access to a greater market, but the choice to act the way they do, with little regard for the ecology or their traditional livelihoods, is a choice of their own. Saying they are victims is denying them development. Just because of their traditional lifestyle that we value so much out here, far away from the place where it actually takes place. That is why I would like to end with a quote from one of my respondents; Pak Kupo:

'I am glad the company came, they have given us the road. The road is giving us new livelihoods for which I am even gladder. I do not want to work on the ladang anymore, it is hard work and I do not like it. Soon I can buy my rice, instead of growing it!'

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