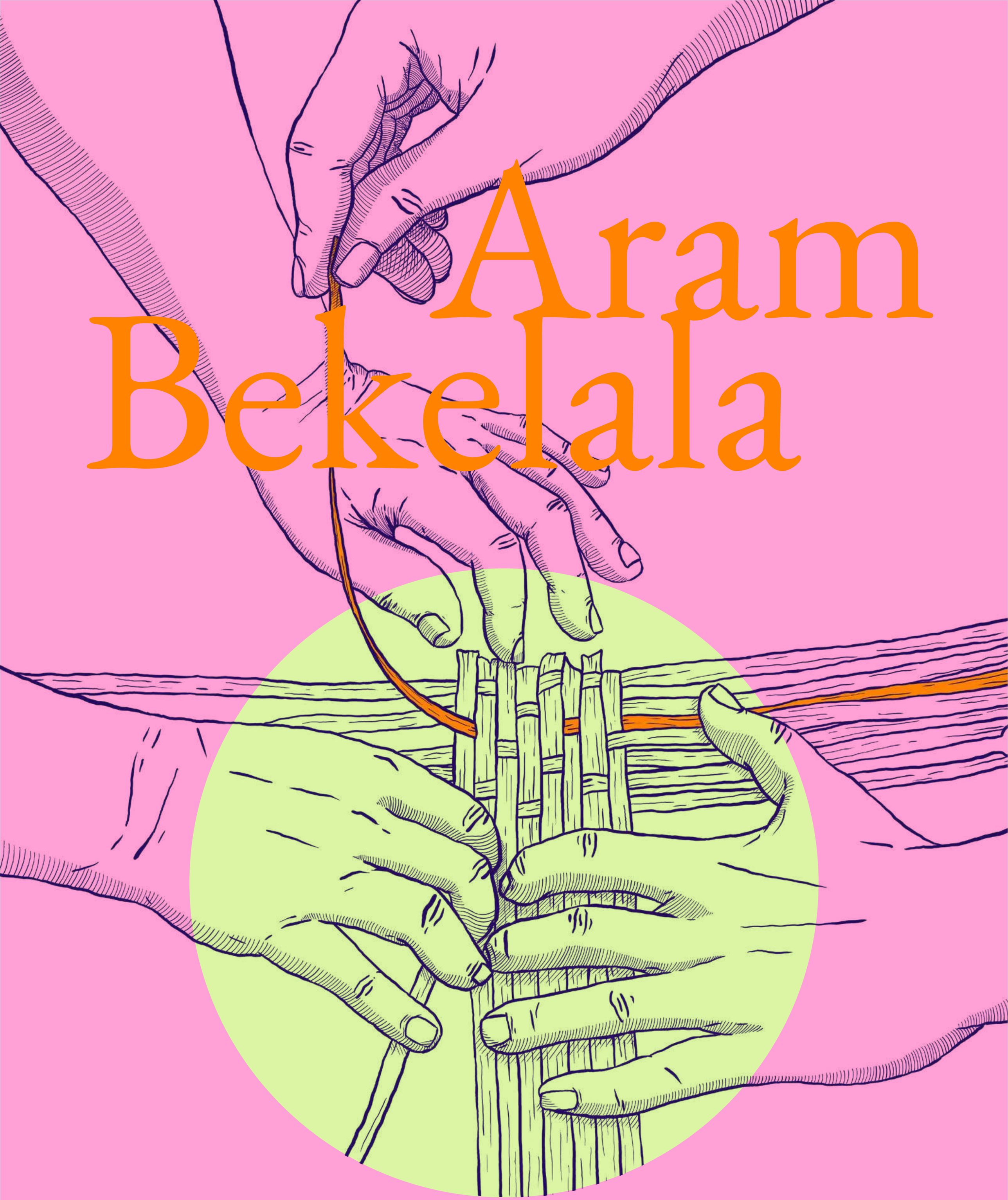
Aram Bekelala



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

Approaches to working with communities in Malaysia

catama

BRITISH COUNCIL

Human-Nature

Contents

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Preface

This is a peer-reviewed guide with suggested recommendations on approaches towards working with communities within Malaysia—with a special focus on Indigenous and/or marginalised communities. This document aims to provide advice and assistance in developing ethical and co-collaborative approaches when working with local communities. It is designed to be a tool to assist but is not a one-size fits all approach and so we recommend it is only used as supplementary material alongside your own in-depth research and practical work.

NOTES FROM THE AUTHOR

This document has been developed in response to post-pandemic conversations, with an intention to enhance the awareness of individuals and organisations alike. It refers to and takes inspiration from local and international research and publications. The guide was written in English and has been peer reviewed, after which it was translated into Bahasa Malaysia.

While it can be used within a community for their own use, it was written from and for the perspective of an urban, non-community member wanting to engage with communities, alongside the considerations an 'outsider' should make. The term 'they' in the document generally refers to the proposed target community. While 'they' can be seen as othering it is used to delineate between the reader and the community that will be engaged with.

This guide is specific to its time and place; as such, some terminology, approaches and ways of thinking may need updating periodically due to relevance and appropriateness. Note that these approaches and advice are not exhaustive and are generalised recommendations. Due to the author's experience, the guide also has greater relevance towards communities in East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah. Advice should be reviewed and adapted to each community. Further research and engagement with experts and cultural leaders should also primarily be sought out to assist in adapting approaches to the specific situation or community.

The author, Catriona Maddocks, wishes to extend her thanks and gratitude for the generosity and knowledge sharing of the peer reviewers. Their unique experience and insight significantly improved this document from its original draft.

The title of this guide, *Aram Bekelala*, is from the Iban language; one of over a hundred languages spoken in Malaysia. It translates as "Come, let's get to know each other" and it is in this spirit that the guide is written. In order to work with integrity and respect it is essential to remember we must come together in friendship and open-mindedness, understanding we all have something to learn from each other's positions.

PART 1: OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES

Part 1 presents established and internationally recognised research approaches for working with Indigenous communities and developing respectful and mutually beneficial relationships. These guidelines were developed primarily by Indigenous scholars in Western settler nations and are provided as a general international standard framework.

PART 2: CONSIDERATIONS AND APPROACHES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Part 2 was written in late 2023 by Catriona Maddocks, a co-founder of Catama. It is based on the author's 12 years of experience engaging with communities throughout East Malaysia. Prior work to this document include her master’s thesis focusing on craft development strategies for Indigenous communities in Sarawak and a Malaysian road map survey and report focused on communities, creatives and the environment. This community engagement guide has been commissioned by British Council Malaysia, as part of their Human-Nature programme.

Catriona Maddocks is a white British woman who has been based in Sarawak since 2009. As such, it was written from the perspective and understanding of a non-Asian Westerner and should be understood from that context. Community peer review has been sought from Indigenous scholars, experts, activists and community-centred organisations. Note that while the document has been reviewed by and had suggestions as well as corrections made by the peer reviewers, any errors, misinformation and factual inaccuracies are the sole responsibility of the author.

Feedback on this document is gladly received; please do contact the author if you have any concerns or further recommendations at catriona.catama@gmail.com.

PART 3: PERSPECTIVES FROM COMMUNITY-CENTRED ORGANISATIONS AND CREATIVES IN MALAYSIA

Part 3 contains notes and comments made by organisations and individuals directly engaging in community projects, who have also peer reviewed this guide. They are:

- Advocates for Non-Discrimination and Access to Knowledge (ANAK)
- Apa Kata Wanita Orang Asli (AKWOA)
- Borneo Bengkel
- Borneo Komrad
- Forever Sabah
- June Rubis
- PACOS Trust
- Pangrok Sulap
- SAVE Rivers
- Society for Rights of Indigenous People of Sarawak (SCRIPS)
- Shaq Koyok
- The Tuyang Initiative

PART 4: WORK AND APPROACHES OF COMMUNITY-CENTRED ORGANISATIONS AND CREATIVES IN MALAYSIA

This section highlights the work of our peer reviewers and demonstrates ethics in action—collaborative, co-created and considered approaches to working with communities in Malaysia.

OVERVIEW OF MALAYSIA: CONTEXT FOR NON-MALAYSIANS

Malaysia is made up of 11 states and two federal territories located in Peninsular Malaysia, also known as West Malaysia and two regions and one federal territory in East Malaysia, in and around Borneo island. In 2023, Malaysia celebrated 60 years since the coming together of the Federation of Malaya, Sarawak, North Borneo (Sabah) and Singapore (who later exited the Federation of Malaysia). As a nation it grapples with its multi-cultural and multi-ethnic identity. The complex interplay between ethnicity, language, religion and geographical power dynamics affect every aspect of politics, society and culture.

Map of Malaysia, adapted by Sonia Luhong Wan from *Malaysia location map* by Uwe Dedering, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The energetic and rapidly developing capital of Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur, with much of the nation's creative and economic wealth being focused there. There is a distinct and long acknowledged divide between East and West Malaysia. However, the same disparity can also be seen between the East Coast and West Coast regions of West Malaysia, as well as the East Coast and West Coast of Sabah, which are politically, ethnically and culturally divided. Statelessness is also a significant challenge faced by communities both in East and West Malaysia.

In recent years, Malaysia has faced significant environmental challenges; from disastrous floods throughout West and East Malaysia, rampant deforestation, as well as their impact on economically weaker states. Additionally, there are huge expansions of palm oil plantations, loss of biodiversity, annual haze air pollution from large scale peat burning and the ever more present questions of food sustainability. Many environmental and societal challenges significantly impact

marginalised communities, who are often based in non-urban areas. These include lack of access to education, health and social structures, transport infrastructure, electricity, internet, clean water, right to earn, land rights and human rights.

From a socioeconomic context in Malaysia the word ‘marginalised’ can refer to communities with disproportionately limited access to education and economic opportunities, people with disabilities, migrant workers, refugees, the LGBTQ+ community and Indigenous people,[1] as well as stateless and/or undocumented communities. Indigenous People in Malaysia are collectively known as Orang Asal; this includes the Orang Asli—an umbrella term for the 18 distinct ethnic groups in West Malaysia—and the various Indigenous groups of Sabah and Sarawak, in East Malaysia.

INDIGENOUS CONTEXT IN EAST AND WEST MALAYSIA

In 2007, Malaysia voted for the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which affirms the right to self-determination; free, prior and informed consent; to cultural integrity, protection of livelihood and to access quality basic services. However, it has not ratified the International Labour Organisation Convention 169 which recognises Indigenous peoples’ aspirations for autonomy over their institutions, ways of life and economic development and the right to maintain and develop their identities, languages and religions. Cornerstones of Convention 169 include participation and consultation.[2]

Despite some legal protections, Indigenous communities in Malaysia face many issues, in particular, with Native Customary Rights. Many rural communities have fought legal battles with the Malaysian government to retain rights to the rapidly depleting primary and secondary forests of their native customary lands, with limited success.

1 Mohd Hishamudin Yunus, *Protection of Marginalised Minorities under the Constitution.*
2 International Labour Organisation, *Convention 169 and International Day of the World’s Indigenous People.* https://www.ilo.org/century/history/iloandyou/WCMS_190269/lang--en/index.htm

In 2020, the Malaysian Census estimated that around 11% of the 32.4 million national population of Malaysia were Indigenous.

> *The 18 Orang Asli subgroups within the Negrito (Semang), Senoi and Aboriginal-Malay groups account for 0.8% of the population of Peninsular Malaysia. Proto-Malay ethnic groups include Jakun, Temuan, Temoq, Semelai, Kuala, Kanaq and Seletar people. The Senoi group includes Temiar, Semai, Semaq Beri, Jah Hut, Mah Meri and Cheq Wong. The Semang group includes Kensiu, Kintaq, Lanoh, Jahai, Batek, Mendriq and Mintil.*
>
> *In Sarawak, the Indigenous Peoples are collectively known as Natives or Dayak (with the term Orang Ulu being commonly used to describe some Indigenous communities who live in the northeastern region of Sarawak). Groups include the Iban, Bidayuh, Kenyah, Kayan, Kedayan, Lunbawang, Punan, Bisayah, Kelabit, Berawan, Kejaman, Ukit, Sekapan, Melanau and Penan (and 12 newly recognised ethnic groups). They constitute around 1.2 million or almost 50% of Sarawak's population of 2.45 million people.*
>
> *In Sabah, the 39 different Indigenous ethnic groups are known as natives or Anak Negeri and make up some 2.1 million or 62% of Sabah's population of 3.4 million. The main groups are the Dusun, Murut, Paitan and Bajau groups.*
>
> *While the Malays are also native to Malaysia, they are not categorised as Indigenous Peoples because they constitute the majority and are politically, economically and socially dominant.*[3]

The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs

3 The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, *The Indigenous World 2023: Malaysia*. https://www.iwgia.org/en/malaysia/5125-iw-2023-malaysia.html

For quick reference, here is a reminder of some key terms:

Malaysia	Divided over two main geographical regions, namely Peninsular/West Malaysia and East Malaysia.
East & West Malaysia	While part of the same nation, these two land masses are geographically, linguistically, culturally and ethnically distinct.
Borneo	Consists of three nation states: Malaysia (Sarawak and Sabah), Indonesia (Kalimantan) and the Brunei sultanate.
Indigenous Peoples	Comprises 11% of Malaysia's national population—over 50% in East Malaysia, less than 1% in West Malaysia. Collectively termed as 'Orang Asal' in Malay.
Orang Asli	The Indigenous communities of West Malaysia. The Orang Asli face distinct challenges and issues, including land rights and legal recognition.
Natives, Anak Negeri	Legal terms for Indigenous communities in Sabah and Sarawak; 'Anak Negeri' means 'child of the state' in Malay.
Dayak	Commonly used umbrella term for some Indigenous communities in Borneo. Particularly used in Sarawak and Kalimantan. In Sarawak, Dayak groups include the Iban and Bidayuh.
Orang Ulu	Politically coined umbrella term for almost 30 small but ethnically distinct Indigenous groups in Northern Sarawak. Translated as 'Upriver People', it includes the Kayan, Kenyah, Penan, Kajang, Punan, Kelabit, Berawan, Lun Bawang, Sa'ban and more.
KDMR	Acronym used in Sabah to define some of the larger Indigenous groups in Sabah; the Kadazan, Dusun, Murut and Rungus. This is a contentious and hotly debated term. 'Momogun' has been suggested as an alternative umbrella term for Indigenous Peoples in Sabah, though this is also controversial.

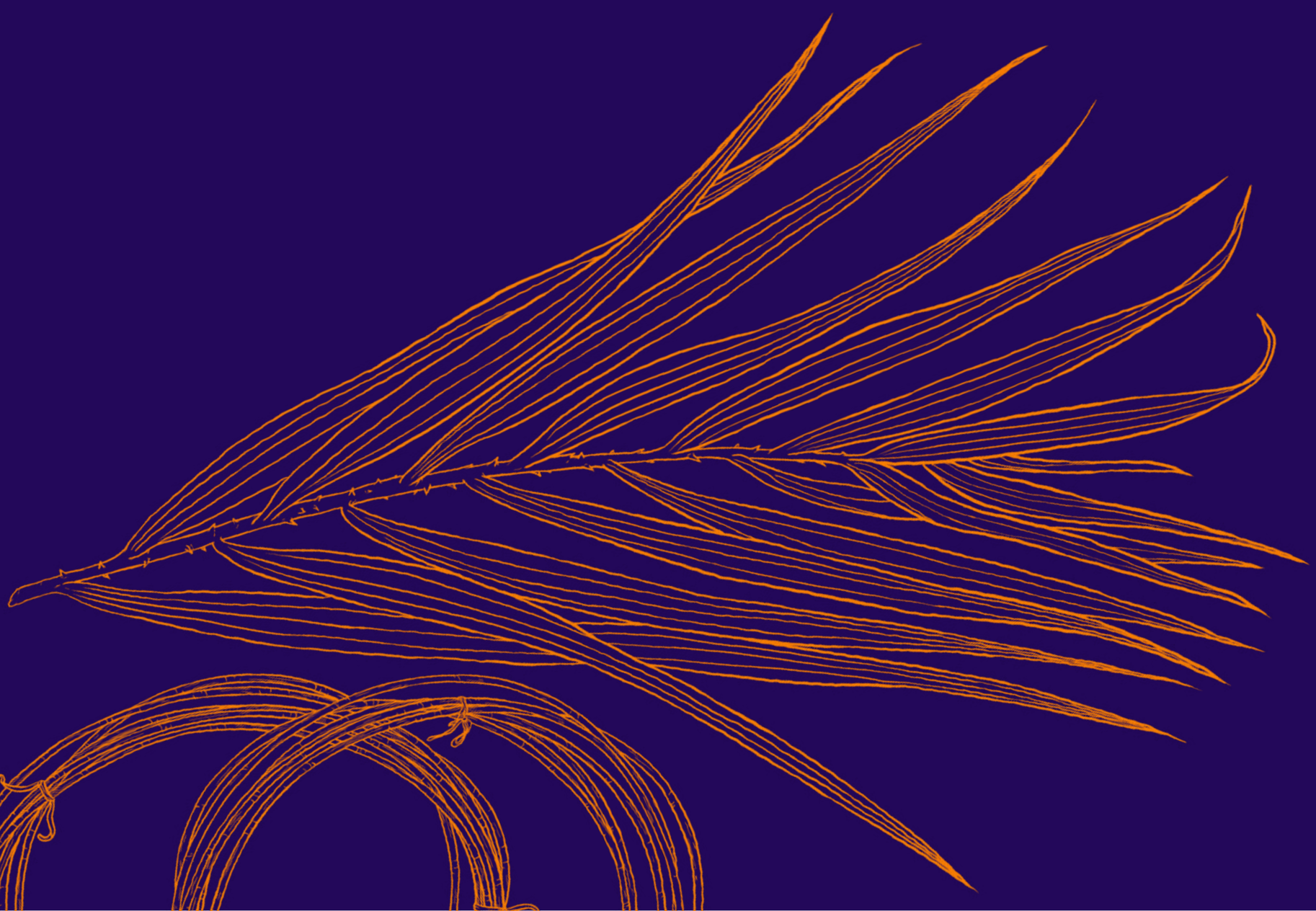
Bumiputera	Translated as ‘sons of the soil’ in Malaysia, ‘Bumiputera’ refers to ethnic Malays, the Orang Asli of West Malaysia and Indigenous Peoples of East Malaysia. Bumiputera rights are enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution, granting privileges in various sectors, including education, employment, business and land ownership. These rights were introduced in the 1970s with the aim to address historical socioeconomic disparities and empower Bumiputera communities. They include quotas for government scholarships, reserved positions in public sector jobs and preferential treatment in business contracts and government procurement, among other affirmative action measures. The policy is controversial and has been described as racially discriminatory.

Part 1

OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES

This guide focuses on community engagement and developing respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with communities in Malaysia.

Below are several internationally developed principles for ethical approaches to working with Indigenous Peoples. Note that these have been developed by Indigenous communities, authorities and researchers from settler colonial nations in the Global North, primarily Canada and Australia. It should be acknowledged that the experiences, challenges, marginalisation and oppression of Indigenous Peoples from post-colonial settler nations are different to that of post-colonial non-settler nations. While these international approaches and strategies can be used as a framework to guide your work, there are also specific, local and customised methodologies that have also been developed with Indigenous and local communities in the Global South. However, these resources may not be as widely published and available.



INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY

In recent years, there has been a global push for more respectful approaches to research and engagement with Indigenous communities, as well as a focus on embracing Indigenous knowledge systems and customary laws.

Indigenous methodologies centre the knowledge, practices and philosophies of their communities and are unique to each group. Generally, these methods emphasise oral tradition, community collaboration, respect for nature and the value of collective knowledge, whilst positioning that Indigenous methods such as story-telling are legitimate ways of documenting knowledge.

The **Six Rs (Respect, Relationship, Representation, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility)** are long recognised principles that provide a framework for engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems, fostering respectful relationships and guiding practices that honour Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing.[1]

1

RESPECT

- Recognise and value the diversity of Indigenous cultures, languages, traditions, perspectives and customary law. Avoid making assumptions based on stereotypes.

- Acknowledge the right of Indigenous communities to autonomy, self-determination and control over their own affairs, including land, resources and decision-making.

2

RELATIONSHIP

- Understand the interconnectedness between Indigenous identities and their relationship with nature, land, water, community ancestors and future generations.

- Recognise the importance of relationships within the Indigenous worldview and being accountable, respectful and trustworthy towards land, people, nature, ancestral knowledge and belief systems.

1 Ranalda L. Tsosie et al, *The Six Rs of Indigenous Research.* https://tribalcollegejournal.org/the-six-rs-of-Indigenous-research

3

REPRESENTATION

- Ensure accurate and respectful representation of Indigenous perspectives and narratives; understand that communities have diverse voices by avoiding stereotypes or generalisations.

- Enable Indigenous individuals to represent themselves authentically and to identify as well as share what is relevant and important to their people. Acknowledge the history of colonial research and museums and their role in contemporary situations.

4

RELEVANCE

- Ensure that any programmes, policies or research initiatives are culturally appropriate and sensitive to and meaningful to the specific needs, values and priorities of the Indigenous community.

- Recognise, value and respect the wealth of traditional knowledge held by Indigenous communities about their environment, resources and sustainable practices.

5

RESPONSIBILITY

- Adhere to ethical guidelines and legal frameworks governing research, collaboration and engagement with Indigenous communities. This includes obtaining prior informed consent, respecting land rights and upholding human rights.

- Be accountable for actions, decisions and outcomes for knowledge entrusted to you. Address any negative impacts or conflicts that may arise from research or initiatives.

- Clearly outline the scope, duration and outcome of your project, address any modifications requested by the community and regularly communicate any updates.

6

RECIPROCITY

- Ensure projects are mutually beneficial and shared with the Indigenous community. This can include financial compensation, capacity-building, skills development or access to resources.

- Foster long-term relationships built on trust and mutual respect, rather than engaging in short-term, extractive projects. Ensure a continuous dynamic relationship with equal responsibility towards negotiating relationships.

INDIGENOUS DATA SOVEREIGNTY

Indigenous data sovereignty asserts the rights of Indigenous Peoples to dictate the collection, ownership and application of research, knowledge, oral tradition, as well as data gathered and collected from their community. Championed in particular in Australia and North America, it acknowledges that data is crucial to strengthen communities, restore practices, exercise rights and accurately represent a community whilst safeguarding knowledge and preventing exploitation from outside groups.[2]

Respecting data sovereignty acknowledges the power dynamics existing between outside organisations and marginalised communities and the errors of the past.

Some basic guiding principles include:

1. Only release Indigenous information with consent from the group—have data use agreements.
2. Respect Indigenous community internal review boards and verify systems for feedback from leadership and community.
3. Use blended research methods that include Indigenous ways of knowing.
4. Respect Indigenous communities authority to govern and release of information.
5. Support development of legal standards that protect Indigenous rights and relies on free informed, prior and sustained consent.

2 Definition by Stephanie Carroll et al, *Indigenous Data Governance: Strategies from United States Native Nations.*

FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT (FPIC)

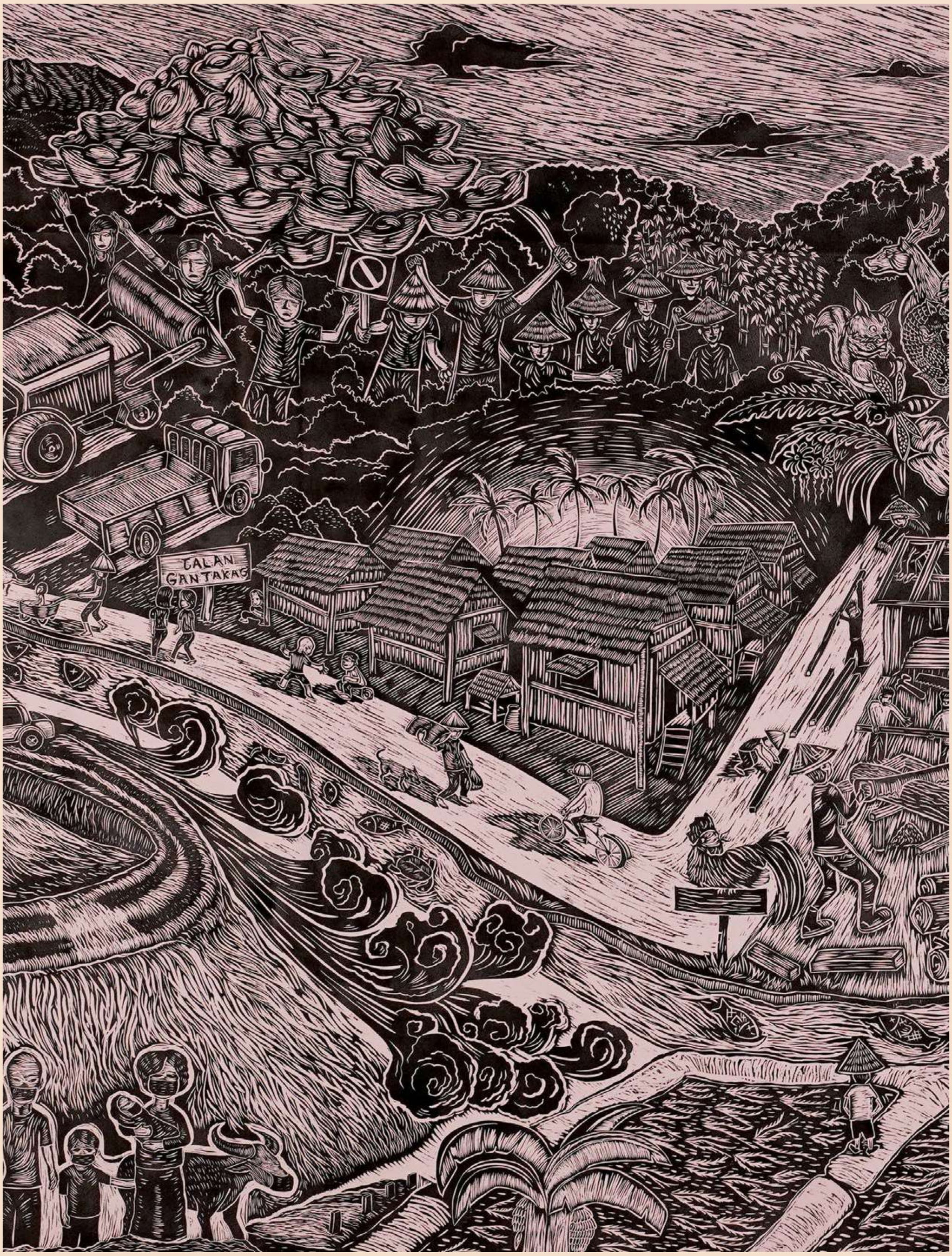
FPIC recognises the rights of communities to make informed decisions regarding activities or projects that may affect their lands, resources, cultures or livelihoods. It is a fundamental international human rights standard, as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). It prioritises the self-determination, autonomy and rights of Indigenous communities while insisting on respectful and mutually beneficial relationships between these communities and outside entities, such as governments, corporations or organisations.

In recent years, there has been a push to amend it to 'free, prior, informed and *sustained* consent', inserting the importance of continuously seeking the consent and approval of Indigenous community members. However, there is also significant critique on the FPIC process and how it is portrayed by certain industries and states that contend that they have received FPIC from selected community members in order to proceed with large scale development projects. It is therefore important that the principles of FPIC are primarily adhered to, rather than insisting that FPIC in itself is applied and presented as sufficient work done in engaging specified communities.

In summary, the role and responsibility of researchers and programme leaders is undeniable, as is the necessity to integrate ethical practices into your approaches. Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge the power dynamics that may exist between researchers who have access to a wide range of networks and technologies, and communities who have more limited access—regardless of indigeneity and non-indigeneity.

> *"(Non Indigenous researchers) have the power to distort, to make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgements and often downright misunderstandings. They have the potential to extend knowledge or to perpetuate ignorance."*[3]
>
> **Linda Tuhiwai Smith**

3 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.



Detail of *Bongkud Namaus* (2016) by Pangrok Sulap.
Woodcut print, 244 cm x 122 cm.

Part 2

CONSIDERATIONS AND APPROACHES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Asking for permission, seeking consent, apologising for misdemeanours or unintentional harm and offering thanks are integral to the Malaysian worldview. These are offered not just in human-to-human relationships, but also in interactions between humans and animals, nature and the unseen. This worldview is practised by rural communities, but also understood and followed by urban communities who have relational links to rural communities.

Often before a group enters the jungle, it is generally acknowledged that this is no longer the realm of humans and a prayer is said alongside a request for safe passage. Paths are to be followed and while many people will carry a machete with them to clear the way, the trees and surrounding environment are not unnecessarily or too aggressively cut back—enough space is made for humans and nature to comfortably exist side by side.

When someone needs to relieve themselves while in the jungle, they will find a quiet spot off the path. It is often advised beforehand to either say aloud or to oneself a statement such as “I need to relieve myself; I apologise if this is your home or if I cause any damage to your place.” This is offered to the unseen realm, in case the aforementioned spot is the dwelling of a spirit. An apology and a clarification of intention is offered, for the possibility of unintentional harm caused. This worldview ensures that respect and permission is implicitly sought, even when possible errors are unknown and unseen, to acknowledge that these spaces may be the realm, environment or home of some other beings.

ADAT AND *ALAM*

Across Southeast Asia the concept of nature—the *alam*—refers to the physical natural environment but also encompasses the unseen, the metaphysical, spirits and beings. The natural and spiritual realms are inherently tied together within the Indigenous worldview in Borneo and the traditional Malaysian psyche. Science, religion and traditional practices are not viewed in opposition of one another; generally folklore and *adat* (customs) hold the same value and relevance as scientific explanations.

> *Indigenous wholism values the interconnections of the self to the animate and inanimate, as well as the metaphysical relationships within and between the physical, emotional, cultural and intellectual realms.*[1]

In Malaysia, the term *adat* refers to customary laws, cultural practices and traditional knowledge systems that have been passed down from generation to generation among the various ethnic groups in the country. *Adat* encompasses a wide range of social norms, customs, rituals and behaviours that govern different aspects of life, such as marriage, family, religion, community interactions and provides guidelines for co-existing within communities and the environment.

Each community has developed their own *adat* which is specific to the geographic, environmental, spiritual and social circumstances of their community. In East Malaysia, *adat* can be seen more evidently practised in rural settings as communities still live within close proximity of each other and continue traditional farming, hunting, fishing, craft and customary practices. In urban settings, although communities have adjusted their mode of livelihoods due to the demands of modernisation, the *adat* still anchors relational dynamics i.e. respect for elders, preservation of culture, customs and *gotong-royong* (community work) during weddings, funerals and community celebrations. Many Orang Asli communities in West Malaysia still hold and practice *adat* even within communities located in the capital city.

The principles and concepts of *adat* contribute towards modern day social-cultural and economic-political systems, as well as towards the welfare of humanity and conservation of the natural environment when not hampered by current structures. In recent years, there have been a growing reinvigoration and recentring

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1 Michelle Pidgeon & Tasha Riley, *Understanding the Application and Use of Indigenous Research Methodologies in the Social Sciences by Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Scholars.*

of the value of Indigenous knowledge systems, recognising the significant role they can play in resource management and sustainable community practices in Malaysia. While much of these systems remain oral tradition, there have been significant efforts made by local researchers, communities and organisations to document these practices. In general, community *adat* includes guidance on:

- land rights and customary land management;
- community governance and decision making;
- cultural and spiritual beliefs;
- social norms and protocol;
- traditional knowledge and practices;
- nature and environmental management.

When engaging with communities, it is useful to discuss with them about specific *adat*, practices and taboos, so that you can understand established practices and protocols within the community and make efforts to abide by them.

RESPECTING COMMUNITIES

In Malaysia, there are over 50 distinct Indigenous groups, with a significant percentage living in modern, developed cities and engaging in urban lifestyles. Assumptions should not be made about the lifestyles, environments and geographical locations of Indigenous community members—some can be based in urban centres working office jobs; they can also live in rural areas, continuing land management techniques passed down through generations. At different points in their lives they may do both.

The East Malaysian states, Sabah and Sarawak, are on the island of Borneo. To many, the name ‘Borneo’ conjures up images of tropical lands, paradise islands, exotic beasts and wild rainforests. Whilst tourism posters and media often feature Indigenous community members in traditional costumes, these stereotypes can be harmful towards the community. Such stereotypes ultimately offer a lazy shorthand to suggest that the populations of Borneo only dwell in the jungle and that solutions must be put in place to ‘save’ these communities, without understanding there are diverse, varied and clashing perspectives, lifestyles and ways of being.

While the situation and experiences of communities are multifaceted, one of the key challenges faced by rural communities is urban

migration. Many young adults leave their communities to go to towns and cities in search of economic opportunities. However, the youth exodus often starts at an earlier age, with young children leaving home to attend boarding schools in more populated areas, only returning during school holidays. This means that rural villages, stilt houses and longhouses are mostly populated by older members of the community, with elders often looking after babies and pre-school children. This generational separation breaks the link in intergenerational knowledge transfer, which has significant impact on community knowledge, customary practices, Indigenous languages, arts and craft forms and storytelling, all of which were traditionally taught orally from elder to youth.

Additionally, community members face issues with obtaining native customary land rights and struggle with land grabs for development projects, deforestation, forced conservation practices as well as the impact of mass mono-culture plantations and exploitative tourism practices. Many communities grow ‘cash crops’, which over the past 150 years have shifted from rubber and cocoa to pepper and palm oil plantations. As international trade prices shift, these can significantly impact the economic security of rural farming communities.

Over-tourism can also be a significant challenge for communities, who may face exploitation and ‘exotification’ by unscrupulous tour guides and insensitive visitors. As land is bought up by external developers and business owners wishing to capitalise on the economic opportunities from tourism, community members can face challenges of claiming native customary rights to their ancestral land. This issue is particularly experienced by Indigenous communities who may be unable to provide relevant documentation and legal paperwork for their land. Undocumented and stateless communities who live in coastal areas and traditionally practised a more nomadic seafaring existence were not officially recognised upon the formation of Malaysia. This makes these communities particularly vulnerable to tourism, hospitality developments and attaining legal rights to land and homes.

Below are a series of observations, recommendations, approaches and customs that can be applied in community engagement to ensure consensual, beneficial and non-exploitative relationships. These were developed from the author’s experience of working with rural, Indigenous communities in Sarawak and do not claim to be exhaustive or applicable to all communities through East and West Malaysia.

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR ANCESTORS

Much Western research, documentation and museum collection practices were carried out during the late 19th century in Malaysia. Typically, museums and publications written by colonial officers were part of a wider set of tools of colonialism and presented to 'prove' the superiority of Western ideology and society. Many books published during this time include descriptions about the rural lives and practices of Indigenous communities, alongside descriptions of phrenology, the disproved and racist scientific method of recording skull sizes.

Often referred to as the White Rajahs, the Brooke administration was led by a British family who ruled Sarawak as a sovereign state in the 19th and 20th century. Whilst there is often a sense of nostalgia towards the Brooke dynasty in Sarawak, Sabah had a very different experience of colonial rule administered by a British chartered company, namely The North Borneo Chartered Company. West Malaysia, previously known as Malaya, was ruled by British administration from the 1820s until 1957.

The legacy of colonial rule and the impact of past research and documentation practices continues today, especially for communities whose previous form of knowledge sharing were passed down orally and now mostly rely on problematic books, texts and photographs to learn about their past.

In the past couple of decades, there have been significant efforts by local academics, researchers, activists and community members who have produced written and videographic material and documentation that people are learning from. However, due to a number of challenges including limited publishing opportunities, short print runs, lack of funding and the politicisation of state printing facilities, there is a lack of resources and publications available; as such community documentation is often undertaken by NGOs or community initiatives.

Some of our modern-day identities, positioning and power dynamics are a legacy of this colonial past and it is essential to understand the role it plays in how a community views you and how you view them. When working with communities you are potentially one of a long line of prior researchers and external organisations/individuals who have engaged with them. Understand that you are viewed as part of a 'collective' of outsiders—these outsiders are your 'ancestors' and from a community perspective you may share accountability for these

actions and any previous harm that may have been done towards the community.

In turn, be aware of your ‘descendants’—how can the people who engage with the community after you be influenced by your work and the legacy you leave? Address your responsibility and accountability and encourage other researchers to also follow prior, informed, active and sustained consent. Create clear documentation of your interactions, decisions and agreements made with the community—this helps maintain transparency and accountability.

COLLABORATION AND CO-CREATION

- Communicate with communities and be open about research objectives as well as who, what, where and why you are undertaking the work. Disclose information about your project—your funding sources, project partners, etc. Be cautious about over-promising or proposing projects that are not yet guaranteed.

- Foster collaborative relationships, identify key partners and engage with the community to elect community representative and liaison roles. Identifying community representatives, liaisons, translators and interpreters is one of the first key steps in a community undertaking and will be vital to assist in community engagement and understanding social structures.

- Different communities have their own leadership dynamics and social structures—take time to understand these. Make sure you engage the community leaders and provide opportunities for consensus decision making. Sometimes community leaders are politically appointed and may not necessarily represent the interest of many of the villagers.

- Seek informal leaders, women and youth leaders, in focus group discussions or individual settings where they have space to express themselves more freely and without the same power dynamics. Ensure diverse voices and perspectives are heard within the community and genders are equitably represented.

- Ensure that community members are actively engaged in the conceptualisation and curation of projects and are not just objects or subjects of your work. Involve them in the decision-making process; this includes planning, implementing and evaluating the project. Build in time to assess and reflect on work alongside community members—adjust and amend your project according to feedback.

- Ask yourselves how your work benefits the community and how can the work be ‘returned’ to them. Ensure you co-publish/present findings alongside community members and consider culturally appropriate and accessible ways to share the work. Collect community members’ names so you can correctly credit them later, but ensure you get consent, as they may want privacy if sharing personal or sensitive issues. Take time to understand the complexity of Indigenous knowledge—what is public and can be shared, what is sacred, what motifs and designs can be innovated, what cannot. This is not information that can be gathered from short-term one off trips, it can take years of trust building! Ask the community what the appropriate way is to collect this information and ensure consistent consent.

LISTEN, LEARN AND BE LED

- Do not make assumptions on where people must live, the challenges they must face and their economic situation to fit your preconceived ideas about a community. These assumptions can ultimately be harmful to the community and to yourself and your project's credibility.

- Agency belongs to the community. Understand that community members are their own experts, knowledge carriers and the guardians of their ancestors’ wisdom. They know their own challenges and needs better than anyone—seek guidance from them and ensure you listen before instigating. Do not presume to understand the problem or provide solutions that communities do not need, want or agree with.

- Indigenous communities often view knowledge and culture as a collective identity and shared community asset, rather than

individual knowledge carriers. Community ownership must be understood when considering intellectual property.

- Be mindful of who you are engaging, albeit the knowledge is communal some individuals may be politically or religiously biassed. Be sure to do a background check with the community about the persons of interest for the subject you're working on. Information could come in multiple nuanced versions, take all for different considerations and do not generalise and do not feed the next person the information acquired from the prior.

- If you can, stay with the community for a period of time to get a better understanding of their lives. Make bonds by participating with their daily activities to form trust and develop relationships with different members of the community.

STAY OPEN-MINDED

- Indigenous, rural and/or marginalised communities have practices and ways of doing and thinking that have been developed for generations. They may not fit with dominant education systems or Western-centric values of development, conservation and sustainability.

- Reject problematic stereotypes and ‘pity poverty’ narratives, you are not their saviour, they are not props for you or your organisation’s work.

- Step out of your comfort zone—if community members want you to dance *poco-poco* (a popular form of local line dancing) or sing karaoke, then join them. This is a positive way to build trusting relationships.

- During some celebrations, in particular harvest festivals, communities may partake in drinking alcohol and may encourage visitors to join in. It is okay to maintain your own personal boundaries without offending anyone, particularly for sole women researchers/practitioners. If you prefer not to drink or to stop drinking after partaking it is recommended to use the excuse of taking medication or not feeling well. Communities will also respect reasons of faith.

- Food is a big matter. Never reject the food you're offered outwardly and only take what you can consume. If you have a restricted diet bring supplies to be shared. Be mindful of outward expression of reluctance and avoid all demeaning attitudes towards what is served and the dietary culture.

- Be respectful of community forest management by forest dependent people. Rural communities often rely on hunted jungle meats and as this is a precious resource, sometimes all parts of the carcass and organs will be cooked and served in one dish.

- Some of the jungle meat served may be listed as protected and/or endangered animals—communities have developed systems of sustainable hunting methods and have certain customary rights to carry out these practices. It is advised to be respectful towards hunting techniques that one may not agree with. If you choose not to partake in wild meat, inform your hosts that you are vegetarian or respectfully let them know you cannot partake in the dish.

- Long-term guests can also consider to come in prepared with their own rations as to not be a burden to the hosting community. Any extra or leftovers of the ration could be left behind with the host as well.

ACCESSIBILITY, EQUALITY AND PERMISSION

- Ensure that your project explanations are accessible—use appropriate terminology and language; do not use acronyms or overly academic terms. Engage translators where possible and avoid problematic terms such as ‘primitive’ or ‘uneducated’. You have a moral obligation to understand and support the needs of the community whilst actively rejecting exploitation of Indigenous and marginalised communities, their knowledge, practices and cultural and land rights.

- Record Indigenous names, stories and terminology when given consent and understand power dynamics between various languages: English, Bahasa Malaysia (the national language) and regional as well as Indigenous languages. Use culturally appropriate communication methods, which may

include oral traditions, visual aids and storytelling, in addition to written materials.

- Seek permission when taking photos and videos of community members and entering longhouses, water villages or community spaces. Ensure photos or any media are ethical and provide dignity to those being photographed or filmed. If you wish to publish or share online about the community, place or activities, ensure the narrative you tell is respectful and not exaggerated or sensationalised. Seek guidance from the community on how they would like their story to be told.

- Take extra care when taking photos/videos of minors. Seek consent from the minors directly, as well as their guardians and explain where and how the photos/videos will be used.

- Many community members will tell stories of Western tourists barging into their homes to “see how they live” and asking problematic questions like why they are wearing ‘modern clothing’ and using motors on their boats. Remember, Indigenous communities are innovative, experimental and ever evolving societies, just like your own.

- Some community members may have limited literacy skills, lack digital literacy and infrastructure, other communities will have smartphones and tablets. Consider how technology access can enable collaborative projects, documentation and communication and what tools and resources you can provide.

- Many rural communities have learnt to necessarily be risk-averse and may be unprepared to spend time and use limited resources to experiment, without understanding the clear benefits of collaboration. For example, it takes significant time and energy to collect and prepare rattan. Community members may have experience of working with craft development organisations before and developed new products. If later they try to sell these products and are unable to or do not feel they receive appropriate return of investment they may be wary to commit time and energy on another experimental product development activity. It is important to understand trends, access to markets and internal and external capacity so as to ensure that craft and cultural initiatives do not create dependency on external

parties. Consider how activities can encourage long-term, self-sustainable activities for the communities themselves.

- Compensate your collaborators appropriately. Budget allowances for community liaison members, translators and honorariums towards community members. However, proceed with care so as not to perpetuate patronage dynamics or have community participation contingent on honorariums. Emphasise the co-creation and collaborative process of developing the project so that communities feel a sense of ownership over the initiative and their involvement in it, versus only being sought as paid resource persons.

- When considering community remuneration, think about:

    - Did it cost something personally for the person to be a part of the project/initiative/programme? i.e. transport fuel/charges, usage of resources, etc. If yes, compensate appropriately.

    - Was there a specialised skill/knowledge required? If yes, incentivise while emphasising the *gotong-royong* collaborative approach to the project.

COMMUNITY TIMEFRAMES

- It is important that you prioritise community schedules and agricultural and cultural commitments rather than your own project or funding deadlines and this should be acknowledged when developing your project. Rural communities are highly self-sufficient and so will have very specific farming and harvesting activities throughout the year. During times such as harvest festivals in May-June in East Malaysia and January in West Malaysia, as well as various planting seasons throughout the year, community members will be unavailable to engage in external programmes.

- Certain natural materials can only be harvested and collected at specific times of year, according to monsoon season or lunar cycles and availability of community members. Preparation and drying of harvested goods also takes time and is dependent on weather. It is recommended that thorough research is undertaken to identify most suitable

times to engage with communities before preparing your project proposals and funding applications.

- Malaysia is a multi-religious country, so also be aware of religious dates and celebrations and of associated beliefs and practices. For example communities may not be able to participate in activities if there has been a death in the village and there may be customary taboos associated for a time period after the death or during anniversaries. Political season is also a sensitive time in rural communities, as well as in the nation as a whole.

Drowning (2024) by Shaq Koyok.
Acrylic on canvas, 92 cm x 92 cm.

Part 3

PERSPECTIVES FROM COMMUNITY-CENTRED ORGANISATIONS AND CREATIVES IN MALAYSIA

A collection of thoughts, experiences, ideas and advice from individuals and organisations who were invited to peer review the guide.

While it is prudent and necessary to acknowledge distinct positions and power dynamics, engage with communities as openly as you can. Be conscious in treading the line between distinguishing and othering; even the best intentions may inadvertently 'exoticise' local (especially rural) communities. Context and settings are certainly different and though curiosity is very much encouraged, it would be worth remembering that communities are also as curious about you as you may be of them and would similarly like to learn. Be open and prepared to engage in an exchange where you might also share about yourself, your culture and customs, in the process of building reciprocative relationships.

Fiqah Roslan, Content and Learning Experience Designer, Forever Sabah

People that are proposed by village heads sometimes do not cover all aspects of the community. Ensure that sessions are accessible for all, women for example might need help with child care to be able to contribute fully in discussions, sometimes women are tasked with preparing food for visitors and again will not be able to take part in the conversations. Some ways we have responded to this is to have children's activities for the children so that the women are less occupied with their children, we can also inform earlier on that we want women to be involved so to ensure food is prepared prior to the session or can be sourced from somewhere else, this is depending on your conversation with the community. Also be mindful of underrepresented persons; migrants, youth/ children, elderly, persons with disabilities, etc. Cultures and norms are also different from one village to another, so do not assume that all villages have the same beliefs. Be mindful also that attire is respectful and the dynamics between genders, perhaps some men prefer to speak more openly with men and women only to women.

Anne Baltazar, Founder, Advocates for Non-Discrimination and Access to Knowledge (ANAK)

Malaysia is a non-settler country, with a long history of maritime trade that has shaped its history and incredibly diverse sociocultural makeup. As such, different nuances may exist here that could be less common in settler countries. Be cautious of perpetuating binaries and (potentially) implying any moral good or bad as an external party, as this may differ from context to context. Not all practices for example are necessary strictly either colonial or non-colonial; many times they are a combination of both. What is seen as 'harmful' or 'non-progressive' today (e.g. forms of autocratic leadership) can also exist/have existed in Indigenous communities for various reasons and may even be perpetuated by some Indigenous leaders themselves. The whole spectrum of human behaviour/tendencies exists in Indigenous people as much as it exists in non-Indigenous people. In short, the general good practices exhorted in this guide can also apply to many non-Indigenous communities around the world; after all, these form the basis of mutual respect and trusting relationships with fellow human beings.

Sonia Luhong Wan, Curator, Borneo Bengkel

Humility and mindfulness are two core values one must have latched on their mind at all times, with a side of humour. To work with people, with a community, is to think like a person, not as an appointed job scope one is hired for or endeavour to be. Leave your understanding of the world behind and be malleable. Be in their world, be in the moment, that's when you get the best of what you're looking for.

Adrian Jo Milang, Community Manager, The Tuyang Initiative

As an art collective, we feel fortunate to collaborate with communities. At the same time, we consider ourselves lucky to learn from them, gaining insights into traditions, culture, local wisdom and the issues they face—especially in the rural area communities. Observing how they live collectively, utilising local resources while preserving them, strengthens and inspires us as an art collective.

We believe that good art is art that benefits the public; unlocking other potentials. In places like Kampung Keiyep and Kampung Penulangon in Ranau, our collective collaborates with communities to create artworks. The results contribute to building a craft centre in Kampung Keiyep and a mini hydroelectric project in Kampung Penulangon. We use art as a catalyst, fostering more serious dialogues concurrently, providing opportunities for capable agencies or NGOs to offer assistance.

Now, electricity has reached Kampung Keiyep via Sabah's state infrastructure and the local university will provide hybrid hydro and dynamo aid to Kampung Penulangon. As a collective that is also a strong believer of trusting the process, we believe others can do even better than us in making positive contributions.

Adi HJ, Collective Member, Pangrok Sulap

Depending on what and where the person/organisation wants to do their work, identifying and communication with local organisations who have been working in the area needs to be made before drafting any community engagement strategy and processes.

Claudia 'Yoggie' Lasimbang, Community Organiser Trainer, PACOS Trust

One of the pitfalls that many external actors fail in their efforts to meaningfully engage with Indigenous communities, who already on their own have a functional eco-social governing system and calendar, is the inability to step in time with the communities. They rush in their efforts to reach the end goals of their projects/initiatives and they gloss over the importance of quality time spent to build trust, respect and an understanding of the community's dynamics and nuances.

Holistic and meaningful engagement with communities are more circular and robust than linear and sequential. A one-time consultation does not equal consent and many of the most vital insights come not from formal meetings but in the kitchen while preparing food, during paddy planting or harvesting or sitting by the river banks waiting for the long boats.

External actors sincerely wanting to engage with the communities must be willing to invest time and embrace an openness to how community members uniquely communicate information, insights and partnership. But if time is of the essence but also equally as important, seek to align with and learn from community-based organisations or entities that have proven themselves with the majority. Identify entry points to the communities by mapping out their current alliances, stakeholders and successful initiatives. A great deal of mindfulness will go a long way in respectfully approaching and engaging people.

Celine Lim, Indigenous Kayan and Managing Director of SAVE Rivers

To work or engage with communities is actually not an easy matter. Most often, when outside organisations and individuals engage with the community there is no win-win situation meaning it typically only benefits one party—the outsiders, for example through implementing CSR programmes or research. One of the processes that outsiders should follow is FPIC. Outsiders need to connect and have a good relationship with community leaders (not necessarily the Village Headman or Chairman of the Village Committee). The right village coordinator plays a very important role in the community engagement. These village coordinators should of course be rewarded fairly because they have sacrificed their time and energy to help, although they could use that time and energy to work and earn a salary/income.

Ensure that the programmes/engagements conducted are suitable for the community and the community's objectives. Do not just implement programmes/engagements based on KPIs without considering the community's needs.

All data/information obtained from the community must be communicated back and the outsider must ensure that the community reviews it before any postings/publishings are made.

Maintain long-term relationships with the community. Always follow up with the community in order to know the current situation and if there are any issues that arise. At least if we know about issues in the community, even if we cannot directly help, we can still connect the community with the right people to resolve the issues faced by the community.

Eliana a/p Tan Beng Hui, Jakun Tribe, Collective Member, Apa Kata Wanita Orang Asli

Engaging with the community is a fragile matter yet full of learning. When entering a community, approach with a mindset of willingness to learn, respect and humility. When in the field, be curious and ask questions, broaden observations and provide fair and critical analysis. Engaging in discussions with multiple parties will be beneficial to your world views. Approaching local organisations and community-based organisations is a plus point since they are the ones on the ground, advocating for and with their respective communities.

As an organisation residing within marginalised communities on the east coast of Sabah since 2015, many of their struggles have made us realise that we cannot change everything. It is important to believe in the process, root cause change and long term education.

Wan Shakila, Manager, Borneo Komrad

It is important to remember that the honour one is given by the community as a visitor or having done work with (in the form of your own Indigenous name, for example) means that the relationship and expectation goes deep. One would be considered almost like family and is expected to be there as part of the community during the challenging times too, not just during the good times of research. So, do not just treat it as an experience to gloat about. Play an active honorary community member role.

Juvita Tatan Wan, Co-Founder, The Tuyang Initiative

The researcher should be aware of the non-confrontational nature of many Indigenous communities, especially in PeninsulaR Malaysia. This is from deeply ingrained cultural values and historical experiences. Many Indigenous communities often prioritise harmony, consensus-building and maintaining relationships within their community and with outsiders. As a result, they may be hesitant to voice complaints or grievances directly, especially in front of visitors or researchers because of fear of causing unnecessary conflict and offending others. This will lead to misunderstanding, as outsiders may interpret the lack of complaints as a lack of problems or needs.

However, it is important to recognise the issues and concerns within Indigenous communities may exist but are often addressed in ways that prioritise community cohesion and cultural norms. One of the important issues is that cultural misappropriation and exploitation are quite significant concerns not just in Malaysia but worldwide. This exploitation can perpetuate stereotypes and marginalise Indigenous voices and it will lead to inequalities.

This issue needs a collective effort by many communities to respect Indigenous rights, promote genuine dialogue and collaboration and ensure that any engagement with the Indigenous community is based on the principles of equality, consent, respect and mutual benefit. The outsider, for example researchers, businesses and society at large, need to engage with Indigenous communities in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner, recognising their actions, knowledge and right to self-determination.

Shaq Koyok, Temuan Tribe, Orang Asli Indigenous Artivist

Safe assumptions to begin with are 1) the capitalist system we are a part of appropriates, instrumentalises and commodifies as a matter of inherent design, 2) the attribution of value is based on this construct which by default devalues intangible qualities e.g. traditional ecological knowledge that is oral and is not 'legitimised' by quantitative research and documentation, 3) the 'colonised psyche' bears the imprint that sees/assumes/projects superiority in whiteness (or westernness) and inferiority in blackness/brownness i.e. there is a default deference because it is in the epigenetic make up of the collective/individual and 4) politeness, political correctness and tip-toeing around these dynamics will keep us stuck in them.

Sincere, authentic and tender moves that take the risk and gestures towards discomfort to bridge the crack, the divide, to touch the pain/the wound is what's needed to even begin to make a breakthrough possible. "Claim bad kin"—that ancestors were involved and that we've inherited the results of their actions and may even be perpetuating those results. Humanise processes and engagement in a way that melts and reveals the vulnerable human.

Shame and guilt is a dangerous and dysfunctional place to start; if we name it and sit with it, what might we encounter beneath it? Can we talk about that? Can we reveal, repair and renew together? What could that look like? How can that shape a different future; can art sense and lean into that future?

Cynthia Ong, Chief Executive Facilitator (CHEF), Forever Sabah

Much of wildlife conservation literature and practices rely on Euro-Western nomenclature that are legacies of empire. Although seemingly neutral, the practice of (re)naming nature depends on political, philosophical and social assumptions that encode top-down behaviour and governance in conservation practices. Indigenous communities' processes of classifying nature are not recognised as valid and, as such, their conservation strategies are made invisible. If Indigenous knowledge is accounted for by contemporary conservation, it is often from a paradigm that focuses on ecological-scientific knowledge, rather than the complex inter-species relationships that Indigenous communities have with nature. As such, Indigenous communities are often perceived as a barrier or problem towards conservation, due to what is perceived as their lack of care for species of conservation interest.

The (re)naming of nature is part of a much broader process of taming/disciplining nature that erased Indigenous knowledge and replaced it with Western knowledge that responds to the white man's fantasy of discovering nature. Knowledge production within conservation science thus involves epistemic violence... If Indigenous knowledge (or TEK: traditional ecological knowledge) is acknowledged within contemporary conservation, it is often from a paradigm that overly romanticises Indigenous knowledge and expects Indigenous communities to remain unchanged over time despite the changing landscapes due to socio-economic pressures on traditional lands.

June Rubis, Environmental Conservationist, ICCA Consortium

The most important identity of the Indigenous communities, especially the Dayak community is Adat. *It is not enough to consider* Adat *simply as customary laws, cultural practices or traditional customs of the Indigenous communities. It is part and parcel of their life. It is indeed their system of life by living through, with and in the* Adat *since time immemorial.*

(cont.)

Like democracy, the Indigenous Adat *has these three very important components such as the human component, the religious component and the legal component. Comparatively speaking, the human component is like the executive power, the religious component is the legislative power and the legal component is like the judiciary in democracy.*

In approaching the Indigenous communities one must have prior knowledge on the Adat *in its three components, then it is much easier to collaborate with the people and that can help them to trust those who serve them directly or indirectly. Therefore, it is also appropriate to understand the 'Purpose' of the* Adat. *In all the* Adat *books produced by MAIS (Majlis Adat Istiadat Sarawak/Sarawak Council for Native Customs & Traditions) since 1994, it is written that "the primary purpose of the* Adat/Adet *in the Indigenous (Iban, Bidayuh and Orang Ulu) society is to maintain a harmonious relationship among members of the community and preserve the physical and spiritual well-being of the longhouse." Proper conduct in accordance with the* Adet *keeps the community in a 'state of balance', individuals with individuals and the community with the physical and spiritual environments. A breach of the* Adet *threatens individual relationships, the spiritual well-being such as the health of the people and the material prosperity of the whole community. To restore the state of balance, the wronged must be given redress and the offender be brought to justice. Where necessary, the defender must immediately provide ritual propitiation. To maintain a cohesive community life, its physical and spiritual well-being, the* Adet *must be strictly adhered to.*

In any outreach programme it is so important to understand these three elements in Adat*, which also mean the three wrongs or offences one can commit against the* Adat*. The first offence is against the community, the second is against oneself as an individual and the third is against the environment around you.*

Michael Mering Jok, Secretary General, Society for Rights of Indigenous People of Sarawak (SCRIPS)

Baya (2018) by Sonia Luhong Wan.
Pyrography and gold leaf on plywood, 30 cm x 30 cm.

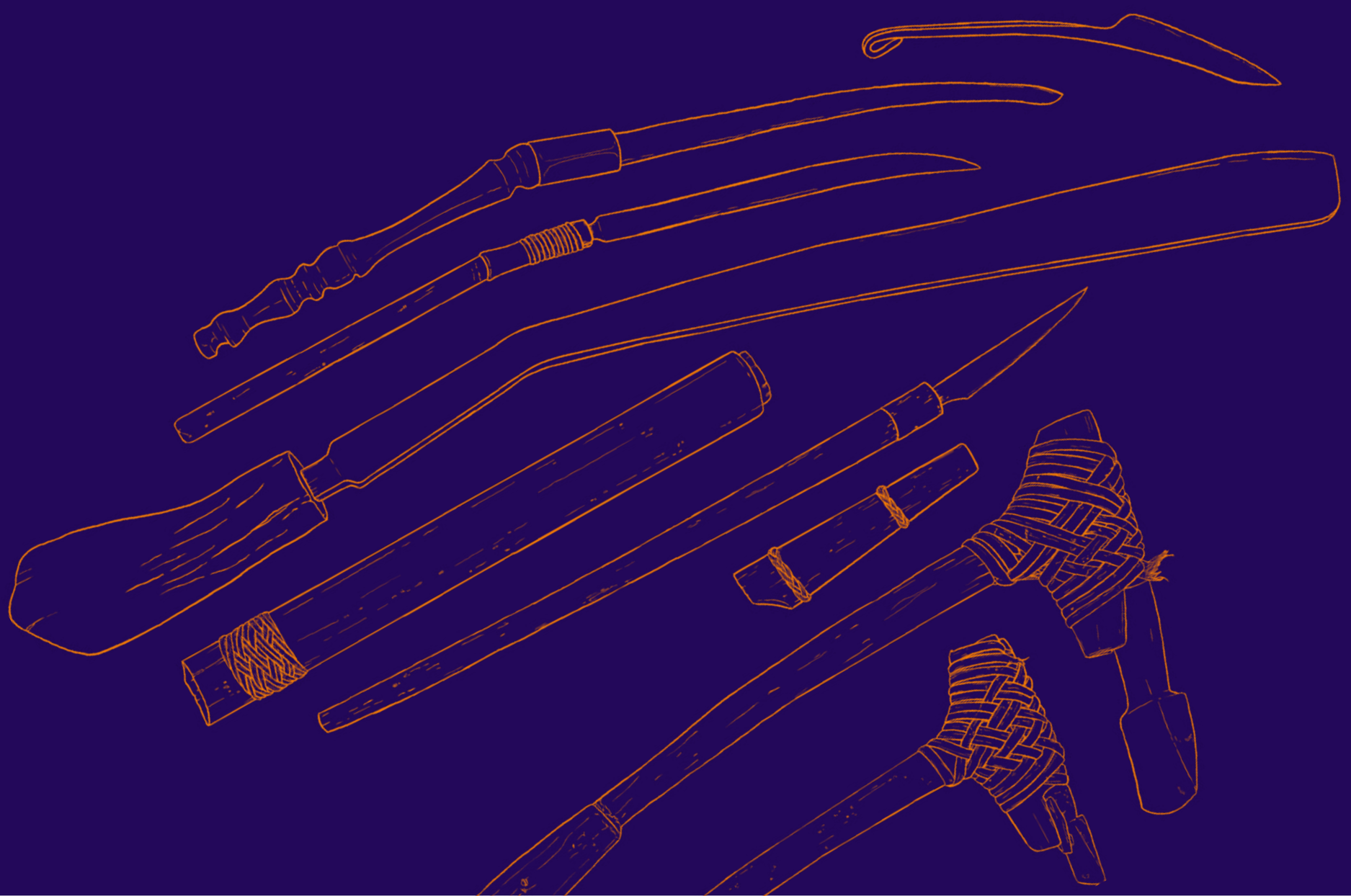
Part 4

WORKS AND APPROACHES OF COMMUNITY-CENTRED ORGANISATIONS AND CREATIVES IN MALAYSIA

This section highlights the work of our peer reviewers; organisations and creatives working with communities in East and West Malaysia. Their activities and efforts demonstrate the principles of this guide in action—collaborative, co-created and considered approaches that not only ensure respect and integrity to all involved, but also acknowledge the unique experiences and challenges faced by individuals and communities in Malaysia.

These projects that are mentioned were independently initiated and driven by the organisations, reflecting their dedication and effort and were not necessarily affiliated with or funded by the British Council.

Note: The biographies and captions were provided in a mixture of first-person and third-person pronouns. We have decided to preserve these preferences.



Advocates for Non-Discrimination and Access to Knowledge (ANAK)

Advocates for Non-Discrimination and Access to Knowledge (ANAK) believes in the fulfilment of basic rights for every child regardless of background or legal documentation status. We are a grassroots organisation which aims to protect the rights of marginalised stateless, undocumented and migrant children. ANAK has worked with UN agencies, international NGOs and communities to provide: paralegal aid and advice on civil registration and advocating on issues relating to statelessness, migration and non-documentation, communication campaigns for health and human rights issues for non-citizen communities and researching knowledge, attitude and behaviours in the area of work.

Anne Baltazar is the founder of ANAK and has fifteen years of experience in human rights and non-profit work. She is committed to conducting research and communicating her findings to support policy reforms. Her fields of research include statelessness, legal identification documentation and migration, particularly among women and children.

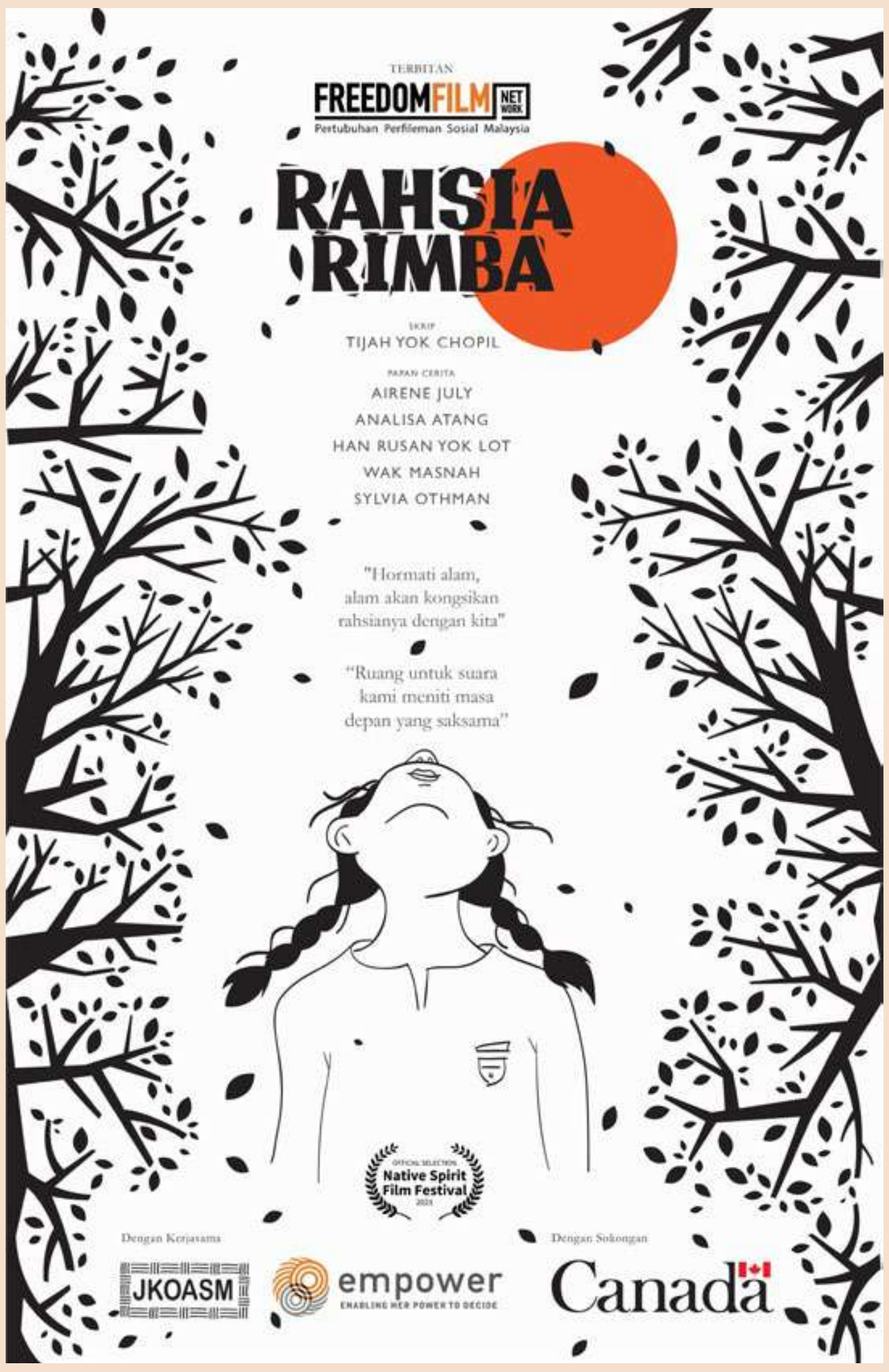
Previous page: Identity documentation consultation with Indigenous communities. **1:** Pandemic food aid mission. **2:** Case management. **3:** Forum on the current Federal Constitution amendments on citizenship issues.

Apa Kata Wanita Orang Asli (AKWOA)

Apa Kata Wanita Orang Asli (AKWOA) is a collective consisting of young women from various Orang Asli subethnicities and states in West Malaysia. AKWOA's vision is to centre Orang Asli identities and issues such as education, environment, media representation, gender perspectives and Orang Asli rights using media as a platform. This collective has been active since 2018, whereby young Orang Asli women have been exposed to knowledge about human rights, women rights and Orang Asli rights.

This collective has received guidance from Freedom Film Network (FFN), Jaringan Kampung Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia (JKOASM) and EMPOWER. Thereafter, they produced a book entitled *Kami Pun Ada Hak Bersekolah* that talks about the challenges that young Orang Asli women face in getting quality educational access. In 2020, they started producing short films entitled *Selai Kayu Yek - The Roots of My Land* (2020), *Klinik Ku Hutan - The Forest, My Clinic* (2021), *Rahsia Rimba - Secret of the Forest Guardian* (2022) and *Semangat Tinak - The Warrior Spirit of Tinak* (2024).

AKWOA also provides training and workshops to young Orang Asli women in video content creation and fundamental rights for them to utilise as tools to present the issues and identities of Orang Asli communities.



Short films and animation produced by AKWOA which tell of the Orang Asli communities struggles to defend their land from encroachment and finding strength from their ancestors' legacy and beliefs.

Borneo Bengkel

Borneo Bengkel

Founded in 2017, Borneo Bengkel is a pan-Borneo platform that seeks to highlight the island's creative communities. Through the lens of arts and culture, Borneo Bengkel engages creatives of all disciplines as well as researchers and community workers, providing opportunities for organic connections and sustainable partnerships.

With collaborations throughout Borneo—Sarawak, Sabah, Kalimantan and Brunei—we have hosted, curated and facilitated residencies, exhibitions, workshops and dialogue sessions. These activities are designed to enable the gathering together, knowledge sharing and community building of cultural practitioners from across the island. By creating these connections we aspire to build bridges that cross borders, languages and experiences.

‘Bengkel’ means ‘workshop’ in the Malay language and it reflects Borneo Bengkel’s focus on knowledge exchange, mutual understanding and collaboration.

Sonia Luhong Wan is the co-curator for Borneo Bengkel, bringing her experience as an artist, designer and researcher to the platform. She is committed to creating spaces that are inclusive, intersectional and supportive for her Bornean brethren.

Previous page: *Making Noise* activities, featured at Yee I-lann's *Borneo Heart* exhibiton at Godown, Kuala Lumpur, February 2023. **1:** Artworks featured in the *DALAM* exhibition, co-curated by Catama and Borneo Bengkel at Think & Tink, Kuching, December 2022. **2:** Working with Kampung Nyegol community members, Sarawak, as part of the Human-Nature delegate trip, February 2022. **3:** Collaborators from the Borneo Bengkel Creative Residency: *People of the Land* at HAUS KCH, Sarawak, October 2018.

Borneo Komrad

Borneo Komrad is a collective fighting for environmental and human justice through liberation education based on opportunity and compassion. Born from student movements, Borneo Komrad's focus is education for stateless children through the establishment of Sekolah Alternatif. The main purpose of liberation education is to improve literacy, provide safe spaces and highlight the students' potential. Education is not merely contained in academics, but also in life skills based on a community's locality and needs.

Borneo Komrad is based in regions with maritime communities, namely Semporna, Tawau and Kota Kinabalu. Art and literature are always used as tools to present the messages of advocacy. As a collective that believes in a self-sustaining economy, Borneo Komrad produces D.I.Y.-based products such as tote bags, herbal beverages from the farm and recycled plastics.

Turning ten years in 2025, this organisation hopes to continue reinforcing self-sustaining community movements rooted in the lower class. With unwavering commitment, Borneo Komrad is determined to consistently strive for social justice through humane and liberating education.

Previous page: With the Indigenous sea community in Teluk Layan, Sabah. **1:** Launching day of Universiti Alternatif for stateless youth in Semporna, Sabah. **2:** Activists adapting to water issues with communities. **3:** Stateless youth learns sewing skills to create products.

Forever Sabah

Forever Sabah is a 25-year programme to support Sabah's transition to a diversified, equitable, circular economy. We describe the shape of our interconnected teams, projects and partners as an ecology: a web of relations and a living organism seeking to re-weave Sabah’s vision for the future. The work centres communities organisations and movements as we navigate complex realities and ask: how do we shape meaningful reconciliation between beings, places and Nature?

We work across four focal areas: Forest, Water & Soil; Livelihood, Tourism & Enterprise; Energy, Infrastructure & Waste; and Food, Agriculture & Fisheries with initiatives that range from the hyper-local to regional and global. It is our intent to include Culture & Arts as a fifth focal area to describe our engagement with the British Council Human-Nature programme and approaching collaboration with fellow creatives, arts and media practitioners.

Previous page: Storytelling workshop group photo. **1:** Learning how to make *bubuh* (traditional fish traps) with the Kampung Dagat community. **2:** Village communities around the Babagon Dam rebuild their livelihoods through agroforestry, restoring wellbeing and food sovereignty. **3:** Forever Segama communities restore river buffer zones with sustainable tree planting.

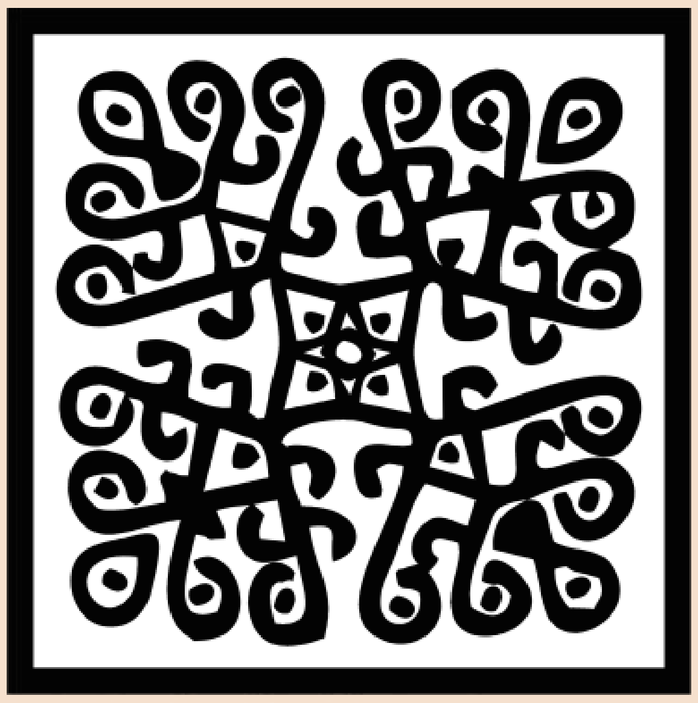
June Rubis

June Rubis is an Indigenous scholar, decolonial thinker and conservationist based in Sarawak, Borneo, with over 20 years of experience working at the nexus of biodiversity conservation, climate change and Indigenous knowledge systems. She holds a DPhil in Environmental Geography from the University of Oxford, where her research focused on decolonising orangutan conservation in Sarawak. June also completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Sydney Environment Institute, University of Sydney and has been recently awarded the Macquarie University Research Fellowship to lead decolonial cartographies research in Southeast Asia.

Since 2020, June is the Global Council Co-Chair of Documenting Territories of Life for the Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCA) Global Consortium and actively serves as a regional council representative for Southeast Asia. She is the co-founder of Building Initiatives in Indigenous Heritage (BIIH), which supports of revitalisation of rituals and cultural protocols in her homelands of Bau, Sarawak, West Kalimantan and beyond.

Photos are from Sebujit, West Kalimantan for the Gawea Nyobang, with my late father. We have been supporting the ritual revitalisation of this *gawea* since the late 1990s/early 2000s, with my father apprenticing as a Priest prior to his untimely death.

For example, we have secured funds from UNDP to rebuild the *baruk* in my grandfather's village, Kampung Gumbang in Sarawak and also other villages and supported the ecotourism activities (this is the work of my family and also through BIIH—which my family started).



PACOS Trust

PACOS Trust

PACOS Trust is a community-based organisation dedicated to supporting Indigenous communities in Sabah. PACOS, the acronym for ‘Partners of Community Organisations in Sabah’, has been actively involved with communities since 1987.

Claudia Lasimbang, fondly known as Inai Yoggie, joined in the formation of PACOS in 1993. At that time, community work by NGOs was not very popular. During this initiation period, she started her work with rural Indigenous women on income generation and empowerment initiatives. Since then, this community engagement strategy has developed into the Socio-Economic Programme of PACOS Trust.

Today, she continues to work and train especially Indigenous women and youths through the Community Organising Training Programme and community projects implemented by PACOS Trust. She also actively shares her wisdom in community engagement with other local, national and regional network organisations.

Yoggie facilitating a community workshop in Karamuak, Tongod, Sabah.

Pangrok Sulap

Pangrok Sulap is an art collective established in 2010 in Ranau, Sabah. The collective is made up of multi-disciplines consisting of artists, curators, writers, researchers, activists, musicians, graphic designers, entrepreneur craft makers and more. This diversity enriches the collective's discipline and in turn makes the collective more dynamic, thus benefiting itself to run various activities and programmes. Along with the collective's mission to strengthen the community through art, they have organised art exhibitions, projects and collaboration with multiple communities for social, cultural, economic and educational development. Since 2013, Pangrok Sulap has participated in various art exhibitions locally and globally. In addition, they have been actively involved with many community projects, forums, workshops and art studies. Some of the collective's works have become collections of museums and galleries such as Mori Art Museum (Japan), Singapore Art Museum (Singapore) and Queensland Art Gallery (Australia).

Previous page: Morning briefing with villagers of Kampung Penulangon, Ranau. **1:** The making of *Cahaya Kehidupan* artwork in Kampung Penulangon. **2:** Printing performance of *Cahaya Kehidupan* artwork with villagers of Kampung Penulangon. **3:** Villagers of Kampung Penulangon installing the pipes for the mini hydro with the volunteers.

SAVE Rivers

SAVE Rivers supports and empowers Indigenous communities to protect their land, rivers and watersheds through capacity building, networking, research, education and advocacy. Since 2011, we have promoted environmental and Indigenous rights awareness and sustainable development solutions. We believe that development can be achieved without destruction of livelihoods or rivers and forests. SAVE Rivers is committed to continuing our duty as a Civil Society Organisation to disseminate information and advocate for Indigenous Peoples and environmental rights.

An Indigenous Kayan from Baram Sarawak, Malaysia, Celine Lim is the Managing Director of SAVE Rivers. Indigenous people and environmental rights are close issues to Celine's heart as she has seen first-hand what it means to be an Indigenous person and how communities are affected by the forced drastic changes in their environment, community and culture through external factors. This has fuelled her work in and through SAVE Rivers, specifically on how the recognition of Indigenous people as the World's Best Forest Guardians qualifies them as experts on the intricacies and the complex interconnections of the natural world and how they naturally should lead the global effort of combating climate change.

Previous page: Community members from Ulu Baram, Sarawak participating in one of SAVE Rivers' agroforestry training sessions. **1:** Our strong Indigenous women showing support as SAVE Rivers was served with a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) suit. **2:** One of the many women-led capacity building workshops. **3:** *Clean Up Tropical Timber* campaign with our UK allies.

Society for Rights of Indigenous People of Sarawak (SCRIPS)

The Society for Rights of Indigenous People of Sarawak (SCRIPS) is a community-based organisation, founded by a group of Indigenous people themselves in 2008, who felt the need to collectively work to protect and defend the rights of Indigenous people in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Its vision and mission are that the Indigenous people of Sarawak are empowered with capabilities to participate in the governance and decisions that affect their individual and collective rights that guarantee their self-determination and to attain the goals of sustainable development for a quality of life without poverty, respect for their cultural identity, human rights and conservation of their natural resources.

Michael Mering Jok is the founder of SCRIPS and Akademi Adat which focus on ensuring the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and practices from generation to generation through traditional learning systems, philosophies and methods. SCRIPS and Akademi Adat facilitate leadership training for men, women and youth and deliver workshops on citizen and cultural rights, documentation of oral histories and community mapping.

SCRIPS' various activities, from Indigenous Leadership Training, Documentation of Oral History cum Community Mapping, Akademi Adat Programme and Sustainable Farming.

Shaq Koyok

Shaq Koyok, an award-winning contemporary artist and activist from the Indigenous Temuan Orang Asli tribe in Banting, southwest Selangor state, is known for merging art and activism into a glorious hybrid. Since graduating in 2009 he has exhibited his artwork in Malaysia and as well in overseas galleries.

His fondest memories are fishing in the nearby peat swamp and hunting small animals in the jungle. In primary school, he discovered art, a passion that shaped the course of his life. In his early years, a land developer encroached on the jungle around his village and now it is reflected in his many works. The trauma in his childhood has fuelled his passion and led him to fight for his people's land rights. For many years now he is a common face at protests, standing shoulder to shoulder with activists to demand equal rights for Orang Asli folk.

Additionally, through art, he frequently expresses the plight of the Indigenous communities scattered across Malaysia with his bold brush strokes. His work depicts gorgeous portraits of everyday Orang Asli people, with powerful stories that cling tightly to the canvas he paints on.

Previous page: Mural painting at Hospital Orang Asli Gombak, Selangor. **1:** Sharing session at COP28, Dubai. **2:** Art workshop at Semai village, Perak. **3:** Demonstration at Shah Alam Community Forest, Shah Alam, Selangor.

The Tuyang Initiative

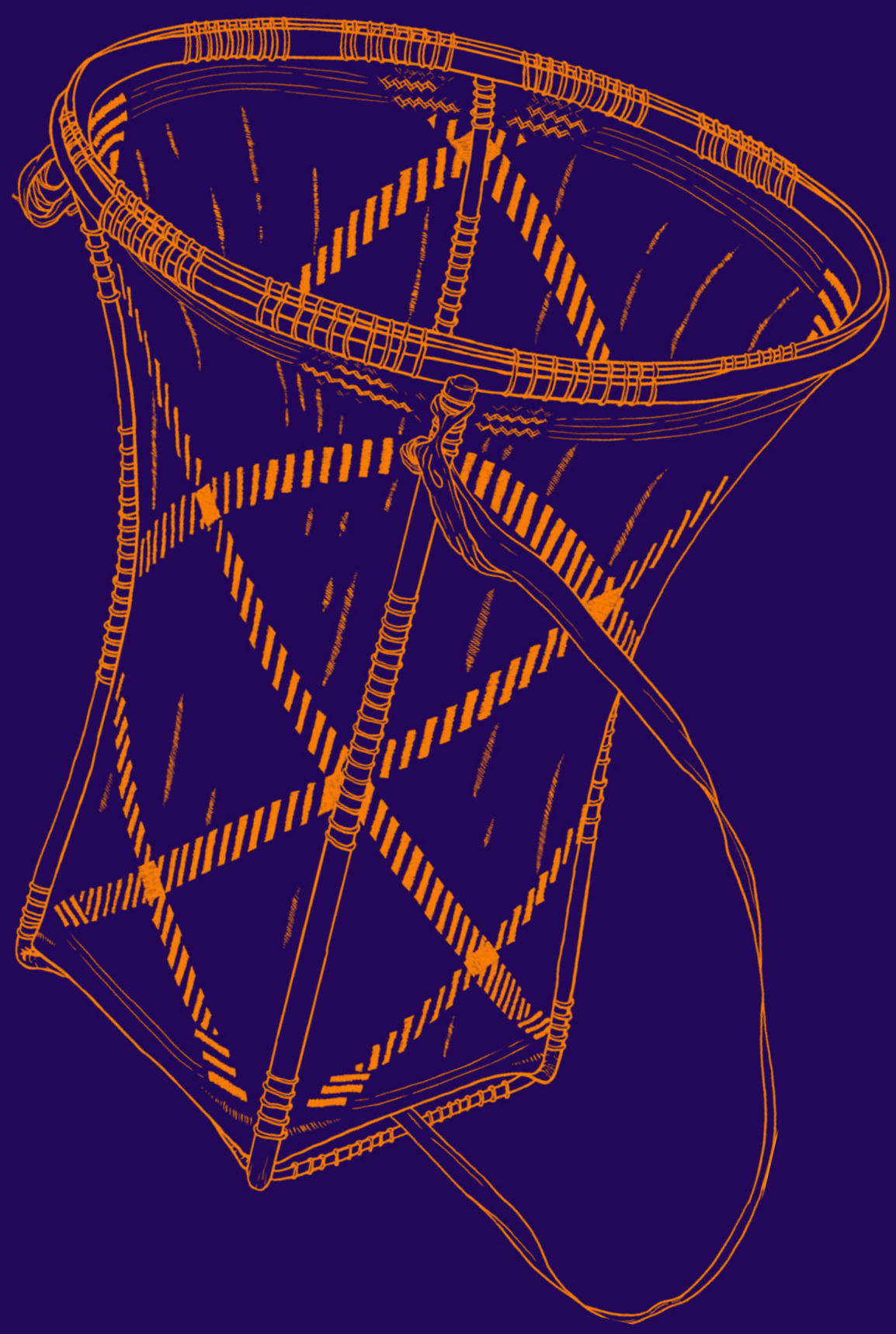
The Tuyang Initiative is a community-led arts management company based in Miri, Sarawak, on Malaysia's Borneo. With a focus on Borneo's Indigenous cultural heritage, the organisation collaborates closely with cultural guardians, providing them with industry experience to contribute collectively to cultural continuity.

As a social enterprise, The Tuyang Initiative is dedicated to ensuring that these guardians have access to meaningful livelihood opportunities through the arts. At the same time, it seeks to practice and promote Borneo’s Indigenous culture, allowing it to thrive for future generations. Since its establishment in 2017, the organisation has been committed to fair and honest representation of Indigenous communities, driven by a deep sense of responsibility and pride in its work.

Juvita Tatan Wan is the co-founder of The Tuyang Initiative. She is Kenyah from Long San, Sarawak. Adrian Jo Milang is the Community Manager for Tuyang and one of the youngest practitioners of the oral tradition of the Kayan people, the *parap* and *takna*’. He is from Tubau, Sarawak.

Previous page: Film screening with Mekat Film at alter/space studio and gallery, 2024. **1:** *Kancet* class with Rose Belare at alter/space studio and gallery, 2024. **2:** *Mepaan* featuring Mathew Ngau Jau and Adrian Jo Milang, Singapore International Festival of Arts, 2022. **3:** *Kelunan* at Damansara Performing Arts Centre, Kuala Lumpur, 2019.

Closing Statement



STATEMENT BY FLORENCE LAMBERT, HEAD OF ARTS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES, BRITISH COUNCIL MALAYSIA

Each person on this planet impacts their environment. But not all humans hold the same relationship with their environment. Understanding the different interactions, approaches and practices as well as our cultural differences and similarities, is key to being able to reimagine new narratives and develop adaptation solutions. Much has been written about climate change and climate adaptation strategies; most answers are sought through science, research and technology. On the other hand, cultural rights and heritage, as well as the communities they involve, are on the frontline of climate change. While communities and cultural heritage are impacted by climate change, they can also be a part of adaptation strategies. Culture and heritage drive and enable sustainable development.

To explore the nexus between culture and climate, the British Council Malaysia Arts team has developed Human Nature, a three-year arts programme that will enable UK and Malaysian artists organisations, scientists and academics, to research and collaborate, to better understand the Human relationship with Nature and with each other and to help us define the role arts can play in addressing climate change.

Human-Nature is a collaborative knowledge exchange programme aimed at creating a more inclusive and sustainable future. Over the three years of the programme, Human-Nature will support the development of research, an artist fellowship called *Time of the Rivers* and foster exchanges between communities, arts practitioners, scientists and academia to embed arts and creative responses into organisations policy, elevate local Malaysian voices to share insights, knowledge and best practices.

Adopting a rights-based approach for engagement of communities must be a priority, as only this approach will allow the shaping of an inclusive narrative involving communities by facing issues and challenges together. Considering sustainable and ethical practices in the work of cultural organisations, as well as connecting with Indigenous and rural communities, can lead to how we consider our relationship with the environment and the climate crisis.

This Community Engagement Guide suggests recommend ations on approaches towards working with communities within Malaysia—with a special focus on Indigenous and/or marginalised

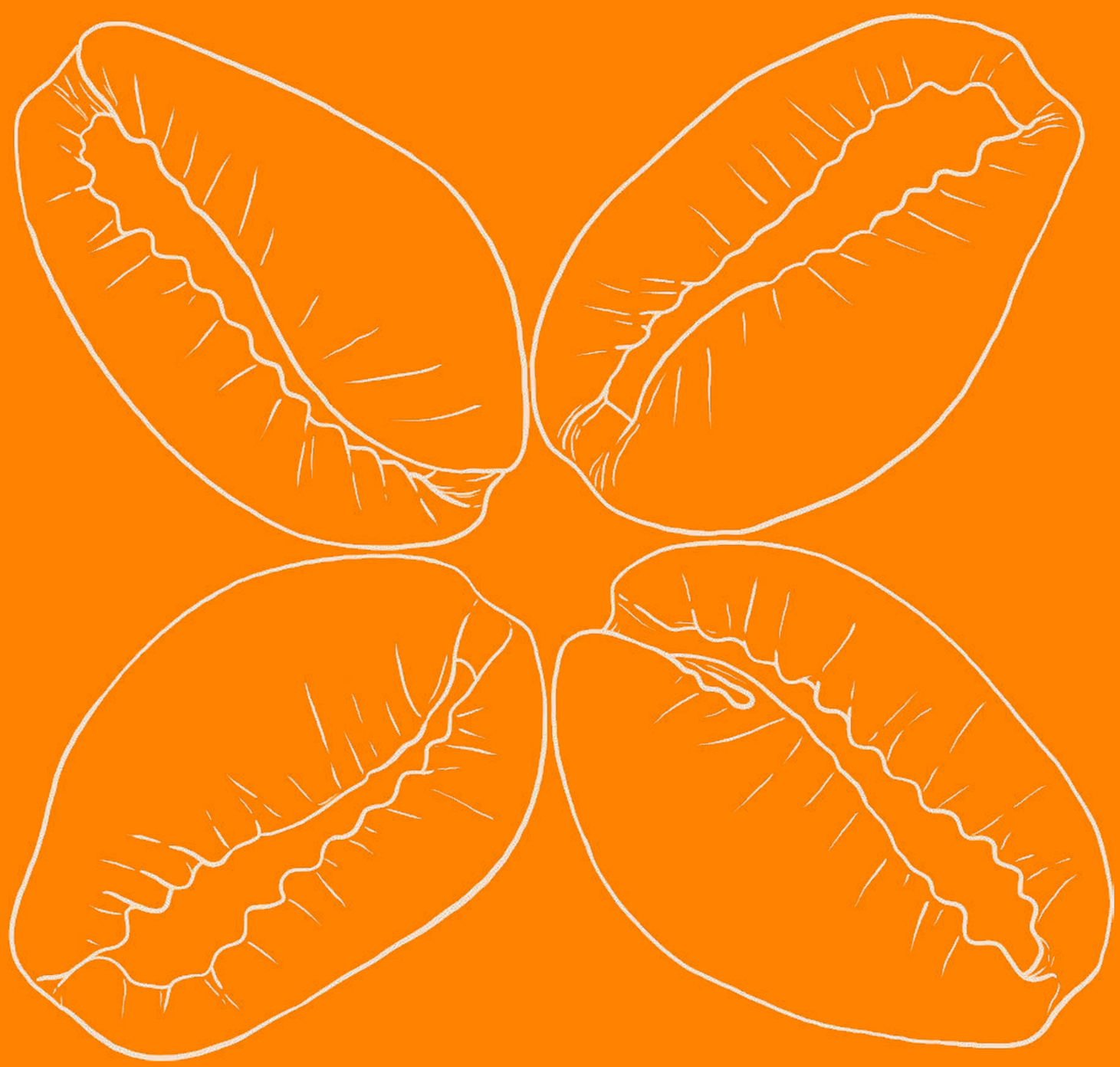
communities. This document aims to provide advice, assistance and tools in developing ethical and collaborative approaches when working with local communities. We believe the contents of this engagement guide can provide the reader with moments of reflection, learning and greater understanding.

We hope that Human-Nature will provide a safe space for dialogue and knowledge exchange and inspire artists, creatives, climate organisations and policymakers to work together to create new narratives.

We invite you to join us on our Human-Nature journey.

Visual Key

About the artworks and illustrations featured in *Aram Bekelala.*



Artworks

***Bongkud Namaus* (2016) by Pangrok Sulap**

Woodcut print, 244 cm x 122 cm.

This artwork was collaboratively produced between Pangrok Sulap and the community of Bongkud Namaus, in Ranau, Sabah. The intricate woodcut documents stories of folklore, histories and struggles experienced by the village. Kampung (Village) Bongkud derives its name from a bent coconut tree, while Namaus refers to a local legend about a woman swept away by a river. British settler Asang (John Trevor White) played a key role in building the village, teaching carpentry and establishing schools.

Over the years, Kampung Bongkud has faced significant environmental degradation from mining and logging activities. Toxic waste from the Mamut Copper Mine polluted air and water, affecting agriculture and causing long-term health issues. Despite the mine's closure, rivers remain polluted, continuing to disrupt the

villagers' lives. In the late 2010s, plans for new gold mining operations sparked opposition due to fears of further deforestation, soil erosion and water contamination. As the community relies on agriculture, particularly rice planting and fruit cultivation, any disruption to their water sources directly threatens their livelihoods. The area holds deep cultural significance for Indigenous groups, further fueling resistance. Local NGOs and environmental groups supported the villagers and the strength of local opposition combined with environmental and cultural concerns, led to the eventual halt of the mining efforts.

Logging has also critically endangered the forests surrounding Bongkud, leading to habitat loss and altering water flow which affected local farming practices and wildlife. While some logging operations may have provided short-term employment or economic gains, the long-term effects have often been detrimental to both the environment and the people. Environmental groups and NGOs have worked with the villagers to raise awareness and advocate for better protection of the forests surrounding Kampung Bongkud.

***Drowning* (2024) by Shaq Koyok**

Acrylic on canvas, 92 cm x 92 cm.

Malaysia is one of the few countries in the world where more than half of its land mass remains covered with tropical rainforest, thanks to the Indigenous communities who are on the frontline protecting these forests from falling victim to development projects.

With rapidly growing urban population and industries, as well as high energy consumption and demand, Malaysia is now heavily focused on renewable energy. Mega-dam projects are particularly popular as supposedly ‘clean’ sources of energy.

But this is a totally false solution. One such project is the Nenggiri Dam development, a RM5 billion project located in the north-eastern state of Kelantan, that will in fact create problems for the Indigenous communities living in the area. This painting, *Drowning*, addresses the issues that will happen if this mega-dam project goes ahead. Many Indigenous communities living in the lowlands will be submerged by flooding for the dam. The project completely ignores the rights of the Indigenous communities who have lived in the area for many generations. The Temiar Orang Asli will face relocation to a new area to get away from the flooding. This project should never have been tabled in the first place, as it is clearly not sustainable and will ignore

the vulnerable communities that have had to deal with land rights for many years. Beyond human impact, the dam will also destroy the habitats of wildlife that have made the forests their home, especially the critically endangered Malayan tigers, tapirs, as well as many more vulnerable animal and plant species.

Baya (2018) by Sonia Luhong Wan

Pyrography and gold leaf on plywood, 30 cm x 30 cm.

Baya is the name the Ibans give to the formidable crocodile, a creature deeply woven into their beliefs. Earthen, crocodile-shaped figures once graced farming rituals calling forth bountiful paddy harvests, while its fearsome form adorned *pua kumbu* textiles, offering protection and courage to warriors. In traditional indigenous beliefs across Sarawak, the crocodile is more than an animal; it is the reincarnation of ancestors, a party in ancient oaths and many more. Today, it stands as both the mascot of Sarawak's football team and a menacing presence in the rivers, where its attacks on humans have become alarmingly frequent. Yet, whatever form it takes—guardian, adversary or legend—the crocodile is inextricably tied to Sarawak and its people as it has been for ages past and for ages to come.

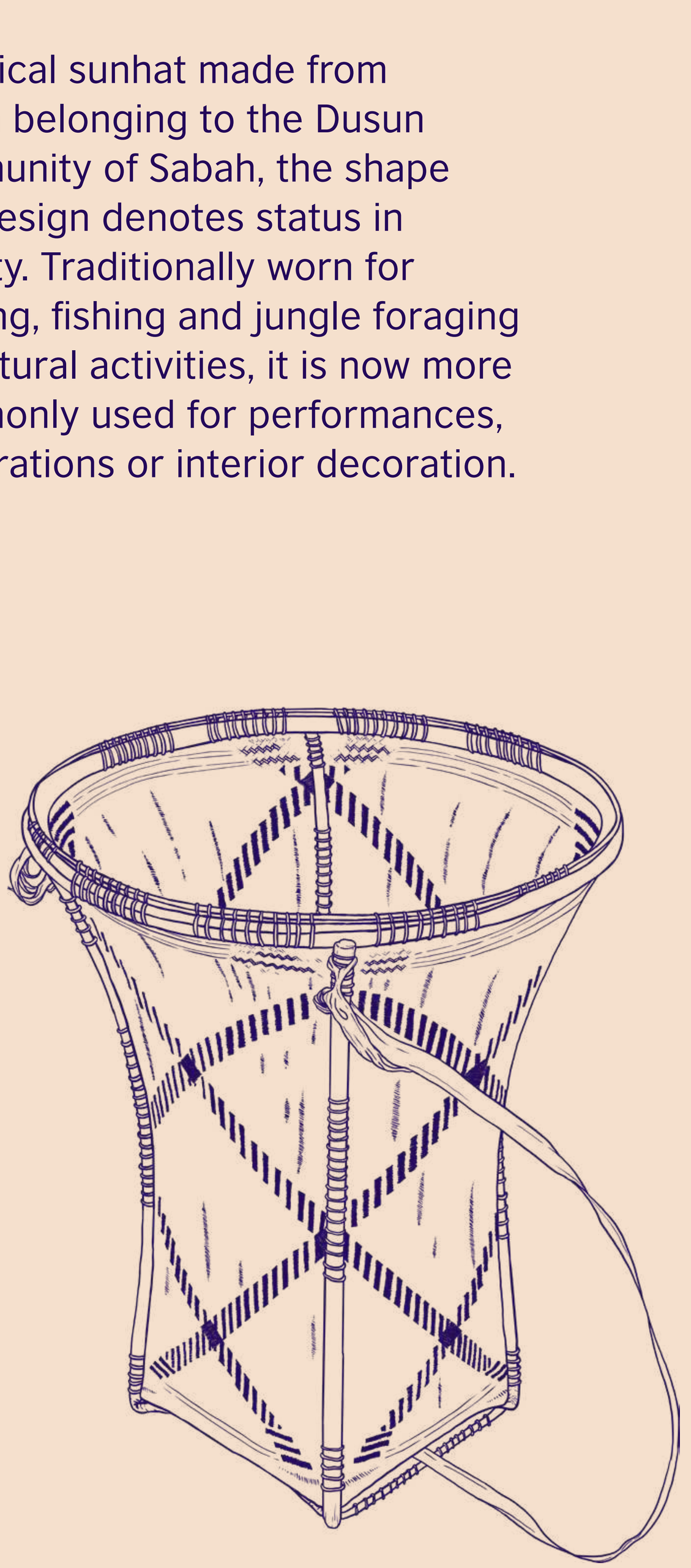
Craft Objects & Tools

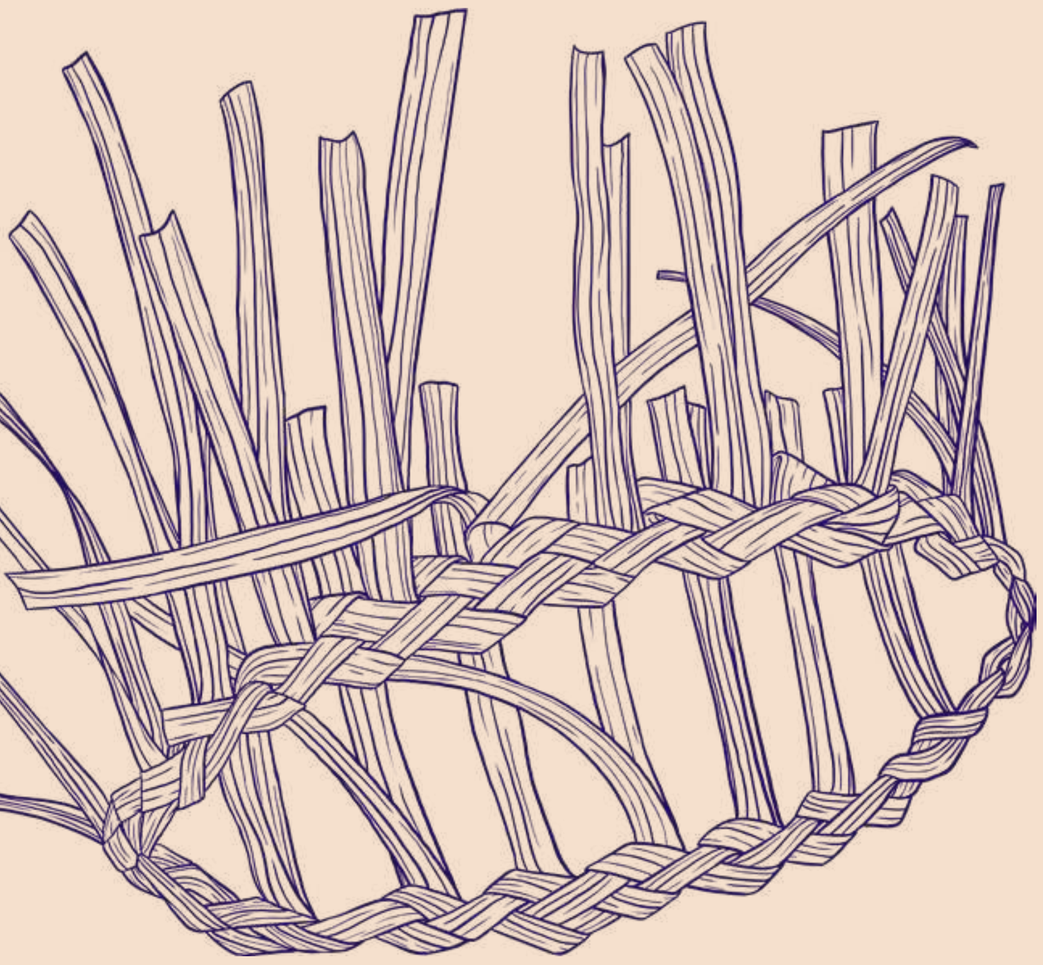
Sirung

A conical sunhat made from rattan belonging to the Dusun community of Sabah, the shape and design denotes status in society. Traditionally worn for farming, fishing and jungle foraging or cultural activities, it is now more commonly used for performances, celebrations or interior decoration.

Takiding

A woven basket made by the Murut people of Brunei and Malaysia and also associated with Brunei's Bisaya, Dusun and Kedayan communities. Made from bamboo, *bemban (Donax canniformis)*, rattan and tree leaves, the *takiding* was traditionally used to carry goods while visiting homes, going to the *tamu* (local traditional market) and to the paddy field.



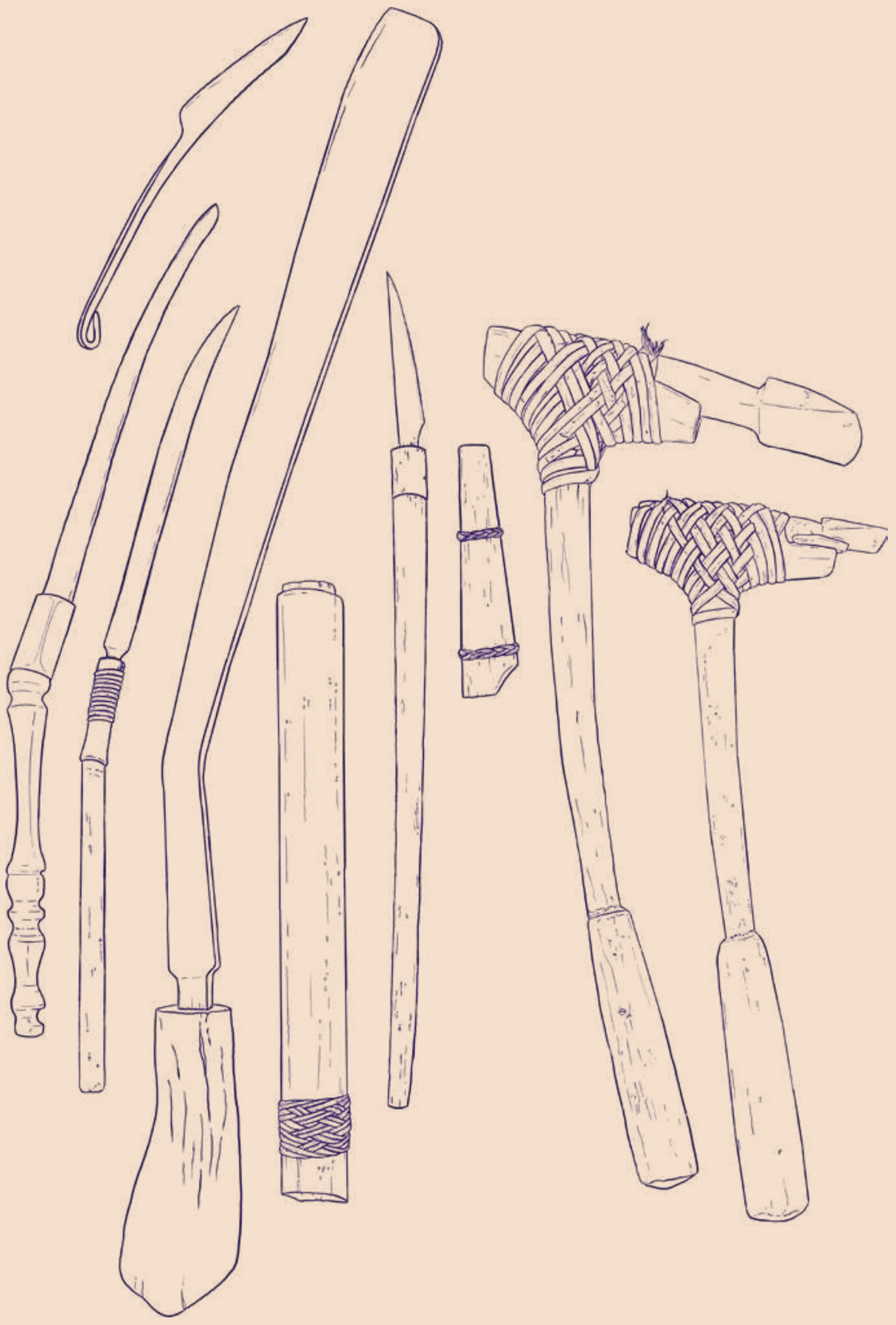


Tempok

A headdress woven from *mengkuang* (screwpine: *Pandanus amaryllifolius*) leaves, used throughout the Orang Asli communities in West Malaysia. Also made from coconut leaves, *resam* and rattan, many varieties and styles can be found by different Orang Asli groups. Often worn for ceremonies or healing practices.

Tools

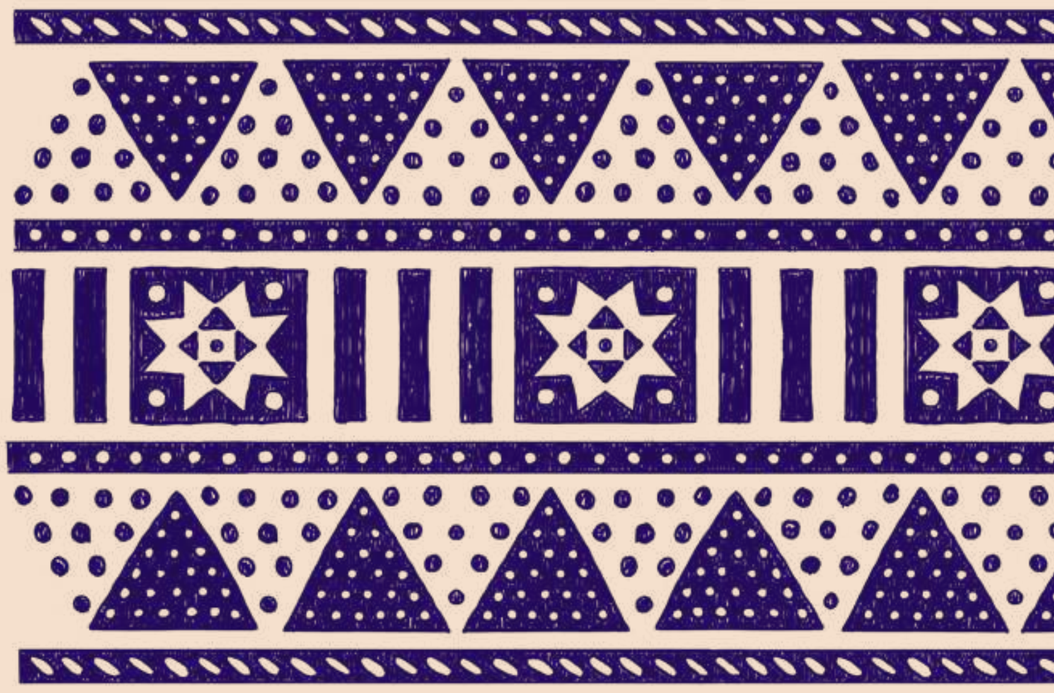
A collection of traditional tools commonly used by craft makers in Borneo. Typically used for harvesting produce from the jungle and for weaving, carving, woodworking, as well as other craft activities. These are essentials to be found in any rural artisans' tool kit.



Motifs

There are many similarities and crossovers in the motifs and designs used throughout Borneo and even the wider geographical region. This can be due to travel, trade, intermarriage as well as the technical capacity of weaving techniques and materials. Depending on the region, Indigenous group and language spoken, the same motif may be known by many different names or even represent different things.

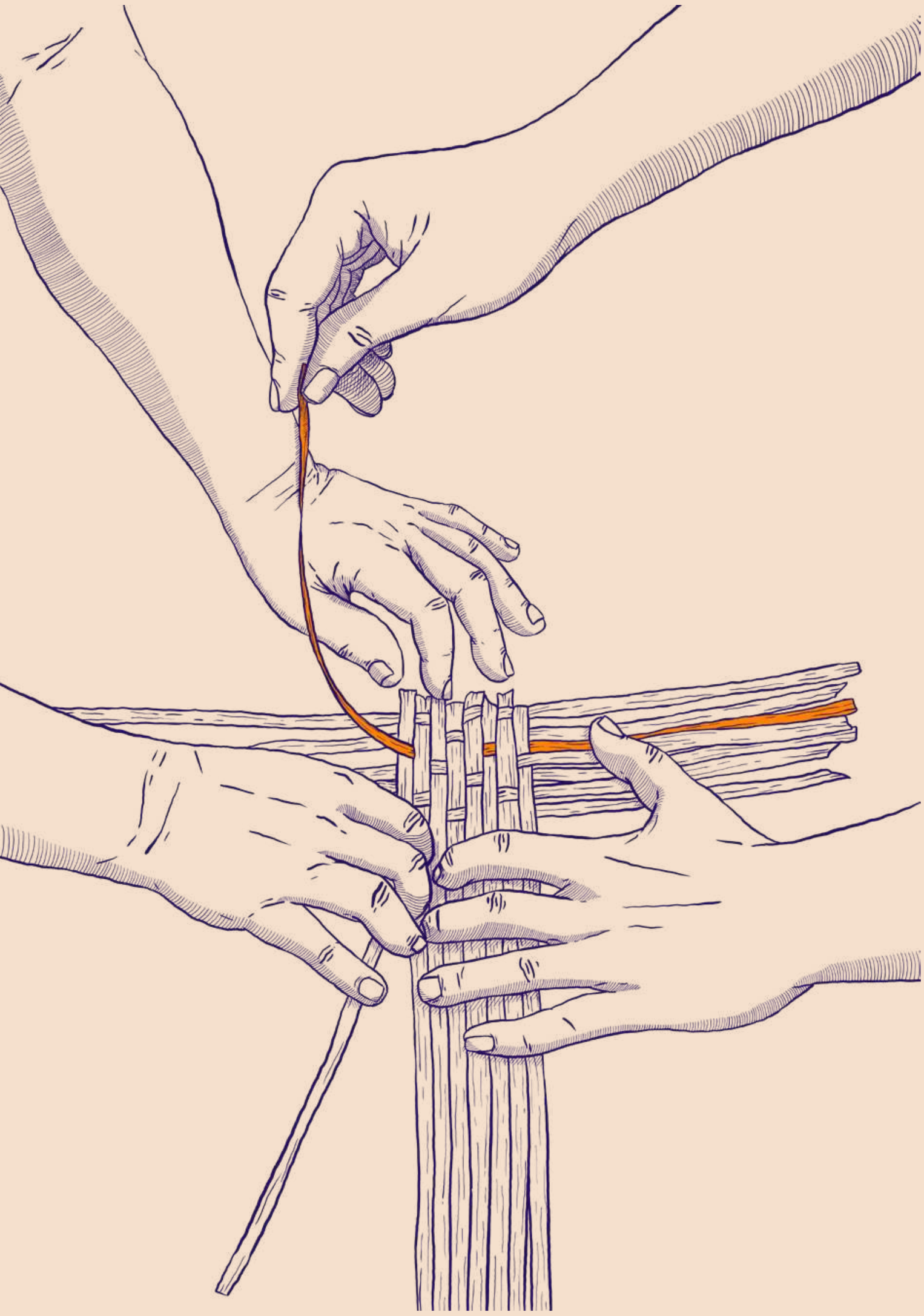
Known as *Binangkusangan* or *Linanku* by the Murut communities of Sabah, the geometric form and curling tendrils are inspired by the rhinoceros hornbill. This motif is also commonly found on Iban baskets and mats.



Common motif found on woven mats, baskets and textiles across Borneo. It depicts a row of stars, with triangular *pucuk rebung* (bamboo shoots), mirrored on the top and bottom. The star motif is also often called a sun, flower, tiger paw print or *pedada* (mangrove apple). The triangular motif can also be referred to as a spear or blade point.

Often woven using naturally dyed rattan, this common motif depicts a band of small bamboo shoots followed by a large curved snake motif. Among the Kenyah people of Long Alango in Kalimantan, the ‘curved snake’ is known as *kalong surat* (script motif), whilst the Ngaju Dayak of Kalimantan would refer to this as *jelau* (leeches).

People



Cover Illustration

A mat being woven from rattan; as with many practices in longhouse communities, weaving is often a communal activity. Source inspiration photo taken by Sonia Luhong Wan at Kampung Sadir, Sarawak, 2018.

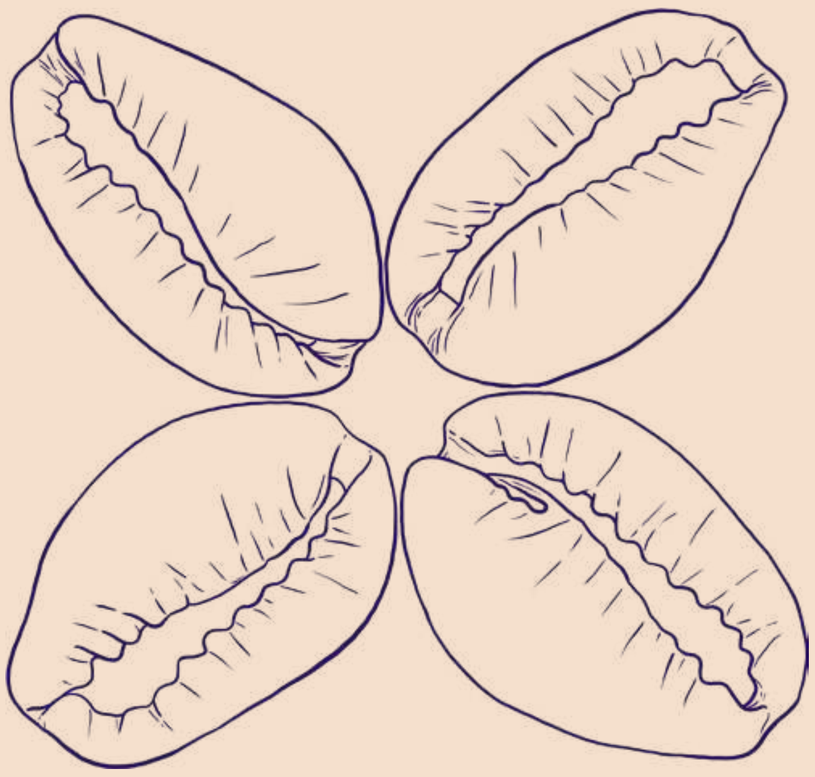
Group Scene

Community engagement work often involves gathering together and sharing thoughts and ideas, whilst community members carry out daily tasks such as craft making.

Gotong-royong is a traditional Malaysian value that encourages mutual cooperation and community collaboration. Derived from the Javanese language, with *gotong* meaning carrying and *royong* meaning together, it refers to working together for the communal good. In order to successfully work together prior gathering is essential. Clear communication, delegation and consensus decision making is an integral part of community *gotong-royong* and should be integrated into your work practice.

Tanah & Air (Land & Water)

Tanah air, meaning homeland in Malay, reflects the interconnectedness between the peoples of the land *(tanah)*—such as farmers and inland communities—and peoples of the water *(air)*—such as fishermen, river and sea dwelling communities. For millennia, food, produce and artifacts have been traded between these communities, significantly impacting and influencing the cultural heritage of Malaysia.

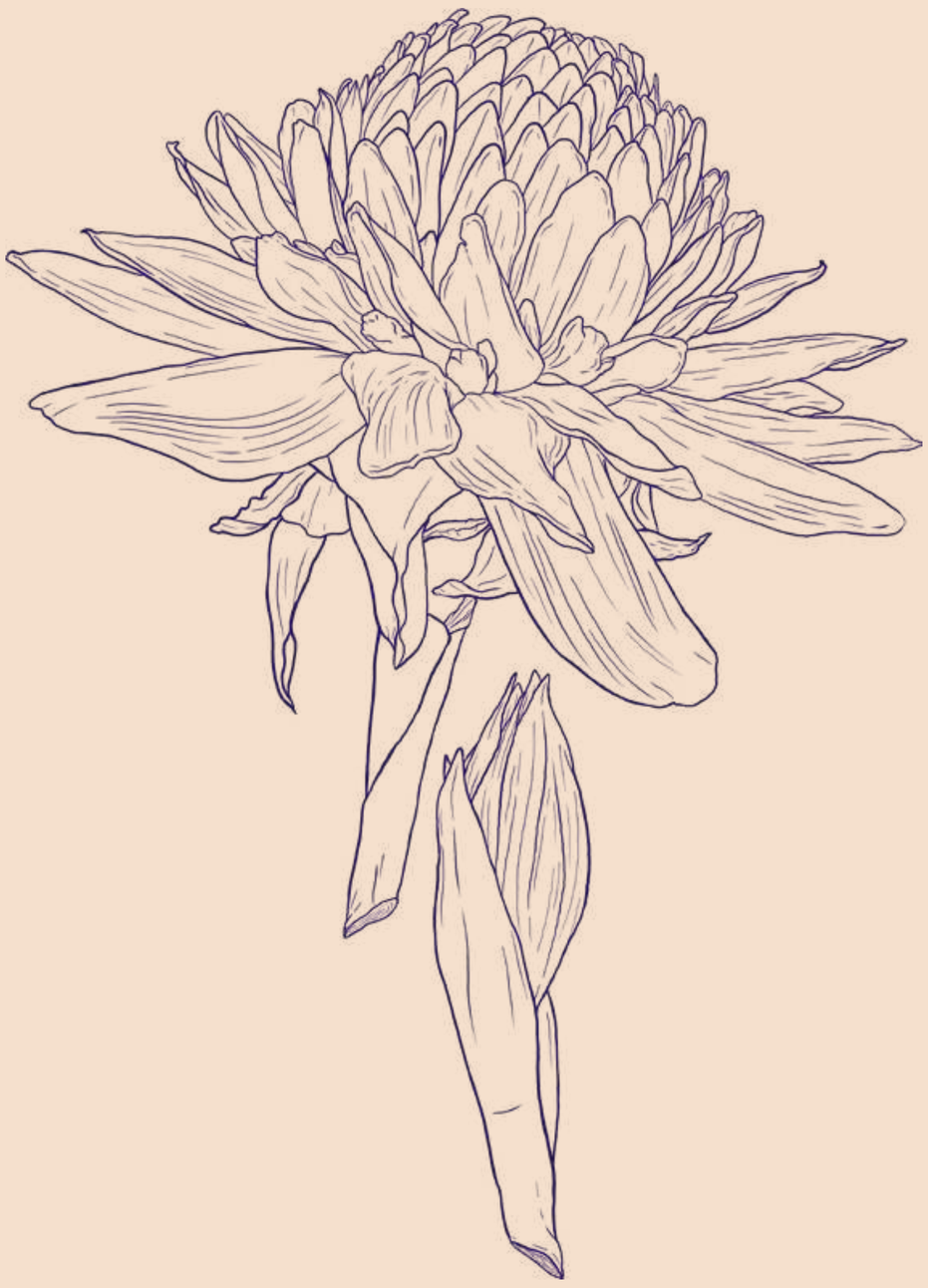


Burik

Sometimes spelt *burie* or *buriek*, these are decorative shells used to adorn clothing and various traditional crafts such as baby carriers or sunhats in the Dayak community. Known internationally as cowrie shells, they are collected from the sea and representative of the significant role trade has played in the region's craft development.

Jelai

Also known as Job's Tears *(Coix lacryma-jobi)* it is a tall, grain-bearing, perennial tropical plant. Also called *dalai* in Sabah and Sarawak and among Orang Asli groups as *lancang* in Temuan, as well as *jerlai* in Semai and Temiar. The teardrop-shaped seeds are used by many Indigenous communities throughout Malaysia as decorative beads, embroidered onto their garments or in their accessories such as necklaces, belts and bracelets.



Kantan

Also known as torch ginger *(Etlingera elatior)*, *kantan* is a fragrant herbaceous perennial plant. While the fragrant and beautiful pink flowers are sometimes used in decorative arrangements, they are used primarily as an ingredient in dishes across Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

Rotan

Calamus manan, the manau rattan or *rotan manau*, is a species of flowering plant in the palm family. The vine is stripped from its thorns and used to weave traditional crafts such as baskets and mats. The many species of rattan found throughout Malaysia are a vital material used for craft, architecture, agriculture and domestic life.

Aram

Bekelala

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Junia Anilik (PACOS Trust)
Adi HJ (Pangrok Sulap)
Celine Lim (SAVE Rivers)
Michael Mering Jok (SCRIPS)
Shaq Koyok
Adrian Jo Milang (The Tuyang Initiative)
Juvita Tatan Wan (The Tuyang Initiative)

The British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. We do this through our work in arts and culture, education and the English language. We work with people in over 200 countries and territories and are on the ground in more than 100 countries. In 2022–2023 we reached 600 million people.

Human-Nature is a three-year arts programme initiated by British Council Malaysia that will enable UK and Malaysian artists organisations, scientists and academics, to research and collaborate, to better understand the Human relationship with Nature and with each other and to help us define the role arts can play in addressing climate change.

Catama

Based in Kuching, Sarawak, Catama is an award-winning social enterprise working with rural and urban communities and creative practitioners to document, innovate and build dialogues on traditional craft and cultural practices and explore contemporary approaches to Borneo's unique creative heritage.

Through our work we develop and deliver toolkits, products and systems for research, engagement and capacity building and create products, platforms and opportunities for inter-generational knowledge transfer.

With over a decades experience of community engagement, a core approach of Catama's is co-creation and co-collaboration to ensure the work we produce is meaningful, impactful and responsive.

Catriona Maddocks

Catriona Maddocks is a curator, artist and researcher originally from the UK and based in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo for the past fifteen years. Her cross-disciplinary work focuses on collaborative platform-building and developing spaces in which to explore identity, community narratives and cultural heritage within a contemporary context.

She is the co-founder of social enterprise Catama and creative platform Borneo Bengkel and lead researcher for Borneo Boat Lute Revival, an initiative highlighting the endangered indigenous lutes found throughout Borneo. As a practicing artist her most recent work *Pagar & Padi,* co-created with Gindung Mc Feddy Simon, explores rice planting practices, land art and indigenous rights.

As a white British woman and long-term foreign resident of East Malaysia, her positionality and curatorial lens is informed from the perspective of an outsider.

Sonia Luhong Wan

Sonia Luhong Wan is an artist, curator and translator hailing from Sarawak, Malaysia. A graphic designer by training, she has also worked in the spaces of arts management, wildlife conservation and renewable energy access. At the heart of what she does is the belief that the arts is not just a tool of self-expression, but also a powerful, intersectional medium for education and awareness that transcends race, culture and language. Sonia is a co-founding and active member of creative organisations Borneo Bengkel and HAUS KCH.

Bethany Luhong Balan

Bethany Luhong Balan is a multimedia designer, poet and visual artist from Kuching, Sarawak. Since producing her first installation pieces in 2019 for the Ruangseni exhibition, she has featured in various poetry anthologies, performances, exhibitions and collaborative projects. Her most recent projects include participating in *Dan Lain-Lain*, an art exhibition initiated by Brunei's Minority Agenda exploring what it means to be 'the other', as well as contributing an illustration to *Shrineshare*, an 'art-exhibition-in-a-folio' project supported by the British Council's Connections Through Culture 2024 grant.

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