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Sustainability Stories of the Lives We Touched

Empowering Farmers Collective in Seriam Village

Kelompok Tani Maju Bersama
Seriam, Kendawangan

During our visit to Pak Udin's residence in Seriam Village, Kendawangan District of West Kalimantan, the Sun was already high in the sky. The heat, however, could not compete the warmth of his smile as he welcomed us with his visibly well-worn fedora hat. We were encouraged to seek refuge beneath the stilt wooden house where Mr. Udin stores his farming tools. Opposite of the storehouse, there is a space that houses a lot of his chickens, and on top of it, sits another stilt wooden house that is painted blue. The two basic structures lie on a 0.5-hectare chilli farm managed by the Maju Bersama Farmers' Collective Group, a community where Pak Udin and his peers collaborate as farmers.



Pak Udin at Maju Bersama's farm, equipped with a hand sprayer

"Usually, friends like to rest there," Pak Udin added, pointing at the blue house. "Everyday, we start working at around 6:00 am. Normally we take a break at 10:00 am and then resume spraying bugs from 4:00 to 5:00 pm"



When he first migrated from Sulawesi to Seriam Village in 1980, Pak Udin took various odd jobs to make ends meet which include harvester and carpenter. Additionally, he also operated a tiny horticulture farm on his own. Given the long history in agriculture he gained during his days in Sulawesi and Malaysia, Pak Udin is frequently asked for advise by local farmers when they are faced with various issues such as limited availability of farm inputs, low productivity, and marketing the products. Despite several attempts, Pak Udin was unable to provide effective solutions to address the challenges in efficient manner.

In mid-2022, Bumitama's CSR team of Sei Rasau Region visited the farmers in Seriam Village, including Pak Udin and his friends, to address their existing problems, as well as explore potential community development programmes relevant to the community in Seriam Village. Then, farmers' collective unit was formed - as recommended by Bumitama, purposed to facilitate the support programme with Bumitama in a more efficient format. This was the precursor towards founding of the Maju Bersama Farmers' Collective, of which Pak Udin quickly became an important member.



Maju Bersama Collective's chilli farm

The farmer support programme, which began in September 2022, is part of KOLEGA initiative (*Komunitas Lingkungan Eksternal Binaan BGA*), Bumitama's support programme for social welfare of communities surrounding the operational areas.

This programme seeks to improve economic empowerment of Seriam Village while educating the farmers to stop land clearing practices by slash and burn method.

"At first, we supplied them with chilli seeds as a trial and regularly coached them on best agricultural practices. The collective borrowed people's land at the time. After several months, the initial crop was fairly adequate, therefore we continued our support by assisting them to clear this 0.5-ha area, as well as supplying fertilisers and extra agricultural equipment," explained Joseph Sitorus, CSR officer at Bumitama.



Discussing marketing plan for the upcoming harvest

Pest and disease control turned out to be one of the most effective agricultural solutions that helped the Maju Bersama collective considerably. "We use biological control methods such as planting lemongrass and tangy flowers along the field's perimeter to attract natural predators. We also spray the infected area with onion peel based concoction, These practices not only helped with crop protection but also boosts agricultural yields," Joseph added.

"The crops are then sold to UPS (Bumitama's convenient store) at a price of IDR 75,000 per kg. This is a good price since I don't have to spend additional cost for logistics, logistics. It is a much cheaper alternative than selling it to Kendawangan," Pak Udin said.

"It is a mutually beneficial programme because Bumitama employees can also benefit from the collaboration as they don't need to travel to Kendawangan to buy chilli. On top of that, the price that we purchase locally, is also lower," Joseph added.

In one of cycle, Pak Udin and his partners have already harvested six times and managed to produce an average of two quintals of chilli per harvest.



Ready-to-harvest eggplant intercrop

"In one harvest, we can get IDR 15 million, so in total, we have earned approximately IDR 90 million,"

"We can now pay for tuition for the kids, medical needs for the family, and big expense customary traditions like circumcision and marriage for our children, as well as other long-term needs, with relative ease," he said with enthusiasm.



Maju Bersama Collective Members with Bumitama's CSR Officer and UPS Assistant

"At the moment, they are intercropping chilli and eggplant. This method also helps cut the life cycle of pests and prevent diseases. In the future, we also plan to expand these farms futher," Joseph stated. "We hope that this collective, which consists of nine farmers, will be a successful pilot project so it could pave the way for more projects for the region and elevate social welfare effectively." With the support from KOLEGA programme, Maju Bersama Farmers Collective has proved that integrated agriculture is the answer to create a sustainable pathway for economic empowerment through community development scheme.