

# Kari bin Ongong



The contribution of Mr. Kari bin Ongong to Sukau Rainforest Lodge (SRL) is immense. In his 70's (as of 2007), Mr. Kari, an Orang Sungai (The People of River who lives along the Kinabatangan River), was initially the land owner of the seven acre site of Sukau Rainforest Lodge.

When Lodge owner Mr. Albert Teo was faced of leasing an area to build the lodge in 1994, Mr. Kari offered to sell the land to him - against the local tradition. "I sold the land after we discussed the benefit from selling of the land. I decided that is best to sell off the land with the conditions that my children and grandchildren are given the opportunity to work in the lodge and that when a boat charter is required, our boats will be given priority before the others', Kari said.

Kari was initially severely criticized by his neighbors and relatives for selling his land to the lodge. The villagers berated him and questioned his judgment, but Kari knew that the land was of little use if left idle. He felt he could create a better future for his family and allowed his grandchildren to continue their education if he sold the land and let it be used for the ecolodge. Initially, the villagers had looked down upon him but his move was proven right as his family members were employed and obtained the rights to conduct river cruises for Borneo Eco Tours' clients. In view of Kari's sacrifice, priority is always given to him and his family members for employment opportunities and boat charters.

According to Mr. Kari, Sukau Rainforest Lodge provides employment opportunities and side incomes from the sale of the locally produced food such as fish, prawns, vegetable as well as by doing odd jobs in SRL such as repairing the jetty and sundeck, extending the staff quarters, making boats, supplying timber and engaging boats for river cruises.

"I am particularly happy to see that the lodge is engaging locals from this area, apart from my children and relatives, to work in the lodge. The lodge is benefiting the locals so it shows I did not make the wrong decision when I sold the land to the company", added Kari. As of April 2007, Sukau Rainforest Lodge employs 27 full time and part-time staff and 85% are locals.

In January 2001, a boardwalk linking Melapi Jetty to the main building was constructed and named 'Kari Boardwalk'. In addition, we also dedicate room no. 3 to Kari in recognition of his significant contribution to our conservation and community projects.

