

## **Indigenous community awareness and rights to forest in Kawang Forest Reserve, Sabah, Malaysia**

### **Abstract**

This empirical study measured the community's level of awareness toward forest use rights and the socioeconomic attributes influencing the community's awareness within three villages surrounding the Kawang Forest Reserve, Sabah, Malaysia. A total of 149 respondents were selected by stratified random sampling from the selected villages. A total of 29 scale-based queries related to community awareness from eight major categories (e.g., the forest resources utilization, forest resources extraction, access to forest, knowledge, encouragement, involvement, willingness and interest) were made to attain the objectives. Overall, the respondents possess moderate level of awareness on their rights as forest users with mean value of awareness of about 2.83. The respondents had a higher awareness of forest resources utilization, forest resources extraction, access to forest, encouragement and interest. However, their knowledge, willingness and involvement level in forestry activities were poor (mean awareness value ranges from 1.50 to 2.99), suggesting a need for forestry extension and motivation. There were several negative correlations among the attributes, for example, knowledge about the role of forest to community with  $r = -0.233$ . It is suggested that appropriate policy and organizational steps to integrate the local community in the forestry activities through community-based natural resources management in the buffer zone of the Kawang Forest Reserve can be a win-win situation for the local community and the forests in the long run.