

# Well-being and Ecosystem Service in Frontiers: Insights from Sabah and D.R. Congo

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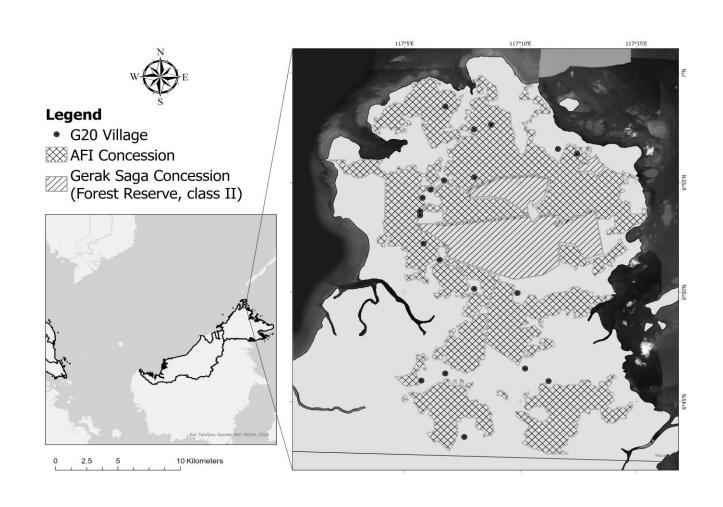
### Introduction

#### Sabah

- ❖ The most concerning issue in Sabah is the recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights to their traditional land use, property, customs, culture, and beliefs.
- ❖ In 1981, residents of fifty-nine Sabah, Pitas District villages agreed to participate with their customary lands in a tree plantation project developed by the Sabah Forestry Development Authority (SAFODA) with a promise to return the land after the first harvest. However, even though the first harvest was done, the land has not been returned to the villagers.
- ❖ After decades, the lived realities of these communities under the development initiative have not met expectations. Thus, this paper examines local well-being as well as ecosystem service in spaces of contestations over land and development.

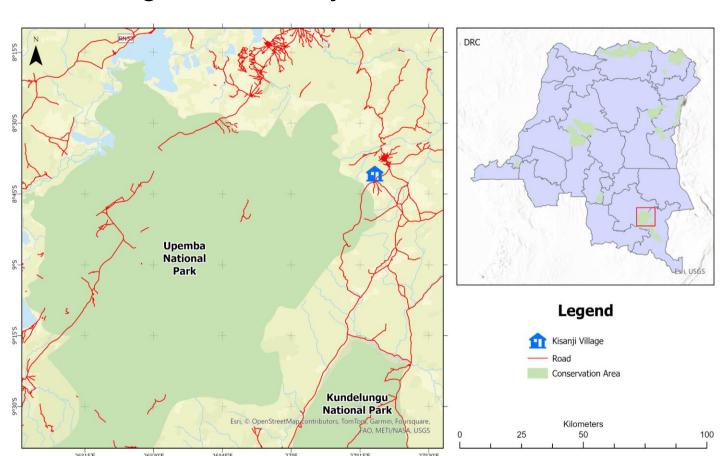
Pitas (left) and Kisanji (right)

❖ 20 out of 59 villages in Pitas, referred to as G20/ gabungan 20 kampung (coalition of 20 villages), a coalition that continues to actively advocate reclaiming customary land rights



### D.R. Congo

- ❖ Despite ongoing conservation efforts, socio-ecological crises deforestation, resource overuse, climate change, and mining pollution continue to undermine ecosystem protection.
- UNP promotes biodiversity conservation people and nature through community collaboration, moving away from fortress-style conservation.
- ❖ This study examines local reliance on natural resources as a critical factor in aligning conservation objectives with community well-being and fostering long-term sustainable human-nature relationship.
- ❖ Situated in the southeastern part of the Democratic republic of Congo, Upemba National Park (UNP) was created in 1939 for its high biodiversity value.



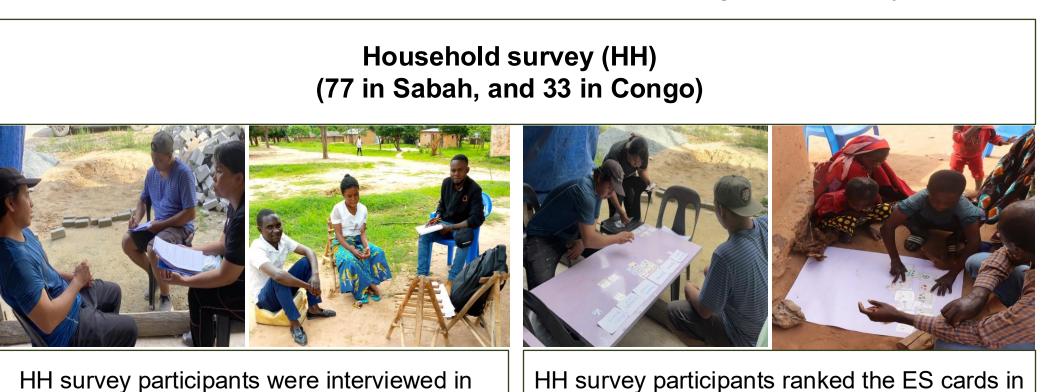
## Methodology

Participatory mixed methods to understand how local communities in Pitas and around UNP live and use natural resources.

Pitas (left) and Kisanji (right)

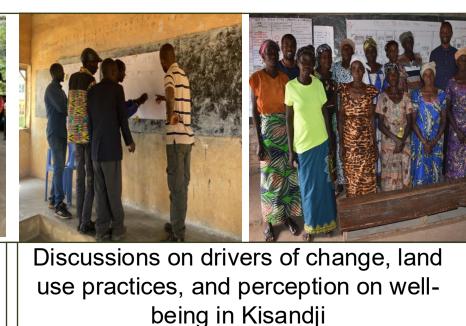
(1) The household survey helps us to understand households' lives, jobs, land use practices, perceptions, and views on access to resources, as well as the benefits they get from nature; (2) the FGDs gave us local perceptions on three different focuses; (3) and for transect walks, they can be viewed as a mobile interview with the key informants by using the power of observation, which provided us with data to understand the relationship between land use change and ecosystem services (ES) from the community's perspective.

**Focus Group discussions** 





on well-being in Pitas





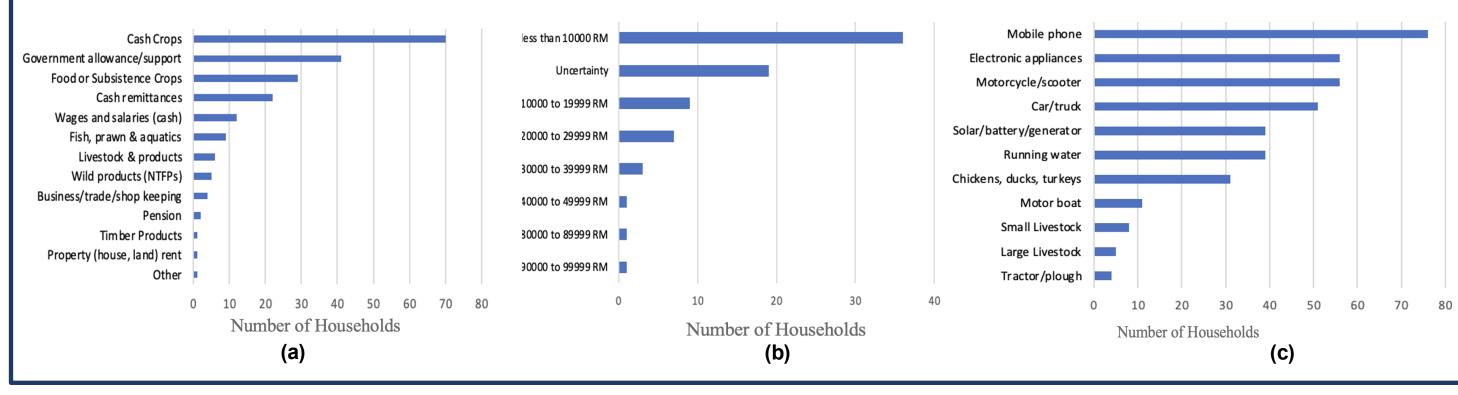
Walking together with key informants to understand the relationship between land use change and ecosystem services in Pitas (left) and Kisanji (right)

### Results

#### Sabah

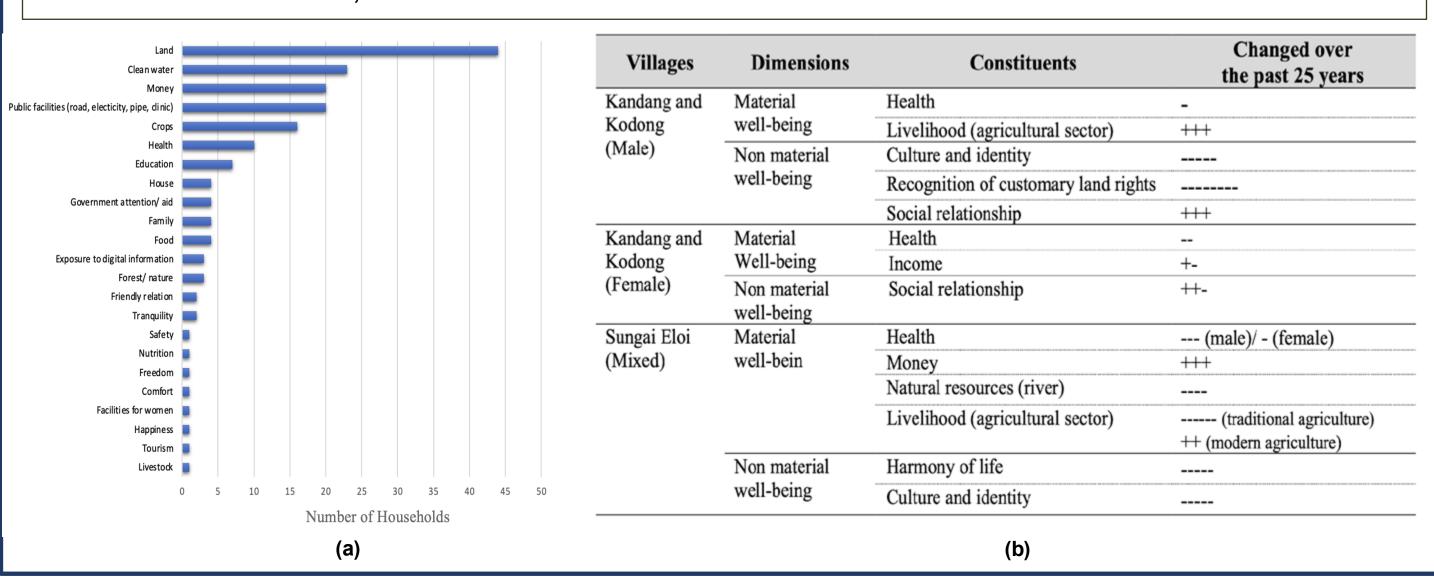
# Economic situation over the past 12 months: a) Income source; b) Amount of Income; c) HH Assets

- ❖ Families' livelihood are largely based on agriculture, where cash crops (90%) such as oil palm and rubber are the main source. However, traditional farming practices have nearly disappeared due to this practice no longer suitable given the current political situation.
- Almost half of the participants (44%) reported earning higher, however, their income remains far below Sabah's minimum annual wage of RM18,000 (USD 4,202)
- The public facilities such as roads and electricity, where initially created for SAFODA's development' program, have improved various aspects of life, especially social relationships.



### Human well-being: a) Requirements for having a good quality of life; b) Changing well-being One key issue is the villagers' limited access to land and resources due to control by public-private venture, which has altered the ecosystem services they rely on. The top five requirements are 'land', 'clean water', 'money' and 'public facilities', 'crops', and 'health'.

❖ This shift has changed the human well-being bundles of villagers, both material and nonmaterial dimensions, as seen in table below.



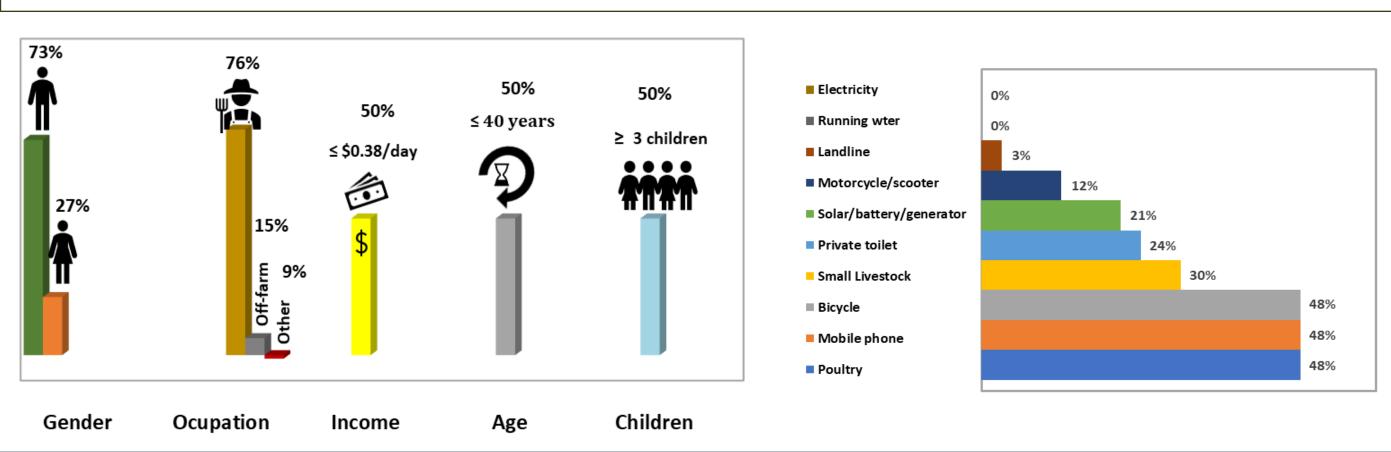
## Main local narrations related to changing well-being

- "Companies such as AFI/ SAFODA take away the rights of villagers because they are considered encroachers, not allowed to conduct agricultural activities in those areas." (Household Survey)
- \* "Access is not allowed by SAFODA. Freedom has decreased." (Household Survey)
- \* "No accessible forest anymore since 1982. We don't have land anymore." (Transect walk)
- \* "Water quality decreased because the water source is affected by the roots of trees planted by SAFODA". (Household survey)
- \* "I can only shower once a week. The water crisis is making daily life even more challenging." (Transect walk)
- ❖ Have a headache, and problems with lungs and heart because I think too much, stress.. Think about illness and land (Household survey)

# D.R. Congo

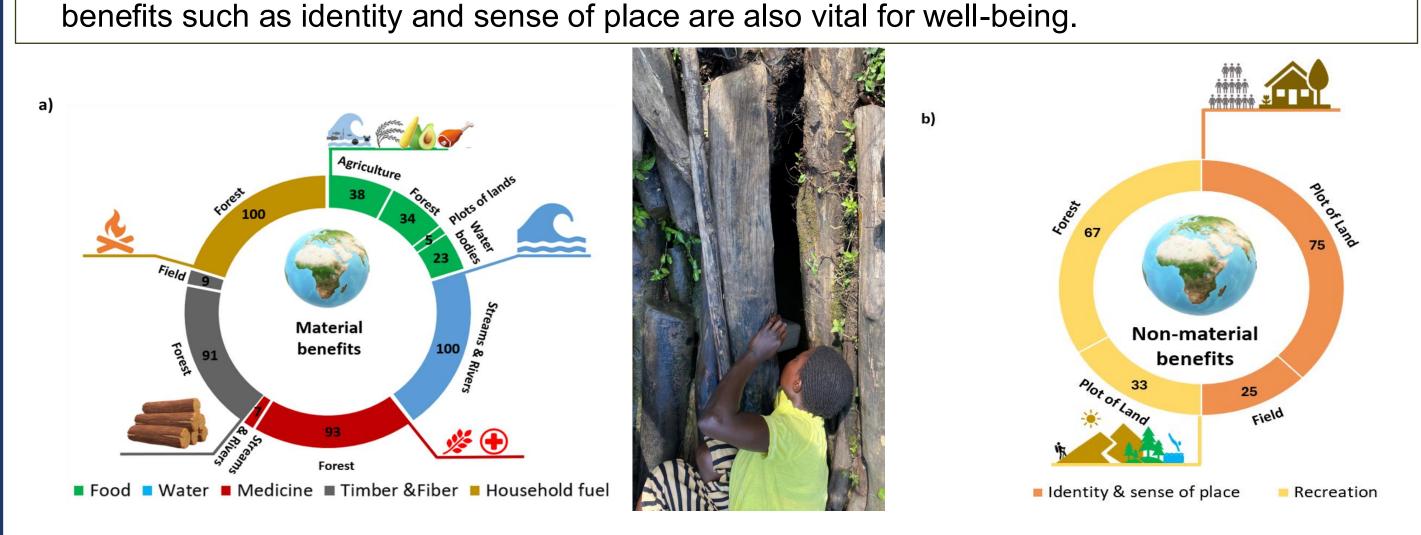
Socio-economic profile: a) Demographic information; b) Household asset

- Families earning the most make \$2.74 per day, while the World Bank defines the poverty limit as \$2.15 per day per person.
- ❖ None has access electricity or running water.



#### Nature contribution to people: a) Material benefits; b) Non-material benefits

❖ In Kisandji, the importance of nature extend well beyond material benefits; non-material benefits such as identity and sense of place are also vital for well-being.



#### Mutual interests of the communities and UNP

- Forest and agricultural lands are the most important land uses for Kisanji inhabitants as they provide various essential services.
- The UNP and Kisanji villagers have 2 main points of contention related to land use and access restrictions, that are creating tensions.



### Conclusions

- Ecosystem services, both material and non-material, play a critical role in enhancing community well-being in Pitas and Kisandji.
- Access to natural resources is a key determinant of ecosystem service benefits; in Pitas, this was hindered by land grabbing by the state and companies, while in Kisandji, conservation restrictions limited access.
- Improving access to ecosystem services and ensuring community rights and needs are considered is essential for sustainable well-being and equitable resource management.