



WEBINAR REPORT

SOUTH-EAST ASIA WEBINAR DECODE

DECOLONIZED, COMMUNITY-LED CO-CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE TOWARDS CLIMATE RESILIENCE (REGION: SOUTH-EAST ASIA)

22 May 2025 | 2pm – 4pm (Local Malaysia Time)

Qadim Hub, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia and Zoom Webinar Platform

LANGUAGE:

English, Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Melayu Sarawak

CASE STUDIES:

1. Modernizing Traditional Apong Production in Samarahan
2. Towards Inclusive Natural Resources Management in Indonesia (TIRAM)

SOUTH-EAST ASIA WEBINAR DECODE



Decolonized, Community-led Co-construction of Knowledge Towards Climate Resilience

- Modernizing Traditional Apong Production in Samarahan
- Towards Inclusive Natural Resources Management In Indonesia (TIRAM).

22 May, 2:30 -4:00pm



PANELISTS



COMMUNITY





DECODE PROJECT TEAM (QADIM HUB):

Assoc. Prof. Ts. Noraziah Abdul Wahab
Assoc. Prof. Dr Rafeah Wahid
Dr Ahmad Syafiq Ahmad Nasir
Dr Ana Sakura Zainal Abidin
Mr. Rasli Muslimen

WEBINAR ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

Mr Haslan Ottot
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Mdm Nur Faezah Taib

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

A total of 189 participants registered, with an impressive actual attendance of 245, reflecting strong interest and engagement. Attendees came from diverse backgrounds, including local and Indigenous community members, university academics and researchers, postgraduate and undergraduate students, NGO representatives, regional policymakers and advocates, as well as industry partners and project funders. The webinar also welcomed members from the Knowledge for Change (K4C) global network, reinforcing the international and cross-sectoral collaboration embedded in the DECODE initiative.

LINK TO STORYMAP

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/95987a732c2c499982c37086283b6f8b>



SPEAKERS:

	<p>Moderator</p> <p>Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rafeah Wahi</p> <p>Assoc. Prof. Dr Rafeah is currently the Director at University Sustainability Centre, UNIMAS. She is the former Qadim Hub Coordinator and is involved in managing various Community-Based Participatory research (CBPR) initiatives and trainings.</p>
	<p>Highlights of Emerging Key Messages</p> <p>Dr. Rajesh Tandon</p> <p>Dr. Tandon is a globally recognized leader in participatory research and development. He is the Founder-President of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), a global centre for participatory research and training established in 1982. He also serves as the Co-Chair of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. As a pioneer in participatory research, Dr. Tandon has redefined the relationship between researchers and those they study. He has served on numerous expert committees for the Government of India, the University Grants Commission, the United Nations, the Commonwealth, and the World Bank. In 2015, the Indian Adult Education Association (IAEA) honoured him with the Nehru Literacy Award.</p>
	<p>Case Study 1 Speaker</p> <p>Assoc. Prof. Ts. Noraziah Abdul Wahab</p> <p>Assoc. Prof. Ts. Noraziah is currently the Assistant Vice Chancellor (Industry-Community Network and Sustainability) of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. She is actively involved in community initiatives. One of her impactful works is on water treatment supply in Sarawak's rural schools.</p>



Case Study 1 Speaker

Dr Ana Sakura Zainal Abidin

Dr Ana Sakura is an academican at Faculty of Engineering, University Malaysia Sarawak. She has been working with the Penuak communities of Samarahan for more than 10 years. Her recent research projects focus on modernising traditional food processing methods, including pepper drying machine, automatic Kek Lapis Sarawak, Gula Apong production, and seafood smoked/drying machine.



Case Study 1 Speaker

Mr. Bujang bin Abang

Mr. Bujang bin Abang is a retired government officer actively involved in community development in Kampung Tambirat. After retiring in 2016, he became directly engaged with the JKKK Induk Kampung Tambirat. He is a key figure in the development of the Apong industry in Samarahan, working alongside UNIMAS. His experience from serving in the Sarawak Department of Irrigation and Drainage has been fully utilized in the development of Koperasi Apong Samarahan Berhad.



Case Study 1 Speaker

Mr. Abdul Nasir bin Buang

Mr. Nasir was introduced to Apong harvesting and sugar production by his father at the age of 10. By the time he was 15, he began harvesting independently, drawing from his early exposure and hands-on experience. To this day, he continues to harvest Apong and produces Apong sugar on a part-time basis.



Case Study 2 Speaker

Dr Mohamad Nasir

Dr. Mohamad Nasir is a legal scholar specializing in environmental law and natural resource management, with a doctoral degree from Radboud University, Netherlands. He has extensive experience in research, advocacy, and policy development, collaborating with NGOs, government agencies, and international organizations on environmental governance and law-making in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. His work includes managing significant projects like the SETAPAK program and the Tiram Research Project, aimed at enhancing participatory governance in regional resource management.



Regional Expert Panel 1

Assoc. Prof. Dr Asyirah binti Abdul Rahim

Assoc. Prof. Dr Asyirah is an Associate Professor at the Geography Section, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), where she also holds the position of Deputy Dean of Research, Innovation & Industry-Community Engagement. With a background in planning and environmental technology from USM, her research interests encompass urban ecology, ecosystem services assessment, circular economy, and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).



Regional Expert Panel 2

Prof. Dr Mahazan Abdul Mutalib

Prof. Dr Mahazan is a Professor at the Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). He is also a mentor at Mizan Hub, USIM's Knowledge for Change Hub.



The DECODE webinar speakers presenting from Qadim Hub, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak



WEBINAR SUMMARY

The DECODE Southeast Asia regional webinar brought together a vibrant multi-stakeholder dialogue involving university administrators, researchers, community leaders, and regional partners to explore decolonised, community-led knowledge as a foundation for climate resilience. Hosted in a hybrid format, the session featured a live forum at Qadim Hub, University Sustainability Centre, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), with Malaysian panellists attending in person and others joining remotely.

The webinar highlighted the collaborative efforts of Gula Apong producers from Kampung Tambirat, Asajaya Samarahan; researchers working to enhance traditional practices through innovation; and knowledge partners from K4C hubs, including the UNESCO Chair, Mizan Hub, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Hub, and Universitas Balikpapan, Indonesia. Discussions focused on aligning university mandates and government support with the pressing needs of local communities, ensuring that policy and practice meaningfully support grassroots realities.

Community representatives shared how participatory knowledge-building has led to tangible improvements in well-being, including increased income, reduced labour, and more quality time with family. These outcomes highlight how traditional ecological knowledge, when valued and strengthened, can enhance adaptive capacity and social resilience. The panel from Universitas Balikpapan introduced the Towards Inclusive Natural Resources Management in Indonesia (TIRAM) project, which advances inclusive governance and co-production of knowledge as tools for managing natural resources amid climate challenges.

Throughout the session, participants reflected on how decolonising knowledge systems fosters long-term, transformative partnerships between communities and institutions, laying the groundwork for resilient, equitable, and self-determined futures.

Keywords: Climate Resilience, Knowledge Co-creation, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), Decolonised Knowledge, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Social-Ecological Resilience, Gula Apong



WEBINAR AGENDA

Time	Session
2.00 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome and Opening Remarks• Highlights of Emerging Key Messages
2.20 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case Study 1: Modernizing Traditional Apung Production in Samarahan• Q&A
3.00 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case Study 2: Towards Inclusive Natural Resources Management In Indonesia (TIRAM)• Q&A
3.30 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional Panel Discussion and Reflections
4.00 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• End of webinar



WEBINAR FLOW

The DECODE Southeast Asia regional webinar, titled Decolonized, Community-led Co-construction of Knowledge Towards Climate Resilience, was conducted in a hybrid format, combining a live session at Qadim Hub, University Sustainability Centre, UNIMAS, with remote participation via Zoom Webinar. The session followed a structured format using a shared presentation deck to ensure coherence across speakers and regions. The flow of the webinar is outlined below:

Welcome and Opening Remarks (5 mins)

Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Dr Rafeah Wahi

The session opened with a territorial acknowledgement and a warm welcome by the moderator. She introduced the objectives of the webinar and emphasised DECODE's commitment to knowledge democracy and the importance of community-led climate action in Southeast Asia.

Highlights of Emerging Key Messages (15 mins)

Speaker: Dr Rajesh Tandon

Dr. Tandon provided a regional synthesis of key messages emerging from DECODE engagements across Asia. His remarks underlined the urgency of decolonising knowledge systems and positioning Indigenous and community-rooted practices at the centre of climate resilience strategies. He also highlighted the value of long-term, trust-based partnerships between universities, communities, and policy stakeholders.



The first session of DECODE Webinar, Highlights of Emerging Key Messages presented by Dr Rajesh Tandon (online)

Case Study 1: Modernizing Traditional Apong Production in Samarahan (30 mins)



Speakers:

Assoc. Prof. Ts. Noraziah Abdul Wahab
Dr Ana Sakura Zainal Abidin
Mr. Bujang Abang
Mr. Abdul Nasir Buang

This session highlighted a successful community-university partnership between researchers from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and the Penuak community of Kampung Tambirat. The session detailed how the project addressed the "dirty, difficult, and dangerous" challenges of traditional gula apong production through a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach. By co-designing innovations like a modern hybrid stove and introducing a new product, apong nectar, the initiative not only improved the safety and efficiency of production but also empowered the community economically. The establishment of the Koperasi Apong Samarahan (KASAMA) further strengthened the community's market position, demonstrating that a sustainable future for their heritage lies in modernizing practices while preserving traditional knowledge.

Among the key insights from the conversations captured during the webinar include:

Moderator: *Assoc. Prof. Ts. Noraziah, how does this Apong modernization project align with your university's long-term community engagement strategy, and what institutional mechanisms are in place to ensure that community-based participatory research (CBPR) like this receives adequate support and recognition?*

Assoc. Prof. Ts. Noraziah: *The Apong Modernization Project is a clear reflection of UNIMAS's long-term community engagement strategy, which is rooted in building authentic partnerships and co-creating knowledge with local communities. This vision is strongly aligned with one of UNIMAS's niche areas — Sustainable Community Transformation — positioning the university as a Community-Driven University for a Sustainable World.*

This commitment is further embodied in the DECODE Knowledge Project, which advances community-led knowledge movements by ensuring that research is not only for communities but also with and by communities. UNIMAS has institutionalized support for community-based participatory research (CBPR) through mechanisms that recognize, incentivize, and reward impactful engagement. These include integrating community engagement indicators into academic performance evaluations, providing competitive funding opportunities for projects that demonstrate strong participatory frameworks, and showcasing research that generates tangible socio-economic and cultural benefits.

To strengthen this agenda, UNIMAS is taking proactive steps to institutionalize CBPR by establishing the QADIM Hub as a dedicated platform to spearhead university-wide initiatives in community engagement and participatory research. The hub will serve as a focal point to connect academics, communities, policymakers, and industry stakeholders, creating a dynamic ecosystem that nurtures inclusive innovation and translates local wisdom into sustainable development solutions.



Through such efforts, UNIMAS reaffirms its role as a university that not only generates knowledge but also transforms it into meaningful action, ensuring that community voices remain central in shaping pathways toward resilience, sustainability, and shared prosperity.



Assoc. Prof. Ts. Noraziah speaking about the university's support that recognize and reward CBPR

Moderator: *Dr Ana, can you share how this project started? How did you ensure that the community's voice and traditional knowledge were central to the research design and decision-making process?*

Dr Ana Sakura: *The project began with a deep respect for the Penuak community and their traditional way of life. We knew we couldn't simply arrive with pre-conceived solutions. Instead, the project started as a genuine partnership, driven by a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach. We spent time with the community to truly understand their challenges and aspirations, recognizing that their traditional knowledge about the apong palms and the land was the most valuable asset.*

To ensure the community's voice was central was the most critical aspect of our work. We didn't just consult with them; we co-designed every step of the project with them. For example, the modern hybrid stove wasn't a product we developed in a lab and presented to them. We collaborated with the Penuak harvesters to understand their traditional boiling process, and together, we developed an innovation that addressed their needs, reduced their workload, and enhanced their health and safety. Similarly, we introduced apong nectar as a new product only after working with the community to ensure it didn't create unhealthy competition with their traditional gula apong business. This collaborative process ensured that all solutions were culturally appropriate and



sustainable, demonstrating that modernisation can go hand-in-hand with preserving cultural heritage.



Speakers for Case Study 1, including community representatives, shared their insights during the DECODE webinar session (from left to right: Mr. Bujang, Mr. Nasir, Dr. Rafeah, Assoc. Prof. Noraziah, and Dr. Ana Sakura)

Moderator: *What was your initial view when the researchers first approached the community to modernize Apong production?*

Mr. Bujang: *When the researchers first came, we were very happy to know that technology can improve our current ways of work and the marketability of our Apong products. The researchers didn't come to teach us or tell us what was wrong. Instead, they came to listen and to learn from us. They sat with us, they observed our methods, and they genuinely respected our traditional knowledge. They made us feel like partners, not just subjects of a study.*

Because of this trust, we were comfortable sharing our ideas. We worked together to co-design innovations, such as the hybrid stove, to improve our Apong work situation. This new stove was not just an invention from a lab; it was created from our experience and their knowledge. This collaboration showed us that modernization doesn't mean we have to abandon our traditions. It means we can make our work safer and more efficient while still honoring our heritage.

Moderator: *How has your role as a Penuak changed since you joined this modernization project and collaborated with the researchers?*

Mr. Nasir: *My role as a Penuak has not changed completely; it has been elevated. Our traditional knowledge remains the heart of everything we do. But now, thanks to the project, the work is much easier and safer.*



Before, the work was very hard. We spent long hours over open fires in a dirty and dangerous environment. Now, with the new hybrid stove, the process is faster, cleaner, and less dangerous. This makes the work more attractive for the younger generation, which is so important for the future of our community.

The session also showcased the pentahelix collaborative initiative between UNIMAS, Kampung Tambirat communities, the funding agency TERAJU, relevant government departments, and private sector actors. It highlighted the application of CBPR principles in developing hybrid Apong stoves that improve the efficiency of traditional Nypa sugar production while preserving Indigenous knowledge and strengthening community resilience. The session featured rich community narratives on how the initiative improved livelihoods, reduced physical labour, and enhanced quality of life.

Q&A Session 1 (20 mins)

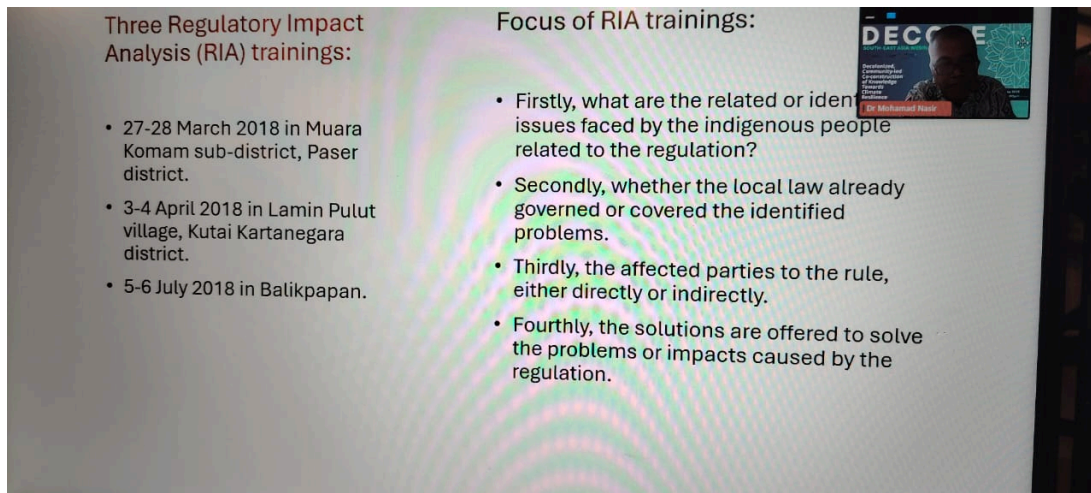
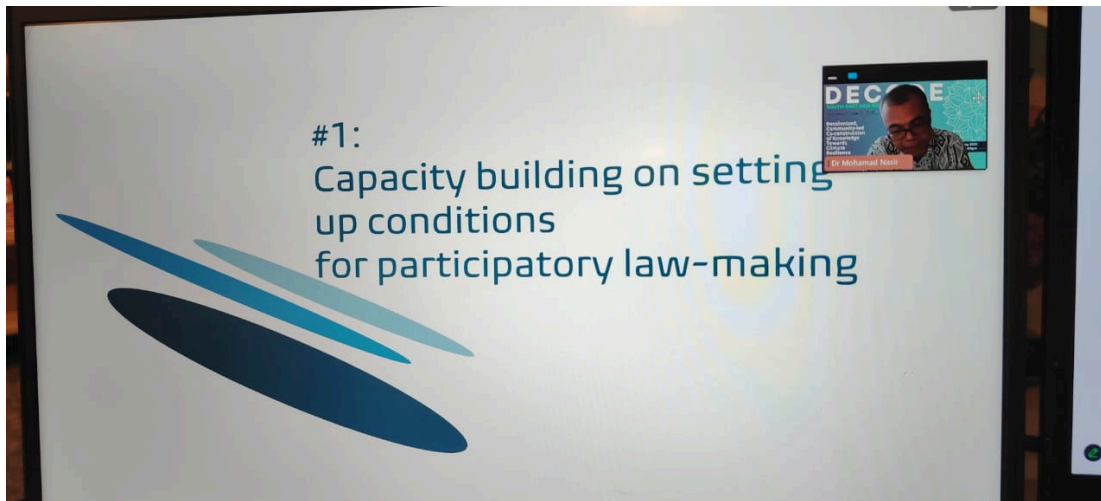
This interactive segment allowed participants to engage directly with the speakers. Questions centred around sustaining traditional knowledge amidst modernisation, university-community dynamics, and ensuring policy alignment with grassroots priorities.

Case Study 2 – Towards Inclusive Natural Resources Management in Indonesia (TIRAM) (15 mins)

Speaker:

Dr. Mohammad Nasir, Universitas Balikpapan, Indonesia

This case study addressed overlapping land-use conflicts in Indonesia and the marginalisation of Indigenous voices in natural resource governance. The TIRAM project, grounded in CBPR principles, worked to strengthen the capacity of Indigenous peoples and civil society organisations at the district and provincial levels to advocate for participatory, transparent, and equitable law-making. The presentation underlined how knowledge decolonisation strengthens legal empowerment and community agency in environmental stewardship.



Dr. Mohammad Nasir sharing on TIRAM project during the DECODE Webinar

Regional Panel Discussion and Reflections (30 mins)

Panellists:

Prof. Dr Mahazan Abdul Mutalib, Mizan Hub

Assoc. Prof. Dr Asyirah Abdul Rahim, USM K4C Hub

This panel brought together academic and community representatives to reflect on key themes across both case studies. Discussions focused on aligning university mandates and government funding with real community demands, sustaining CBPR partnerships, and the practical impacts of knowledge decolonisation. Community speakers emphasised how co-research has improved socio-economic outcomes and preserved their cultural identity in the face of climate pressures.



Regional panel discussion and reflections during the DECODE Webinar (From left to right: Top row: speakers at Qadim Hub & Dr. Nasir (UNIBA), Mid row: Prof. Mahazan (Mizan Hub) & Dr. Rajesh (UNESCO Chair CBR SR), Bottom row: Dr. Asyirah (USM K4C Hub)

Closing Remarks (5 mins)

The moderator summarised the key insights from the session and reiterated DECODE's commitment to fostering inclusive, community-centred climate resilience. The moderator also invited all participants to explore the StoryMap of the Apong Modernization Project, which has been shared in the chat box and is also displayed on the webinar screen. Participants were encouraged to continue engaging through future learning exchanges and documentation initiatives under the DECODE platform.



REFLECTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS

This is a reflection obtained from one of the participants of the seminar, namely Miss Hidayah from Brunei Darussalam. She wrote;

“The webinar was highly informative and gave me a deeper understanding of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Through case studies and shared research experiences, I saw how CBPR values community involvement—not just as participants, but as active partners in shaping research outcomes. It highlighted the importance of collaboration, mutual respect, and shared decision-making.

One presentation that stood out was the Apong Modernization Project in Samarahan, Sarawak. I learned how apong is traditionally made and how the researcher built trust by engaging the community respectfully and without judgment. Another powerful example was the TIRAM project in Indonesia, which showed how indigenous communities were included in managing natural resources and making environmental decisions.

As this was my first regional academic webinar, it was a valuable learning experience. I gained not only knowledge of CBPR but also a better understanding of the technical and ethical aspects of organizing inclusive research. It has inspired me to further explore participatory research and community development in the future”

KEY MESSAGES FROM THE WEBINAR

The DECODE Southeast Asia regional webinar surfaced critical insights on how decolonised, community-led knowledge systems contribute directly to strengthening climate resilience. Through two rich case studies and regional dialogue, several key messages emerged:

Indigenous Knowledge Systems are Foundational to Climate Resilience

- Traditional ecological knowledge held by local and Indigenous communities provides deep-rooted, place-based strategies that support climate adaptation and sustainable resource management.
- The Apong Penuak community in Kampung Tambirat exemplifies this, where generations have sustained their livelihoods and preserved ecosystems through the traditional production of Gula Apong (nypa sugar).
- However, community members expressed concern about the continuity of this practice, as younger generations are increasingly reluctant to engage in Penuak work due to its association with the “3D” nature; dirty, dangerous, and difficult.
- The work involves long hours, exposure to physical hazards, and high labour intensity, which is further exacerbated by climate-related challenges.



- Monsoon seasons bring flooding and dangerous terrain, making harvesting and processing risky, while prolonged droughts reduce sap flow and damage the fragile nypa ecosystem.
- While existing innovations and technologies introduced by researchers have helped improve production efficiency and reduce labour intensity, these are not yet sufficient to fully overcome the growing challenges posed by climate change and the harsh working conditions.
- There is a strong need for continued innovation co-developed with the community, to ensure the sustainability of the practice, protect livelihoods, and support intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Community-Academic Partnerships Must Centre Mutual Respect and Long-term Engagement

- The success of community-based participatory research (CBPR) relies on sustained collaboration that recognises and upholds community agency as central to the research and development process.
- The Apong project serves as a model of this approach, developed through a pentahelix partnership that includes Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), local Apong harvesters, government agencies, project funders, and industry actors.
- This multi-stakeholder collaboration highlights the importance of co-learning, mutual respect, cultural humility, and inclusive decision-making in achieving equitable and sustainable development outcomes.
- Industry partners play a vital role in supporting local economies by helping to commercialise community products, improve supply chains, and provide market access, while ensuring that value creation remains community-centred.
- The right engagement strategies are crucial to prevent misunderstandings and conflict between stakeholders. Trust-building, open communication, and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems are essential foundations.
- When all involved parties: academia, industry and the community are equipped with CBPR skills and approaches, the collaboration becomes more coherent and impactful.
- A shared understanding of participatory principles ensures that efforts are aligned, outcomes are jointly owned, and the benefits of development are equitably distributed, thus maximising impact for all parties.

Language, Rituals, and Heritage as Climate Tools



- Beyond scientific methods, local communities draw upon oral narratives, seasonal rituals, and inherited practices to respond to environmental changes. These cultural expressions encode valuable climate-related knowledge and promote social cohesion, strengthening a community's adaptive capacity across generations.
- Through the Penuak initiative, such Indigenous knowledge is now being systematically documented for future reference. This includes harvesting cycles, ecological indicators, production methods, and cultural practices, ensuring this knowledge is not lost but made accessible for education, preservation, and intergenerational learning.
- The documentation process has created opportunities for mutual learning: communities gain recognition for their knowledge systems, while academics, students, policymakers, and industry stakeholders gain culturally contextual insights that would otherwise be inaccessible.
- The DECODE StoryMap platform acts as a living digital archive that facilitates knowledge democratisation. It enables both local and global communities to access, contribute to, and adapt these learnings for their own climate resilience strategies.
- This initiative not only empowers communities by valuing and protecting their intellectual and cultural contributions but also benefits universities, funders, and practitioners by offering a grounded, community-validated knowledge base for collaborative action.
- By promoting cross-cultural learning and sharing, the platform creates a global discourse space that enhances climate adaptation efforts, fosters solidarity, and builds inclusive pathways to sustainability for all parties involved.

The Apong Penuak Story as a Beacon of Traditional Innovation

The integration of hybrid stoves to modernise traditional Apong production without displacing cultural practices exemplifies how innovation can emerge from within traditional systems. Here, knowledge is not "transferred" but co-evolved through intergenerational learning and shared lived experiences.

Regional and Global Collaboration is Essential to Reframing Climate Discourse

Platforms like DECODE and the Knowledge for Change (K4C) network offer critical spaces to amplify grassroots voices, promote South-South learning, and reframe climate resilience narratives through pluralistic, decolonial lenses. The TIRAM from Universitas Balikpapan illustrated how inclusive governance and local lawmaking processes contribute to sustainable natural resource management.

Community Knowledge Leads to Tangible Impact

Community voices during the webinar attested to the real-world impacts of participatory knowledge-building — including increased income, improved well-being, reduced labour intensity, and more time for social life. These benefits underscore the practical value of co-produced knowledge in addressing both environmental and social vulnerabilities.



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-End-