

# Developing Nyambu Village into an ecotourism destination

Environmentally friendly Nyambu Village in Tabanan, Bali, was recently launched as an ecotourism destination, with support pouring in from various stakeholders.

Painter I Nyoman Wijaya enthusiastically explained Bali's traditional *subak* agricultural system to a group of journalists joining a rice field trek in Nyambu Village, Tabanan, Bali, recently.

The 44-year-old told the curious urbanites about the centuries-old system, under which the water gate — one of the *subak* community's vital assets — allowed for a fair distribution of water.

"Under Bali's *subak* traditional farming system, there are many water channels, keeping the farmland wet at all times," he said amid the sound of a small stream flowing.

"A wet rice field not only stimulates the breeding of eels, snails and other rice field inhabitants, but it also effectively curbs the presence of mice, one of the paddy pests, because mice prefer to live on dry land," he said.

He added that *kangkung* (water spinach) and other kinds of vegetables also grew in the wet rice field.

The well-retained local wisdom of *subak* reflects the philosophical concept of Tri Hita Karana, which brings together the realms of the spirit, the human world and nature.

Under the clear sky, the trekkers also made several stops, listening to Nyoman tell them about water temples found in the rice field, the many agriculture-related rituals and the nearby Yasung River, one of the big rivers in the island of gods, which keeps flowing throughout the year.

Upon reaching a small temple near a tall and shady tree, he told the group about how in his childhood, he used to play with his friends under the tree. "The tree was already here when I was a child," he said while looking up at the tree.

Trekking along the clean and peaceful rice fields with their cultural water temples was a pleasant sample of the tourist attractions that Nyambu Village is offering.

The walk was conducted one day after the official launch of community-based Nyambu Village ecotourism program, officially called Desa Wisata Ekologis (DWE) Nyambu.

Nyambu Village, which in the pre-independence period was called Mundah Village, is located in Kediri subdistrict, Tabanan Regency, about one-hour's drive from Ngurah Rai Airport, Denpasar.

The community-based ecotourism program in Nyambu is expected to fare well as it has received great support and commitment from various stakeholders amid the rising issue of the farmland conversion. Hectares of farmland in Bali have reportedly been converted into hotels.

The community-based Nyambu ecotourism program is being run collaboratively, involving the British Council, Yayasan Wisnu, Diageo and PT Langgeng Kreasi Jayaprima (LKJ), with each playing its role according to their respective expertise.

Country director of British Council Indonesia, Sally Goggin explained how its engagement in the DWE Nyambu program was very much in line with the organization's long-established vision of bringing friendly knowledge and understanding between people in the world.

She said that under its social program, the British Council was eager to participate in contributing to social and economic development, which helped improve local people's prosperity and inclusive development.

"Tourism is one of the main economic sectors in Indonesia. The sustainable tourism program conducted jointly by several partners aimed to stimulate economic growth in the village by improving the capacity of local people in managing the potential that they possess," she said.

Diageo chief representative Adam Djokovic expressed his support for the launch of DWE Nyambu. "We hope that this program can bring positive benefit to boost the people's economy.

"Nyambu Village has ecological and historical tourism potential thanks to its existing rice fields, springs and cultural contact and long history dating back to ancient Bali (around the eighth century until the 13<sup>th</sup>), the era of Majapahit



Photos Courtesy of British Council Indonesia

**Pollution-free air:** A wet rice field in Nyambu Village, Tabanan, Bali, is an attractive form of local ecotourism. Strong commitments from the locals have protected the green asset.

influence (the 14<sup>th</sup> century), until this day," he said.

Under the program, the community was not only involved in mapping and managing the village's tourism, but also had the opportunity to learn more about the long history of the village. "This activity will strengthen Nyambu people's cultural and historical identity," he said.

## Good will

The launch also reflects the goodwill of local authorities, who do not want tourism development to occur at the expense of nature, particularly rice fields.

Tabanan Regent Ni Putu Eka Wiryastuti underscored the crucial role village tourism played in improving villagers' prosperity, saying that village tourism places a community's potential first. "It is unnecessary to build many hotels as villagers are the actors [of ecotourism development] who can reap the benefits," she said.

Foreign tourists can enjoy the stunning natural landscape and culinary delights. "The development of village tourism will be able to limit farmland conversion," she said.

Therefore, greater effort will have to be made to help the

farmers, she said. "We have a regional bylaw that favors farmers and we encourage them to maintain their farmland through various ways, including developing village tourism," she told *The Jakarta Post* following the opening of the DWE Nyambu.

Locals are also strongly support ecotourism.

Nyambu Village is only 25 meters away from a road along which various industries have started to flourish, leaving it "highly vulnerable to changes due to increased urbanization," Nyoman said.

"But we are determined to save our farmland from urbanization," he said.

Nyambu village head Ida Bagus Putu Sunarbawa said her local predecessors had created a regulatory system that limited the development (of housing) on farmland.

"If there is a shift in function, which is personal in nature, there is a lengthy study, either at the administrative village or custom village level," he said.

"Two or three weeks are needed to study whether a piece of farmland can be shifted in function or not. Besides, the buyer's commitment to environmental preservation should



**Cultural heritage:** A local guide talks about a Balinese *pura* (temple) to a group of journalists.

be ensured beforehand," he said.

With ecotourism, "we are able to protect the environment and conserve our culture", he said.

He assured that the program was sustainable, saying that every new village head is obliged to refer to a six-year village program when it comes to policy.

"All representatives of *banjar* [Balinese customary villages] have jointly agreed to empower local people to develop ecotourism," he said.

Diageo's corporate relation manager Dendy Borman said that in parallel with the company's vision to grow together with the community in which it operates, the company would continue to support the program.

Sally Goggin added that sustainability started from the beginning of the program. "Leaving the skills, know-how and network to the village is how to make the program sustainable," she said. **(Sudibyo M. Wiradji)**

## Unlocking village potential

To enable the ecotourism program in Nyambu Village to run effectively, the British Council and Diageo collaborate with Yayasan Wisnu, an organization that focuses on ecotourism development in Bali, as well as local authorities and intellectuals and they also work to engage young people as the beneficiaries of the program.

With a population of 3,400 people, 30 percent of whom are young people, Nyambu Village had yet to realize its huge potential until the ecotourism program was introduced a year ago.

"Our role is to facilitate the [development] process because we possess the required methodology or technical expertise in social enterprise. We partner with Yayasan Wisnu because, apart from living in Bali, the team from Yayasan Wisnu speak the local language," said British Council Indonesia's senior program manager Ari Sutanti.

"Yayasan Wisnu also has similar experiences in developing community-based village tourism," she added.

Local village head, Ida Bagus Putu Sunarbawa, applauded the DWE Nyambu program, which kicked off in February 2015, as a new and positive program.

## Empowerment

"Environment-based tourism requires a commitment to environmental protection by, for example, regularly containing the rubbish and adopting eco-principles," explained Ida.

"We develop eco tourism by considering all risks and consequences. The primary point is to maintain the natural environment and cultural heritage so that the goals of ecotourism can be achieved," he added.

The advantage that the village people gain through collaboration with the British Council, Diageo and other organizations is extra education. "Empowerment is major capital in village development," he said.



Courtesy of British Council Indonesia

**Village cuisine:** A trainer encourages village women to develop local culinary delights as part of a treat to visitors.

I Made Suarnatha of Yayasan Wisnu said that local communities have been involved in the program from the preparation and planning through to the development and implementation phase and "this has brought about a positive result as they each gained confidence in the potential that they possess".

Young people were asked to think analytically about what and whom are in favor of a mass-oriented tourism industry.

"They now realize that tourism does not necessarily mean the opportunity to work in cafes, hotels, and or travel agencies in the city. With the DWE Nyambu concept, they became aware of the potential they can tap," he said.

For example, the farmland that covers 61 percent of the 348,7 hectare-Nyambu village is an asset they would like to develop for the future, one which they protect through *awig-awig pararem*, or customary village regulation.

Founder of the Hanacaraka Society, Sugi Lanus, also known for his work as a *lontar* (palm leaf manuscript) researcher, was involved in cultural mapping in which young

people initiated the unearthing of local cultural legacies and conducted "research on oral history".

As many as 20 young people took part in the six-month-long cultural mapping project, which included identifying strengths and potential, in an effort to identify cultural and historical identity.

Researchers collected information from elderly people whom shared memories pertaining to temples scattered across Nyambu Village.

"My role is to assist them in the appreciation-deserving process and if and when they are unsure about the data, they contact me for consultation on the issue," he said.

The young people held a regular FGD (Focus Group Discussion) regarding their findings, after which they wrote down the compiled information. "In this way, they gathered a complete historical picture and they are happy with their findings," he said.

Local youth were surprised to find that the village had 67 temples and "that Mundah village was an ancient Balinese village with a history that dates back to the eighth century, prior to the Majapahit

Kingdom in 14<sup>th</sup> century", he said.

Research also recorded the journey of Dang Hyang Niratha, a spiritual guru from the Majapahit Kingdom, who once visited Mundah to disseminate Hindu teachings," he said.

## First chapter

Launched recently, the first chapter in the history of Nyambu Village will soon be accompanied by a second chapter, which "might focus more on the interpretation or the richness of meaning," said Sugi who enjoys reading *lontar*.

Findings related to the 67 temples, 22 springs and over 50 percent of its 348,7 hectare-rice fields have raised awareness among local communities about the importance of maintaining and safeguarding assets for sustainable ecotourism development.

Thanks to natural and cultural potential, DWE Nyambu is varied in terms of tourism products and focused on maximizing potential. Currently, in addition to rice field trails, visitors are offered the opportunity to experience a culture trail and or village bicycle tours. **(JP)**

## DWE Nyambu favors locals

The launch of Nyambu Village as an ecotourism destination has started to favor local residents, including executives of the community- and environment-based program.

Niluh Dewi Darmini, 22, a graduate of senior high school who joined the ecotourism management program, for instance, said the training program had allowed her to broaden her horizons, boosting her confidence in her options for working in village tourism.

She no longer sees working in the tourist industry as limited to hotels in Denpasar or other cities, as many of her peers do.

"When the ecotourism in my village develops, I will try to persuade my friends working in tourism in the city to return to the village to work here. If they can get an income here, the amount of which is comparable to what they receive in the city, why shouldn't they work here?" said the DWE Nyambu manager of finance.

I Nyoman Wijaya, a painter who is currently also a manager of product development under the DWE Nyambu initiative, said that since the program was introduced, demand for painting workshops had increased significantly.

"A painting course is included on the program, which is great for me," said Nyoman, who runs a relatively new homestay next to his studio.

Satya, 34, a director of the Nyambu DWE, said that local people had been made more aware of the need to keep the environment clean as an impact of the ecotourism program. "In the past I disposed of garbage anywhere, but now I dispose of it in the proper place," said Satya, who runs a welding workshop.

Based on feedback from visitors during the three-month-long trial period, "we learned the importance of keeping environment clean".

Satya also works as a guide, though he prefers to be called a *krama* (a friend of visitors).

He acknowledged that in the past he had no self-confidence, especially when speaking before the audience but "the training program for guides that I took part in changed my life. I now feel highly confident when speaking before guests".

Aside from the increased awareness about ecotourism among local people, DWE Nyambu has also stimulated artistic and cultural activities, such as painting workshops and arts performances.

"The existing traditional Balinese dance and music groups have increased the frequency of their rehearsals because of an increased request for shows," said local village head Ida Bagus Putu Sunarbawa.

Niluh Putu Kristina Yanti, 17, a dancer, said with a smile that prior to the program, she danced once a week when there was an event but now, "I am invited to dance almost every day." **(JP)**

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