



gle around us. We would like the Government to help us build better houses and provide us with a school and a clinic."

Another Penan man described their situation: "We feel like a fish out of water with our forests gone. For the companies to come and rob us of our forests is the same as us going down to the towns and just taking what we want from the shops."

With their forest resources devastated, the Penan are having to learn to grow rice to survive. They also now spend a lot of their time making handcrafts to sell down the river, so they can supplement their meagre diet with tinned fish and sago out of a packet. But even the craft materials – mostly rattan – are becoming more difficult to find. Many of the children have infected sores, indicating some major deficiencies. Since the logging malaria has become common. For the Penan to live off the forests they need to have large areas of mature forest, to provide them with a sustainable source of forest produce such as sago, fruit, vegetables, herbs, rattan and wild animals.

The intact forest also provides valuable soil protection, leaving the rivers and streams clean. Although logging in Sarawak removes only about ten trees per hectare, between 40 and 50 percent of the forest is destroyed by roading, skid tracks, loading yards and damage during felling and extraction. The torrential tropical rains quickly wash the exposed soil down the steep hill sides into the river systems.

One of the worst aspects of logging the supposed "sustained yield managed permanent forest estate", is the very short cutting cycle. Some areas I visited were being cut over again after only eight years, whereas the

Government claims all logging is on a 25 or 40-year rotation. A recent study found that in no way are the present logging practices sustainable. All the primary forests available for timber production are due to be harvested within 11 years (see box). No thought is given to the sustainability of the non-timber values of the forest or the lifestyles of the tribal forest people.

Any hope of the Government stepping in to aid the people or halt this forest destruction is a pipe dream. The Government does not recognize the land rights of the tribal people, not

even on legal customary land (in June 1990 the High Court ruled that the natives had no right to challenge the validity of a logging licence issued on their customary land). Malaysian government policy is "to bring all jungle dwellers into the mainstream of society." In the words of the Malaysian Prime Minister, who was recently elected for another term, "there's nothing romantic about these helpless, half-starved and disease-ridden people". The bottom line in all this, is the immense wealth that is generated by the 'mining' of the forests.



The banks of the Baram River are lined for kilometres with stacked logs awaiting export. Photo: Grant Rosoman