Bouven Digoel Regency was known as Upper Digoel under the reign of the Dutch East Indies and is located on the riverside of Digoel Downstream River. Many Indonesians recognise Boven Digoel as the place to which national heroes, like Sukarno, were banished. Digoel is located only 25-100 meter above sea level and a small portion of the region consists of peatlands and swamps. The region is relatively hot with high precipitation in the last few years (420.9 mm).

However, villages of Boven Digoel Regency store abundant natural resources. One of them is Ampera Village. Its forest is still untouched and well-preserved. Likewise, its rivers are clean and pollution-free. Surprisingly, there has not been any land clearing for commercial purposes in this village. Forest is important to the lives of the surrounding inhabitants because it is their source of food and serves for other economic purposes, such as hunting location and energy storage (wood). Rivers in Ampera Village are rich of fishes. It seems like fresh fishes consumed by the people of Ampera and Tanah.

“Usually, the entire family [wife, husband, and their children] go along to the woods. Together with other families, they rent a boat. The travel is usually two-day long. When they return, they bring various groceries. Most of the time, they bring gourami and fends or melinjo leaves which are easy to find in the woods,”

USAID LESTARI: STORY FROM THE FIELD
Merah Villages will not run out anytime soon.

Every morning, Ampera Village, located in Mambabibo District, is crowded by young and old women walking in throngs while carrying their children to a small harbor. Most of them are going grocery shopping. Among the crowd, there are two boats at the end of the harbor. The people in there are having a conversation with their female customers about what they have on their boats.

“I have gourami, banana, ferns and pork. What do you want to take?” said one of the man. Two women replied, “Take the ferns and gourami here!” This view is the daily routine of the people of Ampera. People purchase groceries from fishermen and hunters who have just returned.

To hunt pigs, vegetables and other commodities; they usually use one boat rented by several families.

Located on a riverside, the people of Ampera’s common mode of transportation is motorboat. They use motorboat to get back and forth to the woods. They also use the vehicle to sell agricultural commodities and to travel to nearby villages, such as Tanah Merah, the capital city of Boven Digoel Regency.

“Usually, the entire family [wife, husband, and their children] go along to the woods. Together with other families, they rent a boat. The travel is usually two-day long. When they return, they bring various groceries. Most of the time, they bring gourami and fends or melinjo leaves which are easy to find in the woods,” explained Richard Maa, one of the women figures and a teacher in YPPK Santa Theresia Kaliwin Elementary School in Ampera.

Even though this region is rich in natural resources, Hesron Maa, a member of Village Forum Organisation (Bamuskam), warned, “There has not been any official law regulating the management of forest and natural resources. They are still developed. What is currently recognised by the people is an agreement about division of forest and utilisation of natural resources between villages and family clans.”

The people have tribunal hereditary rules, such as the one regulating what kind of trees that can not be cut down in order to preserve it as materials for building boats or other public facilities later. There is also a rule that prohibits stealing resources from other villages or family clans. The people are also encouraged to hunt with traditional tools like arrow. Each family clan is responsible for the enforcement of the rules. In Ampera Village, there are four sacred places believed by the people as the place where their ancestors used to live.

Despite having tribunal laws, the people are also paying attention to the state’s regulations, for example the one that prohibits hunting endangered animals, including cenderawasih and deer. Hesron added, “All locations, in the forest, in the village and surrounding it, have been clearly regulated by hak ulayat. There has never been an overlap of hak ulayat between different family clans or villages.”

People in Ampera Village originally come from Auyu Tribe. Other existing tribes/family clans living in the village are Haagami, Tifahagi, Sakmahagi, Mofahagi, Nohohagi, Sifirhagi, Mukri, Abogahagi, Mabo, Sinfahagi, Habito, Yame dan Nawisi. For the people of Ampera, forest and rivers are their source of livelihood. They believe every corner of their forest and river has to be protected. It is already a communal agreement that they must be preserved for the sake of the people’s livelihood.

There are 101 households and 457 people living in Ampera Village. The Village is one of four villages targeted by USAID LESTARI program in Boven Digoel. USAID LESTARI program tries to ensure that resources of regions like this are kept preserved.
Protecting and preserving the forests and river for future sustainability.