

# Killer mudslide due to tampering of forest: UMS

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KOTA KINABALU: The opening of forests for oil palm cultivation may have contributed to the numerous landslides in the vicinity of Sen Fu Sdn Bhd Estate in Tongod where eight lives were lost in a mudslide last Saturday.

Eleven people, believed to be family members living inside a workers quarters at the estate, became the victims. Their quarters was believed to be within the watercourse of a stream, settlers there identified as Sungai Lidan. Three survived the ordeal.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah Natural Disaster Research Centre Director Dr Felix Tongkul suspects a major landslide uphill had made its way to Sungai Lidan and choked its watercourse and the pressure that built up caused the devastating landslide.

“One of the landslides, located further downstream appears to have blocked the path of the stream (Sungai Lidan). This probably produced a temporary dam which later broke when the landslide upstream occurred and resulted in the debris flow,” he said.

Dr Tongkul was at the site on Tuesday to study the landslides along with members from the UMS centre. They used a drone to capture aerial images of the mudslide. The small stream uphill was where those staying in workers’ quarters drew their water supply from.

Dr Tongkul’s views, however, differed from that of the Fire and Rescue Department which said it noted a catchment had been dug up by plantation workers. Continuous rainfall caused it to burst, thus, causing the landslide.

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Signs of the mudslide making its way to the workers’ quarters beside the Sungai Pinangah. Picture courtesy of Peter Chau for UMS Natural Disaster Research Centre.