Bamboo has always played an important role in the daily life of the people of Tambunan. The edible shoots make a delicious dish or tasty bamboo shoot pickle or “Bosou Hobang” in the local dialect. The stem on the other hand has been widely used for making fence and in house building. The current massive bamboo “plantations” in Tambunan did not start by accident. It was actually initiated by the vision and efforts of two men in the late 1930s’. These two men, a Native Chief and a Forest Guard, through their active collaboration had established a legacy of bamboo planting in Tambunan.

Bamboo Utilisation in the 1930s’
Under the British North Borneo Chartered Company rule, the people of Tambunan, who were warring tribes since time immemorial, finally laid tribal animosity to rest. With peace prevailing across Tambunan, the people had more time to practice agriculture and animal husbandry. The establishment of networks of irrigation canals opened more land for padi fields. Perimeter fencing of the padi field was done to protect this crop from intrusions by people and animals. All these activities especially the construction of perimeter fencing required a large amount of bamboo supply. Since bamboo did not last long when used outdoors such as for fences, it was always in demand in Tambunan.

OKK Taliban, the first Native Chief of Tambunan, under the British North Borneo Chartered Company, realized that in the late 1930s’, the district had undergone a serious crisis in the supply of bamboo as building material. This was due to the over harvesting of natural bamboo by the people of Tambunan then. When the supply of bamboo became critical, many people in Tambunan resorted to stealing their neighbours’ bamboo resource. A lot of these thieves ended up being tried in OKK Taliban’s open native court. In his usual rounding up verdict in such trials, he urged the people not to steal but to plant their own building and food resources. These included bamboo, rattan as well as fruit trees.

The Forestry Department’s Intervention
Taliban’s advise although sound and wise however fell to deaf ears and could not avert the impending “bamboo crash” in Tambunan. Fed up by the poor response, OKK Taliban then sought help from the Tambunan Forestry Department. In 1935, a young Peter Lupang Tingkalus from Bingkor, Keningau, joined the Forestry Department as a Forest Guard. That same year he was sent to S.M.S Forest School, Kepong. On his return in 1936, he was sent to Tambunan. Together with OKK Taliban, Lupang initiated the controlled harvesting and planting of bamboos in the District soon after that.

From the Forestry Annual Report of 1937, it was evident that as early as 1932, the government had exercised regulations on the extraction of bamboos in Tambunan whereby permits were required before the extraction of bamboos could be allowed. The staggering figure of 40,450 mature bamboo stems harvested in 1937 was a testimony to the high bamboo demand in Tambunan at that time.

Forest Guard Peter Lupang established a policy requiring every bamboo permit holder to plant ten (10) culms of bamboo for every bamboo stem extracted. This policy was highly successful as the bamboo resources in the district had increased tremendously and thereby created a bamboo planting culture in Tambunan. This culture had created the massive bamboo plantations seen in Tambunan nowadays.