

Improving social forestry in Indonesia

Recommendations for CSOs



Summary

- The social forestry programme in Indonesia allows communities to apply for different types of forest rights. The programme aims to improve economic opportunities for communities while also promoting forest protection.
- We consulted Indonesian professionals representing civil society, academia and the government, and asked them about the programme's outcomes, how the conditions for success can be improved, and the potential role of civil society organisations (CSOs).
- There is consensus that the social forestry programme helped reduce tenure conflicts between the government, companies and communities, but in terms of generating local economic opportunities and improving livelihoods, the outcomes have been disappointing.
- The environmental outcomes are mixed. In some cases, communities with a social forestry permit are actively engaged in forest protection or rehabilitation. These tend to be communities that receive CSO support. In some other cases, permit holders are converting the forest, and selling the land to outsiders, even though this is illegal.
- So far, efforts by the government and many CSOs have been focusing primarily on accelerating the granting of permits to communities, while there has been little follow-up support for communities, after they have received their permits.
- We recommend that CSOs focus more on the post-licensing phase, promoting viable sustainable forest management through: evidence-based documentation and communication, stepping-up lobby and advocacy efforts for institutional strengthening, and direct support at the community level.

Introduction

More than 30% of the villages in Indonesia are located in and around state forest land (*Kawasan Hutan*). Millions of people depend on state forest land for their livelihoods, although they may not have the government's permission to use or manage these resources. This has been a major source of conflict and tenure insecurity for decades. In response, the Indonesian government took on the ambitious goal to provide communities with formal rights to 12.7 million hectares of state forest lands between 2014 and 2019, through its social forestry programme. The programme distinguishes between five collective tenure models (Table 1). The first three are temporary permits to access, use, and manage the forest, and exclude others.

The fourth is a co-management agreement between a forest user group and a government or business entity (this model was originally implemented by state forest companies on Java). The fifth category (Customary Forest) involves a full transfer of ownership rights to an indigenous community. Through the social forestry programme, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) expects that local communities will be able to improve their incomes, while protecting and rehabilitating the forest resources. According to the MoEF, by June 2020, social forestry permits were awarded for a total of 4.2 million hectares — almost a third of the original target. Most of the awarded social forestry permits have been for Village Forests.

Table 1. Social Forestry models in Indonesia

Model	Form	Period	Target group
Community Forestry (HKm)	Permit	35 years	Forest user group
Village Forest (HD)	Permit	35 years	Village
Community Plantation Forest (HTR)	Permit	35 years	Community business group
Partnership (<i>Kemitraan</i>)	Agreement	Variable	Forest user group near forest enterprise
Customary Forest (HA)	Recognition	No time limit	indigenous community

Approach

We conducted a review of Indonesia’s social forestry programme, aiming to assess its environmental and livelihood outcomes, and identify ways to improve these outcomes and the role that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) can play in this. The review consisted of a desk study, interviews with 15 respondents from the government, academia and CSOs, many of whom work closely with local communities, followed by a workshop with 15 participants representing CSOs.

Acceleration

Parts of the discussions during interviews and the workshop focussed on the government’s efforts to accelerate the implementation of the social forestry programme. This acceleration started in 2016, when the government realised that progress since 2014 had been very slow. There were limited government resources to support the programme, especially at the local level, where proposals submitted by local communities need to be verified by government officials. Moreover, application processes were lengthy and complex, making communities dependent on the support of CSOs, especially for the preparation of a formal map that is required for an application. In response, the government simplified the formalisation procedures, and teamed up with CSOs in an effort to speed up the formalisation process and expand the area under permits.

Indicative Map for Social Forestry

As part of its efforts to accelerate the programme, the MoEF developed an Indicative Map for Social Forestry – also known by its Indonesian acronym PIAPS. The map identifies 13.9 million hectares of land within the state forest zone that can potentially be allocated to communities under the social forestry programme. An analysis of the PIAPS in West Kalimantan Province by Tropenbos Indonesia (Widayati et al., 2019) showed that many of the potential areas on the map are located far away from communities, while areas where communities are currently already practicing agroforestry are often not included. The map could thus be further improved, by explicitly including these areas. It is also suggested that areas that are under inactive plantation concessions should be considered for social forestry permits as well.

Decentralisation

In the implementation of the social forestry programme, the MoEF seems to prefer working with national CSOs

rather than through lower governments. Respondents and workshop participants agreed that further accelerating the social forestry programme would require more decentralisation, i.e., the central government should provide resources to provincial governments to implement the programme. Based on MoEF’s Regulation Number 83/2016, it is possible to devolve authority to implement social forestry to the provincial government, as long as the provincial government includes social forestry into its Regional Development Mid-term Plan (RPJMD). By decentralising the social forestry programme, the central government can mobilise regional and local resources more effectively, and permit procedures can be made more efficient. In particular, social forestry implementation could benefit greatly from the active involvement of Forest Management Units (KPH) at the district level. Forest Management Units have so far showed little interest in social forestry schemes, as they do not want to ‘give up’ their direct control over the state forest land.

Outcomes of social forestry permits

We asked respondents for their opinions regarding the outcomes of the social forestry programme in terms of, among others, community-level governance, tenure security, conflict resolution, forest conservation and livelihood improvement. Below we summarise the main findings of this assessment. They primarily refer to community forestry (HKm) and Village Forests (HD), being the most common social forestry permits.

Community-level governance

To acquire a social forestry permit, a community will have to establish a formal governance body, such as a social forestry management group (LPHD), a forest farmer group (KTH), or a cooperative. However, local capacity is usually limited. Also, respondents stressed that there is a risk that these new structures become dominated by local elites, with little participation of women and marginalised groups. This is especially the case when governance structures are developed in a rushed and top-down manner, pushed by the government’s recent drive to accelerate the programme, leading to inadequate participation of community members.

Tenure security and conflict reduction

We asked respondents about the effectiveness of social forestry permits in providing tenure security to communities. Most agreed that permits increased security, because they helped to prevent land grabbing by other

actors, especially large-scale companies. Several respondents argued that the social forestry programme had decreased tensions between local communities, companies and forestry officers of the government. However, some respondents commented that social forestry permits did not always take away all conflicts over land and resources. They referred to several cases in East Java and North Sumatra, where social forestry permits even aggravated conflicts, for example because the permit areas overlapped with plantation concessions.

Although many respondents claimed that the social forestry programme had helped to decrease conflicts between communities and the government, this did not apply across the board. There were communities and CSOs that rejected the concept of social forestry — with the exception of the Customary Forest (HA). This was because they did not recognise the state's claim as legitimate owner of the forest land.

Conservation and livelihood outcomes

Overall, most respondents and workshop participants considered social forestry permits effective in preventing deforestation by outsiders. This is because social forestry permits make it impossible for commercial companies to obtain logging or plantation concessions for those areas. In some cases, communities with social forestry permits are actively engaged in protection or rehabilitation. This is especially the case when there is CSO support to develop such activities. However, there have also been cases where social forestry permits resulted in increased pressure on the forest from within the community itself. This was, for example, the case in the Village Forest of Muara Merang in South Sumatra. Rather than using the Village Forest for community-based forest management, individual villagers started cultivating agricultural fields within the Village Forest area, and then proceeded to lease or sell those lands to outsiders, ignoring the provision that Village Forest lands are not alienable.

Regarding the livelihood outcomes of social forestry permits, the general notion is that the economic benefits for communities have so far been limited. There are several reasons for this. In some cases, especially in Kalimantan, permits have been granted to areas with degraded forests, located far away from the communities. In such cases, communities have shown little or no interest in developing forest management practices. Next to that, respondents stressed that there was a lack of support services in the post-licensing phase. Although the MoEF has facilities in place to provide financial (BLU) and technical (BUPSHA) services, communities in remote areas are rarely able to access these, as the procedures are complex. A related problem is that social forestry permits are registered with the MoEF, but are not respected by other government agencies, which means it is difficult for social forestry permitholders to access services provided by other ministries and private institutions, such as banks. Also, the development of community-based logging practices

is hampered by existing logging regulations that were developed for industrial logging companies. In several cases, communities started seeing the protection and rehabilitation of the land as a burden, rather than an economic opportunity. Without clear economic incentives, it is hard to realise sustainable community-based forest management.

Communities with social forestry permits may benefit from CSO interventions, helping them set up sustainable forest management practices, and pilot businesses. However, there is a risk that they remain dependent on CSO support. According to respondents, there were only few communities — those with strong community institutions and favourable economic conditions — that had been able to develop sustainable businesses that could operate without external support. In Kalibiru (Yogyakarta), for example, communities with social forestry permits managed to successfully develop community-based eco-tourism businesses, resulting in a full-fledged social, economic and ecological transformation (Santoso, 2019).

Role of CSOs

Indonesian CSOs have been working hand in hand with the government through national and regional taskforces to accelerate social forestry implementation. Several respondents stressed that this had improved the relationship between the government and CSOs. Several national CSOs that previously kept their distance from the government, have now become active partners of the MoEF. Although this is generally applauded by respondents and workshop participants, some argued that there was not enough critical debate among CSOs, and that CSOs had lost their function as independent watchdogs.

Most CSOs focus on the pre-licensing phase; identifying potential communities, preparing them to develop social forestry proposals, and facilitating the formalisation process. There are also CSOs that focus on the post-licensing phase — providing organisational and technical support, and building bridges with private sector actors, such as financial institutions and companies — but respondents and workshop participants agreed that this type of work required more attention. Without such support, permits may eventually result in increased deforestation, rather than sustainable forest management.

Recommendations for CSOs

Workshop participants discussed ways in which CSOs in Indonesia could help increase the conservation and livelihood outcomes of the social forestry programme. Below we mention the main recommendations for CSOs.

Documentation and communication

CSOs need to continuously analyse and document outcomes of different social forestry models to provide evidence-based information that other stakeholders can

use to develop policies and regulations. CSOs can work together with researchers, to provide reliable evidence about the successes and failures of social forestry in terms of economic development and sustainable forest management, and their underlying causes.

Lobby and advocacy

CSOs need to step up lobby and advocacy efforts in support of:

- A wider acceptance of the social forestry programme beyond the MoEF, and the establishment of specialised inter-sectoral agencies at province and district levels, which are dedicated to the implementation of the social forestry programme, with financial support from the central government.
- Devolving implementation authority from the central government's MoEF to provincial, district, and village governments. This requires better coordination concerning the role of social forestry in development plans, especially between the MoEF (represented by the DG of Social Forestry), the Provincial Forestry Service (represented by the Forest Management Unit), district (represented by inter-sectoral agencies), and village governments.
- Transforming Forest Management Units from acting as 'landlords' (trying to maintain direct control over state forest lands) to acting as 'land managers' (promoting and facilitating social forestry schemes).
- Actively involving all relevant Ministries (Agriculture, Home Affairs, Villages, Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration, Finance) in the programme's implementation. This will help mobilise inter-sectoral funding and technical assistance for communities, and should allow the allocation of village funds towards social forestry management groups.
- Adjusting PIAPS where necessary, to make sure it corresponds with communities' realities and needs, and includes traditional agroforestry areas.
- Improving service provision to permit holders in the post-licensing phase, such as technical support (through BUPSHA), and helping communities to gain access to financial credit (through BLU and other financial institutions).

- Reviewing timber administration policies within the social forestry programme, and adapting them to the reality of communities, so that communities with social forestry permits can effectively supply timber, especially for the domestic market.
- Consolidating social forestry policies among relevant government agencies within and outside MoEF and social forestry stakeholders at district and province level.

Direct interventions at community level

- Building institutional capacity of permit holders, especially in terms of financial management and administration.
- Connecting local permit holders with local and regional governments, especially inter-sectoral agencies at district level, Forest Management Units, as well as private sector actors.
- Promoting participatory and inclusive decision-making processes at the community level, helping communities with preventing elite capture and gender bias within social forestry governance bodies, and assisting them with developing tenure-related conflict resolution mechanisms.
- Facilitating communities to develop micro-enterprises and bankable business plans, and to obtain access to markets, technologies, and services provided by the government and the private sector.
- Facilitating communities to receive incentives for sustainable forest management, either through payments for environmental services from local stakeholders (private and public sector), or through an 'ecological fiscal transfer scheme' from district, provincial and central government.

Sources

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