



Deutscher Tropentag, October 8-10, 2003, Göttingen

“Technological and Institutional Innovations
for Sustainable Rural Development”

The Effects of Indonesia’s Decentralisation Policy on Forest Conservation — Evidence from Four Villages in Central Sulawesi

SYLVIA EBERSBERGER, MICHAEL FREMEREY

University of Kassel, Institute for Socio-cultural and Socio-economic Studies (ISOS), Germany

Abstract

One outcome of the ongoing democratization process in Indonesia (reformasi) was the policy of regional autonomy issued in May 1999 and implemented since January 2001. It resulted in devolution of power to the district and sub-district level as well as in deconcentration of authority in the forestry sector.

This paper investigates the effects of this policy on local communities and their forest utilization in two sub-districts in the province of Central Sulawesi. These villages border the Lore Lindu National Park and are situated in a region characterized by rapid deforestation and heavy encroachment into the protected area. Research was carried out during the initial phase of the decentralisation process in the years 2001 and 2002. As a result of the decentralisation the structure and power divisions of the village institutions was altered. This included the transfer of legislative authority to the village level. The local communities’ responses to these institutional changes, in terms of implementation and in terms of how they used their newly acquired authority, varied considerably.

Also, there were indirect effects: The devolution attempts in the forestry sector led to village agreements in a number of villages in the research region. While these agreements may have effected a more sustainable forest management in these localities, it may also result in a decreasing legitimacy of the National Park’s authority in villages, where this policy has not been implemented. This is due to the fact that these agreements are not seen as an institutional innovation, which once may be applied on one’s own village. They are rather perceived as unfair preference of villages that enjoy strong support of NGOs.

Besides these dynamics, we could also observe a change of attitude toward government officials — in this case the park rangers — as a result of reformasi. In the final section, we delineate — by comparing the findings from this study with case studies from other regions of Indonesia — if and how political decentralization can contribute to the objective of a more sustainable forest use. The facilitating and the limiting factors of a successful linkage are identified.

Keywords: Decentralization, deforestation, Indonesia, local communities, National park