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“Solidarity in a competing world —
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People’s Forest Management on the Island of Java: How Have Changes Occurred after the Decentralisation Era?

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Abstract

In Java, around 70% of state-owned forests have been exclusively managed for more than 30 years by The State Forest Company (SFC). As with privately owned forests, the typical form of non-state forest management in Java is called a People’s Forest (PF), which are usually managed in a non-commercial style. By regulation, the SFC is only authorized to manage state-owned forest in Java. However, since SFC was the only existing forest-related institution located at district level, for a long period of time SFC also had additional power to legitimize timber harvested from People’s Forests. This means, without approval from the SFC, owners of People’s Forests could not cut their trees to sell timber products in a legal manner. This complex administrative procedure has created disincentives for People’s Forest development. This situation however has shifted since Indonesia’s national decentralisation policy was introduced.

This research analyses the extent and the causal pathways along which the practices of People’s Forest management in Java have undergone changes after the decentralisation era. The research design builds on extensive review of policy and written documents and two major phases of fieldwork in two selected districts in Central Java. The expert interview was used to explore four dimensions of Policy Arrangement Approach (actors, rules, power and discourses) in the management of People’s Forest. This study reveals that the People’s Forest management scheme has been altered since the introduction of decentralisation policy by bringing a new actor into the playing field of People’s Forest, namely the District Forest Authority (DFA). The DFA with its new power and authority as mandated by the decentralisation policy has to a large extent shifted the role and authority of the State Forest Company (SFC). Discourse surrounding People’s Forests have also undergone changes, which later created incentives for land owners to invest in People’s Forests. In summary, changes in the power structure, regulation, and actor constellation surrounding People’s Forests have encouraged the way people frame People’s Forests, which later contributed to the rapid development of People’s Forests in Java.

Keywords: Decentralisation, forest management, people’s forest, policy arrangement approach