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with planetary health"

Foundation for social forestry adoption in aceh, indonesia: insights from field assessments and stakeholder perspectives

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Abstract

In 2025, the UN estimates that over 5 billion people worldwide rely on forests and non-timber forest products (NTFP) for food, medicine and livelihoods, including 70 million Indigenous communities. Thus, the decentralisation of forest management has become the core of a rights-based approach that guarantees community access to forest resources, leading to the Community-based Forestry (CBF) regimes in the Global South. CBF strengthens the rights of local communities to actively participate and gain multiple social and environmental co-benefits from forest management, such as poverty alleviation and reduced deforestation. In Indonesia, CBF is known as Social Forestry (SF), which stands as one of the national strategic programmes with the allocation of 12.7 million ha for Village Forests, Community Forests, Community Plantation Forests, Customary Forests, and Forestry Partnerships. Over the past decade, studies have found a positive trend between the implementation of SF and the decrease of Indonesia's deforestation rates, enforcing community forest governance, and increasing livelihood alternatives, bringing up positive perceptions among smallholders to adopt the scheme in various regions.

Social Forestry (SF) in Indonesia aims to empower local communities by providing access to forest management and fostering sustainable livelihoods. In Aceh Province, SF programmes have granted rights to 171,631 hectares of forest to 25,813 households since 2016. To assess the early impacts and challenges of these interventions, we conducted field assessments, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with 226 respondents across 17 districts. Our findings indicate that, while SF is perceived to provide economic, social, and ecological benefits, it also presents significant risks, including production, investment, and market uncertainties, as well as capacity gaps among local stakeholders. Building on these insights, we developed a conceptual model that captures the benefits, costs, and risks associated with SF interventions in Aceh. This model provides a structured basis for future decision analysis, with the potential to inform long-term landscape planning and adaptive management strategies. By incorporating empirical data and stakeholder perspectives, this model will support ongoing efforts to evaluate the sustainability and viability of SF in the region.

Keywords: Community-based forestry, decision analysis, deforestation, forest governance, livelihood, social forestry, stakeholder

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