

Assessing the impact of social forestry: a tale of two social forestry groups in Sumatra

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Social Forestry (SF) or community-based forest management as a government initiative in Indonesia has been around since the 1970s and often seen as a strategy to improve community welfare, protect forests, and solve existing tenurial conflicts. Under President Jokowi, the government is committed to providing legal access to those dependent on forest resources in more than 12.7 million hectares of forest areas through various social forestry schemes, such as community forests, village forests, community plantation forests, and customary forests. For the government to better oversee the program and its on-the-ground impacts, effective monitoring and evaluation tools for SF are needed.

Our analysis shows that existing monitoring and evaluation tools for SF developed by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and several non-government organizations contain gaps and weaknesses that need to be addressed. In this research, we proposed a more comprehensive yet feasible evaluation framework for SF, which includes assessment criteria, indicators and methods that revolve around three primary aspects: environmental sustainability, socio-economic improvement, and institutional capacity.

We have successfully tested this evaluation tool to assess two SF groups, namely Beringin Jaya Community Forest in Tanggamus, Lampung and Simancuang Village Forest in South Solok, West Sumatra. The results suggest that SF permits are effective at protecting forests from degradation; the tenurial security afforded to the SF groups serves as an incentive for them to secure their SF plots from threats. In terms of socio-economic improvement, SF not only provides substantial contribution, either direct or indirect, to their livelihood, but also facilitated the emergence of grassroots activism, such as through cooperatives and women groups. Lastly, the management team within SF groups proves to hold a central position in ensuring a smooth field implementation of the SF program, although further capacity building is still needed. Despite all these achievements, these SF groups still require a set of assistance from either local government or NGOs in post-harvest periods to add more value to the SF commodities.

Keywords: social forestry, community forest, village forest, community-based forest management, evaluation.