
Indonesia: The Kalimantan Forests and Climate Partnership REDD project - little partnership, many problems

This article is based on a 4-days field visit and conversations with villagers in 5 of the 7 most affected communities by this project (Sei Ahas, Tumbang Mangkutub, Mantangai Hulu, Katundjan and Kalumpang). Villagers complained about the supposed benefits of the project, and also argued that forest destruction has not been halted inside the REDD project area, while continuous expansion of oil palm, logging and mining activities in the surrounding area undermines even further the aim of reducing emissions from deforestation.

Introduction

The KFCP (Kalimantan Forests and Climate Partnership) Project is a 4-years REDD project that started in 2009 with the aim to produce forests offsets by reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in an area of about 120,000 hectares in Central Kalimantan. The project is based on a bilateral agreement between the Australian and Indonesian government. The Australian government has funded the project until now with about US\$ 31 million. The forest to be protected in the project area is estimated by a community leader in about 60-70% of the area size, while also reforestation and rehabilitation are among the project activities, besides a so-called livelihood component.

Within the project area seven communities along the Kapuas river are directly affected by the project activities, about 2,600 families. The communities are mainly indigenous Dayak people. In terms of organization, every village has a state-appointed and -employed village chief, as well as village leaders elected by the communities, based on religion (Islamic, Christian and traditional beliefs). A local NGO called YPD works for community rights and supporting the livelihoods of the village people.

The KFCP project is one more project in a series of top-down interventions in the area over the past decades, starting during Suharto time when in the 1990s this area got included in the so-called mega-rice project through which the government aimed to contribute to Indonesia's rice self-sufficiency and stimulated transmigration to the region. The project started to drain the peat lands by setting up a huge canal system; however, it was a disaster because the rice did not grow well. What the project did result in was large scale logging, benefitting the Suharto clan, besides forest fires and forest destruction.

After the mega-rice project, other top-down projects with a conservationist character were implemented in the region, like the Orangutan protection project Bosmawas (Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation), and the central Kalimantan Peatland Project (CKPP). The CKPP intended to recover part of the peat lands and its forest vegetation by blocking canals from the mega-rice project. This has become also one of the rehabilitation activities in the KFCP project.

The CKPP project was an initiative of international NGOs like Wetlands International, WWF and CARE. These same NGOs got involved afterwards in the KFCP REDD project and community

members mention that project staff of KFCP includes people that worked before in CKPP.

The “partnership”

Community members complain that the consent of the communities involved has never been given through their own leadership. What the KFCP considers as “consent” are agreements with each of the state-appointed chiefs of the villages in the project area.

The communities themselves got exposed to community surveys, trainings about fire control and also to so-called “socialization” workshops about REDD. One village member explained in detail that after the first workshop, still nobody understood what was REDD about, and the people asked for a second session in more simple language. But even after this session, the people still did not understand. However, they were ‘socialized’ about the REDD project, mainly because it also was said that it would deliver money and work for the communities.

Employment appears to be the main benefit that the project has been offering to the community, especially related to reforestation activities. Each family/participant should grow and plant about 400-575 seedlings/trees. However, the payment is very low, about US\$ 100, and paid in parcels, for example, 50% at the start and the other 50% at the end of the activities, and sometimes payments were paid with delay.

Moreover, in Sei Ahas village, people added that payments were also based on how much trees they actually planted, and other costs like setting up a small nursery and transport are the responsibility of each participant. And real poor people do not benefit from the project, because the money paid for reforestation is too little to survive on. Besides, for those employed the activities implied in considerable time and therefore they complained they now have less time to spend on their own livelihood activities. Also, in the Sei Ahas community the workers are mainly women, apparently a ‘gender component’ in the KFCP project.

Villagers also complain about lack of transparency and mistrust related to project management. For Sei Ahas village, for example, about US\$ 360,000 would be available for the reforestation activities, according to one villager, much more than paid all together to villagers participating in the reforestation work. So villagers ask: where is the money going to?

Although presented as “partnership”, local people frequently complained that there is no “ownership” involved, they are only the labour. It is not their project, which explains they do not really care for the activities involved. One villager said: “people even planted dead tree seedlings”, just to get their payment based on the number of “planted seedlings”. Another community member, member of YPD, does not see real benefits. He adds that it is difficult for community members to raise their concerns and have these considered: “ this is a government project and we have to follow”.

According to a community leader in Sei Ahas, the KFCP project would have assured them that the carbon stored by the reforestation could in future be “sold” by the communities. But he questioned this by responding saying why not selling the carbon that the forest areas already conserve? But the KFCP person said that that was not possible, once KFCP is not able to calculate this carbon and they do not “buy” it.

Villagers also comment that KFCP helped to set up a village plan. But again a leader complains that although they organized meetings and let people speak out, they push for their own agenda by

saying they will “improve” the plan proposed by the community. After doing that, they then ask the village chief to sign the “improved” plan. The villager telling this story said that for this reason he resigned to be a village secretary. He complains that the KFCP never presented the final map of the project area and the “improved” plan, and that their agenda is not based on the community demands, but rather on the ecological conditions of the area.

Summarized, villagers who we heard evaluate that the interest of the project to do meetings with the communities is mainly to obtain their signatures on the attendance list. Villagers tell a story that the KFCP, after many regular meetings, wanted to organize something different for the communities and villagers suggested a presentation of traditional dances. However, the villagers complained that the show, organized by KFCP, was not traditional and moreover not appropriated for children. And even this event, according to the villagers, had an attendance list.

Less deforestation?

Villagers comment that the forest fires continue and KFCP is not doing anything to stop these. We visited one site with people from Mantangai Hulu, that had been burnt by outsiders to obtain a valuable tree to sell on the domestic market. The fire is used to burn the grass so that the valuable trees can be identified and extracted. Even though some people from the community participate in this, they benefit very little. The people from the outside that control this business are the ones who benefit most.

[box] A traditional combat of forest fires

The Dayak people have a traditional fish pond system called ‘beje’, which is digged in the area close to the Kapuas river in order to have fish when the water level goes down by the end of the rainy season. Besides the fish itself, the advantage of this traditional system is that it delivers water for irrigation and it also helps combating forest fires. One villager, now employed by the KFCP project, complained that he could make a better income from this system than the money he receives now as an employee of the project.[/box]

Regarding the reforestation – carried out in areas between 200-400ha per community - in Sei Ahas, for example, a community leader said only 40% of the planted seedlings survived. In Katundjun it is claimed that from the first 25 hectares reforested only 20% of seedlings survived. Besides, villagers complain that the reforestation is done in a ‘rehabilitating’ forest area which means that growing trees are being cut in order to plant tree seedlings, and the overall result in their view is more deforestation than reforestation. Also, there is a lack of maintenance; when trees die there is no substitution and also the forest fires have affected the reforestation areas. What is also mentioned is that the villagers are not consulted about the chosen species and claim that the KFCP is reforesting with the wrong species, those that are more adapted to the riverside than to the conditions at the reforestation location. But the communities are not involved in the choice of the species. Moreover, it is KFCP that blames them for the loss of seedlings.

Villagers also complain that KFCP is not challenging the expanding oil palm business, like PT RAS company, mentioned in Sei Ahas village, that could not be operating because it lost its license but this is not being reinforced by the authorities. This made the community organizing a protest, blocking the road. The case is now being handled by the National Forestry Council. Oil palm expansion is a main driver of deforestation in Kalimantan and goes hand-in-hand with logging activities. Communities complain about lack of action by the government, supposedly not interested in having trouble with these companies, however very interested in the KFCP REDD project because this brings money in for the state budget. Another problem villagers denunciate are possible overlaps

between oil palm concessions and the KFCP project area.

To summarize, a REDD project here goes hand-in-hand with forest destruction in and surrounding the project area. According to the environmental NGO WALHI, mining and oil palm plantations are among the main drivers of deforestation in Indonesia. Village leaders question why KFCP wants to plant only 400 ha of reforested area – of which only maybe 150 ha survives - while around the area so much forest destruction continues? Deforestation is a problem for the people, as 99% depend on the forest, as one leader in Sei Ahas observes.

Restrictions and lack of recognition of community land rights

Villagers suffer from a number of restrictions. They complain that since the KFCP project started, about 30 small canals have been blocked, denying them access to areas they are used to go. Also, when people need timber now, they need to go outside their village area, once it is forbidden to cut trees in the KFCP project area.

The need to recognize land rights is a common and basic demand, and leaders in Katundjan added that losing access to their lands was their biggest fear now. They say the KFCP project wanted to classify their forest area as “community forest” but the Dayak communities want it to be called “indigenous people forest”, because of the decree signed by the governor of Kalimantan, recognizing the right of indigenous peoples to manage their forest; but KFCP disagrees arguing that the national government does not recognize indigenous peoples rights. It is therefore that the KFCP has not promoted land tenure rights of communities, according to villagers, although this is one of the basic demands of the communities. YPD has helped communities to do community mapping. Villagers in Sei Ahas people showed, for example, their community map with an area they consider as theirs and necessary for their cultural and physical survival, totaling 26 thousand ha.

The communities struggle for their rights

Over the past few years, communities are fighting a battle to get recognition for their demands, also referred to by them as their “concept”. This means recognition of their land rights in the first place, besides support to improve their livelihoods. An often mentioned livelihood proposal is the one to plant rubber, which is a tree villagers are familiar with and the product can be minimally processed by them inside the village, different from the much more corporate-controlled oil palm. While the oil palm harvest must be transported straight away to the processing mill, rubber can be stored. For Sei Ahas, a project for 400 rubber seedlings per family was approved by KFCP but the seedlings never arrived, according to the villagers. In Katundjan, a community leader says that their rubber planting project was rejected, but that the KFCP project wanted them to plant oil palm. He was offered a job by KFCP but he did not accept it.

The people are getting nervous, also because KFCP is blaming them for the problems. There was an incident in Kalumpan village, in June 2012, when a village meeting would take place but KFCP only invited few people. As a reaction, villagers burnt the village hall. In Mantangai Hulu, a similar incident happened. When a meeting would take place about the budget of KFCP with few invited people, and about 300 villagers appeared, the village leader decided to cancel the meeting. As a reaction, some windows of the village hall were broken. The police is investigating this but since then, May 2012, KFCP emptied the office in this village and left, and is actually not welcome anymore in Mantangai Hai. One representative of this community says “we reject KFCP since the beginning because there is no transparency”, and “it is good KFCP has gone, since then we have no quarrel anymore”.

More recently, in August 2012, an open protest letter including several of the aforementioned issues was sent to the governor of the Province of Kalimantan, signed by community leaders from the 5 directly affected communities, YPD, a local community supporting organization, and also WALHI. Afterwards, a meeting took place to discuss the issues raised in the letter between community representatives, the state government and KFCP. The resulting agreement was that each community would carry out their evaluation of the project and present these together with their proposals of what should be done to a working group, coordinated by the government in order to give follow-up.

This recent attempt of dealing with the serious problems that the KFCP REDD project has caused in the communities involved is still ongoing; meanwhile, several community leaders classified this most recent attempt to solve problems as “the last chance” for the project.

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Based on a field visit and information contained in “In the REDD: Australia’s carbon offset project in central Kalimantan”, FOEI

(<http://www.foei.org/en/what-we-do/climate-biodiversity-finance/latest-news-1/in-the-redd-australias-carbon-offset-project-in-central-kalimantan>) and “Controversy surrounding Australia’s Kalimantan Forest and Climate

Partnership REDD project deepens”, REDD-Monitor

(<http://www.redd-monitor.org/2012/09/11/controversy-surrounding-australias-kalimantan-forest-and-climate-partnership-redd-project-deepens/>)