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## Indonesia: Gold in Bukit Tiga Jurai affecting food sovereignty

### **Sumatra Copper Ltd.**

Sumatra Copper Ltd., a London based mining company, has concessions in forest areas in Indonesia for mining, operating them jointly with the Newcrest Group. One of these concessions, about 300,000 hectares, is located in Sumatra, in the border triangle of the provinces of Bengkulu-Jambi- and South Sumatra. The companies that operate inside the areas are Indonesian affiliates of the two companies, for which Sumatra Copper requests permissions from the respective heads of district or governor.

One of them is operated by P.T. Jambi Gold, a company under the umbrella of Sumatra Copper Ltd in Jambi. It has a forest concession of 7,480 hectares in Sarolangun and Merangin Districts. In Bengkulu, Sumatra Copper Ltd., under the name of PT. Bengkulu Utara Gold, owns 99,979 hectares located in North Utara, Rejang Lebong, Kepahyang, Lebong, Central Bengkulu, and Mukomuko Districts. The concession area overlaps with the area of the Bukit Daun Protected Forest (50,000 hectares) and Kerinci Seblat National Park. In addition, the Group, under the name of P.T. Lebong Gold, has also been granted 57,630 hectares in Lebong District.

In South Sumatra, the Sumatra Copper Group owns forest concessions through two of their sub-companies: P.T. Dwinand Nusa Sejahtera (9,979 hectares) and P.T. Musi Rawasa Gold (75,000 hectares). Both concessions were granted by the Musi Rawas Head of District.

The activities of these companies are hidden from the surrounding communities, as they don't even know that concession agreements have been issued covering their lands and forests. The local people are only aware about certain companies operating with activities of construction and transportation of mining products from inside the forest, using helicopters. Yet, they do not have any knowledge about which company is active and what is the destination of the mining products.

### **Threats on Last Forest of Sumatera**

In the daily lives of indigenous peoples in Jambi, the area around the triangle border of Jambi, Bengkulu, and South Sumatra is known as “Bukit Tiga Jurai”, which means the hill of springs from which rivers flow into three different directions (jurain could also mean lineage). These forest areas are located on Bukit Barisan Mountains. In Jambi province, this border covers three districts, namely Merangin, Sarolangun and Tebo, while in Bengkulu it borders with six districts that still have forest areas in the northern part of Bengkulu: Mukomuko, North Bengkulu, Central Bengkulu, to southeastern part of Kepahyang, Rejang Lebong, and Lebong. In South Sumatra, the forest areas are parts of Musi Rawas and Linggau District.

A large number of community members in these areas are still very much integrated with the natural and weather cycles, as they are highly dependent on forest products and the agricultural practices are adapted to the forest ecology and hydrological cycle. Yet the local economic system based on

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environmental functions which are indeed the strength of the communities inside and around the forests remain invisible, as if non-existent for the Indonesian economy. Thus they are not identified as legitimate part of the State economy that ultimately positioned forests into unproductive areas within the economic paradigm developed by the government, that only considers them “productive” when a concession is given. This “unproductivity” is actually used to legitimate the land and forest grabbing for companies .

The forest like in Kerinci Sebalat, in addition to having strong influence on the life and future of the communities within and adjacent to this forest area, also has a very important value to the lives of hundreds of thousands of community members who are not geographically adjacent to this area: the hills feed some important rivers that flow across a dozen of districts. So not only communities living in and adjacent the forest area of Kerinci Sebalat depend on this forest, this is also true for many communities dwelling on the coast and along the river banks in a broader area.

The landscape changes of forest cover and extraction activities that affect the geomorphological structure of this region will directly impact the agriculture practices and livelihood of farmers and fishermen who strongly depend on water availability. Referring back to local history of naming the area as "Bukit Tiga Jurai", since the old days the local communities considered the forest areas of this triangle as the origin/lineage of the peoples living on the slopes of the west coast (Bengkulu), and east coast (Jambi and South Sumatra). Changing and extracting in the "Bukit Tiga Jurai" region means exterminating the source of life and culture of the people in the three areas.

The Indonesian government has indeed divided the forest areas into various ones with a different status, such as Kerinci Sebalat National Park, Bukit Daun Protected Forest and another area which is a 'limited production forest' that serves as buffer zone to the national park. Geographically, the triangle border forest of Jambi – Bengkulu – South Sumatra is dominated by the area of Kerinci Sebalat National Park, the last biodiversity reserve of Sumatra where Rhinos, Orang Utan, Tapir, Sumatran tigers and elephants still remain and thrive.

### **Culture, food sovereignty and forests**

Batang Asai is a sub-district in Sarolangun of Jambi Province, located on the eastern slope of Bukit Barisan Mountains. It is a portrait of community dualism of being administratively under village government, while the living culture is still based on the clan system.

One of these is the Pengambang Matin clan which is believed to be one of the oldest clans in Jambi. For many generations, they have been aware that the soil beneath their lands and rivers are rich of gold, yet they only extracted gold in traditional manners.

Today the Pengambang Batin community members are restless after having become aware that their lands have been included into the concession area of Sumatra Copper, under the name of PT. Jambi Gold. For many generations, Pengambang people have been living in harmony with the natural cycle of the forest ecosystem around them, by making use of various products and producing their own food, guaranteeing food sovereignty.

For planting rice, the people are using the Kungai river as a source of irrigation for their traditional rice fields , pumping water into the rice fields using a large wheel made of wood.

In the post- harvest season, they use rice fields to graze their buffalo. For Pengambang people buffalo has an important value in addition to using the meat for food, the buffalo is also very helpful in

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their traditional mode of agriculture to prepare the land as well as providing organic fertilizer. Buffalo also can be a long term financial reserve, for their childrens' education and house construction.

In addition to wetland rice farming, they also practice padi huma (upland/dry rice) farming which is usually adapted to the local seasonal calender, and planted along with various other crops to divert various types of pests. Although upland rice is planted near the forest, it does not suffer from pest attack, because in addition of being planted during a certain period when particular kinds of pests are declining, also various types of plants and living things that the pests need are still available.

Various non-timber forest products are also used for daily needs, such as kepayang, beside using the fruit as a side dish, they also process the seeds into cooking oil and fuel. In addition to kepayang, there are still many other forest products utilized by Pengambang people for food, medicine and other daily needs. In general, the natural resources are used, controlled and conserved in a communal system, for instance by applying lubuk larangan (customary law) to protect the fish diversity in the river, where people are not allowed to catch fish in certain protected areas of Lubuk Larangan during a particular period of time.

## **Conflict and Environmental Destruction**

The issuance of the gold mining concessions in the region without prior knowledge of the local communities will create conflicts between the companies and community members in the various districts in the three provinces.

### *1. Conflict about forest areas used and managed by communities*

The forests that have been turned into concession areas of Sumatra Copper Group in almost all districts are bordering and administratively overlap with the areas of indigenous communities. Thus it will create conflicts with the community members at the village, sub-district, clan and district level, as the communities who are administratively and culturally controlling and managing the areas will be threatened and lose their sources of livelihood when the companies begin operating.

It also would threaten the existence of the Suku Anak Dalam community in Jambi whose territorial area is located in the Masurai and Sebelat mountains. The Suku Anak Dalam people will be severely harmed by the company's operation as their areas for nomadic culture will vanish, and at the same time it would mean the extinction of various natural resources, the main sources of their livelihood.

### *2. The conflict of traditional mining vs corporate mining*

Traditionally people in Lebong District have practiced gold mining for generations. While in Sarolangun District, recently small-scale gold mines have been operated in the river stream by migrants using the mechanical separation method.

The presence of the companies will turn these two mining practices into illegal activities under the Indonesian legal system, as they are operating inside the company's concession areas that have been issued by the government. The banning and expulsion of the traditional and small-scale miners will provoke rejection and protests from the community members.

### *3. Conflict related to environmental destruction*

Disposal of tailings into rivers flowing through various districts in the three provinces will reduce the

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quality of river water consumed by the communities along the river, disrupt irrigation systems for rice fields and livestock raising as well as negatively impact human health.

As in Buyat Bay, Mandailing Natal and Papua, the drastic physical and chemical changes in the river water quality will directly affect the people who consume the river water, and in the future will drive turmoil and collective protest.

The rejection of some villages of Marga Batin Pengambang of Batang Asai Sub-district, Sarolangun District, Jambi Province, is just the tip of the iceberg of communities who have directly witnessed the activities of the company. In addition, the brief overview of their lives before the presence of the mines is also a portrait of local wisdom, guaranteeing food sovereignty, of the people living inside and adjacent the forest in other provinces in Sumatra. Mining the gold in Bukit Tiga Jurai would mean instigating conflict and trouble for the government and the company themselves.

This a situation, where the government, on the one hand, is facilitating large-scale mining which would make this forest area “productive” while, on the other hand, destroying living systems like forests and rivers, highly productive systems that provide community food sources, affecting heavily food sovereignty and the overall future of these communities.

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