
Women's Land Tenure Security and Community-Based Forest Management

In Indonesia, the western part of Java -Halimun- is well known by its high biodiversity and cultural richness. In terms of community-based forest resource management systems, indigenous and local peoples of Halimun possess centuries of farming and knowledge about the tropical rainforests. They utilize the surrounding forest and land for various uses in models of swidden cultivation (huma), rice field (sawah), garden (kebon), mixed tree garden (talun) and various types of forests (such as Leuweung Titipan, Leuweung Tutupan and Leuweung Buka'an). These models are managed as one integrated system by men and women. It is well noticed that men and women contribute to their family's welfare, often in complementary ways, and each type of contribution is indispensable, especially within poor families. With regards to food security, women make a bigger contribution to their families as a whole than men, because they are more involved in swidden cultivation and rice production.

Since 1924, under the Dutch colonial time, a part of the Halimun ecosystem area was set up as protected forest area to be changed in 1979 into nature reserve, and again in 1992 into national park up to nowadays. On the other hand, Halimun is also a big source of state income. Government tree plantations (since 1978); large scale estates of tea, cacao, rubber (1970s); and gold and other mineral mining (1990s), have been disrupting the ecosystem. Moreover, all those "development projects" have restricted and even more ended peoples' access to and control over livelihood resources (land and other forest resources), entailing the disappearance of traditional knowledge, particularly that of local and indigenous women.

"Since the forest was cut down and converted into pine garden, the water quality for sawah [rice field] is no longer good. Apparently, this kind of water quality is not suitable for growing the local variety of paddy." (Mrs. Annah). "Formerly, we could easily find ki beling [medicinal plant] surrounding here, but now, we should walk far to the Cibareno river to look for it." (Mrs. Surni, a midwife)

In response to the many external pressures, environmental damages, constriction or even loss of local access to and control over the land, women from Malasari and Mekarsari villages work harder than before to provide food for their families by, among other:

- Becoming daily poorly paid agricultural-wage laborers (buruh tani), earning US\$ 0.7 – 1.4 a day;
- Doing ngepak (arrangement between landless peasant women and land-owners for planting and harvesting paddy, earning two bundles of rice for each ten that they plant);
- Doing maro (local share-cropping, by keeping 50% of the harvest);
- "Illegally" cultivating small parcels of the "state" land managed by the State Forestry Company Perum Perhutani;
- Carrying out women's "voluntary" day-care to support other women who would like to do ngepak or buruh agricultural works;

Whichever the combination of women's and their family members' efforts, however, the food supply often still does not meet the families' yearly requirements: "I never sell the paddy that I cultivate. It is

not enough even for my family,” said Mrs. Arti. “If there is no land, there is no food. If there is little land, there is little food,” expressed Mrs. Minarsih.

Malasari and Mekarsari women’s access to and control over land and other forest resources are insecure, and their families have no legal rights, protection and guarantees regarding the future use of the land. The general consequence is that, since the people are forced to cultivate in this “legal vacuum”, it is indeed very difficult for them to receive support and assistance. As a result, women and their children suffer most under hunger, malnutrition, domestic violence, and violations of other rights including the right to health, education, the freedom of speech and gathering.

In order to guarantee the sustainability and development of community-based forest resources management system, the certainty of independent rights in which that system is developed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities is required. The certainty of peoples’ --especially women’s-- independent rights should be adopted in natural resources related policies which acknowledge that the main actors in the natural resources management consist of women and men, with their different respective needs, interests, priorities and restrictions. The voice of Mrs Uun as one of women elders in Malasari village: “We have defended our land before, and we will defend it again” should be heeded!

In wrapping up this paper, in terms of manifested women’s independent rights on land and other forest resources, it is very important for us to define and bring into reality the issue of how women could improve their own life --for instance, their own prosperity level in terms of food quality, clothing, health (especially their reproductive health), education, security and safety feelings as well as leisure time for taking a rest and doing other private activities-- as a consequence of their participation in the many efforts to achieve a better life (welfare condition). These are basic and important conditions which should be highly considered by us as outsiders, such as governments (including policy makers), local NGOs and international cooperation agencies (including international NGOs) as well, when we plan to design “community-based” forest or other natural resource management projects in a participatory manner. Who exactly gets direct benefits from the project? Is it the women? Or, does the project even create overburdens for women? It is crucial to further analyze critical questions about how access to (and control over?) the land and other production factors provides direct positive impacts on the whole of women’s lives both in domestic and public domains.

Excerpted and adapted from: “Towards Sustainability and Development of the Community-Based Forest Resource Management System through Ensuring the Women’s Land Tenure Security (A Case Study in Malasari and Mekarsari Villages in Halimun Ecosystem Area)”, by RMI – The Indonesian Institute for Forest and Environment, E-mail: rmibogor@indo.net.id , sent by Ulfa Hidayati. The full document is available at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/CBFM/RMI.rtf>