
Indonesia: A call for a halt in certification activities

A numerous group of Indonesian NGOs that gathered last April 21st issued a letter questioning the certification of forest concessions in that country, because those concessions are based upon the extinction of native customary ("adat") rights. They reasonably argue that it is not possible to grant a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certificate to a forest concession holder under those circumstances. They "reiterate the call to LEI (Lembaga Ekolabel Indonesia) and FSC for a halt in all scoping, pre-assessment and assessment activities with concessionaires (HPHs), as well as an immediate moratorium on the issuing of any certificates, until core issues related to "adat" rights are agreed and settled among stakeholders."

According to the signing NGOs, the existing concession system is at the root of the problem being faced by Indonesian forests and forest peoples. Further assessments or issuing of certificates to conventional HPHs would but legitimise such system and thus add to the problem. They consider instead that certification must secure indigenous rights in order to be credible. The certification of HPHs in the current situation is against the securing of indigenous and community rights, since no independent analyses have been undertaken regarding FSC's Principles 2 (on Tenure and Use rights and Responsibilities) and 3 (on Indigenous Peoples' Rights) in relation to the Indonesian legislation. Only if these analysis are performed can the Indonesian authorities know what steps need to be taken to generate possibilities for logging operations to comply with such Principles, so as to enable credible certification to take place. On the contrary, if the present situation is not modified, indigenous peoples' and local communities' rights in Indonesia would be seriously undermined.

Land tenure --and not forest management-- is thus the main issue to be solved: "In order to follow the amended Constitution of 1945, that recognises indigenous peoples' rights, relevant laws and regulations related to land tenure issues are urgently in need of reform" states the document.

The cases of certification bodies such as SGS in the Diamond Raya case, and SmartWood in the case of several certifications at Perum Perhutani, are mentioned as examples of inadequate consultation methodologies. The signing organizations ask how the consultation procedures can be considered valid, and how they can be monitored when "fundamental things such as definitions of 'representativeness' and 'informed consent' is not even something the certification bodies are able to explain."

The letter concludes by highlighting the necessity of a halt in certification activities "so as to enable us to assess and analyse the situation and work together to create a platform for informed discussions between different stakeholder groups on the future direction of certification in Indonesia, that will truly accommodate community rights, and help secure a better future for Indonesia's forests, and a truly credible certification system."

Article based on information from: "Indonesian NGOs calling for an immediate halt in scoping, assessments and issuing of certificates to HPHs/KPHs", April 21, 2001, sent by Kim Terje Loraas, The Rainforest Foundation , 30/4/2001,

