
Indonesia: Mega-project in Central Kalimantan

It seems that problems for the Dayak people in Central Kalimantan do not cease. While they are still suffering the consequences of this year's enormous forest fires, the mega-project launched by President Suharto at the beginning of 1996 to convert around 1.5 million hectares of peat swamp forests into rice-fields keeps on going, in spite of the local and international protests, and of the recommendations made two months ago by the EIA carried out in the area.

A report produced by Jakarta-based NGO PAN-Indonesia shows how the local way of life, that makes the best of available resources, is being sacrificed to this project. The production of rattan, purun grass (local palm tree) and fish that the Ngaju Dayaks of Dadahup used to obtain is being replaced by Green Revolution varieties of rice, such as IR66, Cisanggarung and Membrano, that need great quantities of chemicals. The government had promised to pay out compensations for the rattan plantations, fishponds and canals but none have been settled until now. Besides, local people are becoming more and more dependent on the project work through contractors, since their cultivated lands are being wiped out. According to the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) the project will also have long term implications for the hydrological cycles in the area involved, causing floods and droughts that will affect people living downstream the River Mengkatip. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) has suggested the Indonesian government to abandon this questioned mega-project.

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