

Using Analysis and Advocacy to Bring About Policy Change in Indonesia¹

At the start of the WWF-Macroeconomics Program Office's (MPO) Economic Change, Poverty and Environment (ECPE) project in Indonesia in 2001, WWF-Indonesia was seeking to expand local natural resource management efforts that were part of existing integrated conservation and development programmes (ICDPs) in the Nusa Tenggara region. For example problems in protected forests had been growing as more and more people were migrating to the margins of protected forests and engaging in agriculture within the protected area. Small experimental community forestry projects seemed insignificant in the face of the tide of encroachments and land clearance by people in search of small plot of land and livelihood.

A detailed analysis revealed that localised efforts at land use planning were unlikely to succeed within the existing policy and institutional framework for forest management at the national level. Despite decentralisation of protected forest management to the district level, community participation was being actively restricted by the national government regulations. At the same time, district governments with little experience in forest management, had begun relying on forests to finance their budgets. Reliance on forests for their revenue, when combined with a huge demand for wood from nearby urban areas, had created incentives for local governments to bend rules and allow business interests to gain access to forest land. To appease local residents, areas within the forest were also being made available to them without much consideration for how that would impact on the forest.

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The national policies and regulations governing access to forests by local communities were riddled with contradictions and ambiguity. Thus, though in principle the forestry department has a scheme to promote community-based forest management, this has remained at a localised pilot level, and not part of any systematic implementation. Given the political exclusion and marginalisation of poor farmers, this is not surprising. However, the fact that a recognition of community-based forest management exists on paper, and may be one of the most important forestry policy developments in Indonesia in the past half century, was used in this project to bring a coherent basis for its implementation in practice.

A two-pronged approach was adopted. The primary effort was on improvement of regulations at the national level to give locally elected bodies a say in forest management. This was supplemented by an equally critical local effort aimed at building local advocacy skills to raise awareness amongst district parliaments about the benefits of community-based forest management and 'best' practices emerging from ongoing pilot schemes.

Significant progress has been achieved in a short span of time at both national and local levels. At the national level, a new social forestry policy was finalised in July 2004, while at the local level, two district governments in Nusa Tenggara have developed their own regulations for community forestry management. Key to both developments was involvement and consultation with a broad range of stakeholders including government, members of parliament at regional level, NGOs, academics, community representatives, local farmers and the private sector. Central to the success of this effort was the commitment of WWF-Indonesia to integrate conservation and poverty reduction as an integral part of its mandate, and to build relevant institutional capacity to respond to the substantive as well as policy engagement needs of this challenging task. Success also required a synergy between analysis and action at multiple scales, and ability to tap expertise to link the local poverty-environment dynamic to these. Using solid analysis as the basis for action turned out to be essential for building partnerships, for identifying strategic interventions, and for making an effective case for advocacy and policy reform.