



# Community-based forest management is failing to fulfil its promises: community forests and people's timber plantations in Boalemo, Gorontalo Province, Indonesia.

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## Background

Since the political reform of 1998, the Government of Indonesia has increasingly incorporated the approaches of community-based forest management (CBFM) in its forestry policies with the purpose of giving local communities better access to land and forestry resources and, therefore, contributing to the alleviation of local poverty. CBFM was prioritized in the 1999 Forestry Law (Article 3), providing legal, financial and market access to local communities. Recently, the Government of Indonesia has committed to a rapid agrarian reform process aiming to bring at least 12.7 million hectares of the state-forest zone under CBFM. Among policies and programs developed by the Government are several state sponsored schemes, including Community Forest and People's Timber Plantation, that were stipulated by Government Regulation no. 6/2007 (Urano 2013).

Community Forest (Hutan Kemasyarakatan/HKm) is meant to provide easy access for communities to forest resources in order to improve the welfare of people living in, and around, forest areas. It can be granted over forests with 'protection' and 'production' statuses as long as there are no encumbered rights or permits issued by the state for use of forest products.

People's Timber Plantation (Hutan Tanaman Rakyat/HTR) has been initiated to accelerate economic growth by facilitating community access to forest land, the timber trade and markets.

Both schemes are being managed by community farmers' groups ('kelompok tani') that have been established to manage the allocated working areas defined by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF).

Although designed by the central government in Jakarta, HKm and HTR are, by decree, implemented by local governments. This brief analysis outlines the challenges and threats in the implementation and enactment of both policies at the local level by citing the example of Boalemo District in the province of Gorontalo on the island of Sulawesi.

## Main messages

- When there are no third party or external funds available to publicise and explain community-based forest management in a province, implementation of the process, by default, may fall under the responsibility of governmental agencies
- Under governmental agencies, facilitation and technical capacity is weak owing to limited financial and human resources
- Limited resources have led to a rushed implementation process where target groups (often impoverished and landless villagers) are left out
- Community-based forest management has failed to empower target groups and instead it further excludes people for whom the programs were initially meant
- Third parties, such as community organizers and civil society organizations, and local government agencies need capacity building and resources to assume the role of facilitators
- While the communities require training in growing trees and forest management, they have been left to fend for themselves
- Implementation and follow-up of community-based forest management is further being challenged at local levels owing to poor institutional coordination with confused and overlapping responsibilities and weak budgeting among various governmental agencies

## Research sites

Since 2003, the district of Boalemo in the province of Gorontalo is undergoing major forest conversion and land degradation owing to extensive promotion of, and conversion of land to, maize monoculture. Commercial interests promote both the production and market to smallholders. The environmental impacts of conversion are now being experienced by the local population owing to run off: soil erosion and frequent floods during raining seasons; and water scarcity during dry seasons. These impacts are causing challenges to the environment and livelihoods. Farmers have become highly dependent on maize and the local governments now recognize the importance of more biodiverse production systems.

Field research was conducted in Hutamonu and Wonggahu villages, Boalemo District, Gorontalo. In both villages, the main agricultural crops were corn and coconuts. Farmers also produced some cacao, clove, nutmeg, candlenut, banana, pepper and chili. Women preferred to grow annual crops, such as chili and groundnuts, while men were more interested in commercial perennial crops, such as cacao. In Hutamonu, HKm has been allocated over a total of 490 hectares. The licence over the area (Penetapan Areal Kerja/ PAK) was granted in February 2013 by the then Ministry of Forestry and the right-of-use licence has been recently signed by the Regent of Boalemo. In Wonggahu, the right-of-use licence for HTR was granted in 2013, covering 67.8 hectares. Local government agencies are yet to operationalize these licences.

## Procedures

Providing farmers with more access to state land has been recognized as a good intervention, in particular, in regions where farm land is limited (Perdana et al. 2012).

In order to obtain government approval to participate in HKm and HTR programs, local communities have to go through the following procedure. An application must be submitted by a community, which will include maps of the proposed forest areas and information on land size, function and existing resources. This has to be approved by the district's regent (Bupati). Upon the recommendation of the regent, the MoEF in Jakarta sends a verification team to the field and determines the forest areas for the sites. After determination by the Ministry, the community is then required to submit a management plan to their local government in order to receive a Licence of Use of Community Forest (Izin Usaha Pemanfaatan Hutan Kemasyarakatan/IUPHKm) or a Use Licence for Timber Forest Plantation (Izin Usaha Pemanfaatan Hasil Hutan Kayu Hutan Tanaman Rakyat/IUPHHK-HTR).

## Reality in the field: local empowerment or rushed government agenda?

### HKm and HTR in Boalemo

#### • Legalizing forest encroachers

Both study villages in Boalemo were in some way involved in past and current encroachment on state-owned forest land by local and external parties. In the past, their involvement included extraction of valuable timber through illegal logging. More recently, both villages have been using the forest land for farming,

motivated by the scarcity of land. Such clearing of land for cultivation might have been a traditional customary practice that runs counter to the statutory demarcation of land and forests as state land. However, the rapid demand for arable land in Gorontalo was motivated in 2003 by the establishment of the Agropolitan program of the provincial government, championed by the then governor to raise the province to the level of a major, export-oriented, maize production centre in Indonesia. Local governments in the province encouraged farmers to adopt maize monoculture by providing subsidies and hybrid seeds. During the consequent rapid expansion, villagers who had no land for cultivation cleared land within forest zones, seeking new opportunities and, in particular, taking advantage of the maize market. This led to conflict between villagers and the Government's forestry agencies over forest land boundaries. The need for resolving these conflicts has been high on the agenda of local governments and at local institutional level HKm and HTR are now clearly seen as an opportunity and an effective way to solve conflicts over forest tenure. The experience in Boalemo, as in other places in Sulawesi (Moelino et al. 2015), is that CBFM is mainly perceived as a solution to contentious claims over forest land and only secondly a tool for empowerment. HKm and HTR are, therefore, seen by local forestry officials as a mechanism to legalize forest occupation by villagers by granting them legitimacy through conditional tenure under HKm/HTR and, thus, more often accepted by 'accident' rather than because of understanding the benefits of collaboration and/or improved forest governance (Moelino et al. 2015). The importance of legalizing 'encroachment' has also been stressed during field research by forestry officials at district level.



- **Confusion among farmers' groups**

This legalization process has often been rushed by local governments. We can see this more clearly if we take the example of the community farmers' groups in both schemes in the two respective villages. In Hutamonu, the HKm farmers' group was composed of 113 members (Gunung Hijau farmers' group). Members were appointed through a hasty process initiated by the provincial Forestry Agency, together with village officials, by allocating plots of land to villagers without their consent and without any considerations for landless villagers. The designation of land surface to be managed by each individual had also been allocated randomly, ranging 1.5–5 hectares (policy restricts land area to a maximum of 5 hectares per member for both schemes). In Wonggahu, the formation of the HTR farmers' group (five sub-groups, each of them allocated 15 hectares) was also decided by officials together with the heads of each farmers' sub-group, without involving others, co-opting people who had already opened land at the location before the initiation of the program. Focus-group discussions revealed that among the 40 HTR members only four did not have any kinship with another member. This clearly demonstrates that land allocated falls into the hands of very few households, those which had cleared land in the state-owned forest some years ago and who received legality over this so called 'illegal' land occupation through the HTR program. Since plots cannot exceed 5 hectares per member, those who cleared bigger land surfaces had to split them by allocating portions to their relatives (land size ranging 0.2–5 hectares per individual). Consequently, the entire HTR land area is controlled by a few families within the village. This clearly contradicts the notion of equity, especially knowing that nearly 200 households in Wonggahu were landless at the time of study. Fifty percent (50%) of the villagers did not own land themselves and were obliged to lease some to farm.

Both farmers' groups were previously formed under the national reforestation and rehabilitation program (Gerakan Nasional Rehabilitasi Hutan dan Lahan) and were taken over by officials for the HKm and HTR programs.

- **Lack of understanding and poor publicising of the programs**

This rushed, 'top-down' process of land allocation and membership has had a strong impact on the community's understanding of the schemes, particularly their acceptance of the use rights. Our study found that farmers listed as members were not aware of their membership or did not understand the scheme itself nor were they aware of the amount and location of land plots that had been supposedly



Men's focus-group discussion in Wonggahu village. Photo: World Agroforestry Centre/Nurain Lapolo

allocated to them. In Hutamonu, for instance, during discussions conducted in the village, some members who were farming in the area since 1997 had only recently learned that their names were on the list of the farmers' group. During preparation phases, there had never been any publicising ('sosialisasi') about the objectives and management of the schemes in the villages by the Forestry Agency. People were totally unaware of the rules, objectives, restrictions and responsibilities of the schemes and the steps required to undertake any activities in the designated areas. The situation was similar to sites in South Sulawesi (Moelino et al. 2015). There was an overall lack of trust in governmental programs among villagers owing to past experiences and a misunderstanding over the status of the land and rights over forests. They also worried that after the expiry of the 35-year licence, control of the land would return to the government. In Wonggahu, there was not a single socialization event held. Socialization took place in a neighbouring village also targeted for HTR and only three members from Wonggahu joined the training and a field visit at that time.

Boundaries of the programs were also unknown by the members. Although they had been set on maps in the proposals, they were unclear in the field. The mapping of the areas had been conducted by officials from the Forestry Agency, in consultation with village officials, without any direct consultation with villagers and farmers' group members. In both villages, there was no participatory mapping exercise conducted to allocate the areas. Maps only showed areas that had been identified by officials as having been encroached by villagers. In Wonggahu, for instance, people were uncertain about the boundaries of the HTR scheme and were confused about the difference between the rehabilitation program and the HTR boundaries.

- **Limited knowledge and technical capability**

Technical capability to support practical activities in the field was also extremely limited. HTR policies provide three financial options for members: 'mandiri' (self-initiative); 'kemitraan' (partnership); and 'developer' (private investor). Members in Wonggahu

decided to opt for the mandiri scheme but lacked the financial means and technical capacities to undertake any activities by themselves. In 2014, following the issuance of the licence they initially received 2050 jabon tree seedlings (*Anthocephalus cadamba*; known locally as 'kadam') and then another 1500 from the Forestry Service (ideally 1 hectare of land should be planted with 400 trees). However, most of the seedlings did not survive owing to the farmers lacking knowledge of tree cultivation. They also struggled to transport the seedlings to the location, which was far away from the village on steep slopes. Many trees died before even reaching the location. Although the members engaged in a collective labour effort ('gotong royong') to plant the seedlings, there was no proper technical training on growing trees for timber and members were left to fend for themselves. Since that episode, the members had not received any further support from forestry agencies and the land was poorly managed. In nearly all cases, the success of smallholders' tree planting and production systems is dependent on the groups and individuals involved receiving technical and market training (Roshekto et al. 2007; Roshekto et al. 2008). Further, as well as timber trees (which can only be harvested after 5-to-7 years), farmers would also be likely interested in growing trees that produce short-term revenue, such as fruit species.

The situation in Hutamonu regarding HKm was similar: the members experienced considerable uncertainty about how the land was to be managed and who was responsible for providing technical and financial inputs. They were eager to continue their traditional cultivation practices: growing maize, coconut and some candlenut and clove. However, these practices were not considered acceptable for state forest land.

At the time of study, there were no management plans for future use of the HTR and HKm. After receiving the right-of-use licences, the farmers' groups decide how to manage the forests and then submit their work plans. However, developing such documents requires technical skill and is best accompanied by third-party support. If no support is provided, it is likely that the program will stagnate and remain poorly managed. There were no such management plans for future use of the HTR and HKm schemes.

In both villages, people also complained that the land allocated was far away from their homes, posing challenges not only in travelling to their allocated land but also in transporting future harvests.

### What went wrong in the process?

According to CBFM regulations, the responsibility for facilitation for empowerment of communities

is borne by local government agencies. However, these agencies often do not have the appropriate budget and human resources to efficiently undertake this task. Consequently, facilitation of CBFM in Indonesia is often supported by third parties, such as environmental and development NGOs, who take the lead in providing relevant information and ensuring broad community understanding, forming farmers' groups, and supporting the design of management plans. However, in Gorontalo Province, there was no such third party with the appropriate skills and external funding to undertake the responsibility. As a result, actual facilitation was weak and only conducted by local governmental agencies with limited financial and human capacity. This led to a rushed implementation process whereby target groups (impoverished and landless villagers) were left behind. The very essence of CBFM as a national policy is improvement of forest governance, recognizing the benefits of collaboration with local communities. However, it is being implemented in such a way that it fails to fulfil its promise of equity and empowerment. Rather, implementation further excludes those for whom the programs were initially designed.

Perception of the schemes at local government level is restricted to CBFM's potential to settle conflicts and legalize encroachment. It is perhaps for this reason, as stressed by Moelino et al. (2015), that there is not enough effort spent on institutional building and ensuring a free, prior and informed consent process.

Policy implementation at field level has been even further challenged by a lack of technical capability in local government agencies to support practical activities, such as the establishment of nurseries and tree plots, management of the plots, or harvesting and marketing. So far, technical support has only been through the provision of seedlings without providing any further technical training and guidelines, which has led to poor results. For HTR, developing nurseries on the spot, as well as proper marketing analysis, seems to be necessary to avoid repeated failures. Correspondingly, there needs to be stronger support to extension services because farmers are not aware of the requirements of timber production. They are left to themselves with neither financial nor technical skills to run the schemes efficiently. For HKm, agroforestry systems are the most promising solution but confusion remains among local governments about orientation of the schemes. For HTR, in addition to timber trees that only provide revenue after several years, farmers have stressed their wish to grow fruit trees. However, seedlings cannot be allocated by the Forestry Agency; the responsibility falls under the Agricultural Agency, which does not have a mandate over HTR areas. There should be coordination between the two agencies to allocate trees that are not simply forestry oriented in order to produce short-term benefits.

## Institutional confusion over responsibilities

Implementation and follow-up is further being challenged at provincial and district levels owing to confused and overlapping responsibilities and budgeting among the different governmental agencies involved, aided by poor institutional coordination. HKm falls under the directorate-general for Social Forestry and Environment Partnerships (Perhutanan Sosial dan Kemitraan Lingkungan/PSKL) with the MoEF while HTR responsibility lies with the Forest Management Units (FMUs). However, forestry agencies at provincial and district levels, the Watershed Management Agency (Balai Pengelolaan Daerah Aliran Sungai/BPDAS) and the FMUs are all mandated with facilitation. It is, therefore, unclear who is supposed to be responsible to inform the people, create farmers' groups and support the development of management plans. In all agencies, there is no budget allocated by the central and the local governments for activities related to CBFM on the ground. Budgets are often only enough for operational costs and are not sufficient to undertake any field activities. Agencies also pointed out that the process is slow owing to complicated and unclear procedures and policy by the central government along with the confused roles and responsibilities. Agencies were also unaware of the central government's targets for CBFM. At local levels, there had also been contradictory information about land allocation for CBFM in the province.

The poor coordination among the various agencies can be seen in the example of contradictory maps. The FMU in Boalemo had not yet taken leadership in HKm—although the responsibility fell to it under its land area jurisdiction—owing to an overlap in land-purpose allocations. The HKm area in Hutamonu had not yet been allocated as such on the FMU maps but was still designated as a timber production area. This needed to be clarified by the Ministry in Jakarta in order for the FMU to take action. In this instance, there was clearly a lack of communication between BPDAS and the FMU since in the early implementation phase BPDAS did not inform the FMU that the land was already allocated for HKm development.

Last but not least, there was a lack of leadership in providing information to the people and fulfilling responsibilities. Under CBFM policy, within two years after approval by the Ministry in Jakarta of the community proposal, the local government must issue the right-of-use licence (Surat Keputusan). If it fails to do so, the land-allocation map will be revoked and the process cancelled. In Hutamonu, the right-of-use licence was approved by the regent of the district shortly before the deadline expired. However, at the time of study, the signed use licence had yet to be operationalized with the communities concerned and the document was still in the possession of the

district Forestry Agency. This was due to uncertainties at field level: unclear maps and disorganized farmers' groups. Further, the allocation of land plots needed to be revised. Officials were expected to train villagers in how to establish a well-organized HKm structure. The district Forestry Agency had managed to issue the right-of-use licence on time, however, once it seemed that the licence was guaranteed no one was in a hurry to move to the next implementation stage and engage in socialization. While the official licence had been granted, people in the village concerned remained ignorant of the existence of the program.

## What should be done?

Knowing the multiple actors involved and the confusion over responsibilities, there needs to be better cross-institutional cooperation and a better understanding of the rules, regulations and objectives of each CBFM scheme so that local decision-makers can make the right choices for local conditions. It would, therefore, be relevant to establish a multi-sectoral and multi-institutional task force at the provincial/district levels that would be responsible for developing a land-rehabilitation strategy through CBFM for the province and districts and seeking access to capital from banks and governmental channels for activities.

The CBFM process should not stop with the issuance of the HKm/HTR licence but continue with long-term facilitation that helps the target groups comprehensively implement their management plans. Facilitation should also be provided at the licensing phase by supporting the creation of well-targeted farmers' groups and clarifying the implications of the programs. Since facilitation is the responsibility of the local government, funds would have to be made available through the district budget. The empowerment of the agricultural extension agency through training extension agents would also be necessary to improve technical capacities in nurseries, small-scale forestry management and marketing.

Under Law no. 23/2014, FMUs remain the key institution at field level. Accordingly, their capacities would have to be strengthened to conduct inventories of existing forest management and build upon local practices that have perhaps been forgotten owing to the rapid expansion of cash crops. Instead of imposing new forms of forest management, it would be important to develop locally-appropriate models together with the targeted communities.

If adequate resources are not provided and capacity in coordination and facilitation not improved, the ambition of allocating millions of hectares of land under CBFM shall remain as a target on paper only.





Land allocated for community-based forest management in Boalemo is often highly degraded and on slopes. Photo: World Agroforestry Centre/ Nurain Lapolo

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