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Local administrations are preventing community forestry projects from being enacted and are instead awarding access to forests to businesses, a study reveals.

The Leiden-based Van Vollenhoven Institute (VVI) has released a report showing that by the end of 2010 the Forestry Ministry established 78,110 hectares of land for community forests.

Regency

administrations have issued business permits for 29,680 hectares of that land.

“Various permits have been misused by certain local groups to allow access to others who obviously have no traditional rights to forested areas. They don’t even depend on forests for their livelihood,” VVI researcher Herry Yogaswara said.

Community forests are granted to local residents who are dependent on forests for their livelihoods and social activities.

The VVI report titled “Tenure Justice in Indonesian Forest Areas: A Comparative Study of Community Forestry in Central Kalimantan, Lampung and Yogyakarta” concluded that many local governments imposed tough licensing procedures on community forestry projects while simultaneously handing over permits to many ineligible groups.

In 2007, the government determined to allocate 2.1 million hectares for community forestry projects by 2014, or 500,000 hectares of forest annually. The 2007 target was included in the two-year forest clearing moratorium agreement between Indonesia and Norway that was signed in May of last year.

“No significant progress has been achieved so far in providing legal security for local communities,” Herry said.

The report said that in Central Kalimantan many local cooperatives were used by groups with strong financial capital to obtain licenses in order to exploit community forests.

Conservation-based community forests were not well-managed by local residents in two Central Kalimantan areas, Katingan regency at Petak Bahandang and the Marikit district, as people there were still strongly connected with illicit logging activities in those areas.

Partnership for Governance Reform program manager Hasbi Berliani said ten years ago community forestry was considered a great integrative approach that was desperately needed

to tackle poverty and massive forest destruction problems in Indonesia.

Citing Center for International Forestry Research data from 2004, 10.2 million people out of a total of 48.8 million who live in forested areas are poor, and most are unable to utilize forest resources to improve their living conditions.

According to Forestry Ministry data from 2006, 53 percent of the total villages in Indonesia are located inside or on the borders of forested areas.

Hasbi said community forestry projects failed to assure “tenure justice” for local communities and were especially impeded by local government officials.

“Many regents are reluctant to provide a definitive permit direly needed to realize the implementation of community forestry projects,” he said, adding that most regents would rather give permits to forestry companies instead of joining with “unprofitable” community forestry projects.

The lack of budgetary allocations also aggravated program implementation, he said.

According to the Partnership for Governance Reform, a community forestry project costs Rp 500,000 (US\$56.6) per hectare, which means the government needs almost Rp 250 billion to establish 2 million hectares of community forestry projects by their 2014 goal.

The Forestry Ministry has only allocated Rp 3 billion a year for the projects.

Forestry Ministry social forestry affairs director Haryadi Himawan said his ministry was not the only group that should be responsible for the implementation of forestry projects.

“They require strong partnerships, especially from local governments. We are now looking into local government attitudes to community forestry programs,” he said.

“We will be ready to punish any local official, either regent or major, who refuses to support the programs,” he added. (ebf)