



Toward more equal tenure: A case of post-customary forest recognition

Info brief



Kasepuhan Karang Indigenous Community, Lebak Regency, Banten Province, Indonesia

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Context

Kasepuhan Karang is an indigenous community in an area that used to be part of Halimun Salak National Park in Lebak Regency, Banten Province, Indonesia. In 2016, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry the Customary Forest awarded the community title deeds that gave them full ownership of their customary forest.

This research studied the impact of the recognition of Kasepuhan Karang's Customary Forest. Soon after, a women-led cooperative was established in support of their customary forest management. The research focused on changes in the tenure security of women and men from various backgrounds, including those who are unprivileged, marginalized, elderly and younger community members.

Research questions

This research was conducted to understand how legal recognition of the community's customary forest has or has not improved the tenure security of women and other marginalized groups. The research aimed to answer the following key questions:

- What rights do women have in agroforestry areas that are a form of customary forest management and what is their experience of exercising those rights?
- Does women's engagement in the microcredit cooperative affect or increase women's tenure security in the agroforestry areas?
- Does this engagement also support tenure security of marginalized groups, such as landless men or widows?

Methodology

This was participatory action research. The research team consisted of Indonesian Institute for Forest and Environment (RMI) one female and one male staff members and four female cooperative managers and members. Data collection was conducted through desk study, interviews, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Respondents were selected for in-depth interviews based on the profiles of cooperative members who represented a variety of backgrounds, including widowed women, landless men and young people.

Findings

The research revealed changes in four aspects of women's and men's tenure after the Kasepuhan Karang Customary Forest was recognized and after their women-led cooperative was established.

First, there has been no change in gender roles in forest governance and management at the household level. Husbands are always the decision-makers unless they are working outside the village. This is true whether access rights belong to the husband or the wife in a household, especially when it is market-related. Women are still associated with sustenance provision.

In agroforest areas where a family mostly grows fruit trees and other woody plants, decision-making is done by the men. This is true even though women also clear, weed and tend the cultivated plants and collect wild plants, including mushrooms, ferns and herbs for food.

Second, women's access to the agroforest area changed after Customary Forest recognition. When their customary forest was designated as a national park in 2003 to 2016, women were afraid to access the forest to collect firewood and wild plants for food. Husbands also forbade their wives from going to their agroforest.

There were several cases when communities were criminalized or chased by police rangers because they were using forest resources, such as gathering wood for making charcoal. This situation had caused a decrease in their food diversity as they could not collect wild plants. However, after their customary forest was recognized in 2016, the women and their husbands felt more secure to accessing their agroforest. Today, their food biodiversity is similar to what it was before 2003. However, younger women are not really involved in agroforestry or paddy field management, even when the access rights are in their names.

Third, women's leadership roles have changed in community level. Customary Forest recognition has provided many opportunities for women to be part of their customary forest governance. There is a need for more people to work together to manage areas that used to be inaccessible to the community and women have been chosen to manage the cooperative.

Improvements are still needed but the women cooperative managers are now more confident to make decisions. This empowerment has enabled them to make plans to support other women on various issues, including women's access to forest resources. The community also has positive perceptions of women's

leadership in what was traditionally considered as outside women's domain. Women's leadership in the public sphere was unknown before Customary Forest recognition and before the women-led cooperative was established.

Fourth, the cooperative has strengthened the community's tenure by providing loans to community members in emergency situations without taking away their access rights. Twelve out of 81 cooperative members, some of whom had lost rights to their agroforest and paddy field areas more than 10 years ago, have regained their access thanks to a loan from the cooperative. However, there are also cases of some of the more well-off members borrowing funds from the cooperative to buy the access rights of other members in emergency situations. This potentially increases the gap between the 'elites' and the 'non-elites' at least in terms of access to land.

Conclusions

Customary Forest recognition has affected the community's, women's and men's tenure security in a variety of ways. In general, women and men of Kasepuhan Karang feel more secure in accessing their forest and as a result the community has implemented various initiatives in its agroforest areas. Security of access has once again enabled women to collect more food from the forest, as they did before their customary forest was designated as a national park in 2003.

However, at the household level, recognition of their Customary Forest has not changed gender roles significantly. Women are still managing agroforest areas although they are more involved in

paddy field management. However, they are still not involved in decision-making, especially related to marketing their forest produce.

More attention needs to be paid to gender roles in agroforest management. Otherwise future support, such as fruit tree rehabilitation coffee cultivation development, might increase the tenure security gap between women and men in the customary forest area.

Customary Forest recognition has provided a valuable opportunity for Kasepuhan Karang's women to become leaders in the governance of the customary forest, which was not the case before 2016. Recognition has created a promising path for more inclusive forest governance if further assistance from government or civil society organizations is delivered effectively.

Recommendations

- Using relevant projects, familiarize the community with more gender equal and social inclusive principles, such as cooperative development, nursery development and food.
- A specific program for younger women, might be useful to reconnect them with customary forest management or with the post-production phase. Their connection to the forest will be crucial considering the customary forest collective ownership has no time limit.

Endnotes

1. Een Suryani, Susi Irma Handayani, Isut Sutini, Yunengsih, Fauzan Adima and Siti Marfu'ah.

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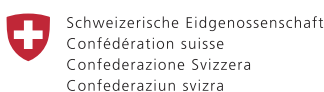
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