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Economic value of non-timber forest products among Paser Indigenous People of East Kalimantan Saragih, B.

Citation

Saragih, B. (2011, November 10). *Economic value of non-timber forest products among Paser Indigenous People of East Kalimantan*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/18078>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Tropical forestry in Indonesia is facing challenges in terms of sustainability and the survival of its inhabitant, indigenous people, not least because the perception of policymakers is that, since the 1970s, forests have provided a major solution to economic development by producing timber, conversion forest land for agriculture, mining, and other non-forest land use. Consequently, the forest and its resources have been undervalued and its monetary potential has been underestimated. This has led to overexploitation and conversion, which ultimately results in the loss of biodiversity and threatens the survival of indigenous people.

This study, conducted in a small forest protection area in Gunung Lumut in the Pasir District of East Kalimantan, focuses on the poor indigenous people in this region and reveals the crucial role that the forest plays in both the economic and non-economic dimensions of the lives of the indigenous people of Paser. Indeed, the forest contributes to the Paser household economy in almost all aspects of life. Forests are so much more than trees and timber, and the Gunung Lumut protection forest goes far beyond providing food and materials for construction. It is the backdrop for the Paser people's spirits and cosmovision.

This study suggests that conversion or other land use options for forest land should begin with an evaluation process, in order to reveal the 'true' value of the forest – economically and environmentally – for the livelihoods of indigenous people. These values must be part of the toolkit for developing policies for land and forest use. In addition, such an evaluation process boosts the negotiating capacity of the indigenous people to prevent further losses from forest conversion.

This study shows that monetary valuation also benefits forest management by preventing unnecessary conversion of forest land and further loss of biodiversity in tropical forests. It provides indigenous people with a bargaining tool in the context of compensation for the loss of their resources.

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