
Indonesia: Wonosobo forest managed by the community

Wonosobo is a rural district in Central Java, close to the mountainous Dieng plateau. Much of its 18,896 hectares of state forest is designated Protection Forest as the hilly uplands are the watershed for several major rivers. Like all other forest land in Java, the Wonosobo forest was controlled by the state-owned forestry company Perum Perhutani, which according to field reports has severely damaged or destroyed well over half the 'state forest'.

When the colonial government was in charge of managing the Wonosobo forest, it converted most of the lowland forest to monoculture agricultural land and plantations. Local people were hired to work on the plantations and to produce timber, but they no longer had control over the land. However, despite centuries of colonial administration, the conversion of most lowland forest for agriculture and the establishment of plantations, elements of traditional forest management still persist in some parts of Java, where diverse systems co-exist. The Javanese term wono, incorporated into the names of many villages and towns, can mean forest, paddy fields or orchards since the same land is used to grow trees, rice and other agricultural crops -sometimes in rotation; sometimes by intercropping.

People have lived in Wonosobo forests for generations, relying on rice, fruit, livestock, and vegetables for their sustenance. Selling of non timber forest products is also a way of income for them: honey, resin and fiber. They continued applying their traditional forest management in a few parts of the forest, and developed a very sound model of agro-forestry in which community members decide collectively how resources should be managed, taking both economic and environmental needs into account.

These forests managed by people are much healthier than forests managed by the state. The difference is striking: the community forest is diverse and flourishing, and the state forest is degraded.

The people of the Wonosobo forest demonstrate that community forest management is the best way to secure both protection of the forest and the people.

Article based on information from: "Nature: poor people's wealth", "Communities care for forests", Walhi/Friends of the Earth Indonesia, July 2005, <http://www.foei.org/publications/pdfs/poverty.pdf>; "Community forest management, the way forward", Down to Earth, <http://dte.gn.apc.org/srf3.htm#won>