

Characterization of the Air Dingin - Muara Labuh Area of the Kerinci - Seblat National Park: Farm and National Park Interactions

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ABSTRACT

Buffer-zone agroforestry has strong potential to stabilize the farming systems of villagers living adjacent to protected forests, enabling them to prosper without encroaching into the forest. An area on the north-eastern border of Kerinci-Seblat National Park (KSNP) in West Sumatra was chosen as a prospective ASB research site to provide insights on interactions between slash-and-burn practices and the buffer zone of the national park. The study focused on harvesting of forest products by farmers; sought correlations between the degree of reliance on forest products and type of farming system; and measured the contribution of mixed gardens and nagari forests to reducing farmers' dependence on KSNP resources. The Air Dingin-Muara Labuh study sites provide a unique laboratory for careful observation of the interaction between farming systems and protected wildlands. Farming communities nestled within the central rift valley are squeezed between the boundaries of KSNP on the western slopes and protected forest on the eastern foothills. With a rising population and only this narrow corridor of land legally at their disposal, the stage is set for exacerbated tensions between the dual objectives of ecosystem conservation by the state, and resource exploitation by smallholder farmers. Understanding the indigenous communities and their customs governing resource tenure will be a vital prerequisite to any interventions. This paper represents a modest beginning by characterizing farm and KSNP interactions and proposing emerging research issues for the ASB research plan.

INTRODUCTION

To initiate ASB research in Indonesia, an area on the northeastern border of the Kerinci Seblat National Park (KSNP) in West Sumatra was chosen as a prospective research site to provide insights on the interaction between slash-and-burn and the buffer zone of a major national park (see Map 1). An underlying premise was that buffer zone agroforestry has strong potential to stabilize the farming systems of villagers living