



**PEOPLES' PERSPECTIVES OF COMMUNITY
FORESTRY: VIEW FROM SOUTH EAST PAHANG
PEAT SWAMP FOREST, MALAYSIA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore respondents' perspectives on forest conservation. Equally important to the focus of the research is to explore the key condition that helps account to the successful establishment of community forestry in the conservation area of South East Pahang Peat Swamp Forest (SEPPSF). It is anticipated that the knowledge generated from this research would afford new insights about forest management. It hopes that knowledge generated from this research would also be a groundswell support to pilot community forestry in the highly bio-diverse ecosystem of SEPPSF. Further it hopes that discussions and recommendations generated from the research would be a catalyst to forestry planners to initiate transition in forest management, from central state control to community based forest management. This study employed qualitative case study methodology to illustrate respondents' perspectives on forest conservation and the key condition under investigation. Respondents of this study included a mixture of purposefully selected 15 people varying from local communities (Jakun) who used to live in and around South East Pahang Peat Swamp Forest, scientists who research forest policies and social scientists who work on community rights in forest management. The research was based on two research questions: 1) What perspectives do people hold with regard to forest conservation, and 2) What is the key condition people envision as relevant that helps account to the establishment of community forestry in forest conservation area. After careful analysis of the current forest policy mainstream in SEPPSF, the mainstream thinking does not have a structure to springboard a community centred forest conservation project. The ensuing situation grabs the attention of respondents in the research, and through an extensive discussion with the respondents, this research agreed on three things. First, for community forestry to take shape in SEPPSF, the authority must recognize local communities' right in forest management. Second, for community forestry to carry on in the longer run, local communities have to be part of forest conservation activities that benefit them in long term. Third, prior to the trial of community centred conservation project, a study on peoples' perspectives towards forest conservation precedes other priorities. People perspectives are crucial in terms of deciding the suitable conservation projects that are congruent to local environmental condition.

ملخص البحث

يهدف هذا البحث إلى الكشف عن وجهات نظر المشاركين حول موضوع المحافظة على الغابات، وعلى نفس القدر من الأهمية فإنَّ محور البحث الأساسي يتمركز حول محاولة استكشاف الشرط الرئيسي الذي يساعد على بيان أسباب إنشاء مجتمع الغابات، وذلك ضمن مجال البحث الذي تمثَّل في مستنقعات غابات جنوب شرق ولاية باهانج (SEPPSF). ومن المتوقع أن تحمل تلك المعرفة الناتجة عن هذا التحقيق مجموعة من الرؤى الجديدة حول إدارة الغابات. كما نأمل أيضاً أن تسهم هذه المعرفة المتولدة عن هذا البحث في زيادة دعم أصحاب القرار المعنَّين بالمحافظة على الغابات المجتمعية الرائدة في نظام التنوع الحيوي البيئي في مستنقعات غابات جنوب شرق ولاية باهانج (SEPPSF). وإضافة إلى ذلك فإننا نأمل أن تساهم تلك المناقشات والتوصيات الناتجة عن هذا البحث في أن تكون حافزاً لمخططي الغابات لبدء التحول في إدارة الغابات من الإدارة المعتمدة على سيطرة الدولة المركزية إلى الإدارة القائمة على مجتمع الغابات. وقد استخدمت هذه الدراسة المنهج النوعي الذي يوضح وجهات نظر عينة الدراسة حول قضية المحافظة على الغابات واستقصاء الشرط الأساسي الذي يحقق ذلك. وقد اشتملت عينة الدراسة على عينة قصدية متعمدة، تكونت من 15 شخصاً من مجتمعات محلية مختلفة من السكان الملايو الأصليين والذين يعرفون بأورانغ أصلي (Jakun)، الذين اعتادوا العيش في مستنقعات غابات جنوب شرق باهانج وحولها، وذلك وفقاً لوجهات نظر العلماء الذين تخصصوا في دراسة الجانبين السياسي والاجتماعي والذين يعملون في مجال إدارة حقوق مجتمع الغابات. وقد قام هذا البحث على سؤالين بحثيين، وهما: 1- ما وجهات نظر السكان فيما يتعلق بالمحافظة على الغابات؟ 2- ما هو الشرط الذي يتصوره هؤلاء السكان الذي تقوم عليه عملية إنشاء مجتمع الغابات في مجال المحافظة على الغابات؟. وبعد تحليل دقيق لوجهة النظر السائدة المتعلقة بسياسة المحافظة على الغابات في مستنقعات غابات جنوب شرق ولاية باهانج (SEPPSF) فإننا نرى أنَّ هيكل هذا التفكير السائد لا يمتلك نقطة انطلاق لمشروع الحفاظ على مجتمع الغابات يكون المجتمع هو محورها. وبعد مناقشة مستفيضة مع المشاركين وتحليل الأمور التي لفتت انتباههم، وافق البحث على ثلاثة أمور، وهي: أولاً، لكي يأخذ مجتمع الغابات شكله في SEPPSF، يجب أن تعترف السلطة بحق المجتمعات المحلية في إدارة الغابات. ثانياً، من أجل استمرار مجتمع الغابات على المدى الطويل، يجب أن تكون المجتمعات المحلية جزءاً من الأنشطة المتعلقة بحفظ الغابات، وأن نضمن الاستفادة منها على المدى الطويل. ثالثاً، قبل الحكم المسبق على مشروع المحافظة على الغابات، فإنَّ أولوية دراسة وجهات نظر السكان تجاه مسألة المحافظة على الغابات تسبق الأولويات الأخرى. إنَّ وجهات نظر هؤلاء السكان هي صاحبة القول الفصل من حيث البتِّ في مشاريع الحفاظ على الغابات التي تتواءم مع ظروف البيئة المحلية.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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Signature.....

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*To my parents and my brother, Muhammad Khair Mohd Shaleh, for their enthusiasm,
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

SEPPSF	South East Pahang Peat Swamp Forest
JAKOA	Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
CF	Community Forestry
GEF	Global Environment Facility
UNDP	United Nation Development Program
CPR	Common Property Resources
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Products
ALDP	Agricultural Land Development Programme
RISDA	Rubber Industry Smallholders Authority

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Dominant approach to forest conservation policy has always been under the control of central state forest management. Solid empirical evidence has cited the designation of state forest conservation area as famous government policy to encounter the impact of forest degradation on ecosystems (Poffenberger, 2006; World Resources Institute, 2002). Though government roles in forest conservation have succeeded in preventing the overuse of natural resources, a juxtaposition of empirical evidence to the success stories of central state forest management has confirmed that conservation policy can be frustrating, rather than accommodating the provision of fairness and justice to forest communities (World Resources Institute, 2002; World Wide Fun, 2001; Colin, 2003; Colin, 2002), and in some incidents have forcibly resettled people from their traditional land (Dahlberg & Burlando, 2009).

A number of studies have posed contrasting findings though, and have exhibited the fact that affected people from government conservation policy are positive about the tradeoff between their traditional lifestyle with government resettlement schemes (Harun, Sulong, Wai, Ismail, Yusof, Manaf & Juahir, 2010; Hamid, Abu Samah & Man, 2013). Indeed, these studies have posed two perspectives - positive and negative - towards government conservation policy, and have forwarded avenues for research on forest conservation policy.

The outcomes that colour forest conservation policy debates have been a vibrant area of research that has yielded strong insights into forest management system in tropical countries. A central insight into the debates is that, extensive studies by now have established to tell us that governments from all parts of the tropical world are changing their forest management policy (Agrawal, Chhatre & Hardin, 2008; Asia Pacific Forestry Week, 2008). A core change has been the groundswell support for the establishment of community forestry in designated central state's forest conservation area. This support has its supporters from many quarters of academia, international organizations, human rights organization and international donors (Ross & Panya, 2009; Poffenberger, 2006; World Resources Institute, 2002; Colin, 2003).

While there is no full blown definition of community forestry, yet there are integrated definitions of community forestry that have been used in previous studies exist. It is worth noting to list down several definitions of community forestry. Although definitions that have been constructed are accorded to specific contexts, the various exponents of the definitions and understanding of community forestry do have a common nucleus to the core understanding of community forestry that is developed in this research. The definitions are given below:

- 1) Community forestry is a local institution in which local communities are organized to create their forest management system (Djamhuri, 2008, p. 84).
- 2) It denotes a wide range of forestry activities, including planting, protecting, and harvesting techniques. These local activities are based on local ideas that link rural people to forests, and their ecosystem, and the benefits to be derived as the result of local communities' forest related activities (Sunderlin, Dewi & Puntodewo, 2007, p. 28).

- 3) It is defined as the governance and management of forest resources by local communities for commercial and non-commercial purposes, including subsistence, timber production, non-timber production products, wild life and the conservation of biodiversity (Gilmour, Malla & Nurse, 2004).
- 4) It refers to a local system of forest management, often dating back many years that was created spontaneously by local communities. It gives local communities greater rights and responsibilities in forest management or as a caretaker of land that belongs to the state (Poffenberger, 2006).

These four definitions are taken from different writers with varying ideas, and accordingly, it becomes inevitable for the researcher to give a common treatment to all definitions. Nonetheless, the definitions that have been posited by previous researchers told us that when discussing community forestry, and by large they operate by giving local communities greater rights, entitlements and involvement over forest management (Djamhuri, 2008; Sunderlin, 2007; Gilmour et al., 2004; Poffenberger, 2006). Community forestry forces central state to hand over to local communities certain responsibilities in forest management, the legitimization of local communities as the direct stakeholders of the forests, and their involvement in designing forest conservation policy (Agrawal & Ostrom, 2001; Dev & Adhikari, 2007; Gibson, Williams & Ostrom, 2005).

Substantial empirical studies have diagnosed a fact that changes in forest management policy at the state level, which has led to the establishment of community forestry, which further benefits peoples' livelihood and forest bio-diversities (Clark, 2008; Soontornwong, 2006; Mahanty et al., 2006; Rasheed, 1995). Persha, Agrawal and Chhatre (2011) attribute the twin benefits of local communities' participation in conservation rule-making in ensuring healthy ecosystems, whereas the United Nation

Development Program community forestry projects in some parts of South East Asia nations have been successful because local communities give assistance to international organizations in the cultivation of traditional herbs (UNDP & GEF, 2007). For all we know, there is a local flavour in forest care, and the local people's involvement is the key reason for the overwhelming number of supporters of community forestry who have lauded for more primacy of local communities' participation in forest conservation activities (Anderson, 2011; Cox, 1985; Djamhuri, 2008; Leete, 2007; Persha et al., 2011).

Although there has been a proliferation in the number of efforts to establish community forestry in state land forest conservation area, there are also cases of failures. In light of this statement, some writers have challenged the valued result of community forestry to advance a successful model of environmental and development goals. For example, the failure to create community forestry at the community level in hopes of stemming more loss to forests is caused by the lack of land tenure or property rights arrangement for local communities (Djamhuri, 2008; Ostrom, 2000; Ostrom, 2003; Berkes et al., 2004). The lack of land tenure arrangement has already produced uncertain results as to whether individuals who are engaged in forest conservation activities should play their part in community forestry. It has been cited that when lack of tenure security to the land has been eluded from community forestry, people do not 'feel' that they have to commit to land management (Pagdee, Kim & Daugherty, 2006).

Thus, land rights provide a strong incentive for community based forest management, and the benefit of the land rights arrangement will give locals the confidence that they hold the rights to reap benefits from forest-related activities (Pagdee et al., 2006).

Many scholars have suggested property rights arrangement to be brought to the fore of policy table in order to avoid failures, as scholarships regarding community forestry told (Ostrom, 2003; Ostrom & Hees 2007; Zimmerman, Peres, Malcolm & Turner, 2001; Ormsby & Kaplin, 2005; Sunderlin, 2006). The journey towards the creation of community forestry that succeeds in some contexts has been well-documented by many scholars (Gibson et al., 2005; World Resources Institutes, 2002; Pagdee et al., 2006; Ostrom & Hess, 2007; Varughese & Ostrom, 2001; Acharya, 2002). In those literature, the historic shift from central state forest management to community forestry is characterized by emphasis on community rights in forest management. In this light of forest transition, the dominant central state position in forest management as the only institution to take care of natural resources has been superseded by an organized local community institution (Djamhuri, 2008).

One can speculate that the propensity to move towards community forestry as to how it was established, practically rests on the formation of institutional arrangement at the local level, with greater stress on community rights in forest management (Ostrom, 2000; Ostrom, 2003; Ostrom & Hess, 2007; Agrawal & Ostrom, 2001). This assumption that community forestry succeeds because local communities are the direct stakeholders in the forest is implicit in most literature on community forestry (Mehta & Kellert, 1998; Sunderlin, 2006; Rasheed, 1995).

Many researchers have built comprehensive case studies, advocating the implementation of community forestry in tropical regions, and they have documented many success stories (Acharya, 2002; Mahanty et al., 2006; Sunderlin, 2006; Soontornwong, 2006; Sunderlin et al., 2005).

Although one can speculate as to what success stories are needed in community forestry, there seems to be little conclusive agreement about the key condition that helps account to the establishment of community forestry in forest conservation area. This is because condition is case specific and one size does not fit all. Previous writers have contributed to troika of debates regarding what makes community forestry successful (Boissière, Locatelli, Sheil, Padmanaba, & Sadjudin 2013; Kindt, Noordin, Njui & Ruigi 2005; Ormsby & Kaplin, 2005; Clark, 2008). From the plethora of debates in exploring an alternative forest management system, they have appreciated people's understanding on activities that are responsible for environmental changes. In light of knowledge of previous scholars, it appears that people's perspectives on land management or land planning, and their observations on forest landscape have given policy makers and research institutions a broader understanding of environmental issues (Boissière et al., 2013; Kindt et al., 2005; Ormsby & Kaplin, 2005; Clark, 2008). More importantly, those studies have generated knowledge about forest management in the tropical world. As Boissiere et al. (2013) have said 'Insights that researchers have gleaned from research participants have provided suffice momentum to pilot and test community forest management in the tropical world' (p.4)

This research is guided by a considerable amount of knowledge generated by previous literature on community forestry. Pivotal to the forthcoming exploration of this research is the discussion on securing community rights in forest management. Knowledge of scholars on community forestry tells us that community forestry is thought as a social institutional arrangement that aims to give local communities the right in forest care (Feeny et al., 1990; Berkes, 2004; Berkes, 1989; Ostrom, 2000; Ostrom & Hees, 2007; Acharya, 2001; Agrawal, 2000; Agrawal & Ostrom; 2001; Sunderlin et al. 2005; Sunderlin 2005; Zimmerman et al., 2001).

The above literature in their discussions has revealed the need for the formation of local community rights to access and to manage well-defined forest boundaries for community-based conservation projects. In the process of forming the local structure, it will open up the gate for negotiation between local people and the government. It conveys a group of villagers working together, maintaining natural resources, progressing towards obtaining conservation objectives and establishing cooperation. Thus, prior to community forestry, there is a necessity to explore people's perspectives on forest conservation, and the key condition that helps account to the establishment of community forestry in forest conservation area.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The groundswell support for community forestry was developed by proponents whose contention was to encourage local communities' participation in forest care, forest management and forest related activities. Previous literature has found that when local communities have contributed to forest protection projects, forest conditions have been enhanced. Also, when local communities who envisioned a long term dependency on forest resources for their livelihood, and were handed their rights to design community based forest management, they were committed to forest conservation projects (Soontornwong, 2006; Mahanty et al., 2006; Djamhuri, 2008; Leete, 2007)

Despite those advantages that have made community forestry a successful model of forest management in the tropical world, one size does not fit all. The establishment of community forestry may be ideal and feasible if everyone from the government officials, local communities, and policy makers mutually agree to pilot and test community forestry. But to get every stakeholder to agree to this significance act requires a deeper understanding into a multitude of people's perspectives on forest

conservation, forest management, changes in forest landscape, and the foundation of community forestry (Boissiere et al., 2013; Kindt et al., 2005; Clark, 2008).

Given the reality that forest conservation is only part of the whole picture that caters to insurmountable forestry debates, there is a need to glean insights from people who are connected to forestry debates. This is because in order to facilitate community forestry, the devolution of forest management to local communities has to be accepted in the mainstream forest policy as the experiences of pioneering countries have indicated (World Resources Institutes, 2002; Leete, 2007; Colin, 2002; Colin, 2003; Asia Ingenious People, 2004; Varughese & Ostrom, 2001; Agrawal & Ostrom, 2001). Devolution means local communities have the rights to access, manage, and control forests and they could benefit from forest related activities. The process of devolution is cumbersome as it requires the formulation of a legal framework to recognize local communities' right in forest management. Even if there is a tendency towards an institutionalization of community forestry in the legal framework, the problem that plagues the efforts to change the mainstream policy has been narrowed down to political will (Sapari, 2012; Colin, 2002; Colin, 2003). However, an accumulated knowledge from previous researchers has proven that if it is within the central state's deliberation to recognize community forestry in forestry policy, then community forestry can be trialed and tested (Sapari, 2012).

These debates on community forestry, scholars have testified to the necessity of future researchers to delimit the scope of study about community forestry to the mentioned key condition, where previous studies have identified gaps in their works and suggested directions (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Ostrom, 2000; Ostrom, 2003; Ostrom & Hees, 2007; Akiefnawati et al., 2010). In appreciating the ground that has been set up by previous scholars, this research seeks to explore the key condition under

which community forestry could be established in South East Pahang Peat Swamp Forest (SEPPSF). Three reasons motivate the research:

1. Especially valuable to the research is people's perspectives on forest conservation, whose descriptions and insights are based on their experiences, in terms of living and researching in the SEPPSF. With their help, this research hopes that community forestry can be developed in a context that is congruent to the living landscape.
2. Especially catalyst for the research is the state of the knowledge of the key condition that helps account to the establishment of community forestry. Several domains of thoughts and ideas that are gleaned from respondents are analyzed and enclosed with recommendations.
3. Especially instrumental to the research are insights, opinions and knowledge about 'what should be done' to establish community forestry project in South East Pahang Peat Swamp Forest, where community forestry is not included in the current forest policy. In light of this search, people's support towards conservation project will be the cornerstone to pilot and test community forestry in SEPPSF.

It is anticipated that the knowledge generated from this inquiry would afford new insights about forest management. It hopes that knowledge generated from this research would be a groundswell support to pilot community forestry in the highly bio-diverse ecosystem of SEPPSF. Further, it hopes that discussions and recommendations generated from the research would be a catalyst to forestry planners to initiate transition in forest management, from central state control to community-based forest management.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1 To explore people's perspectives on forest conservation. It is expected that the concentration of people's perspectives on forest conservation will trigger a series of exploration on changes in the living landscape, and people's reactions towards a forest conservation project.
- 2 To explore the key condition that helps account to the successful establishment of community forestry in forest conservation area. It is expected that the analysis of the insights related to forest management will trigger to series of exploration on what should be done in order to develop community forest in SEPPSF.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- 1 What perspectives do people hold with regard to forest conservation? Do they support forest conservation project?
- 2 What is the key condition do people envision as relevant that helps account to the successful establishment of community forestry in forest conservation area? What is the government's position on Natural Resource Management, and what should be done to develop community forestry in SEPPSF?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study emanates from the researcher's desire to uncover the key condition that helps account to the successful establishment of community forestry in South East Pahang Peat Swamp Forest. The current knowledge about the process to facilitate community forestry indicates that the design of community forestry in forest conservation area will first have to secure community rights in forest management. Such

assertion has been warranted by a number of studies dealing with forest management policy which has concerns over the question of who owns the forest (Pagdee et al., 2006; Persha et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2002).

Thus, this research hopes that an increased understanding on community forestry and its associated processes that are needed will increase the amount of support to springboard community based conservation projects in SEPPSF. In other words, an increased understanding about what should be done in order to develop community forestry in SEPPSF could open the gate of negotiation between local communities, policy makers, international donors, and commissioned researcher.

Thus, in its own awareness about the potential development of an alternative forest system, this research seeks to explore people's perspective on forest conservation, and hopes that their insights on forest conservation will trigger a positive stance towards forest conservation project. Of the major concern in this research is to unveil respondents' unanimous commonalities about the importance of forest conservation, the changes in the living landscape, and the prevailing government position on forest management. Therefore, a collection of perspectives on those issues will elevate the groundswell support for the establishment of community forestry in SEPPSF.

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.6.1 Common Property Resources

Common property resources (CPR) theorists have developed a framework to guide a study on various elements of social and ecological interaction, and scholars who have depended on this theory have demonstrated a great deal of their work to explore the key question of who owns the forest. (Berkes et al., 1989; Berkes, 2004; Ostrom, 2000; Agrawal & Ostrom, 2001; Ostrom & Hees, 2007). In light of this understanding, CPR