BUILDING PARTNERSHIP THROUGH NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS

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Non-wood forest products are a vital part of the livelihood of communities who live near to forests. Improving the quantity and the quality of non-wood forest products is, therefore, an absolute necessity. Many steps must be taken to do so: engage with local communities, help them improve their entrepreneurial skills, and assist them to expand their networking and partnerships to promote their products. All of them are required to ensure better livelihood of the communities and, at the same time, the sustainability of the forests.

Since 2014, Forest Management Unit V (or also known as “Kesatuan Pengelola Hutan V”) Aceh, has been trying to commercialize pine resin to improve the livelihood of local residents. They choose pine resin due to the lucrateness of the business. The head of the Forest Management Unit, Kamaruzzaman, said, “I am certain that pine resin is an entry point for the involvement of local community in preserving forests, considering that until this moment they have not yet fully realize its potential as a source of livelihood.”

Basically, there are many forms of non-wood forest products, including resins, leaves, tree barks, forest...
They all can contribute to the local economy and help improve the overall prosperity of the locals. Unfortunately, the utilization of non-wood forest products is still traditional and for mere self-sufficiency purpose. In short, the abundant non-wood forest products are left unexploited. Indeed, the people still do not have the entrepreneurial mindset that can encourage them to produce and market the products.

There are currently 25 thousand hectares of pine forest in Aceh Province alone. They are specifically located in Gayo Lues Regency, Nagan Raya Regency, Central and Southwest Aceh. Resin from pine trees can be processed into turpentine, a fluid obtained by the distillation of the resin and is mainly used as a solvent for oil paint or as one of materials to make perfume. It smells similar to eucalyptus oil.

Kamaruzzaman said that he and his team are trying hard to improve the involvement of residents in preserving forests. The Forest Management Unit tries to accommodate both the economic interest of local residents and the sustainability of the forests. It is noteworthy that the failure to preserve forests is caused by the lack of community’s involvement. The unit is aware that they are suffering from limited budget and manpower to watch for forest degradations. Utilizing forest resources means people are also involved in protecting the forests. “By involving local communities from the beginning, the likelihood of success of forest preservation is higher,” said Kamaruzzaman.

At the beginning, people refused to commercialized pine resins due to marketing limitations. They had no idea of where and how to market the products. In respond to the issue, the Forest Management Unit cooperates with cooperatives and Village-Owned Enterprise to process and distribute the resin. A company, PT Kencana Hijau Bina Lestari, apparently needed pine resins in a great amount, up to 50 tones resins per day. This was deemed as a great opportunity, especially with the fact that the company had not yet obtained the necessary daily supply.

To take advantage of the one-in-a-million-opportunity, the Forest Management Unit invited an expert from Bogor Agricultural University to introduce a useful drilling method to tap pine resins. At first, the method was deemed too intricate. But as soon as people noticed that drilling method leaves smaller holes and minimal damage to trees which means faster recovery, the method started to gain pop-
ularity. Resins flowing out of the drilled holes are streamed with pipes, and they will all be collected in a plastic container. This method is also proven to produce clearer and better quality pine resins.

Every kilogram of pine resin is sold for Rp 4000. However, the involvement of local residents is still low. It is estimated that only one percent of the residents are pine resin farmers. To meet the daily supply, the company has to employ farmers from outside of Aceh and even Sumatra. The local residents are more attracted to lemongrass oil farming which is considered easier to do.

To attract more farmers, PT Kencana Hijau Bina Lestari in partnership with Bogor Agricultural University actively introduce drilling method to every village with pine forest. Not all pine forests are owned by the company; some are privately owned by local residents. The company provides drilling equipment for villagers, and they are allowed to buy the equipment in installments. One of the staff of Forest Management Unit V, Zulhammuddin Arbie, said, “Although it is still not perfect, this is an attempt to protect Aceh’s forests. Pine resin business will minimize loggings and help realize the sustainable commercialization of forest resources. People used to sell pine trees for a hundred thousand Rupiah each trunk. Now, they are more interested in farming its resin or lemongrass oil instead.”

The Forest Management Unit also tries to maximize the utilization of other non-wood forest resources, including lemongrass oil, rattan and palm sugar, in an eco-friendly manner. Lemongrass oil business is considered promising even though they are not as profitable as pine resin. It is a great idea to run both businesses simultaneously; lemongrass will flourish when planted near to pine trees.

Friendly Forest Security Officers

The Forest Management Unit also partners with the Forest Security Agency (or also known as Pengamanan Hutan). Forest security officers are nowhere similar to their stereotypical image: cold, heartless and physically violent. Surprisingly, they are friendly, caring and very listening. The presence of the officers help preserve forests and support the improvement of the surrounding livelihoods. Forest security officers are involved throughout the whole process of socialization and training. Of course they are still watching over the forests, but this time they are also taking a persuasive approach to gain support from the local residents.

The step has been fruitful so far. Local residents used to ignore environmental degradations that they witnessed and were unwilling to report them to the Forest Security Agency. Now, the people are very cooperative, and they, in fact, often patrol together; Forest Security Agency is taking a persuasive approach that allows them to combat environmental crimes and enforce laws more effectively. “Forest Security Agency is now responsible to hold socializations and trainings for farmers and the general public. They are expected to be able to be close [with the people] and raise the interest of the people to exploit non-wood forest resources in a sustainable manner,” said Kamaruzzaman.

All stakeholders have to be involved to successfully preserve the environment while improving the economy. The Forest Management Unit V will also work closely with The Regional Water Utility Company (or also known as PDAM) to manage water resources in Gayo Lues. Zulhammuddin Arbie said, “If we did not build cooperation to ensure water sustainability, I think, ten years from now, we will find water difficult to obtain.”

The Forest Management Unit is learning how to
build a multi-stakeholder collaboration (including by involving local residents) to effectively and sustainably manage forests. Partnership between the government, private parties and local communities in exploiting non-wood forest products will be continuously evaluated. One thing is for sure, the Forest Management Unit is committed to one specific ideal: when the forest is preserved, the people will prosper.