



Land Governance in an Interconnected World

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EMERGENT DYNAMICS OF MIGRATION AND THEIR POTENTIAL EFFECTS ON FOREST AND LAND USE IN NORTH KALIMANTAN, INDONESIA

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Abstract

Many of the world's poorest live in a close relationship with trees and forests. To sustainably enhance their well-being, policymakers require accurate information about who these people are and how they interact with forests. While migration has been widely adopted as one of an important strategy for their lives, the links between migration and its potential effects on forest and land use are remains poorly understood. This lack is becoming even more glaring as improved transportation and communication systems are transforming and intensifying mobility patterns.

In an attempt to resolve this gap, we present evidence of how the changing face of migration impacts on land use decisions made by households in Indonesia. Much of the existing literature addressing the interlinkage between migration and the environment in Indonesia investigates the extent to which migrants are responsible for deforestation in the places where they settled. Our study moves beyond the limitations of such studies in three innovative ways. First, instead of treating migration as an independent force impacting on the environment, we recognize the importance of mediating variables in determining forest outcomes. Thus we engage with previous studies on the economic, social and ecological drivers and effects of migration, and expand on them by tracing the impacts of these phenomena on forest management systems. Second, we shift the focus from the receiving areas to the migrant-sending regions. Focusing on migrant-sending areas allows us to include a variety of emergent patterns of migration into our analysis, such as rural-urban, circular and educational migration. Finally, we do not limit ourselves to the effects of migration on forest cover only, but also consider the implications for forest-related livelihoods, access to and distribution of natural resources and the design of policy interventions.

Our findings are based on mixed-methods research in two different landscapes in Malinau Regency, North Kalimantan. *Lower* Malinau is a peri-urban area on the outskirts of the capital of the regency in which a small portion of the area is forest and a coal mining zone. *Upper* Malinau is a vast forested landscape and located in a border with a neighbor country. Data were collected in two rounds. It began with quantitative data collection through a survey of 360 households in 8 villages. Following this, we revisited four villages with the highest rate of migration and most evident changes in forest landscape. In this round, data were acquired through 141 interviews and 20 focus group discussions.



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Quantitative analysis demonstrated that the primary driver of migration in our sample was pursuing higher education (80%). Male and female residents migrated in roughly equal numbers (54% male, 46% female). Qualitative fieldwork revealed how these patterns evolved, in conjunction with various contextual and situational changes in both host and home areas. Until the year 2000, migration was shaped by the need for staple supplies, such as clothes, salt, and other edibles, in the context of limited access to market due to geographical isolation. This type of migration was heavily dominated by male residents who commonly went to Malaysia to work at logging companies. After the decentralization implemented in 2001, development appeared and brought an array of economic opportunities, particularly in the form of employment in the public sector. The construction of road network, school, market and governmental offices alleviated the villages' seclusion. Interest in pursuing higher education rose together with demand for skilled labor to run newly established public services. Improved access to urban areas and increased information flows further nourished the educational aspirations of the village youth.

This resulting pattern of migration placed a burden on the sending households, whose expenditures increased as they financed the tuition fees and living expenses incurred by the educational migrants. The need to finance educational migration affected their livelihood strategies and land use decisions. Two discernible strategies were being employed, with different implications for land and forest use. While some households further intensified agricultural production, others opted to diversify their livelihood portfolio. In the latter case, there was a surge in logging, finding agarwood (*gaharu*), micro business. The stage of development of an area, the availability of infrastructure and access to markets played a role in defining what strategy was adopted.



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Qualitative discussions with the educated youth returnee migrants and current education migrants in two receiving cities reveal youth aspiration to return home upon the completion of their education. This was explained regarding place-based attachment, and expectation to have greater access to formal jobs upon returning. These youths also indicated their aspiration to continue agriculture and forest-based livelihoods upon their return, albeit as a side job. These findings reflect the continued importance accorded to agriculture and forestry for subsistence purposes and as a safety net against shocks and other stresses, on the one hand. It also points to the effects of a new district decentralization plan and opening up of employment opportunities on the emerging generation, on the other.

Our findings are significant for two reasons. It questions a common assumption in the contemporary discourses on rural development that youth are exiting agriculture/forestry sectors. It points to the unexpected effects of the current process of state-making in the forest frontiers of Indonesia, and the need to include the next generation and their shifting aspirations and life trajectories, in policies and programs aimed at promoting sustainable and inclusive development.

Key Words:

Migration, Youth, Education, Forest, Land Use