

ABSTRACT

Indonesia is facing several problems related to the management of protected areas including encroachment, poaching, illegal trade of protected animals and plants, as well as conflicts of interest between protected areas and local communities surrounding them, especially over economic issues. The problems, such as local communities' complaints, indicate an imbalance of environment, economic and social aspects of protected areas, as well as show injustice in the establishment of protected areas. Using the lens of environmental justice, this study aims at analysing the processes of the establishment of Sebangau National Park (SNP) as one form of protected areas in Indonesia, along with the implementation of the management activities, and its impacts on the livelihoods of forest communities. Through stakeholder analysis and regulatory framework analysis, the study also suggests some options to balance the ecological, economic, and social goals of protected areas, which is also the central research question of this study. The term "balance" is intended to enhance social and economic aspects of the management of national parks as it is assumed that the ecological aspect is usually prioritized and deeply elaborated compared to the economic and social aspects.

This study employed a case study approach. SNP and its surrounding villages were selected as the case study sites since the park was established by changing the status of state forest from production to conservation. Three sample villages were purposively selected based on: (1) variety of local community's livelihood; (2) village location; and (3) type of village (traditional or transmigrant). Focus groups, household survey, in-depth interviews, observations, and relevant documents are used to collect data. The data was then analysed using a combination of quantitative analysis (descriptive statistics) as well as qualitative analysis (using environmental justice framework and stakeholder analysis, and descriptive analysis).

The results of the study show that the establishment and expansion of national parks has made an important contribution to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, but in an inhabited forest area such as SNP, it has led to the economic and social problems for forest dependent communities due to access limitation. In terms of environmental justice, this study depicts that the establishment of SNP did not adequately comply with the criteria of environmental justice, namely procedure, recognition and distribution, since local communities were not adequately consulted or involved in the establishment and management of the national park. Furthermore, approaches to mitigate the adverse impacts failed to fully consider the diverse cultures and customs with different livelihood strategies surrounding the park. The study also found that the options made available for local livelihoods were limited and did not meet specific needs and demands of certain ethnic groups. Overall, the transformation of the Sebangau production forest into a conservation area significantly disrupted local livelihoods and led to adverse economic, social, and cultural impacts.

The stakeholder analysis shows the existence of 12 parties who have interests in and influence the management of SNP's resources. Two of them are key players,



namely SNP Management and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), while the community is a subject with high interest but low influence. Using the concept of property rights, to achieve environmental justice, it is necessary to shift the position of the community to become the key players by enhancing the influence of the community.

Adequate attention to environmental justice must be made if park authorities are to improve the social acceptability of the national park. They should meaningfully engage the local communities in decision-making procedures related to park management, because they are directly impacted by the park. The authorities should also understand the different sociocultural aspects related to the local people surrounding the park and their different needs and livelihood strategies. Finally, the livelihood alternatives should be carefully assessed, and local communities should be adequately consulted to ensure that the existence of the park is socially and culturally accepted.

Efforts to strengthen the influence of community can be carried out in various ways that include developing community-prioritized zoning system, providing alternative livelihoods to communities, and establishing a buffer zone. The formation of the buffer zone is the most recommended method since it will significantly improve the influence of community by granting management rights in the buffer zones in the forms of community or village forests.

Keywords: national parks, forest communities, local livelihoods, environmental justice.