

Political Ecology of Industrial Plantation “Pulpwood Plantations are NOT Forest”

By:
Muhammad Teguh Surya
Head of International Affair and Climate Justice
WALHI (Friend of the Earth Indonesia)

The idea of Indonesia monoculture pulpwood plantation or better known as *Hutan Tanaman Industri* (HTI) has actually started since the Dutch colonial era. Where in 1847, the Dutch government requested two German foresters, Mollier and Nemich, to design a forest farming system for Java as an effort to address the demands of teak for shipbuilding industry owned by Chinese and Dutch entrepreneurs, which are scattered along the northern coast of Java, starting from Tegal, Jepara, Juwana, Rembang, Tuban, Gresik, up to Pasuruan.

Dutch colonial government prefer monoculture system (planting one dominant tree species) proposed by Mollier. They reject the multicultural system (planting a variety of trees) proposed by Nemich because the monoculture system is economically more profitable and meets the demand for timber at that time. (*Nurjaya, 2008, Wikipedia, 2008*)

The idea of industrial plantation itself was firstly introduced by the government in a seminar in 1984 on Timber Estate, which recommends a programme to rehabilitate critical and unproductive forest areas. The term of *Hutan Tanaman Industri* (HTI) was increasingly used after that. The government also has formalized HTI into various policies that regulate HTI, including Government Regulation No.7 of 1990 on Rights of Industrial Plantation Forest Control, PP No.34 on Forest Governance and Forest Management Planning, Forest Utilization and Use of Forest Area, as well as Forestry Minister Decree No.10.1/kpts-II/2000 on Guidelines for Granting Permit of Timber Utilization. None of the three policies can clearly define HTI and why then can be called a forest.

The use of HTI term on any government policy related to development of monoculture pulpwood plantation is clearly an act of hazing a meaning that has political, economic, and ecological consequences. When HTI is considered as a forest, then the process of clearing the remaining natural forest is considered as legitimate, assuming when the natural forests are exhausted then will be replaced by HTI.

This is in line with the definition of deforestation by the World Bank (1990) which implies that deforestation is the loss of forest coverage that cannot produce timber. It is ironic when Indonesia's forests have high biodiversity value, a source of local inhabitants' livelihood, are simplified by the government and World Bank into merely valued for timber. Forest Steward Council also stated that industrial forest is categorized as “forest”, very ironic.

Whereas between forest and plantation clearly have different characteristics. Forest basic characteristics are multi storey canopy, has biodiversity, continuous existence, has hydrologic function, and has a distinctive ecosystem. While HTI do not have the basic

characteristics and as a timber plantation that can be compared with other plantations such as rubber, tea, coffee, and palm. (*Notohadiningrat, 2006*)

Hazing of the meaning and definition of forest into plantation represents certain interests that are dominated by global interests, due to the large increase of forest coverage lost by the increasing demand per capita of urban society and global demands for processed wood, pulp and paper.

HTI Hunger for Timber

Furthermore, the government categorizes HTI into three types. *First*, HTI pulp is a monoculture plantation designed primarily to supply materials for pulp industry; with planted tree species of *acacia*. *Second*, HTI carpentry is a monoculture plantation designed primarily to supply materials for carpentry and other wood industries. *Third*, other HTI is a monoculture plantation designed to supply timber and other industries, such as a specific type of wood mainstay in one place.

However in further development, HTI pulp is the one that gains notice from the government to be developed. It is at least based on the development of the export value of forestry industry, which in the period 1985 – 2004 started to slowly gain a sizeable foreign exchange contribution from plywood products to pulp and paper (*Suhermanto*), and increasing consumption of paper per capita in all countries, as well as high pulp prices in international market ranging between USD 750-930/ton for long fibres and short fibres USD 810-865/ton (*BBPK, 2008*).

Unfortunately for 17 years (1989 – 2006) the government is only able to build 3.03 million hectares of monoculture plantations from 10.2 million hectares planned, although various facilities have also been given to employers during that period. So it can be comprehended that monoculture plantation is a serious threat to the destruction of natural forests of Indonesia and the wrong answer for various issues in forestry industry.

For example, to be able to produce one ton of pulp required 4.6 meter cubic of wood, each single ton of pulp can produce 1.2 ton of paper; and monoculture pulpwood plantation with *acacia* per hectare is capable of producing 160 meter cubic of wood with a planting cycle and harvesting for 6 years (*Syumanda, 2008*). If the total production of Indonesia pulp currently reaches 6.4 ton per year, then 29.44 million meter cubic of wood required per year (*Sinar Harapan, 2006*). Imagine how many millions of hectares more forest areas that have to be pledged into HTI, while currently there are 14 pulp and 7 pulp and paper factories producing.

History recorded that issues in forestry industry do not lay on raw materials alone, but there are issues in policy inconsistencies, discriminative, legal guarantee, labour regulations, business assurance, and land certainty, of which the issue was never discussed thoroughly for solution.

The government is preoccupied with their taught and overlook other issues, thus providing various facilities to entrepreneurs that should not be done because this country will lose its bargaining position in business negotiations. Various social issues, environmental degradation, and human rights violations committed by corporate was

never to be fully resolved by the government because starting from the beginning, entrepreneur was never been placed equally but beyond.

The government still seems reluctant to learn from the past failures and misguided in interpreting the investment interests; where truly investment is needed for prosperity and welfare of the people, not vice versa.

The government should review the engine capacity of each timber industry, pulp and paper, and adjust it with the availability of raw materials, focus on the fulfilment of domestic needs, and allocate reforestation fund to the ecological restoration process of vital ecological areas that have been degraded.

The consumption model of urban residents should also be reformed so that the pressure on natural forests can be reduced. **(end)**