

Green economy tied to indigenous rights

Activists have warned that the transition to a green economy could be difficult given the prevalence of land disputes that involved a large number of the country's impoverished tribal communities.

Noer Fauzi Rachman, an advisor on agrarian reform at Partnership for Governance Reform, said a green economy was not a ready-made solution and it remained to be seen if the government could maintain the rights of indigenous people to manage their land.

He said that currently, the government had to deal with three types of land disputes that involved violations of rights of indigenous communities, regular land grabs and the massive distribution of land to private companies.

"The future of the green economy hinges on our ability to solve land-based problems," said Noer during a workshop on green economy in Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan, over the weekend.

Indonesia is currently facing green economy challenges, including whether it can achieve its target of cutting CO2 emissions by 26 percent by 2020 without causing problems to the economy.

Noer said a green economy required honoring the rights of indigenous people over their ancestral lands and natural resources.

"Giving tribal people a security of tenure on their ancestral lands and natural resources appears to be one of most critical challenges we may face in moving towards a green economy," he said.

Tribal communities currently faced growing threats, including violence and manipulation from companies controlling land concessions and other large-scale exploitation, he said.

"These concessions, covering production, extraction or conservation activities, have led to the destruction of their livelihoods," said Noer.

The Forestry Ministry's office in Central Kalimantan recorded that as of March, 327 cases of conflict and social unrest had impacted on plantation businesses in the province.

The conflicts involved both private and publicly-owned companies and have taken place in 14 regencies and municipalities.

They include land conflicts between plantation companies and local communities, land-based clashes between different groups of people, and business licence disputes.

"I must say that in this province, most forestry and mining concession are given to companies that operate on ancestral lands. Unfortunately, we've not seen a single policy from the government that protects the Dayak tribal people's rights over their ancestral lands, even though the Dayak have been living here for generations," said Siun Jarias, secretary of the Central Kalimantan administration.

He said that of total of 1,400 villages in the province, more than 600 villages were currently located on ancestral land.