

Kalimantan forests degradation: the underlying cause and effects and current stat...

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Borneo, the largest island state in world, is gifted with abundant natural riches and resources which include exotic species of plants and animals, rare minerals, wonderful mountain sites, and spectacular rain forests (Schultz). Most of its land area has been occupied by Indonesian provinces of Eastern, Western, Central and Southern portions of Kalimantan. Heidi Schultz's report published in the National Geographic clearly describes that abundance of natural resources in the island.

Schultz's report describes this geographic location as a land of concentrated minerals, rich soils, and timber woods from the rich rain forests which surround the region. One of the most beautiful rainforests known in the world is found in this area, the Kalimantan Forest. The Kalimantan Forest is specifically located in Jakarta, Indonesia. It has been known over the centuries to be one of the richest rainforests in the world until it has been exposed to forest degradation during the late 1960's (Indonesian Working Group). The main roots of these forest degradations in Kalimantan has been a popular topic of research all over the world since it was once considered as one of the world's richest rainforests. Over the years of research about the underlying cause of the deforestation in Kalimantan, one thing has remained consistent about the findings: illegal logging and uncontrolled local autonomy within the rainforest have been found to cause the near-dead condition of the woodland (Toyoda). It was found that the continuous increase in demand for logs in the leading industrialized nations forced the movement of the over-active logging in Kalimantan.

The change in the previously peaceful state of Kalimantan Forest into a nearly dying forest has been seen by most ecologists as dramatic and rather disturbing. Most of Kalimantan's resources went to the production of furniture, paper pulp, and other wood products most industrialized countries nowadays are demanding (Butler). Over the recent years, Kalimantan has been the immediate source of the world's finest timber woods. This leaves Kalimantan with only a memory of what used to be a fine and spectacular rainforest in the tropical soils of Indonesia (Butler). In addition, recent findings were able to measure the annual deforestation rate in Kalimantan.

According to the recent reports of Rhett Butler, founder of an environmentalist site Mongabay. com, the annual 200, 000 hectare/year deforestation rate from 1985 rose to an alarming rate of 1. 2M hectare/year in 2002. It can also be observed from the report as supported by the graph above that the shift from the 1991 deforestation rate to the 1992 deforestation rate is very drastic. This bothered not just the national government sector of Indonesia but the rest of the environmental activists in the world who fight to preserve such precious rainforests like Kalimantan. It was even reported in The Jakarta Post in its 1st of December 2001 issue that within five years of continued and uncontrolled logging activities in Kalimantan, the forest is feared to disappear and be eradicated in the map of Indonesia (Nurbianto and Wulandari).

The report showing in detail the findings of the State Ministry of Environment statistical study in Jakarta states that the loss of the 56 million cubic meters of timber which equates to US\$8. billion can be attributed to the unregulated

and unmonitored illegal logging in the area. Nabel Makarim, State Minister for Environment, emphasized and further stated that “ the illegal logging is now conducted indiscriminately in protected forests, national parks and in other restricted areas” which continues to contribute to the relentless degradation of the Kalimantan forest (Makarim qtd. in Nurbianto and Wulandari). This just proves how rampant and raging illegal logging is in the Kalimantan area. Chart 1: Average Annual Deforestation in Kalimantan.

Effects of the Kalimantan Deforestation It may appear that not all people understand that well what deforestation means and what it can cause to the lives of the dependent organisms in the forests of the world. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a leading environmental activist organization, emphasizes the biodiversity and the preservation of natural resources to sustain the natural wealth of life (Innes).

The organization has been consistently advocating the reality that forests are the habitats of biological diversity which is the most natural wealth the world ever had. During the more preserved years of the world’s forests, one out of ten parts of the world’s total land area is covered by rich rainforests (Indahnesia. com). Over the recent years, the percentage of dying rain forests all over the world has been doubling continuously in rate. Indahnesia. com, a web site which advocates the preservation of the wonders of Indonesia, states that this horrible degradation of world forests poses great dangers and hazards to the environment as forests serve as sponges which absorb and hold water for long periods of time which eventually helps in preventing huge floods and landslides.

In addition, the site also claims that deforestation contributes to global warming since the absence of forest trees allows numerous toxic gases to stay longer in the atmosphere like carbon dioxides, nitrogen, and methane which all set up global warming. Aside from these, the cases of illegal logging have also been reported to cause conflicts and friction against villages in Jakarta. This is brought about by various logging activity profit and traditional land claims which have not yet been resolved up to present date (Toyoda). Moreover, the ruining of these natural riches also contributes to the continuous decline of the overall GDP of Indonesia as the environmental expenditures consistently rise.

In addition to this, the uncontrolled deforestation activities in the country even led to serious government challenges and destabilizations because of the citizen's doubts the state's authority over natural resource utilization (Alfred, Hardiono, and Rautner 25). As it may seem, the hazards to life, economy, peace among locals, and government stability can greatly destabilize any nation which fails to fight rampant degradation of forests. Indeed, deforestation may always appear to be an inexorable and inescapable truth for the forests of the world.

Thus, it is always dissatisfying and alarming as well to accept the possibility that rich and spectacular forests like Kalimantan would cease to exist and leave nothing for the future generation, if this rampant and widespread act of killing the world's forests shall persist in the years to come.