



SUCCESS STORY

Empowering Communities, Protecting the Environment

The Changes for Justice (C4J) Project is bringing change to local communities by empowering them with new knowledge and skills on how to resolve local disputes. The project is cooperating with local district courts, prosecution offices, and communities in three pilot locations in Aceh, Riau and West Kalimantan.



Image above: Local village leaders stand at the river separating a vast area of palm oil plantations from the forest that they are fighting to save.

“Most of us here are farmers. Sometimes someone is reported to the police for entering our land, but a plantation company claims ownership. . . Learning about laws on forests and boundaries in our neighborhood helps us to respond to the company and to everyone who claims ownership of our land and forest. If they violate the law, we know how to report it. . . We don’t want to lose our land and, most importantly, we do not want to suffer from natural disaster because our environment has been destroyed. Forming a paralegal group in the village is a good start. We will be stronger in a group, instead of as individuals.”

Yohanes, a local villager

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The Supreme Court and Attorney General’s Office of the Republic of Indonesia have implemented new reforms to improve public services. Now the lessons on improving public access are being brought to the local communities to improve not only their access to justice, but also their knowledge on how to protect their forests and wildlife.

The USAID Changes for Justice (C4J) Project is engaging with local communities and training their leaders as paralegals to build their legal awareness and compliance with environmental laws and regulations. Mostly farmers, these leaders have experienced conflicts with plantation companies or village government over land disputes and/or natural resource management issues. They also face challenges in their communities from climate change.

This community engagement program focuses on areas which offer a great potential for implementing sustainable environmental management and reducing threats to biodiversity, focusing on illegal logging, land conversion, wildlife trafficking and poaching. Aceh, Riau and West Kalimantan were selected as pilot areas, The communities in these areas are very prone to be involved in such cases.

The C4J Project assists the communities with knowledge on basics of legal system in Indonesia, paralegal functions, and ethics through case studies and role playing prosecutorial and court processes, and documenting, investigating and reporting cases.

The trainings have changed the participants’ perception and attitude as they were initially being skeptical with the Indonesia’s justice sector, which is a key start on the improved interaction between law enforcers and public. After the three days training, the communities showed more confidence and enthusiasm as they understand better about their right to information and how to access justice. They are eager to participate in any training continuation on more specific topics such as mediation, and mentoring on topics related to civil and crime cases of forestry issues and land disputes, legal assistance and consultation.

Rafiq, a local participant stated, “With this training, I now understand about legal processes and actions I can take. It helps me analyze the current cases we are now facing and defining an action plan, whether it be a crime, or a civil or administrative claim.”

Arie Andhika, a judge at Bangkinang District Court, believes that the paralegal training is important because “this activity has linked us with our community.”

The C4J Project is a five-year project funded by USAID, and implemented by Chemonics International. C4J works with the Supreme Court, Attorney General’s Office, and communities to improve transparency and accountability in Indonesia’s justice system. The project began in May 2010, and continues through May 2015. For more information on C4J, please contact the Contracting Officer’s Representative Mr. Dondy Sentya, USAID Senior Rule of Law Specialist at dsentya@usaid.gov, or info@chemonics.com, or www.c4j-indonesia.org