

# Hillside forest land as a safety net for local people in a mountain village in West Java: an examination of differences in the significance of national and private lands

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## Abstract

In Kemang, a mountain village in West Java, Indonesia, the local people call the hillsides *pasir*, a term which includes both privately owned hillside land or nationally owned forest land. It is apparent that the national forest lands function as a social safety net, serving as land where the middle-class and the poor can conduct “informal” cultivation, through temporary agreements with the state forestry corporation, or even “illegal” cultivation without permission. In this study, the households cultivating on national forest lands were identified as: (1) having most household members living together; (2) having a relatively young head person; (3) cultivating a small area of rice field; (4) having participated in the former *perhutanan sosial* system; (5) being dependent on the income from hillside land; (6) taking advantage of the rare opportunities for off-farm income; and (7) having a low total income. Meanwhile, the *talun-huma* system is dominant on privately owned hillside land, where a part of the *talun*, or tree garden, is cleared for use as a swidden on a 30-year rotation. In such cases, the land functions as a safety net only for the limited number of people who are permitted access to the land. The function of the privately owned hillside land, through the mutual-aid system, should not be overestimated; it is probably less important than national forest land in terms of income redistribution. It is recommended that the government of Indonesia consider the possibility of formally ensuring the long-term rights of local people to utilize the national forest lands in Java.

Talun - Hillside land - National forest - Illegal cultivation Key words

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