

Palm oil expansion in tropical peatland: Distrust between advocacy and service environmental NGOs

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1. Introduction

- Indonesia has the largest area of tropical peatland in Southeast Asia
- The habitat is under threat with palm oil as the main crop due to high international demand.
- For example, in 2016, 10.25 million tons of Indonesian CPO was exported to India, followed by the European Union (6.6 million) and China (5.1 million) (Varqa, 2017).
- Approximately 10 per cent of the Indonesian tropical peatland area had been converted to palm oil plantation.
- By 2020 the area under oil palm would have increased by between 20 to 25 per cent to around 4.0 million hectares (Miettinen et al., 2012).

- In Indonesia context, environmental NGOs (ENGOS) have an important role to play in the protection of tropical peatlands.
- After the downfall of the Suharto regime in 1998, the number of ENGOS has been increasing.
- Some of them apply advocacy strategies while others work with service-delivery activities, for example, community empowerment and development.
- Explores the ENGOS' role in peatland protection by looking at their actions, networks and material support.
- Explore how donors' involvement in transferring the duties of the state to the ENGOS has an effect on the relationships between advocacy and service ENGOS in peatland protection.

2. Responsibilization concept

- Refers to the process of “rendering individuals or groups responsible for certain aspects of their well-being previously considered the duty of state” (Erbaugh, 2019:1)
- Transfer responsibilities to other agents is to reduce the costs of taking care of specific domains such as environment, sometimes without understanding communities’ resources and capabilities to carry out these new responsibilities.
- Responsibilization turns individuals, families, and organizations, entrepreneurs or business entities into actors that are responsible for their own actions (Lemke, 2002).

Responsibilization framework in the special issue

Action, Institution and material supports

- Actions – activities conducted by the ENGOs.
- Institution - networks such as local communities, government and companies, as well as national and international communities
- Material supports – funding of the ENGOs.

Distrust concept

- Three fundamental elements: trustors, trustees, and actions
- Distrust means that trustors have a negative expectation of the trustee's conduct (Lewicki, et al., 1998), commitment, and independence (Stern & Coleman, 2015).

3.2. Data sources

Interview (43)

Organizational Type	N 2016	N 2017	N 2018	Total
Local advocacy ENGOs	1	1	4	6
National advocacy ENGOs	1	1	2	4
Inter. advocacy ENGOs	1	-	-	1
Local service ENGOs	-	1	4	5
Prov. Adm. officers	4	4	-	8
Local lawmakers	1	2	-	3
Palm oil farmers	5	7	-	12
Palm Oil Associations	-	-	1	1
Local com. leaders	2	1	-	3

Observation

- Active participation in the rallies organized by advocacy ENGOs in 2016 & 2018.
- In the March 2018 “Care for Earth” campaign organized by a service ENGO consortium.

4. Result – 4.1. Actions, network, and fundraising of ENGOs in Riau province

Consortium	Number of members	Actions	Network	Donor/ Fundraising
Advocacy ENGOs				
ENGO 1	21	Investigation, lawsuit action, policy advocacy, and judicial review	National & International	Int. donor
ENGO 2	13	Investigation, lawsuit action, policy advocacy	National & International	Public donor, int.& nat. donor
ENGO 3	7	Facilitation, and demonstration	Regional	Mem. contribution
ENGO 4	4	Demonstrations and organizing farmers	National & International	Mem. contribution
ENGO 5	3	Environmental broadcasting	National	Advertisement
Service ENGOs				
ENGO 6	20	Community development and empowerment	National	Company found & government

4.2. Distrust and the transfer of responsabilization

Trustor	Reason for distrust to the trustee		
	Action	Institution	Material support
Advocacy ENGOS	Whether service ENGOS actions have positive impact to the well-being of local communities	Service ENGOS have overly close relations with timber and palm oil company groups	Conflict of interests of service ENGOS funding from timber and palm oil company groups.
Service ENGOS	Advocacy ENGOS actions can be harmful to the economic development of the region	The legitimacy of advocacy ENGOS for having too little support from the grassroots.	Political agenda behind the global donors regarding market share competition of the vegetable, sunflower, and CPO.

Example of advocacy and service ENGOs' statement

- *“How can I trust them [service ENGOs] if they work and have a close relationship with companies. At the grassroots, our members are in very violent conflict with them [companies] because they got a permit to occupy more than half of an island in this province. And all areas of the island are peatland.”*
- *“Yes, we obtain funding from international donors, mostly. But, they [donors] give us the freedom to organize programmes and actions.”*
- *“For me, they [advocacy ENGOs] should learn more about how the political interests of economic production in the world works. What is wrong about our (partner) companies wanting to do something for earth’s conservation? So please do not be too confident that you are a holy organization and others are dirty because you never work with companies.”*
- *“My organization is involved in a consortium project, but it is weakened by the rejection of some proposed programmes which were judged by the donors to be beyond their expectations. We regret this action because the rejected programme is important if they really want to do something for forest and peatland conservation.”*

5. Discussion – 5.1. Responsibilization of advocacy and service ENGOs

- The relationship between advocacy ENGOs and their donors is equal.
- Some of them independently fund their actions which allows them to take responsibility for peatland protection and people's economic well-doing.
- They also raise formidable opposition to the incapability of the government to control the unsustainable practices and tropical peatland utilization by palm oil companies.
- They are struggling to sustain their own well-being due to the lack of adequate financial resources, and dedicated activists run the organizations without full-time staff and salaries.

- The service ENGOs work based on projects planned by donors and the relationship they have with their sponsors is hierarchical.
- They do not have the power to influence the programme, to allocate the budget, and to lead their organizations based on their own knowledge and principles.
- The donors require the ENGOs to work according to donor interests with a limited possibility to realize their own ideas and actions.
- They have less flexibility and freedom to pursue their actions and plans, and they have a duty to carry out the programmes requested by the donors.

5.2. Distrust between the ENGOS

- Distrust occurs in a situation where a party has doubts about the behavior and actions of another.
- Each has a stereotypical image of the other's actions, dreams, self-autonomy, competence and credibility, and they are unable to accept each other's vulnerability.
- This study, however, found a balance in the roles of the two groups.
- The actions of advocacy ENGOS are vital for challenging the activities of the palm oil companies, and these NGOs constructively criticize the government towards ensuring better lives for the inhabitants.
- At the same time, community development and empowerment programmes of service ENGOS are also important for improved well-doing of local communities.

6. Conclusion

- Responsibilization in peatland protection impacts on the actions, networks, and material support of these two groups and leads to increasing distrust between them.
- Responsibilization often occurs without the transfer of needed powers, for example, the ability to arrange the programmes based on responsabilized actors' knowledge and principles.
- However, due to the diversity of actors, governmentalities and contexts, these have to be studied case by case.

Kiitos!

Link of article

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1389934119302540>

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