



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Forest Policy and Economics

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/forpol](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/forpol)

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

Rijal Ramdani<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Anu K. Lounela<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Geographical and Historical Studies, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland<sup>b</sup> Department of Government Affairs and Administration, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia<sup>c</sup> University Researcher, Development Studies, Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Helsinki, Finland

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Environmental non-governmental organizations  
 Responsibilization  
 Distrust  
 Palm oil  
 Tropical peatland  
 Indonesia

### ABSTRACT

Tropical peatland suffers from rapid degradation due to expansion of palm oil plantations. In Indonesia, Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) have an important role in peatland protection. This paper discusses the implications of responsabilization in the relation between advocacy and service ENGOS in the context of tropical peatland protection and the expansion of palm oil in Sumatra, Indonesia. Drawing on the scholarly discussion on responsabilization in environmental management we show that responsabilization in peatland protection increases distrust among the ENGOS by generating a diversity of actors with different material support, burdens and principles of work, and even polarized opposition between the networks. Such distrust has a bearing on the effect of the actions, networks, and material support of advocacy and service ENGOS. Advocacy ENGOS share similar interests with their donors, which allow them to perform their expected actions autonomously, while service ENGOS are more dependent on donors' programmes and aims. The research utilized methods such as face-to-face semi-structured interviews with advocacy and service ENGOS, state and non-state actors, palm oil farmers, palm oil associations and three leaders of local communities, combined with participant observation. We argue that responsabilization should be explored case by case because different responsabilization processes lead to differing burdens among different types of ENGOS. Contrary to expectations, responsabilization in peatland protection may thus decrease the possibilities for peatland protection in the area.

### 1. Introduction

Tropical peatland is a habitat with a large amount of carbon (70 GT) and different flora and fauna (Miettinen et al., 2012a; Koh et al., 2011) and Indonesia has the largest area of peatland in Southeast Asia (Page et al., 2011). However, the habitat is under threat due to the activities of the mono-agriculture industry, with palm oil as the main crop based on high international demand for the product (Hamilton-Hart, 2015; Li, 2018). For example, in 2016, 10.25 million tons of Indonesian CPO (Crude Palm Oil) was exported to India, followed by the European Union and China which accounted for approximately 6.6 and 5.1 million tons, respectively (Varqa, 2017). In 2010, approximately 10% of the Indonesian tropical peatland area had been converted to palm oil plantation, with Sumatra having the greatest area of conversion at around 1.0 million hectares; it was predicted that by 2020 the area under oil palm would have increased by between 20 and 25% to around 4.0 million hectares (Miettinen et al., 2012b). Riau province has the

largest area of tropical peatlands in the country. Around 4.1 million hectares of Riau province is peat bog (Wetlands International Indonesia, 2005). At the same time, 2.3 million hectares of palm oil plantation exist in the region and of these, 25% are located on peatland (Miettinen et al., 2012b: 9). However, the real number of palm oil plantations could be higher because many smallholder farms are not covered by the statistics. The region with its massive land-use change is vulnerable to peat fires and forest degradation, and thus to high carbon emissions (Purnomo et al., 2019).

In Indonesia, environmental NGOs (ENGOS) have an important role to play in the protection of tropical peatlands from the palm oil and timber industries. In Riau, the location of this research, 50 ENGOS under six consortia, have actively been involved in tropical peatland protection for around two decades. The advocacy ENGOS apply advocacy strategies which include civil lawsuit action, lobbying, and pressuring the decision-making processes. Others, which we will call service ENGOS, work with service-delivery activities, for example,

\* Corresponding author at: Department of Geographical and Historical Studies, University of Eastern Finland, Metria Building, PL-396, P.O. Box 111, Joensuu, Finland.

E-mail addresses: [rijalram@student.uef.fi](mailto:rijalram@student.uef.fi) (R. Ramdani), [anu.lounela@helsinki.fi](mailto:anu.lounela@helsinki.fi) (A.K. Lounela).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2020.102242>

Received 26 April 2019; Received in revised form 15 June 2020; Accepted 25 June 2020

Available online 08 July 2020

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community empowerment and development.

This article explores the NGOs' role in peatland protection by looking at their actions, networks and material support. It adopts the responsabilization concept (Erbaugh, 2019; Mustalahti et al., 2020) to explore how donors' involvement in transferring the duties of the state to the NGOs has an effect on the relationships between the NGOs in peatland protection. Responsibilization as a conceptual framework refers to the processes of "rendering individuals or groups responsible for certain aspects of their well-being previously considered the duty of the state" (Erbaugh, 2019: 1). The responsabilization approach has been employed, among others, to explore how in Canada voluntary organizations encourage volunteers to channel their resources towards educating others on how to become responsible citizens (Ilcan and Basok, 2004). In the case of the Philippines, the NGOs work on empowering the poor, but often also extend their service to the political rationalities of control and surveillance of "marginalized" people and biota (Bryant, 2002).

In the Indonesian context, the number of NGOs has been increasing after the downfall of the Suharto regime in 1998. The number of NGOs increased rapidly due to abundant funding from foreign donors to support democratization and freedom to join political associations (Hadiz, 2010). The NGOs in Indonesia are diverse and ideologically divided. At the beginning of the Suharto era in particular, many NGOs channeled government aid and programmes to poor or other vulnerable groups which thus were dependent on the state (Nomura, 2007; Aspinall, 2005; Nyman, 2006). Yet there were also NGOs that critically engaged with the state, even though they had to accept the state ideology (Pancasila) as the ideological foundation of their organization. Indonesian NGOs became a critical force in Indonesia in the 1980s, which could be seen as the turning point in the history of NGOs in the country (Bryant, 2001; Eccleston and Potter, 1996). NGOs formed an arena that government did not consider politically challenging besides that many NGO actors were also from the middle classes and had connections to the ruling elite (Nomura, 2007; Lee Peluso et al., 2008; Tsing, 2011). For instance, the Indonesian Forum for Environment had a close relationship with the Minister of State and Population for Environment, Emil Salim, who also needed the NGOs, which was evident from the meeting that established the forum in 1980 (Bryant, 2001: 27; Nomura, 2007). Since the end of the 1990s, many NGOs have mainly acted as accountability and transparency watchdogs and as an element of democratization through aggregation, policy consultation, implementation assessment and evaluation, and advocacy (Hadiwinata, 2003; Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu, 2002).

Indonesian NGOs have focused their work in environmental degradation, forest fires, illegal logging, peatland degradation, climate change, and unequal forest land distribution (Bryant, 2001; Thorburn, 2002; Lee Peluso et al., 2008; Lounela, 2015; Lounela, 2017). Some scholars have discussed the NGO network dealing with the judicial review and show that a new political conjuncture had provided opportunities to reclaim indigenous rights to forest (Astuti and McGregor, 2017). Nesadurai (2018) has discussed the role of international NGOs in encouraging a sustainable certification mechanism through the use of the Roundtable Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) initiative (Nesadurai, 2018), while pointing out how globalized some NGO networks are. However, some other researchers have expressed concern over the international trend, global donor demand, and northern influence on NGOs in Indonesia and have commented on their effectiveness with reference to the lack of managerial, accountability, and advocacy skills (Antlöv et al., 2010; Eccleston, 2005; Aviel, 2000; Antlöv et al., 2006; Longhofer et al., 2016).

This study aims to examine the implications of responsabilization in the relation between the advocacy and service NGOs in the context of tropical peatland protection and the expansion of palm oil plantations in a regional context. In line with the special issue, we use the critical perspective of responsabilization, and focus on agents, actions, networks, and material support. This paper is divided in five sections.

Following the introduction, section two focuses on development of a conceptual framework of responsabilization, agents, action, institution and material support, and distrust, section three discusses the methodological approach of the research, section four presents the results and discussion analysis, while the final section covers conclusions, reflections and implications.

## 2. Conceptual framework

### 2.1. Understanding responsabilization

In this special issue, the concept 'responsibilization' is understood as the transfer of duties and work burdens relating to natural resources governance to local citizens and communities by public agents (Mustalahti et al., 2020), duties which were previously performed by governmental institutions (Erbaugh, 2019). Responsibilization is an "element of governmentality" (Erbaugh, 2019) as it works through governance techniques or administrative and bureaucratic machinery and activities. The concept is often used in connection with the discussion on neoliberalization since through responsabilization the state seeks to transfer responsibilities to other agents to reduce the costs of taking care of specific domains such as environment, health or education (Erbaugh, 2019; 2) without understanding communities' resources and capabilities to carry out these new responsibilities.

As an element of governmentality, responsabilization aims to make organizations, consumers, people, and communities responsible for the improvement of resources and for ensuring environmental sustainability in a specific location (Mustalahti and Agrawal, 2020, Forthcoming in this special issue). Thus, responsabilization turns individuals, families, and organizations, entrepreneurs or business entities into actors that are responsible for their own actions in the course of taking the responsibility for specific duties (Lemke, 2002: 12–13). Responsibilization borrows from theories of governmentality by pointing to individualization in the processes of transforming the bodies and minds of the people through liberal governmental technologies – technologies of self – where people aim to improve themselves under certain authoritative regimes. In advanced neoliberalism, people are expected to be free and behave responsibly in terms of their rights and also compensate for their lives and vicissitudes (Rose et al., 2006: 90–91).

In this context, the responsabilization concept brings into view how these processes affect the relationships between different types of NGOs concerning peatland protection. In the Indonesian context, the responsabilization framework has recently been utilized in research concerning forest management and primarily community-based forest management (CBFM) where the burden of forest management is placed on local groups in the name of social forestry (Erbaugh, 2019). In the case of Riau in Indonesia, donors transfer the duties of peatland protection and management to the NGOs. In terms of service NGOs, in other countries as well as in Indonesia, responsabilization refers to a situation in which some duties of government or donor agencies have been transferred to NGOs, but they have no power or autonomy to implement such programmes independently nor to modify them according to their own principles. However, we note in the case of advocacy NGOs that they have a relatively greater autonomy to operate on their own terms while at the same time tending to transfer some of the burdens and duties of peatland protection to the local communities.

Our research shows that transferred duties and work burdens do not necessarily mean that NGOs do not subordinate themselves as agents to the demands of the donor agencies. Rather, these agents can act as autonomous subjects as is the case of advocacy NGOs, while service NGOs remain subordinate within the hierarchy of governmental agencies, corporations, or donors, which makes them agents that conduct activities on behalf of company and government interests. Similarly, researchers on responsabilization in environmental governance have discussed how NGOs govern their organizations in

**Table 1**  
Distribution of organizational actors in the interview.

Organizational Type	n (Interview 2016)	n (Interview 2017)	n (Interview 2018)	Total Interviews
Local advocacy ENGOs	1	1	4	6
National advocacy ENGOs	1	1	2	4
International advocacy ENGOs	1	–	–	1
Local service ENGOs	–	1	4	5
Provincial administrative officers	4	4	–	8
Local lawmakers	1	2	–	3
Smallholder palm oil farmers	5	7	–	12
Palm Oil Associations	–	–	1	1
Local community leaders	2	1	–	3
Total	13	17	11	43

accordance with their knowledge, capacities and resources (Mustalahti et al., 2020). Such NGOs also tend to arrange their programmes based on their principles (Lemke, 2002; Rose et al., 2006). In other words, these NGOs are expected to have alternative material support and exercise self-governance in conducting their activities and carrying out programmes within the regime of new (neo)liberal governance of “free societies” (Rose et al., 2006).

## 2.2. Agent, action, institution and material support of ENGOs

The ENGOs are classified into advocacy and service delivery in terms of their actions, institutions, and material support (Jordan and Van Tuijl, 2000: 2052). With institution, we refer to the ENGO networks, while material support refers to the funds provided by their donors.

The NGO literature has shown how advocacy is conducted through direct communication with policymakers, demonstrations and protest, petitions, influencing news, and taking an active part in public hearings to speak on behalf of a section of society (Tang and Zhan, 2008; Zhan and Tang, 2013). Advocacy NGOs advocate the rights of citizens and communities through investigations and civil lawsuit actions (Frank et al., 2007; Nomura, 2007). On the contrary, service NGOs are agents that work for the governments and companies and conduct actions in the interests of their donors (Agbola, 1994; Purnomo et al., 2020). For example, Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu (2002) argue that service NGOs through their development and empowerment projects implement the donors' environmental programs.

When looking at ENGOs in Sumatra, it is necessary to look at their networks. Networks cover the relationship of NGOs with other actors such as local communities, government and companies, as well as national and international communities (Eccleston, 2005). The networks can be based on relationships that are hierarchical, based on collaboration, or based on funding sources (Eccleston, 2005). The funding of the ENGOs can be generated from membership fees, income-generating activities, public support, governments, corporations or companies, and international donors (Batti, 2014; Tang and Zhan, 2008). The service and advocacy ENGOs have different sources of funding or materials, but most ENGOs mobilize funds from government, international donors and corporations due to the political interests of governments and international donors on environmental protection and forest conservation and, more recently, on climate change programs. Corporations collaborate with ENGOs through corporate social responsibility and environmental protection programs (Antlöv et al., 2006; Frank et al., 2007).

## 2.3. Distrust between ENGOs

Distrust is fundamentally related to a conceptual understanding of trust. According to Stern and Coleman, the trust concept has three fundamental elements: trustors, trustees, and actions (Stern and Coleman, 2015). Trustors refer to the first party, while trustees refer to the second party. Trust means the first party (trustors) accept the

vulnerability and the behaviour of the second party (trustee) in actions. In this article, the trustor and the trustee are used interchangeably to represent either advocacy or service ENGO consortia depending on the context, while the action refers to the activities and strategies they apply. Moreover, trust means the trustor accepts the vulnerability and behaviour of the trustee in the action (Rousseau et al., 1998).

Distrust means that trustors have a negative expectation of the trustee's conduct (Lewicki et al., 1998), commitment, and independence (Stern and Coleman, 2015; Lewicki et al., 1998). Distrust also comes from doubt about the other's competence, credibility, and predictability (Kasperson et al., 1992). Kasperson et al. (1992) argue that distrust can derive from lack of knowledge, from reputation and from inconsistency in performance. It is useful to discuss responsabilization in connection with the concept of distrust since the transfer of duties comes along with differing material support and different principles of work and thus has an effect on the relations between the different types of ENGOs. In this article we utilize this distrust concept by exploring how it plays out in the processes of transferring duties in peatland protection to ENGOs in Sumatra (Table 3).

## 3. Research methods

This research employed the methods in which concepts of agent, action, institutions, material support and distrust are used to explore the processes of responsabilization in peatland protection.

The fieldwork was conducted in Riau province, Sumatra, Indonesia from 2016 to 2018 by the first author. The data was collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews, observation and relevant documents. The face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 leaders of ENGOs (Table 1). The informants represented both the advocacy and service groups involved in environmental activism in the region for between 5 and 10 years. They also represented the variety of ENGO backgrounds in their consortia. Moreover, semi-structured questions based on the conceptual framework were used to retain focus on the topic and ensure the informants can express their experiences and opinions. In some cases, NGO documents and publications were obtained from websites, magazines and newspapers. The aim was not only to crosscheck the validity of the information but also to support the evidence based on wider sources.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were also conducted with other state and non-state actors including eight administrative officers, three local lawmakers, 12 smallholder palm oil farmers, one palm oil association representative who also worked at the CPO Fund of the Ministry of Finance, and three leaders of local communities (Table 1). The goal of the interviews was to understand the political and policy context of peatland governance, the expansion of smallholder palm oil farmers into protected peatlands, and the experience of local communities working with NGO programmes. Every interview took one and a half hours and was recorded using a voice recorder. The data was further transcribed and classified according to the key concepts: action, institutions and material support, distrust. In some cases, the interviews

were repeated to crosscheck unclear information or to complete other questions based on reflection. This is critical in qualitative research to maintain the reliability of the data.

Furthermore, the first author conducted observations to capture a general feeling and idea of the ENGO activities, such as active participation in the evening rally for child victims of the 2015 peat fires; a member of an advocacy ENGO consortium organized the rally in 2016. Further, participant observation took place in the March 2018 “Care for Earth” campaign and in the related evening discussions that a service ENGO consortium organized on a car-free day on Sunday morning. The vice-director of a large environmental donor in Indonesia attended this event. Likewise, the first author took part in a demonstration instigated by another advocacy ENGO consortium in collaboration with some student organizations working on wetlands and harmful electricity generator development. The first author kept a diary to record these events.

The first author elaborated and modified the data for analysis. This approach was suitable for the primary data-gathering step due to the opportunities it provided for the redevelopment of the conceptual framework during data collection and analysis. This activity also made it possible to crosscheck the reliability of the data by contacting the informants (Strauss and Corbin, 1994).

Lastly, the conceptual framework of agent, action, institution, material support and distrust were used to analyze all data, including interview transcripts, the diary on participant observations, and secondary documents. These concepts were used to analyze how advocacy and service ENGOs conducted their actions, developed their networks, received funding from donors, and how this all affected the relationship between the ENGOs, communities and peatland protection in the area. These concepts shed light on how different actions, institutions, and material support led to the constraints and distrust between these two types of ENGOs.

#### 4. Results

The ENGOs in Riau province are grouped into six consortia. The first five are categorized as advocacy ENGOs, while last is a service ENGO consortium, as shown in Table 2. The main issue of concern for ENGO 1 is to rescue forest from the expansion of timber and palm oil companies, while ENGO 2 focuses on environmental conservation in general as well as on the relationship between humans and nature. ENGO 3 works for equal land distribution and ENGO 4 campaigns to raise the environmental awareness of communities. The only NGO adopting peatland conservation as the main vision of its movement is ENGO 5, while ENGO 6 encourages communities living near forests to adopt non-timber and non-palm oil economic activities.

These ENGOs mostly focus on forest and environmental issues, but they are also concerned with tropical peatland protection because more than 50% of the Riau province is peatland. The ENGOs share the same view that in order to minimize the excessive release of CO2 the area should be kept free from oil plantations. Nevertheless, both advocacy and service ENGO pay limited attention to the unsustainable practices of smallholder palm oil farmers who operate 45% of the plantations. Advocacy NGOs argue that smallholder farmers are working for “subsistence only”, while the service NGOs believe that without any alternative income, local communities need to plant oil palm in the peatland areas. Palm oil cultivation by smallholders or the corporations is a long-running dispute between the ENGOs. Furthermore, the donors also have different views on the issue. Thus responsabilization in peatland protection in relation to palm oil cultivation increases the gap and distrust between the ENGOs.

##### 4.1. Actions, network, and fundraising of ENGOs in Riau province

ENGO 1 has a large network at the national and international level. For example, the Indonesian Forum for Transparency Riau (FITRA) is

**Table 2**  
Grouping of ENGO consortia in Riau Province, Indonesia.

Name of Consortium	Number of Members	Responsibilization Framework		Network	Donor/ Fundraising	Important Comments
		Action	Network			
<b>Advocacy ENGOs</b>						
ENGO 1	21	Investigation, lawsuit action, policy advocacy, judicial review, press release, conference, and annual bulletin report	National & International	International donors	Local NGOs with a large national and international network	
ENGO 2	12	Investigation, lawsuit action, policy advocacy (inside and outside of local legislative assembly), demonstration, victim advocacy, programme facilitation	National & International	Public donor, the Indonesian Forum for Environment, national & international donors.	Provincial board of the Indonesian Forum for Environment	
ENGO 3	7	Community empowerment, facilitation, education, demonstration, victim advocacy, civic action	Regional	Membership contributions & ENGO 1 and ENGO 2 Programmes	Has 130 village boards	
ENGO 4	4	Demonstrations, sending threatening messages to local government leaders, organizing farmers, horticulture and vegetable cultivation	National & International	Membership contribution & Agricultural production	An ideological organization	
ENGO 5	2	Environmental broadcasting and entertainment, radio community, off-air talk show	National	Advertisement & National radio corporation	Only facilitates advocacy NGOs to broadcast their programmes	
<b>Service ENGOs</b>						
ENGO 6	20	Community development and empowerment	National	Belantara Foundation, Government programme & Company donations	Community development such as helping the local community close to the biosphere conservation area on mushroom and honey production.	

Source: based on interviews with ENGO consortium representatives.

**Table 3**  
Reason for distrust between advocacy and service ENGOs.

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

one of its members, which is vocal on the issue of natural resource corruption. At the international level, ENGO 1 is a member of the Rain Forest Action Network (RPAN) and the Environmental Paper Network (EPN). The Asian Foundation from the USA and Siemenpuu from Finland are the main supporters of its activities, such as investigation of illegal logging and forest fires, lawsuit actions, policy advocacy, judicial review of national and regional regulations, press release conferences, and lobbying in support of divestment directed towards controlling both timber and palm oil company activities.

ENGO 2 is the representative board of the Indonesian Forum for Environment. The consortium is made up of twelve NGO members with 8 being legal assistance organizations. This NGO mostly uses lawsuit actions to deal with the unsustainable practice of palm oil companies or what the NGO calls “open war” action. Furthermore, ENGO 2 undertakes demonstrations and lobbying to advocate on behalf of environmental victims and to influence regional policy. Their activities are regularly funded by the central board of the Indonesian Forum for Environment, a member of Friends of the Earth.

In 2010, ENGO 3 was established mainly by ENGO 1 and ENGO 2. Currently, a local board for this group exists in 130 village territories in seven districts (*Kabupaten*) of Riau province. Their actions are focused on documenting local indigenous people's knowledge of peatland utilization and advocating on behalf of victims in forest conflicts with palm oil companies. For example, a protest was organized by advocacy ENGO 3 to advocate on behalf of local people of Padang Island in a major conflict with a timber and palm oil group company. This ENGO has organized hundreds of demonstrations at district, provincial and central government levels calling for the activities of the company in their peatland island to be stopped. The highlight for their actions was when some local people and activists of Padang Island, both men and women, sewed their mouths shut, which symbolized the death of social and environmental justice.

In contrast, ENGO 4 is an ideological movement with a major dream to eliminate land monopoly and privatization by timber and palm oil companies in the region. They are a part of the alliance of agrarian reform movements in Indonesia, which is a member of the Asian Peasant Coalition (APC) and the International League of People's Struggle (ILPS). This organization works in many areas with local people to promote the cultivation of horticultural crops and vegetables for income generation. At every international labour and farmers' day, it regularly organizes rallies with its four strategic members in the region, as shown in Table 2. The largest demonstration organized with other NGOs was in 2015 concerning the issue of forest fires to ask the provincial government to decide on the emergency statutes for the region. Moreover, several threatening messages were sent to the mayor, governor, and local lawmakers to open free health facilities for haze victims.

ENGO 5 facilitates ENGO 1, ENGO 2, and ENGO 3 to broadcast their programmes in a talk show called “Mahoni” which is an Indonesian acronym for people, forest, and human destiny. The majority of ENGO 5 programmes are campaigns such as a green community, green eco-lifestyle, and green spotlight directed towards raising public awareness about the environment. Their mission is to support environmental activism in Riau, educate the public about the environment, minimize

peatland destruction, support law enforcement against deforestation, and monitor the activities of timber and palm oil corporations. However, ENGO 5 generates most of its income from commercial advertisements and funding support from the main office of ENGO 5 in Jakarta.

ENGO 6 is the only consortium applying a service role to the tropical peatland communities and advancing a cooperative dialogue with the government and companies. Its board comprises five representative chambers including ENGOs, the Forest Department of Riau province, timber companies, the Malay cultural agency (LAM) and Riau University. There are currently 20 ENGOs working collaboratively within the consortium of ENGO 6, divided in five groups based on forest working zones such as Giam Siak Kecil, Kerumutan, Semanjung Kampar, Senepis, and the national park of Bukit 30. The programme of this ENGO is based on the Belantara foundation project that is supported by the largest Indonesian timber and palm oil company group. ENGO 6 freely welcomes government agencies and companies to support its programme.

#### 4.2. Distrust and the transfer of responsibilities

The service ENGOs cooperate with corporations and do not see their activities on peatland as problematic since the corporations mainly work according to state laws and policies. In fact, the service NGOs are dependent on funding from companies and government projects. For example, a company group established an environmental foundation through which the company group allocated billions of IDR to 20 service ENGOs in Riau province. The leader of a service ENGO confirmed to the first author that his organization received two billion (IDR) in 2018. The first author also interviewed a former employee of the environmental foundation, who confirmed the arrangement the ENGO had made with the company group.

The advocacy ENGOs are against the acceptance of funds from companies that they believe to be the leading perpetrators of deforestation and peatland degradation in Riau province. The advocacy ENGOs argue that the corporations' donations hide their political agenda to keep the ENGOs silent and delegitimize their existence. For example, one of the advocacy ENGO leaders said:

- (1) “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.”

The advocacy ENGOs also argue that the programmes of the service ENGOs decrease the effects of the peatland protection efforts because they do not involve communities as participants in the programmes but rather as objects of their projects. For example, in the case of a project of canal blocking and rewetting of the degraded peatland around the Giam Siak biosphere conservation area, the service ENGO consortium donated part of the funds to a third party without consulting the local communities on how and where the canals should be built. One of the advocacy ENGO leaders said:

- (2) “The projects they [service ENGOs] are working with now are not relevant to the communities and peatland protection. They treat communities as an object of their programme...”

Thus, advocacy ENGO has suspicions regarding service ENGOs' actions and subordinate position towards their donors. During the interview, one service ENGO leader admitted that they have less freedom to innovate because their donors regularly evaluate their work. For example, one of the service ENGO leaders said:

- (3) “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.”

On the other hand, the service ENGOs argue that the actions of the advocacy group, such as demonstrations, petition, and civil lawsuit actions, can harm political stability and economic development in the region. One actor said that demonstration is an old lobbying method, but it leads to too much traffic on the roads, violence or even self-harm as the sewing one's mouth exemplified. The service ENGOs argue that global economic interests influence the objectives of advocacy ENGOs. This argument echoes the accusations by the Indonesian Palm Oil Association (GAPKI), the CPO Fund of the Ministry of Finance, and a representative of the police forces interviewed during the research that advocacy ENGOs receive most of the international funding from the global north and the USA, which have their own political and economic interests concerning industrial-scale palm oil production. They argued that the international support for advocacy ENGOs is related to the competition between vegetable, sunflower, and crude palm oil (CPO) producers, where Indonesia is the highest producer of crude palm oil in the world and might take over other countries' share of the market. The service ENGOs believe that the source of every international donation should be evaluated to reveal if funding came from public donations, global governance institutions, money laundering, or debt swap. A leader of one of the service ENGO consortia argued:

- (4) “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. Do they know about debt swap and money laundering? Are debt swaps and money laundering good or bad for human justice?”

The service ENGOs argued that advocacy ENGOs such as ENGO 1 and ENGO 2 do have not much of a community basis at the grassroots but conduct their actions in the name of the public interest. They suspect that both ENGO 1 and ENGO 2 carry out investigations of deforestation and institute lawsuit actions on forest crimes, such as forest fires, with limited support from communities living in and around tropical peatland areas. However, according to the interviews, the advocacy ENGOs claim that they have the autonomy to organize their own programmes and actions, which gives them legitimacy for their work. The advocacy ENGOs make applications selectively to the donors and receive funding if the applications are approved. For example, one of advocacy ENGO leaders said:

- (5) Yes, we obtain funding from international donors, mostly. But, they [donors] give us the freedom to organize programmes and actions. But the problem is that we are not allowed to share the money with other NGOs outside our consortium.

The advocacy ENGOs can realize their programmes in the way that they have proposed, but they are not necessarily able to fund their networks from the same funding. However, it is not easy to show how much they have support from the communities even though they also tend to collaborate with the grassroots. The service ENGOs are suspicious of the advocacy ENGOs' demands for maximum land redistribution, which also concern the areas under corporate concessions. They say that this idea seems utopic since the companies have legal rights to utilize the forest with the support of an immense network of connections to the central power of government. For example, one of the senior service ENGO activists said:

- (6) “I know their consortium and it seems they have a big dream about the equal distribution of land which seems utopic...”

The distrust between the advocacy and the service ENGOs increases due to responsabilization both by the corporations and by the donors. This is visible in their suspicions over funding sources and whether these are independent of donor demands and interests, doubts about their legitimacy for the communities or the public, and of the effects of their programmes on the peatland protection.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. *Responsibilization of advocacy and service ENGOs*

We observed that advocacy ENGOs use advocacy actions, such as legal investigations, lawsuit actions, petitions and press release, as their strategies to enhance peatland protection. They try to influence the decision-making processes and regulations relating to forest and peatland protection through demonstrations, direct lobbying, public hearings, and judicial review. In our case, there is considerable tension in the conflict between companies and advocacy ENGOs with a real base of community members at the grassroots. These community members have used a self-harm action such as mouth sewing as a means of demonstrating.

The service ENGOs have a very different approach. They apply community development and empowerment programmes to shift the economic activities of the concerned group away from reliance on forest timber and towards other activities such as mushroom and honey production (see [Table 2](#)). In the case of Semenanjung Kampar and the Giam Siak biosphere conservation programme, for example, ENGO 6 helped local communities to develop mangrove tourism, mushroom cultivation and honey production. The case indicates that the service ENGOs play the role of an implementing agent for the environmental programmes of the government and companies. The service ENGOs focus on economic development and empowerment of the communities living in and around tropical peatland areas.

Institutional networking is an important part of the advocacy ENGOs' work in Riau. They have both national and global networks, and they relate with their partners as strategic allies and supporters through their campaigns, divestment promotion work, and application of international pressure to disinvest. Furthermore, global environmental actors recognize them to be the oppositional force against corrupt governments. However, the service ENGOs have a limited number of partners which are restricted to the regional and national levels and focus only on the projects of these donors. Consequently, it seems that the service ENGOs have less capability to expand their network to the global level because they are dependent on current collaborative partners such as timber and palm oil company groups.

The advocacy ENGOs challenge the palm oil companies openly because, in their view, the corporations are involved in land acquisition and tropical peatland destruction. These organizations also criticized the government for having too little capability to control and monitor corporations' activities on tropical peatland. In contrast, the service ENGOs recognize companies and the government as their collaborative

partners. Similarly, other research showed that the advocacy ENGOS mostly challenge governments and corporations (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Bondaroff, 2014: 1), while service ENGOS work collaboratively with governments and corporations as their donors (Austin, 2007: 53–54). In the case of Riau, it is evident that the corporations do not support advocacy ENGOS that work to correct their harmful business practices on tropical peatland utilization.

Some advocacy ENGOS receive financial support from international donors; for example, ENGO 1 and ENGO 2 are funded by the Siempenpuu Foundation and the Asian Foundation, respectively. In some cases, both ENGOS collaborate with the national government if the proposed programmes are related to their interests. It is interesting that, apart from donor funding, some advocacy ENGOS mostly fund their actions independently through the cultivation of crops, membership contributions and advertisements, which is the case with such organizations as ENGO 4, ENGO 3, and ENGO 5. In contrast, the service ENGOS depend solely on funding from companies and government, which turns them into their clients who agree to conduct several activities in response to their donors' interests. Similarly, some scholars have noted that the transfer of funding is more like a transactional relationship focusing on specific projects with restricted goals and timeline (Austin, 2007).

From the perspective of the responsabilization discussion, the relationship between advocacy ENGOS and their donors is equal; the organizations have the freedom to conduct any action necessary to protect the tropical peatland, and they are autonomous in their actions. Their relationship is established on mutual interests, and the donors have responsibilities to inform and guide the organizations which also self-govern their actions.

The advocacy ENGOS independently fund their actions, as was observed in the case of ENGO 3, ENGO 4, and ENGO 5. In the Riau context, these self-actions mean that advocacy ENGOS take responsibility for peatland protection and people's economic well-being, which actually should be the responsibility of the state. These ENGOS work on those issues with minimal financial reward and sometimes at high personal risk. At the same time, they also raise formidable opposition to the incapability of the government to control the unsustainable practices and tropical peatland utilization by palm oil companies. Thus, the advocacy ENGOS 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.

Their situation differs from the service ENGOS that work based on projects planned by donors. The relationship they have with their sponsors is hierarchical because these ENGOS as agents 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. In other words, although the service ENGOS are economically better off than the advocacy ENGOS, 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.

Responsibilization, whereby duties of peatland protection are transferred to the ENGOS, places differing burdens on advocacy and service ENGOS and also affects their autonomy to act according to their own principles. The different sources of funding they access and the creation of a variety of networks means that responsabilization has a large effect on the nature of their work.

### 5.2. Distrust and responsabilization in peatland protection to ENGOS

Different actions, networks, and material support have implications for the distrust between advocacy and service ENGOS. For example, the advocacy group, as the trustors, doubt whether the actions of the trustee have a positive effect on the well-being of the local communities due to the possible political and business interests of donors such as timber and palm oil group companies (Table 3). The local communities

also have less involvement in the programme arrangements which the service ENGOS apply. The advocacy ENGOS have a moral duty to serve community aspirations which can be implemented in the practical programmes. Moreover, as trustors advocacy ENGOS detest how service ENGOS receive funding from companies which sometimes are in high-tension conflicts with communities. For example, the case of a peatland island has shown that local communities living in the area are in a severe face-to-face conflict regarding violation of their rights with a company group.

On the contrary, the service ENGOS, in the trustors' position, doubt the support and public legitimacy of the trustee (here advocacy ENGOS) and the final goal of the latter's actions (see Table 3). For example, the service ENGOS question the political agenda of the donors with regard to global market share competition observed in the vegetable, sunflower and crude palm oil (CPO) production sectors. Moreover, the trustors wonder if the actions of the trustee are sufficiently supported by the public which would provide legitimacy for their actions. In this sense, legitimacy refers to moral justifications for the environmental and social actions which the advocacy ENGOS apply (Atack, 1999). Another aspect is the trustee's actions towards land justice distribution and their constant challenge to the business processes of the palm oil industry, which the trustors by contrast believe is harmful to the economic development of the region. The palm oil industry has contributed to the regional income but also to reduction in land available for the villagers' subsistence (Gatto et al., 2017).

These findings confirm that distrust occurs in a situation where a party has doubts about the behaviour and actions of another. Moreover, 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-being of local communities because there are only a limited number of institutions that empower them in terms of their livelihoods instead of generating income from the timber.

Another noticeable issue is that most advocacy ENGO leaders, in order to be deemed transparent, legitimate and independent, distance themselves from interacting with service ENGOS. They mainly interact with their own network and other advocacy ENGOS inside their consortia even though they are personally familiar with service ENGO activists. Kasperon et al. (1992) has argued that the lack of knowledge of the other's reputation is the main factor for distrust, but this is not the case in our study. This study argues that responsabilization increases the diversity of actors and networks, creates polarizations and tensions between the different networks and even more importantly, creates distrust between advocacy and service ENGOS.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the responsabilization or, in other terms, the transferring of tasks and duties in peatland protection and how such transfer has a bearing on the relationships and work of advocacy and service ENGOS in Riau, Sumatra. The article argues that responsabilization in peatland protection impacts on the actions, networks, and material support of these two groups and leads to increasing distrust between them.

Responsibilization generates a diversity of actors in peatland protection: corporation and governmental bodies transfer duties to service ENGOS that ought to act in accordance with the formers' principles and programmes that differ from the principles of advocacy ENGOS and their donors. The contemporary peatland governance processes in Indonesia show that responsabilization 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 (Rose et al., 2006; 98). For instance, in the case of Riau, the advocacy ENGOs have more autonomy than service ENGOs and donors give them the freedom to design their programmes. They are also openly critical towards the palm oil corporations unlike the service ENGOs. The two categories of ENGOs have grave doubts about each other's principles, political interests, and public legitimation. Thus, we argue that responsabilization increases distrust by strengthening the different types of ENGOs in their different orientations, principles of work and networks, in some cases, even pushing for polar opposition to each other.

In terms of material support, the advocacy ENGOs have less material support in comparison to service ENGOs. On the other hand, advocacy ENGOs search for additional funds for their activities from crop cultivation, collaboration with the communities, and membership fees. Some people work voluntarily without monetary rewards, which increases their burden considerably. These actors question the generous material support to service ENGOs and how it plays out in the political and economic interests of the latter's donors. On the contrary, service ENGOs receive generous funding for their activities and programmes, which they obtain from corporations or governments. For their part, service ENGOs have doubts about the donor interests behind the material support provided to advocacy ENGOs. Hence, both kinds of ENGOs, but even more so the advocacy ENGOs, are burdened with multiple tasks and duties at the provincial and community levels. This reflects what Rose et al. (2006: 90-91) call "advanced liberal government" whereby the central strategy is the creation of freedom, that is, people are obliged to be free and maximize their lives as enterprises and act self-responsibly, as is the case with the ENGOs that take responsibility in peatland protection.

In conclusion, responsabilization increases distrust between different types of ENGOs because it generates a diversity of actors and different and even polarized networks that have different burdens. These outcomes, we could assume, also decrease the possibilities of these ENGOs to enhance peatland protection in the area. This outcome relates to different ways responsabilization plays out between the donors and different types of ENGOs.

#### Authors' statement

The first author has developed the methods, conducted the fieldwork, and collected and sorted out the data for the article. He also drafted the framework and introduction for the article. The second author has developed the theoretical framework, worked with presentation and analysis of the data and methods, abstract, and contributed to the answers to the reviewers' comments. We do confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor it is currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

#### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

1. Part of the study funded by the University of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia
2. Part of the special issue called "Responzibilisation" funded by the Academy of Finland (grant no. 259726).
3. The Strategical Research Council of Finland (grant no. 312689 and subgrant no. 312692)

#### Acknowledgment

This work was part of the study funded by the University of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia and part of the special issue called "Responzibilisation" funded by the Academy of Finland (grant no. 259726). The authors are grateful to Eko Priyo Purnomo, Agustiyara, Abdul Malik, Bang Andre, and Nugroho Noto Susanto for their assistance in the process of data collection. We also express our appreciation to the Responsive Natural Resources Research group team, namely Irmeli Mustalahti, Antti Erkkila, Nina Tokola, Denis Dobrynin and Violeta Gutierrez Zamora for their comments, advice and motivation. We gratefully acknowledge the Strategic Research Council of Finland (grant no. 312689 and sub grant no. 312692) for covering the costs of open-access publishing. We would also like to thank our language editor Nick Quist Nathaniels and two anonymous reviewers.

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