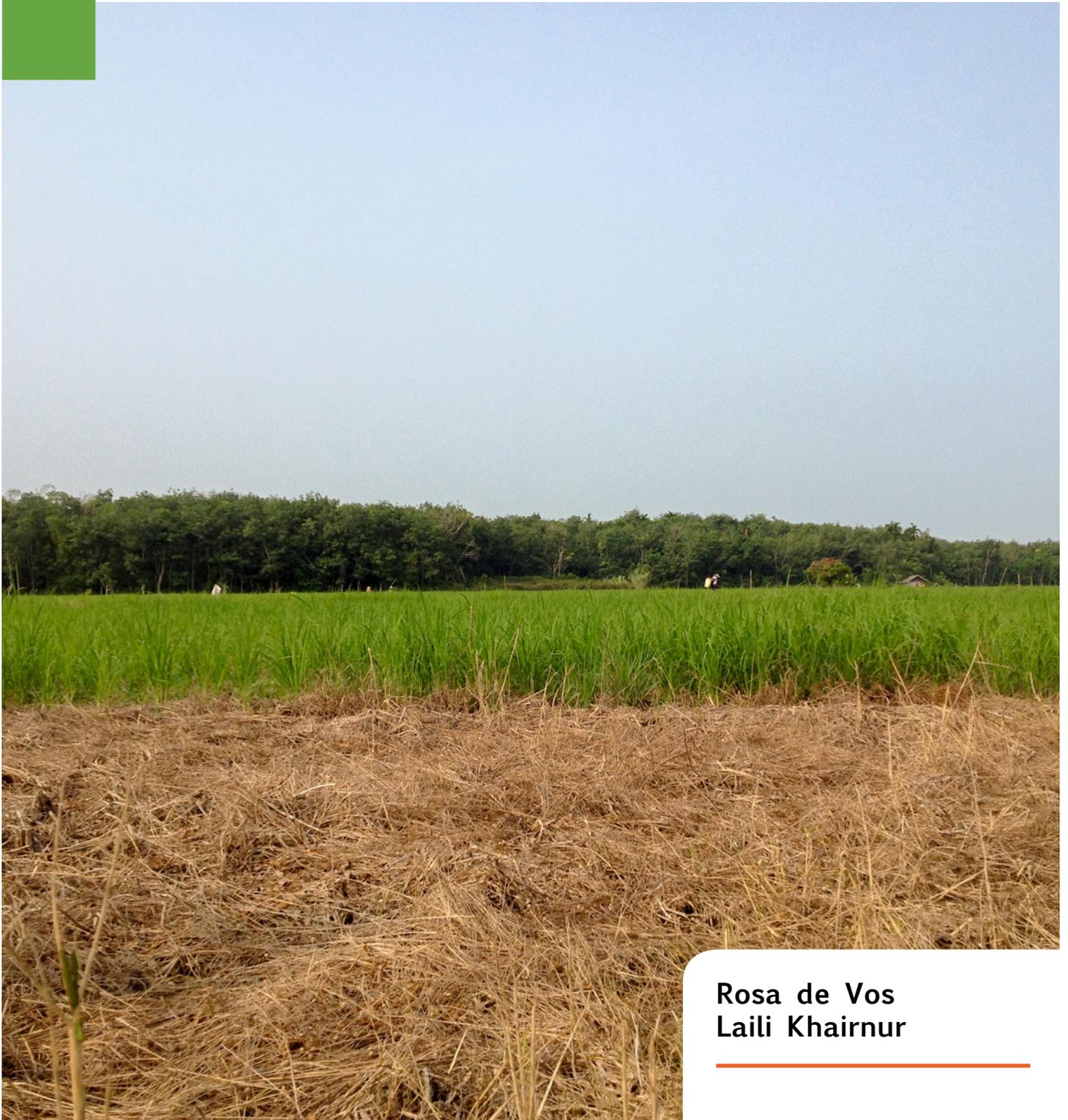


Putting livelihoods on the map: use of spatial planning in West Kalimantan



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“Producing palm oil sustainably is not just a question of how to produce it, but where to produce it, and where not to...”

Introduction

Oil palm cultivation can be a valuable source of income, but farmers may have important reasons to make other choices, preferring other crops or combine oil palm with other crops. In West Kalimantan, land acquisition for large-scale oil palm expansion has led to conflict with local communities, because in the planning of such plantations there is often little consideration for pre-existing land use and livelihoods. In such cases, participatory village-level spatial planning and mapping is a way to strengthen the ability of rural communities to decide whether or not to engage in oil palm, and if so, on which land, and under what terms.

Oil palm has gained a strong foothold in West Kalimantan –the area of mature industrial plantations having more than doubled in the past six years, from 683,276 ha in 2011 to 1,445,695 ha in 2017 (Directorate General of Estate Crops 2017). Many farmers have benefited from this boom, but others have become involved only under adverse terms, and have lost access to land and sources of income. Conflicts between companies and local communities occur as concessions are often given for land that is already inhabited and being cultivated, with customary land rights weakly protected by Indonesian law. Lacking formal land titles, farm lands may be regarded by the government as state land, unencumbered by rights, and therefore available for land investments.

Although important steps have been taken, policy initiatives to prevent and address conflicts do not always match realities on the ground. Land conflicts are not so easily solved by just sorting out who owns what, and determining the right amount of compensation for the transfer of land from communities to companies. Land acquisition for plantation development is a complex

and fragmented process, involving many actors and activities, dispersed over place and time (Peluso and Lund 2011; de Vos et al. 2017). Policy makers strongly believe in the principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), but in reality, negotiations between companies and communities do not take place in ‘roundtable-like’ settings where consent can be negotiated, and companies and communities rarely meet directly beforehand to discuss details of proposed plantation projects.

Consent must be negotiated in the planning phase, and project details should be made known to a wider public beyond the villages concerned. But as commonly happens, concessions are granted without consultation, and local communities find out only as companies start work on preparatory activities such as constructing roads and canals, measuring land and demarcating concession borders. In these cases, when companies finally meet community members, tensions are often already high. This leaves little room for a thorough consideration of the pro’s and con’s for giving consent, the terms under which this is given, and the differentiated, long-term consequences of plantation development.

Mapping as a tool to protect livelihoods

Therefore, rather than relying solely on free, prior and informed consent, solutions for sustainable and equitable palm oil production require more structural approaches to protect rural livelihoods, based on respect for pre-existing ways of using and understanding land, prior to any land acquisition activities. In West Kalimantan, local NGOs are making steps to achieve this by promoting participatory village-level spatial planning. The objective



Oil palm plantation in Sambas Photo: Rosa de Vos

is to strengthen the autonomy of local communities to control their territory, and decide whether or not to engage in oil palm cultivation – and if so, on what land, and under what terms.

Mapping is used by NGOs around the world as a tool to help protect the land rights and livelihoods of marginalized communities, in rural areas and in cities. Researchers however, have warned that mapping and spatial planning should not be seen as a panacea to secure land rights. On the contrary, such activities may also create new conflicts, as they potentially exclude certain groups of people, and can even make resources more visible to potential investors (Peluso 2005; Fox et al. 2006). Moreover, village maps and spatial plans may be disregarded by governments and companies, or by villagers themselves.

This paper highlights two examples from Sambas District: Sungai Putih village and Tanah Rawa village. Both villages have been in conflict with an oil palm company and are now in the process of conducting participatory mapping and spatial planning,

assisted by local NGO Lembaga Gemawan. This research is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2013-2016 (11 months in total). Research methods included participatory observation, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with village members, village officials and NGO staff, and analyses of local media and NGO reports on the subjects of spatial planning, mapping, the village law, palm oil and land rights.

Oil palm expansion in Sambas

Sambas is a coastal district in West Kalimantan, an important maritime trade hub with a long history of smallholder production for the global market. Key crops are rubber and coconut, also rice, black pepper, maize, fruit and pulses – and since over a decade, also oil palm. Since 2004, 32% of the region (202,331 ha) has already been granted to 35 oil palm companies, and by 2018, 43% of these concessions have been developed as shown by CIFOR's atlas of deforestation and industrial plantations (www.cifor.org/)

map/atlas/). In other areas, the process of land acquisition is ongoing, though some communities are now also engaged in village-level mapping and spatial planning to anticipate company claims.

In 2008, Sungai Putih village and 14 other villages were included in an oil palm concession of 20,000 ha given out to a private company. Unrest began when the company started demarcating the borders of their concession. This included placement of cement poles in farmers' crop fields on village land, making the farmers afraid that they would lose their livelihood. Company representatives and government officials told farmers to cut down their rubber trees to make way for oil palm, which was assumed more profitable. But farmers said that they cherished their rubber plantations as they provide a daily source of cash, and tapping rubber is considered 'light' work that can be done between other farm activities. Rubber trees also offer a connection to ancestors who planted them, and they are valued as an asset for future generations. Producing rubber on their own land gives farmers autonomy, and they feared they would just become plantation labourers on their own land if oil palm plantations were established.

During the first 'socialization' meetings between company representatives and community members, there were no discussions on how to explore ways to integrate oil palm with other community land uses. One farmer who attended a meeting described it as merely 'informative', without room for discussion, adding that "The company just made promises about how we would become rich, but did not discuss the details of the plantation project plan", such as the exact location, time frame, land transfer arrangements, or details of the proposed plantation scheme.

Later, villagers organized a demonstration demanding that the head of the district government revoke the plantation license, and which to their surprise, he did on the spot. However, after challenging this decision in court, the company's license was re-activated, and though the company withdrew from Sungai Putih, it started to

develop in another village where resistance had been less organized. Almost a decade after the demonstration, rumours kept circulating about the company's plans to expand and return to Sungai Putih. In addition, new concession documents related to other companies were circulating in the villages, and the district government could not guarantee that oil palm companies would not return in the future.

Putting livelihoods on the map

Community mapping has a long history in Indonesia, and NGOs have mapped villages to protect land rights since the 'new order' (Warren 2005). In response to the enduring uncertainty, the council of Sungai Putih and neighbouring villages invited the NGO Lembaga Gemawan to map the village land. This NGO was established during the 1999 Reformation by student activists from Pontianak and Sambas with the aim of strengthening rural economies and political rights. Since oil palm conflicts started to occur in Sambas around 2006, Lembaga Gemawan has used mapping to strengthen communities' ability to plan and control their territory.

President Jokowi's new Village Law (No. 6/2014) granted more autonomy to villages to control their own territory (Vel and Bedner 2015; de Vos 2018). Lembaga Gemawan noticed that since the implementation of the new Village Law, some district governments were more interested in facilitating village mapping and spatial planning. Local communities and NGOs in Indonesia can use this momentum to further influence the allocation of concessions by proposing long term spatial plans for village development, based on assets and resources already present in villages.

Lembaga Gemawan stresses that in participatory mapping, the role of the NGO is mainly to train villagers' mapping skills. It is important that villagers are in control of the process and can do most of the work by themselves. In Sungai Putih, after a series of meetings, villagers appointed a mapping team and the village head provided a formal mandate letter.



Drone flying over Sungai Putih village Photo by: Lembaga Gemawan

The team first took GPS coordinates of village borders, and after discussions with neighbouring villages, drones were used to make high-resolution photographic maps.

Based on these, the village council created a spatial plan of land use zones, including rubber plantations, rice fields, mixed-crop gardens, and residential areas. These zones were then to be formalized through regulations (*peraturan desa*), to be enacted after approval from the district government. The idea is that these zones cannot then be converted to other types of land use, such as oil palm, without formal permission of the village council. The former village head of Sungai Putih argued that the village needed to have its own spatial plan, because many parties seek access to land. He said that “To secure our land rights, we need to have a village map. Then we are in a better position when we are at the negotiating table with companies and the government.”

In addition to designating zones through village regulations, villages in Indonesia can also opt to propose to district governments the designation of land for sustainable food crops, peatland protection areas, agrarian reform land, or social forest land where villagers are granted legal permission to use state forest. This procedure can be complicated, especially when land is still classified as forest and as such, formally controlled by the state and proposals have to go through the Ministry of Forestry and the Environment. However, Lembaga Gemawan has experiences with communities in another district who successfully claimed former converted production forest as sustainable food crop land, and which was formally ratified by a district regulation with permission from the Ministry of Forest and the Environment.

In another village in the area, Tanah Rawa village, Lembaga Gemawan and the Institute for Peat Land Recovery worked with farmer groups to re-cultivate a peat forest area that had been destroyed by fire and was prone to new fires. A participatory mapping



Sungai Putih village. Photo by: Rosa de Vos

programme was initiated to inform village-level spatial planning so that it could contribute to restore and protect the area. After testing which crop would grow best on the deep peat soil, villagers choose to grow ginger and taro, and to keep livestock.

In addition to restoring peatland, preventing forest fires, and creating new livelihood opportunities, this programme was part of a more general effort to strengthen village autonomy to control their own land. This followed conflict with another oil palm company in 2010 after a large part of village land was included in a 10,000 ha plantation concession. A key problem was the lack of clarity regarding the exact location of the projected plantation, as a village official explained: “They said they would plant on ‘empty’ land. We thought this was the production forest that previously had been used by timber companies to grow acacia and mahonia. But they lied. Our rubber gardens would be destroyed. It turned out that they were not allowed to plant in the production forest, only on our land which has the status of

non-forested, agricultural land. The land marks were placed in our gardens. The village head asked me to cut my rubber trees to make way for a road. They never discussed the exact location. If it is on our land, we reject. If it is in the forest, we agree, because we want a road. There were many ambiguities. It was not clear.” The company eventually cancelled the plantation project after community protests. However, after the first company retreated, several new concessions were granted to other companies, prolonging uncertainty, but it is hoped that village-level spatial planning may help to avoid a repetition of conflict.

Benefits and challenges

In the two villages where spatial plans were piloted, the resulting maps have not yet been put to the test because no new companies have yet to become active there. However, the process of mapping and spatial planning activities, such as taking GPS coordinates and having village meetings, have already generated valuable

discussions within the villages about the status of land, tenure security, and aspirations regarding land use in the future. And that villagers are visibly engaged with spatial planning also sends a message to companies.

During one village meeting where company activities were discussed, a community representative from Sungai Putih said that “Surely the company will hear about our meetings now, and they will know that we are on our guard.” In addition, activities are picked up by local media and this influences debate at district level and beyond. In this way, village-level spatial planning could help in the revision of concession maps so that they would be more considerate of local community interests. And if oil palm companies propose to use village land for plantation development, maps and spatial plans can provide leverage at the negotiation table.

Lembaga Gemawan acknowledges that spatial planning alone is not enough to protect land rights and livelihoods. Therefore, it works in parallel on socio-economic development programs, including a rubber cooperative, organic farming, a credit union, and women’s groups that produce traditional Sambas cloth and handicrafts. The NGO also organizes workshops on village governance and village law, and has established village schools to train women in participating in village governance. Such activities aim to strengthen the capacity and capability of villagers to protect their rights and influence their own socio-economic development.

Keeping the pitfalls in mind, several conditions are crucial when using mapping to prepare spatial plans for villages. The process needs to be genuinely participatory and inclusive, involving both women and men, and representatives from different social classes and ethnicities. In addition, a key factor explaining success in Sambas was that the village head and council had good relations with the NGO and were highly involved in facilitating the process. Local leadership and networking are vital in such programs. And importantly, a village map and spatial plan should

not be the end goal. Rather, these tools should be a starting point for discussions, raising awareness about land rights, and influencing government spatial plans.

Ways forward for a more inclusive palm oil sector

Crucial for a more inclusive palm oil sector is the strengthening of village economies and community autonomy. Planning for plantation development must also consider existing land use to avoid conflict, and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) procedures alone are not enough to prevent conflict. Village-level planning and mapping on the other hand, give communities leverage when negotiating with companies and the government.

Indonesia’s 2014 Village Law provides room for NGOs and villages to take initiatives in planning future land use. If villages are offered palm oil development projects on village land, maps and spatial plans can help assess direct and long term consequences of this and on what terms this can be beneficial or not. Participatory mapping and spatial planning contribute to free, prior and informed consent procedures, by giving communities the opportunity to accept proposals under their own terms, or say no to plantation development.

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This paper was submitted for inclusion in the forthcoming edition of **ETFRN News 59 - Exploring inclusive oil palm production**, due for release in early 2019. This will contain 20 papers plus interviews, presenting examples of innovative and inclusive palm oil production systems. It will assess what has not worked, but importantly, it will analyse what positive practices and policies have worked for more inclusive palm oil production and why, as we strive towards more collective and sustainable solutions to this apparently intractable problem.

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Cover photo: Rice fields and rubber gardens in Sungai Putih village. Photo by: Rosa de Vos



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