

Healing an Oil Palm Landscape



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Key Points

1. Seruyan District is pioneering a Jurisdictional Approach to landscape management and sustainable commodity certification, for which conflict resolution and remedy for past social and environmental harms are core requirements.

2. Extensive oil palm plantations have caused multiple impacts including land grabs, deforestation, destruction of rivers, lakes, swamps and peatlands, and consequent loss of biodiversity, ecosystem services, livelihoods and cultural sites.

3. Indigenous Dayak communities impacted by these developments, propose remedies for these harms and have developed visions of future land use that would restore riparian forests, wildlife corridors, swamps and farmlands and give them a role in biodiversity management and monitoring.

4. Positive engagement with government agencies, in charge of National Parks and wildlife conservation, is opening the way for co-management within the Tanjung Puting National Park and restoration of livelihoods in the buffer zone.

5. District Government plans for remedy already include conflict resolution pathways, recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights and fairer benefit sharing. To get RSPO certification, local environmental and social remedy is also required for which modalities are being developed.

Oil palm development is notorious for its negative impacts on the environment and human rights, but also celebrated for generating wealth and huge volumes of edible oils from less land than any other edible oil crop.² The Indonesian government has plans to expand oil palm estates not just for export but also to meet rising domestic demands for cooking oils, oleochemical industries and biodiesel. Like it or not, it seems Indonesians will have to learn to live with it. Are there not better ways of producing the oil in the first place and are there ways of undoing the environmental harms and providing remedy to communities who have lost most?

Since its founding in 2004, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) has developed an ambitious voluntary standard for 'certified sustainable palm oil', which now supplies some 19% of the market in globally traded palm oil. Now, through its Jurisdictional Approach, it is also providing a framework by which local governments can apply these same standards to large, medium and small growers that have not yet joined the RSPO.

In Seruyan, the district government has embraced this approach and started to apply it through a long-term commitment to legal, administrative and practical reform with a focus on resolving the pervasive land conflicts that have flared up between companies and communities. This report summarises some of the results of this effort, which combines local government, NGOs and local companies in an effort to make remedy for past harms.



Community land use planning meeting. Photo: PROGRESS

Historical sketch

While early waves of modern human beings have inhabited Borneo from at least 40,000 years ago, the consensus among linguists is that Austronesian languages entered the island from Taiwan and through the Philippines about 5,000 years ago borne by a wave of pioneering farmers who settled the Indonesian archipelago and beyond.³ Their descendants in Borneo, today collectively known as Dayaks, make up the indigenous peoples of the island along with Kadazan-Dusun and Murut peoples in Sabah. While these peoples developed self-sufficient ways of life well adapted to their tropical forest homes, they also traded forest products in exchange for metal tools, cloth, salt and prestige items such as gongs and ceramics. Indeed global trade networks have encompassed Borneo since the first millennium CE if not much earlier and there is evidence of the influence of Hindu religious beliefs in some of the early coastal kingdoms from as early as the C4th CE.⁴ These sultanates established themselves around the coast and up some of the major rivers and became the major conduits that linked inland communities to global trade. The ruling families gradually adopted Islam from the C14th onwards.

On the southern coast of Borneo, the Banjar sultanate, which traces its origins back to 1526, gradually expanded its authority along the coast, at its high point claiming control of trade as far west as Sambas in what is now West Kalimantan and eastwards to encompass the Sulu Archipelago. Inland, however, the Dayak peoples maintained their autonomy and lived in widely dispersed riverside settlements linked to the coast by canoes and riverine trade. Their lives were ordered by their kinship systems, social hierarchies, customary laws and traditional beliefs.⁵ Banjar influence on the coastal settlements, including areas some way up the Seruyan river, led most of the downstream Dayak to convert to Islam but many maintained their customary laws relating to land, marriage and inheritance and some continued to adhere to their traditional beliefs.

However, the sultanate, which based its influence on the growing trade in pepper, struggled to maintain independence from the Dutch who sought control of all the spice trade in the archipelago. After two hundred years of tussling, eventually in 1830 the sultanate was forced to accept Dutch control of trade and the oversight of a Dutch resident. This system of indirect rule through the Banjar sultan was maintained throughout the rest of the colonial era. However, the land administration that was imposed bore the fingerprints of Dutch administrative norms, which prevailed until Indonesia achieved its independence in 1946.

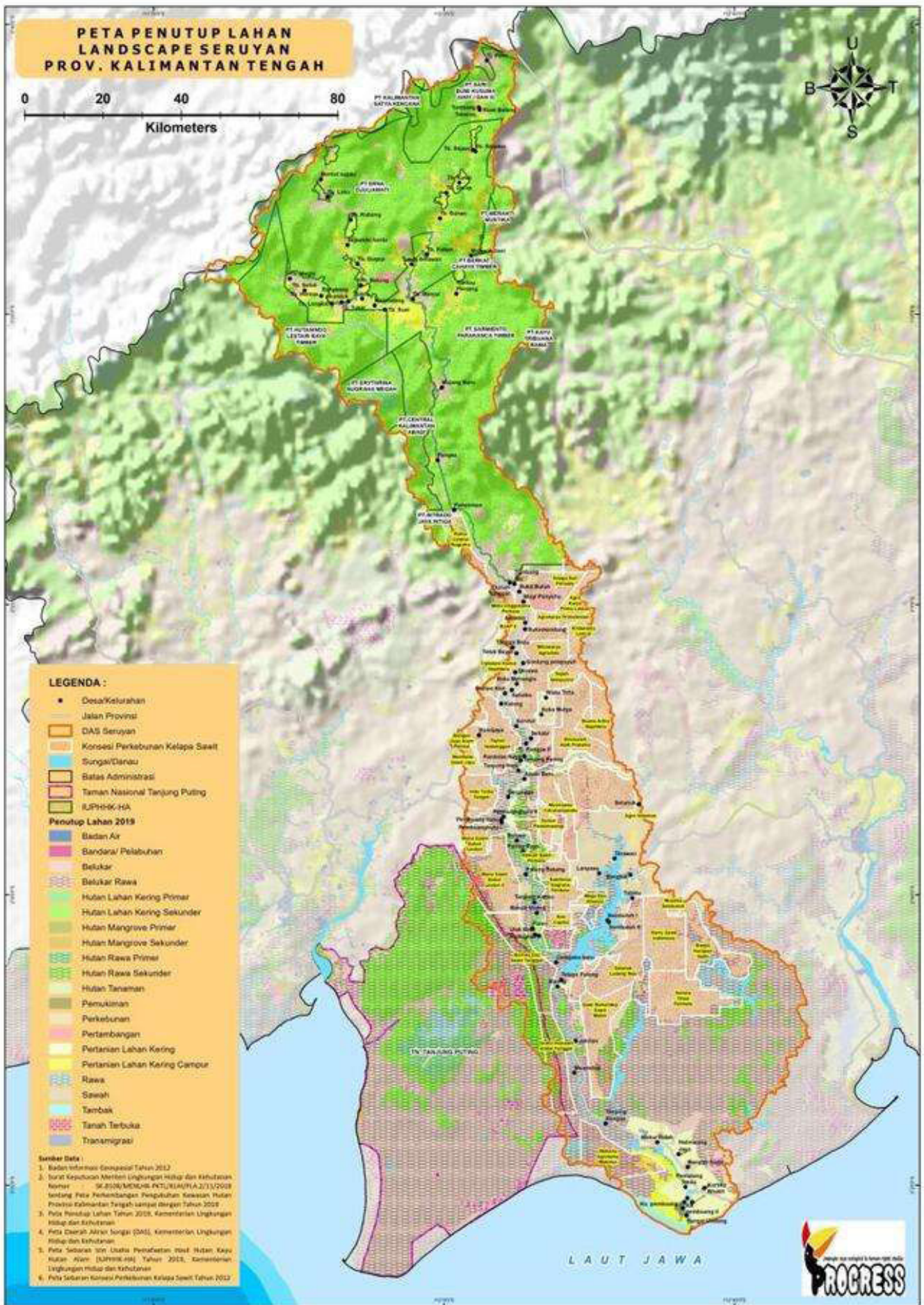
After independence, Central Kalimantan, with a strongly Dayak majority, was declared a separate province. Proudly and simultaneously asserting Dayak identity and modernity, the first Governor of the province, Tjilik Riwut, himself a Dayak, formalised the diverse traditional beliefs into a syncretic religion, incorporating supposedly Hindu symbolism, and known as Kaharingan.⁶ During the Suharto dictatorship (1966-1998), the main economic activity in the region was logging, some permitted by the issuance of forestry concessions by the Ministry of Forests in Jakarta, but much of it illegal. The lowland forests including important protected areas were gradually denuded of choice timbers while small towns expanded around sawmills and timber processing plants.



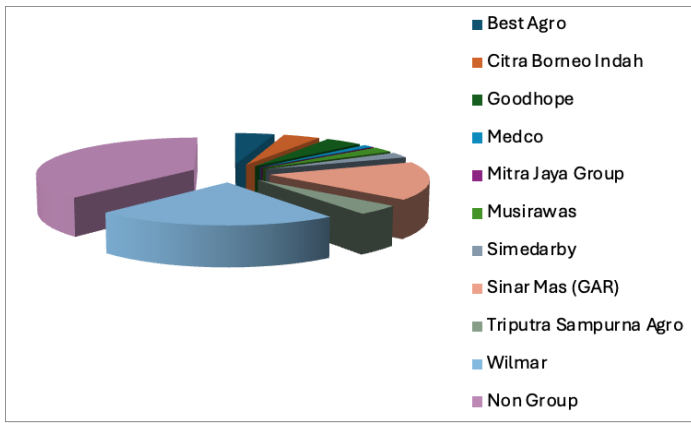
Oil palm fruits being harvested for processing. Photo: PROGRESS

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, the new *reformasi* Government instituted a process of decentralization with the aim of making district administrations and legislatures accountable to local electorates.⁷ Seruyan was officially designated as a new district (*kabupaten*) in 2002 and elected its first *bupati* (regent) in 2003.⁸ The new administrative system granted considerable authority to regents to issue agribusiness permits and, initially, even logging licences.⁹ The new regent in Seruyan, Darwan Ali, took full advantage of this power, such that between 2003 and 2005 he issued some 87 oil palm plantation licences extending over more than half a million hectares,¹⁰ of which some 320,000 ha. were planted by 2016. According to an investigation by The Gecko Project, a large number of these licences were sold to Darwan Ali's family members and cronies who then sold them on to the oligarchs who run the huge agribusinesses that dominate the Indonesian palm oil industry. Darwan Ali was able to win re-election for a second and final term in 2008.

In 2013, he attempted to get his son, Ahmad Ruswandi, elected to take his place.¹¹ However, by then popular opposition to the destructive impacts of oil palm plantations was so widespread in Seruyan that an alternative independent candidate, Sudarsono, promising conflict resolution and benefit-sharing, was elected as *bupati* in his stead. In 2015, Sudarsono proudly announced that Seruyan District would pioneer the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil's newly announced Jurisdictional Approach to palm oil certification,¹² setting the District on a path to address the social and environmental harms caused by uncontrolled oil palm expansion.¹³ Since then, although the political leadership of the district has changed three times, the district's commitment to implement the reforms needed to qualify for RSPO's Jurisdictional Approach has been upheld.



Land Occupation by Large Oil Palm Plantation Groups in Seruyan District

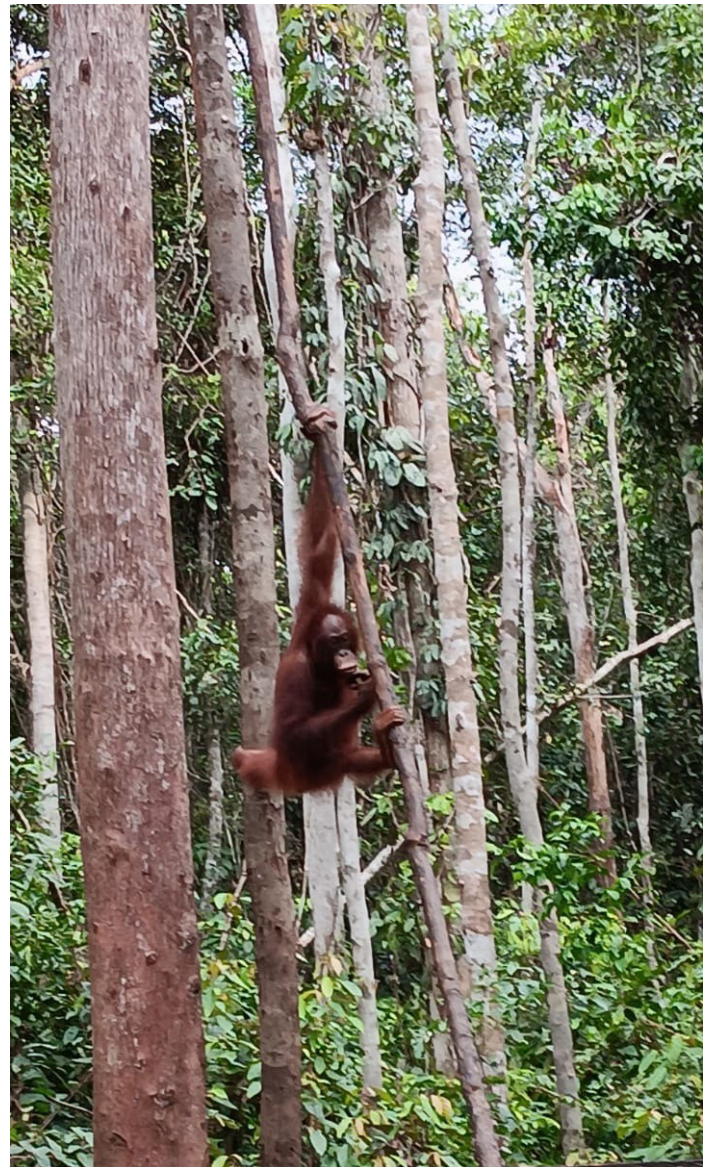


Corporate group ownership of oil palm plantations in Seruyan. Source: PROGRESS

Population

Seruyan Regency has a population of 158,282 with a density of 10 people/km², according to government data (Badan Pusat Statistik) for the first semester of 2024. Seruyan Regency consists of 10 subdistricts, 3 townships, and 97 villages.¹⁴ In the government's classification, the majority of the population in the upstream areas are Dayak Kohin and Dayak Ot Danum, while Dayak Ngaju predominate along the Seruyan River. Other ethnic groups registered by the government include Banjar, Jawa, Sunda, Bugis and Flores. As shown on the above map, in the southern portion of the district almost all community lands are overlapped by imposed oil palm plantations.

This project¹⁵ has worked with seven communities in Seruyan whose customary lands border the Tanjung Puting National Park. These peoples consider themselves to be descendants of the Dayak who originally inhabited the region and, while most adopted Islam during the Banjar sultanate, they still maintain a Dayak system of land tenure in accordance with customary law. The majority speak a distinctive language, referred to as Bahasa Pemuang,¹⁶ which is related to but differs from Banjarese itself and from the Dayak Ngaju language which is prevalent further upstream. A common self-identification among some of the villagers is 'Dayak Banjar', which captures this sense of mixed heritage, while others now see themselves as Banjar and also speak Banjarese.



Semi-wild orang utan in Camp Seluang Mas 1. Photo: FPP



Signboard stating 'Customary Territory, Lake Sembuluh I community'. Photo: FPP

Table showing villages engaged with by the project and the palm oil companies that overlap their lands ¹⁷

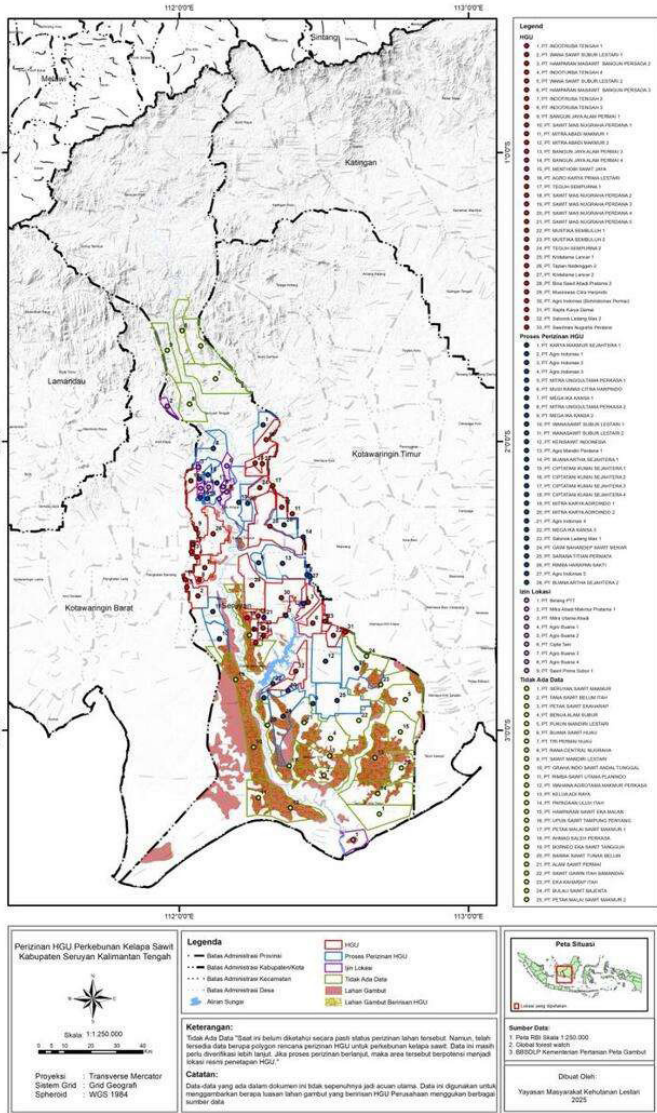
No.	Name of the Subdistrict	Name Of Village	Name of Oil Palm Plantation	Oil Palm Plantation Group
1	Hanau	Paring Raya	PT Musirawas Citraharpindo	Musirawas Group
			PT. Sumur Pandan Wangi	Musiwaras Group
			PT Wana Sawit Subur Lestari	Best Agro International
			PT Sawitmas Nugraha Perdana	
2		Parang Batang	PT Wana Sawit Subur Lestari	Best Agro International
			PT Sawitmas Nugraha Perdana	
			PT Rim Capital	Goodhope Group
			PT Sumur Pandan Wangi	Musirawas Group
3		Tanjung Hanau	PT Wana Sawit Subur Lestari	Best Agro International
			PT Sawitmas Nugraha Perdana	
			PT Rim Capital,	Goodhope Group
4		Danau Sembuluh	Benua Usang	PT Wana Sawit Subur Lestari
	PT. Rim Capital			Goodhope
	PT Sawitmas Nugraha Perdana			
5	Danau Sembuluh I		PT. Selonok Ladang Mas	USTP
			PT. Mustika Sembuluh	Wilmar Group
			PT Musirawas Citraharpindo	Musirawas Group
			PT Rimba Harapan Sakti	
			PT. Kerry Sawit Indonesia	Wilmar Group
			PT Mega Ika Khansa	Triputra Agro Group
			PT Gawi Bahandep Sawit Mekar	Triputra Agro Group
			PT Sawitmas Nugraha Perdana	
			PT. Agro Indomas	Goodhope Group
		PT. Rim Capital	Goodhope Group	
6	Danau Sembuluh II	PT. Selonok Ladang Mas	USTP	
		PT. Mustika Sembuluh	Wilmar Group	
		PT. Kerry Sawit Indonesia	Wilmar Group	
		PT Mega Ika Khansa	Triputra Agro Group	
		PT Gawi Bahandep Sawit Mekar	Triputra Agro Group	
		PT Sawitmas Nugraha Perdana		
		PT. Agro Indomas	Goodhope Group	
		PT. Rim Capital	Goodhope Group	
7	Seruyan Raya	Lanpasa	PT Rim Capital	Goodhope
			PT Agro Indomas	Goodhope
			PT Musirawas Citraharpindo	Musirawas Group
			PT Sawitmas Nugraha Perdana	

Oil palm plantations in Seruyan have resulted in extensive deforestation. A rough calculation using the Global Forest Watch data set (see map above) suggests that between 2004 and 2024, in the southern part of the district dominated by oil palm plantations, approximately 358,000 hectares (ha) of forests were cleared, including some areas meant to be protected in the Tanjung Puting National Park. Most of this clearance took place between 2004 and 2008 with another peak year in 2016. Our field surveys show that extensive areas of peat have also been taken over for plantations. Of the 224,859.73 ha of peatlands mapped in Seruyan District, no less than 141,751 ha (63%) are now overlapped by oil palm plantation permits.¹⁹



‘Drunk’ oil palms planted on peat. Photo: FPP

Contrary to regulations, plantation companies have routinely planted across smaller and even some large rivers without protecting riparian strips, have drained and planted oil palms in locally valued swamps, and in places have even planted right up to the banks of the Seruyan River and Lake Sembuluh. Local people complain that, as a result, waters have been muddied, fish-stocks have been depleted and many subsidiary streams and rivers have completely dried up. The change in limnology has not only meant that people have lost access to clean drinking water but also they can no longer get to upriver farming areas that they previously reached by boat. Moreover, remnant families of orang utans surviving in isolated forest stands along the main river are now cut off by tens of kilometres of oil palm monocrops from the orang utan populations in the Tanjung Puting National Park, putting their survival in jeopardy.



Map showing oil palm concession boundaries and areas of peat in brown.

Source: YMKL

Human Rights Violations

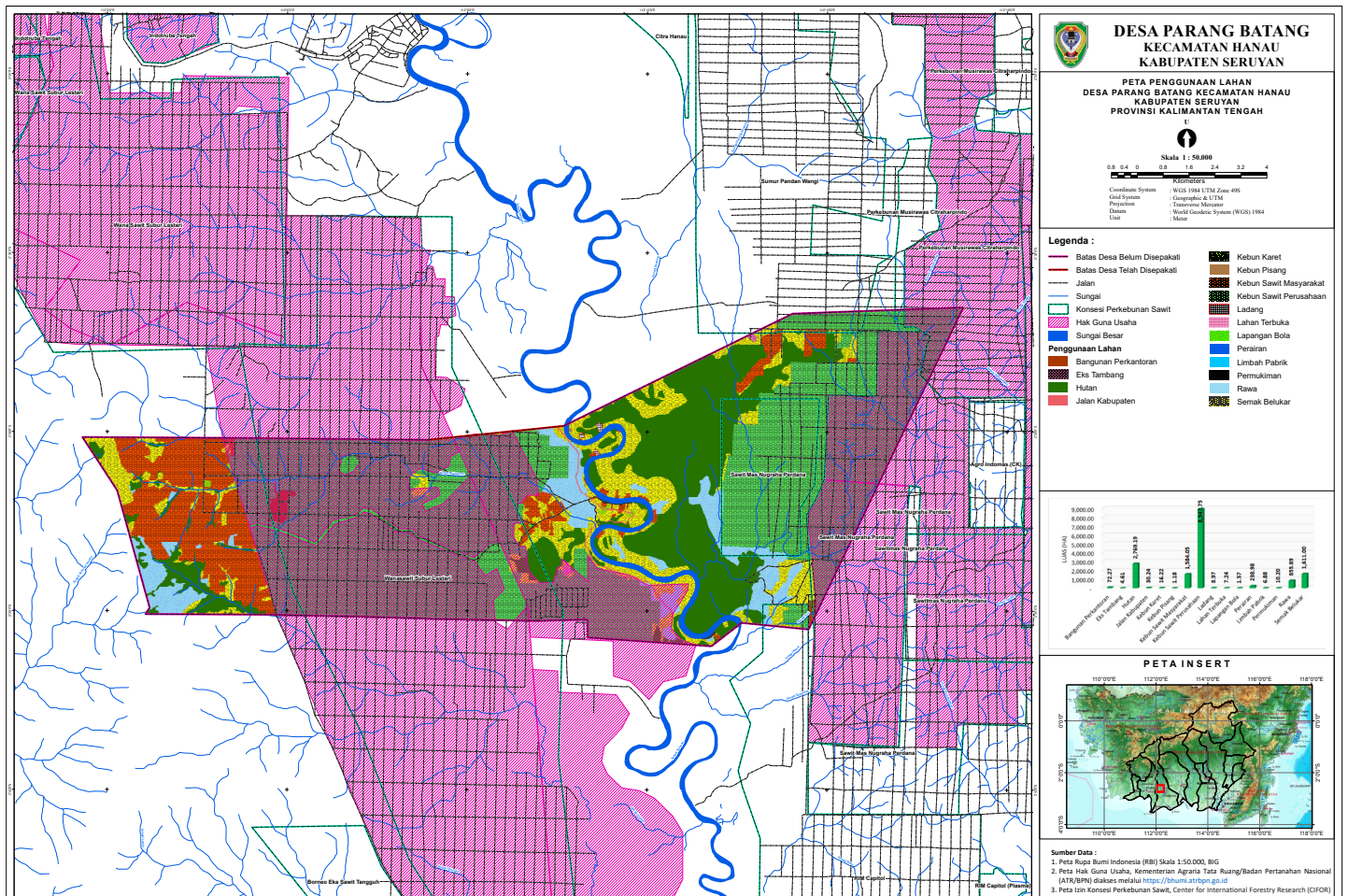
A detailed human rights impact assessment carried out for the Mosaik Initiative in 2021 by FPP, YMKL, PROGRESS and led by the indigenous rights lawyer, Asep Firdaus, based on detailed interviews and focus group discussions in eight administrative villages (four in Seruyan and four in neighbouring KotaWaringin Barat district), found that all eight villages have had concessions for company oil palm plantations imposed on them.²⁰ In some villages only small areas have so far been allocated by the Government to companies for oil palm plantations. In others, numerous companies have gained concessions covering the great majority of the communities' lands. In one extreme case, no less than 8 separate companies have concessions overlapping the lands of just one village.

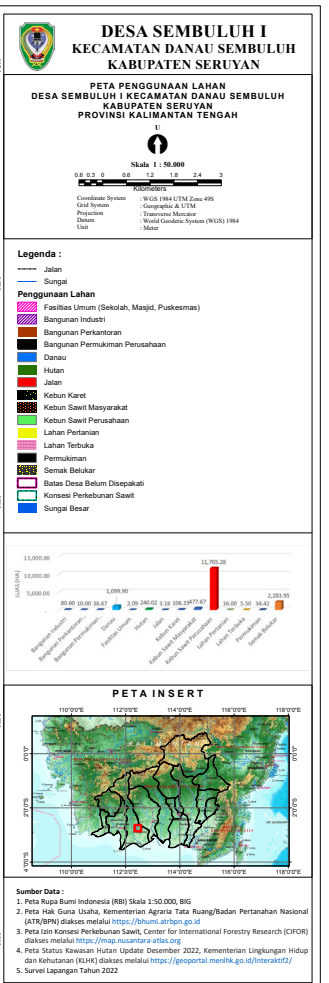
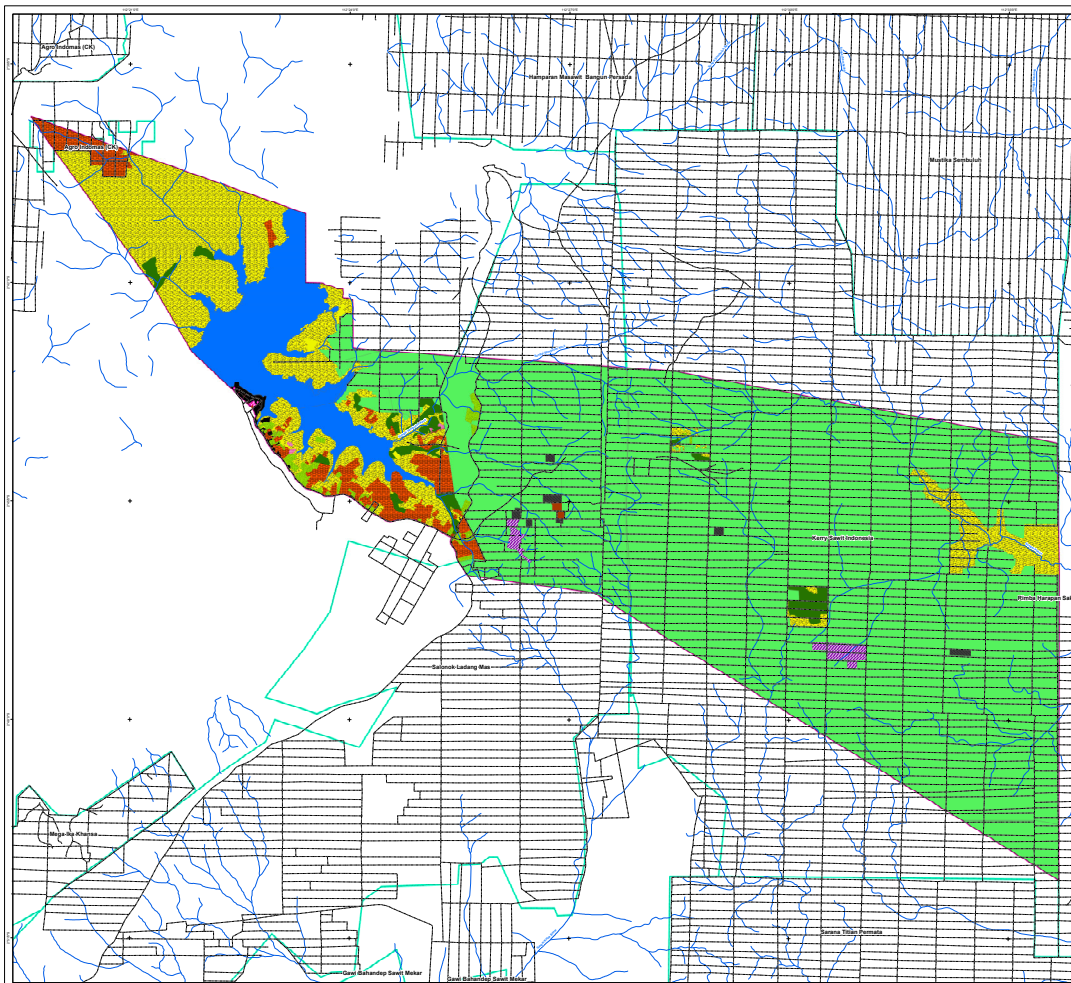
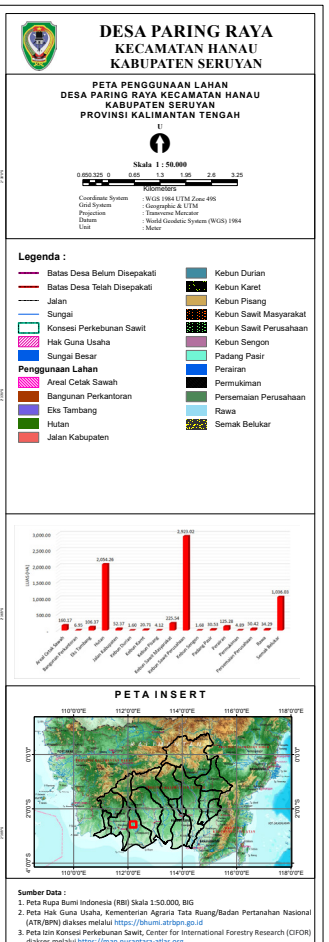
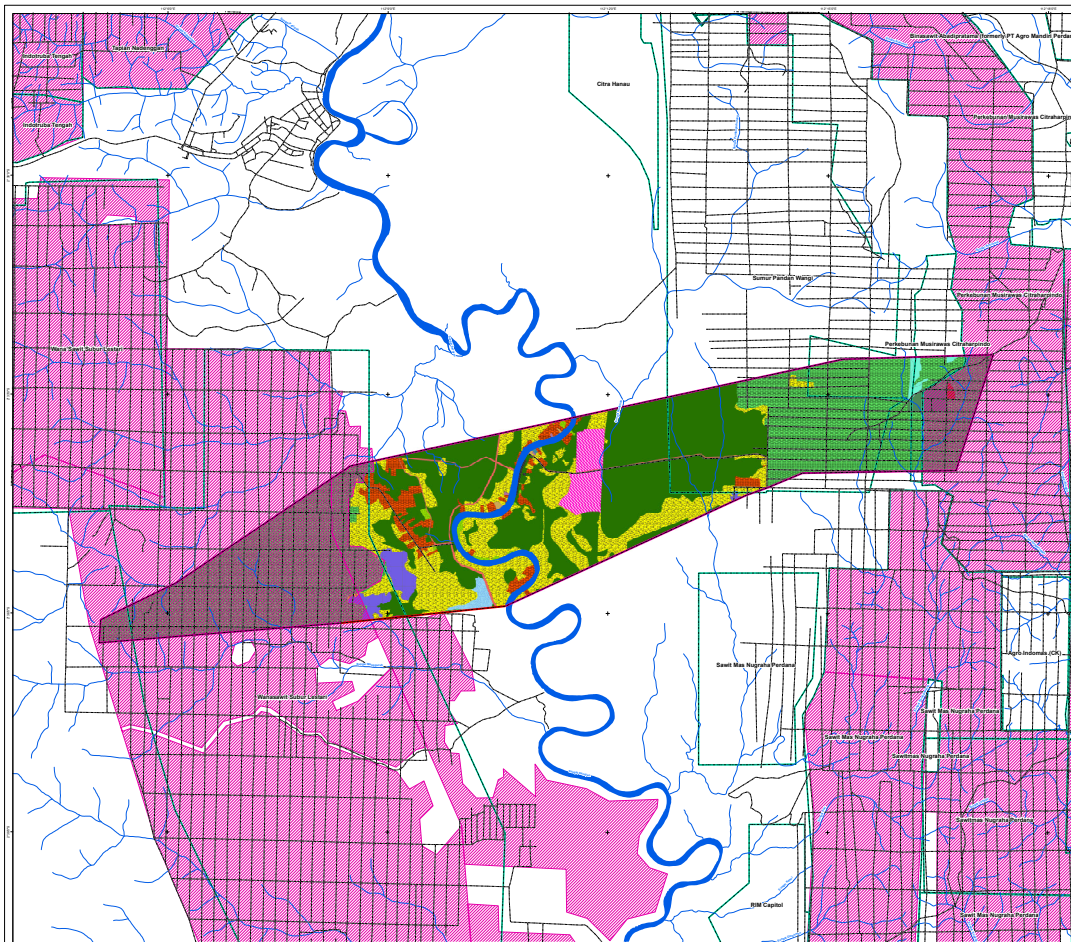
The findings from the Human Rights Impact Assessment are sobering. Human rights abuses associated with oil palm estates are prevalent in both districts. There is a lack of effective Government implementation of international and national human rights obligations. Although national laws upholding many human rights exist, not only are key elements of national law not being upheld but there are systemic problems in the way concessions are granted and companies operate. Peoples' rights to be informed are not upheld. They are not given the chance to say 'yes' or 'no' to the take-over of their lands. They are not given scope to choose how they are represented.

Communities' rights to their lands, territories and natural resources are neither protected nor even recognised. Compensation payments for expropriated lands, where paid, have been nugatory and only provided for farmed lands and not communities' wider territories. Legally required smallholdings are, for the most part, not being provided.

Workers' rights to freedom of association and free collective bargaining are not upheld. Most local workers are employed as casual day labourers and paid substantially below the statutory minimum wage. There are deficiencies in the provision of basic education and health services, exacerbated by sub-standard transportation and, in some specific instances, limitations on people being able to transit estates to access subsistence resources. Most communities report problems voicing concerns against their treatment, including intimidation and criminalisation of those raising grievances, and complain that dispute resolution has been ineffective. Some protestors and complainants have suffered intimidation, harassment and worse (see Box below).

While challenging, these findings confirm the Government's own data, which show that to date palm oil development across Kalimantan has brought few benefits to local communities and has instead brought net economic, social and environmental harm, especially to isolated communities relatively unused to markets.²¹





Maps showing how village lands in Seruyan have been overlapped by imposed palm oil concessions.²²

Violence and Human Rights Violations in Bangkal Village in Seruyan

Since 2004, the community in Bangkal Village has expressed their objection to the presence of PT Hamparan Masawit Bangun Persada (PT HMBP), a subsidiary of Best Agro Internasional, a palm oil group rooted in Central Kalimantan. These objections were documented in the minutes of a community meeting signed by the Head of Bangkal Village and sent to the Regent of Seruyan District. However, the Regent of Seruyan subsequently issued a Plantation Business Permit (IUP) for 11,250 hectares of land to PT HMBP. In 2006, the Head of the National Land Agency then issued a decision granting the company a Business Use Permit (HGU) for 11,229 hectares of land to PT HMBP. The HGU overlaps the lands of Bangkal village.

In 2008, community representatives met with representatives of PT. HMBP to draw up an agreement in which PT. HMBP promised to contribute to village development. In 2013, PT. HMBP held another meeting with Bangkal Village residents to discuss the contributions that PT. HMBP would make to the Bangkal Village community. At the meeting, the community confirmed the extent of PT HMBP's HGU, which took over part of the community's land, and requested that they manage as 'plasma' (smallholdings) 1,175 ha that had been converted to oil palm outside PT. HMBP's HGU. PT. HMBP stated that it agreed to the plasma proposal and would implement the agreement by 2014 at the latest.

By 2023, PT. HMBP had yet to fulfil the community's demand for 1,175 hectares of plasma land outside PT. HMBP's HGU. The failure of PT. HMBP to fulfil its promises and implement the agreement that had previously been reached with the Bangkal Village community, led the community to commence demonstrations near the company compound from 16th September 2023. The protests were sustained and gradually escalated as they were met with increasing resistance by the company and then local police brought in at the company's request.

On 7th October 2023, the continuing protests culminated in a serious clash in which the police used live ammunition to dispel the protestors, resulting in serious casualties. One victim, named Gijik, died from a gunshot wound to the right side of his chest, and 2 other victims, named Taufik Noor and Ambar, suffered serious injuries to their waists and backs. During the incident, 20 members of the public were arrested by police officers and taken to the East Kotawaringin Police Station.²³

Local NGOs widely condemned the incident querying why the police were defending a company that was illegally operating outside its concession area and were instead penalising the community:

"We consider it to be a violation of human rights when state agents who are tasked with defending the public engage in repression directed towards the community. Especially because what is done by the community is just to obtain their rights that [are] legally protected under [the] Constitution..."²⁴

The clash, which was filmed on several handphones, was also widely reported in the media and then investigated by the police and by the National Human Rights Commission, as well as by NGOs and academics.²⁵ As a result of the investigations, some police personnel were transferred to other localities but only one police officer was prosecuted and given a six month sentence. The arrested residents were eventually released. The 'plasma' has still not been provided.

Jurisdictional Approach

As noted, the original motivation of the Seruyan Government for adopting the Jurisdictional Approach was to provide redress for the harms caused by oil palm plantations and ensure that the impacted communities had secure rights and improved livelihoods.²⁶ At the time the Forest Peoples Programme with YMKL was invited to engage in the district, in 2017, the local government reported that it had identified 300 land conflicts in the district linked to oil palm development.²⁷

Under the current RSPO certification system, companies that are members of the RSPO voluntarily seek to comply with the RSPO standard as set out in its Principles and Criteria (P&C), some of which go beyond what is required in national laws. Once confident they are in compliance, the companies pay a third party Certification Body (CB) to send an audit team to verify compliance, and if their operation is found to be satisfactory by the auditors, the CB can then award the operation a certificate which allows the company to sell their product from that specific mill and supply base as 'Certified Sustainable Palm Oil' (CSPO). Most European and American palm oil buyers prefer CSPO and a number of financial institutions expect the palm oil companies they bankroll to be RSPO members. So far, some 19% of globally traded palm oil has been RSPO certified.

The basic concept of the RSPO's 'Jurisdictional Approach' is to make the RSPO P&C mandatory for all operations in participating jurisdictions. Since a lot of companies, especially medium-scale operators, and most smallholders are not RSPO members, the Jurisdictional Approach requires that mechanisms are put in place to both incentivise and enforce compliance with RSPO requirements. This is done through the formation of a multi-stakeholder Jurisdictional Entity which becomes an RSPO member and assumes responsibility (through 'upward delegation') for undertaking some of these requirements. Such requirements include identifying and protecting High Conservation Value and High Carbon Stock Areas, developing land use plans to ensure further expansion avoids such areas and peatlands, and ensuring communities' livelihoods and rights to their legal, customary or user lands and to Free, Prior and Informed Consent are upheld.

Where High Conservation Values have been lost or degraded since 2005, the Jurisdictional Entity also needs to implement an approved 'Remedy and Compensation Plan' that provides remedy to communities that have lost areas crucial for providing them with ecosystem services, livelihoods and cultural identity (HCV 4, 5 and 6) and compensation, in the form of conservation set-asides or payments, for lost areas crucial for endangered species, critical habitats and ecosystems (HCV 1, 2 and 3). Areas of riparian forest and peat overplanted with oil palms should also be restored. The amount of compensation required for cleared forests is calculated through a Land Use Change Analysis, which determines how much forest has been cleared for palm oil operations and which year this happened, and provides a calculator for estimating the compensation therefore due.²⁸ Social liabilities should be remedied through direct negotiations with the impacted communities,²⁹ and this provides a critical pathway for helping to resolve land conflicts resulting from imposed plantations.

Fulfilling RSPO requirements

Jurisdictions seeking to enter the RSPO system have to comply with a 3-step set of requirements before it is accepted that they can put forward groups of palm oil producers for independent auditing and certification.³⁰ These stage-by-stage requirements include provisions to uphold RSPO social and environmental requirements. In Step 1, the jurisdiction must develop a plan to adopt procedures for upholding the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent and for recognising legal, customary and use rights to land. A legal gap analysis is also required to identify any RSPO requirements which go beyond what is required by national

and local laws. In Step 2, these procedures on FPIC and for land rights recognition need to be in place and legal regulations need to have been adopted to close off any gaps. An assessment is also required to identify any disqualifying social and environmental violations and steps taken to address them. Then, in Step 3, the new legal requirements on land rights recognition and FPIC need to be actually implemented, a Remediation and Compensation plan needs to be implemented and disqualifying social and environmental requirements including human rights violations and systemic land grabbing need to be resolved.³¹ So far, Seruyan has completed Step 1 of this process and expects to complete Step 2 in 2026.

	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3
System Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Multi-stakeholder group established with mandate from the relevant government authority II. Statement of intent to achieve 100% RSPO compliance made public by relevant government authority. III. Plan developed for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establishment of the JE b. Relevant policies, system, procedures to support Jurisdictional Approach c. Spatial mapping of all producers, millers, refinery and crushers, HCV/HCS and other relevant information. d. Database of information on producers, processors, and supply chain actors within the Jurisdiction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. JE is legally established with a Multi-stakeholder Board in place (Element 1.1 and 1.2 of System Requirements) II. JE Internal Control System (ICS) developed (see Element 2) III. Oil palm planted areas and land bank of all producers, millers, refineries and crusher and refinery facilities spatially mapped. IV. Database compiled on producers, processors, and supply chain actors within the Jurisdiction. V. JE becomes an RSPO member. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. The Internal Control System of JE (including internal audit) is functioning (Element 2 – fully implemented). II. Quality control system in place and policy framework (Element 1 and Element 2) III. Plan in place to establish Internal Grievances, Complaints & Appeals Mechanisms (Element 3). IV. Financing viability and transparent accounting procedures in place. V. Oil palm planted areas and land bank of JE members, and a detailed database required for RSPO certification.
Landscape-Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan developed to conduct and/or develop Jurisdictional level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Procedures for FPIC and for recognition of land rights (legal, customary and user rights) formulated II. Indicative HCV and HCS mapping (in alignment with RSPO requirements), includes mapping of peatlands III. Historical Land Use Change Analysis (LUCA) in accordance with RSPO LUCA guidance document. IV. Legal gap analysis of differences between RSPO P&C and Jurisdiction law and policies. V. Regulation on use of fire, fire prevention and control measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Indicative map of peatlands, HCV and HCS areas. II. Jurisdictional level 'No-go' zones (for conservation and protection) mapped. III. LUCA completed with (potential) liability declared and made publicly available. IV. Procedures for recognition of land rights (legal, customary and use rights) developed. V. FPIC procedure and guidelines completed for the Jurisdiction. VI. Regulation on use of fire, fire prevention and control measures in place. VII. System developed and fully operating at a Jurisdictional level to monitor, detect and verify deforestation, hotspots/ burning and conversion of peatlands, HCV areas, HCS areas and other 'no-go' zones, including social risks and impacts. VIII. Legal gaps identified on the differences between RSPO P&C and Jurisdiction law and policies and the necessary regulations or procedures are developed. IX. Assessment of disqualifying social and environmental issues and steps taken to address them including no conversion of HCV, HCS or peatlands, and serious human rights violations and systemic land grabbing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. FPIC and land rights recognition procedures and guidelines are in place and being implemented. II. Spatial planning is in place, including HCV, HCS, and peatland, and RaCP requirements are being implemented. III. SEIA procedures and guidelines are being implemented. IV. Remediation and compensation plan approved (for conservation liability(s) identified in Step 2) and in implementation V. New Planting Procedures as per RSPO requirements being implemented VI. Enforceable regulations or procedures are adopted and applied to overcome gaps with RSPO P&C VII. Disqualifying social and environmental issues are addressed or certification cannot proceed. VIII. System developed and fully operating at a Jurisdictional level to monitor, detect and verify deforestation, hotspots/burning and conversion including social risks and impacts.

After Step 3 has been completed and there is a fully functioning JE, the JE receives group certification through external audit, following respective RSPO Standards. Auditing of the standards is as the Certification System Requirements and necessitates adequate evidence at the appropriate level of management.

High Conservation Value and High Carbon Stock mapping

YMKL, PROGRESS and FPP have been working with a number of communities in Seruyan to help them engage with the Jurisdictional Approach, and our work is now formally linked to the Mosaik Initiative, coordinated by the Bali-based NGO, Kaleka, with funding from the Swiss aid agency, SECO. A core part of this work has been to help communities understand what is the RSPO, and its standards, how the Jurisdictional Approach - with its multistakeholder engagement of local government, companies, smallholders and NGOs - provides scope for improving their lives and how they can make use of the new mechanisms being adopted by the district government to resolve land conflicts and labour disputes.

This has also involved helping communities map their lands and identify areas that are of 'High Conservation Value' in accordance with the RSPO standard and the HCV system.³² While welcoming NGO support, initially there was a lot of resistance from the target communities to the language of 'HCVs'. This was because the communities' previous experience of 'conservation', in the form of the Tanjung Puting National Park, had been so negative. Moreover, some of the RSPO member companies in Seruyan, as part of their efforts to conform to RSPO standards, had imposed HCV set-asides within their estates without compensating prior land users for these new restrictions on their livelihoods and without any consultation. Community members note that the first they knew about HCVs was to see new signboards erected banning them from making further use of these areas. From the communities' point of view it seemed totally unjust that incoming companies could be allowed to clear huge areas of lands and forests while they were not allowed even to hunt, gather or farm on the small remnants left of their customary lands. Not surprisingly, the language of 'conservation' and 'high conservation values' has a bitter taste for them. It took some time for the communities to accept that both the HCV and HCS approaches, if applied correctly, are meant to be applied with their involvement and consent and should also have included measures to protect areas that they consider important for them, for providing fresh water and transportation, the resources they need for their basic needs and areas crucial to their cultural identity.³³

Land Use Planning

In the normal application of the RSPO standard it is the responsibility of growers – oil palm companies and smallholders - to avoid any conversion of primary forests and HCV and High Carbon Stock (HCS) areas and any planting on peatlands. This is usually done by having experts identify where in a proposed plantation there are such areas and then setting them aside – in consultation with, and with the consent of, local communities. Under the Jurisdictional Approach this becomes the responsibility of the Jurisdiction Entity.

This 'upward delegation' of responsibility has the advantage of reducing costs, allowing conservation set-asides to be planned for at landscape scale and thus optimise possibilities for establishing connectivity in the landscape, important for wildlife and long-term biodiversity conservation³⁴. It does however place a significant burden on the Jurisdictional Entity to engage thoroughly with all the communities in the jurisdiction to make sure the values in the landscape important for them are identified and protected, with their agreement.

As part of this pilot initiative, the High Conservation Values Network was contracted by RSPO to carry out a detailed jurisdiction-wide assessment of the presence of HCV-HCS areas in Seruyan and based on this experience to then develop a methodology for carrying out HCV-HCS assessments at scale. The agreed approach starts with a high-level screening of the landscape using existing remote-sensing maps and databases. This is then followed by targeted HCV-HCS assessment fieldwork in high-risk areas, and quality assurance, before integrated development and conservation

planning for defining 'No-Go zones' is undertaken. The aim is that this eventually leads to the adoption of a Jurisdictional-scale land use planning map by the jurisdiction. A final step to independently check that the procedure was properly applied and the resulting maps are of adequate quality has yet to be developed.³⁵ The process has been adjusted to ensure that at critical points in this process, communities are consulted and their Free, Prior and Informed Consent for the resulting maps is obtained. The exact procedures for this FPIC process are still being elaborated by the RSPO.

To complement this initiative, FPP, YMKL and PROGRESS have been working directly with the target communities to help them identify the HCVs in their territories, with the aim of then integrating the findings from these bottom-up maps with the top-down maps being developed using remote sensing and targeted field checks. The comparison should also help ensure that maps generated by screening and a limited number of field assessments really are identifying HCVs prioritised by the communities.



Focus Group discussion of community land use plans: Photo: FPP

Restoring the environment

As part of this effort to ensure that communities' rights and livelihoods are secured and their priorities for the future are taken into account by the local government agencies concerned with both development and conservation, FPP, YMKL and PROGRESS have been engaging with the communities to help them develop their own land use plans.

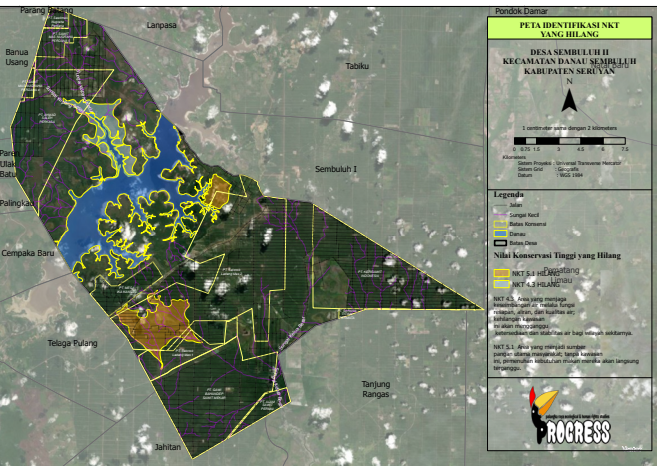
As a result of this long-term engagement, communities are beginning to appreciate the importance of identifying and mapping the areas important to them. They understand that mapping is not merely a technical activity, but a tool for understanding and preserving their remaining land and for planning the fair and conscious management and restoration of their living spaces. They also identified some of the key challenges that they face, such as :

- Conflict between communities and orang utans, both of which are being squeezed out by plantation expansion.
- Loss of traditional livelihoods, clean water sources, and forests where they fish, collect wood and forest products.
- Labour problems and unfair palm oil worker wage systems (e.g., IDR 80.000 per day or IDR Rp350/kg for palm fruit bunches at PT. WSSL) faced by the communities.
- Environmental pollution and land conversion that impact their livelihoods.

Working through participatory mapping processes, the target communities have produced maps of both remaining and also lost HCVs, which serves as a basis for communities to demonstrate the impact of landscape change and is intended to help them to prepare long-term village land use plans. Two examples of such maps are given below.



Map of lost HCVs in Danau Sembuluh I Village



Map of lost HCVs in Danau Sembuluh II Village

Community visions

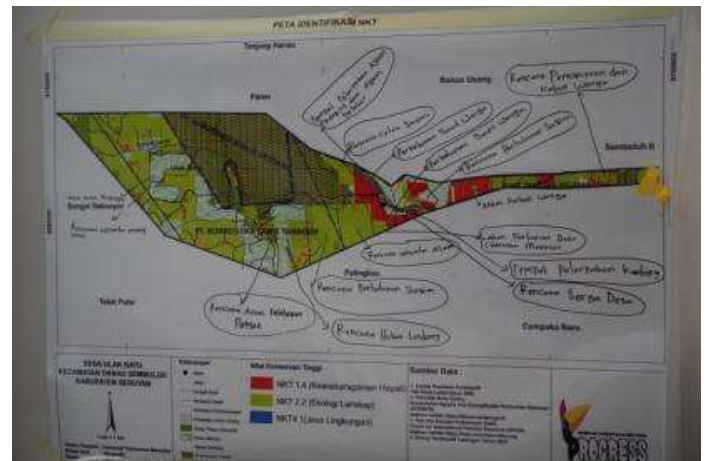
Based on the results of these deliberations, each village has begun to develop land use plans and landscape restoration visions, which also serve as the basis for developing Village Spatial Plans (RTRW Desa) and Village Regulations. In principle, villages have the authority to manage their own space in accordance with Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages and village-level local authority. These plans fall into two main categories:

1. Community protected areas – including rivers, lakes, peats, forests, and locations that still have high ecological potential;
2. Production areas – including agriculture, smallholder plantations, livestock farming, and future settlement areas.

The communities also emphasize that remedy and compensation is not just about money, but rather should be directed at realising a collective plan for equitable village development, in which companies, the government, and the community are equally responsible for the impacts caused:

1. Threats in their area (palm oil expansion, silica mining, pollution, and unilateral land use changes).
2. Remaining potential, such as fish sources, food crops, aren palms, rattan, or nature tourism.
3. Local action plans, such as:
 - Creation of village protected forests and fishing tourism sites (Paring Raya Village).
 - Village spatial mapping and organic vegetable cultivation (Parang Batang Village).
 - Lake management for tourism and fisheries, and development of smallholder livestock farming (Lanpasa Village).
 - Recognition and protection of Batu Bejanggut customary forest, Teluk Tiwadak food security, and village forest planning in Tanjung Perak (Danau Sembuluh II Village).
 - Lakefront tourism plan, watershed rehabilitation, and integrated waste management (Danau Sembuluh I Village).
 - Orang utan ecotourism and coffee plantations as economic alternatives (Ulak Batu Village).

All villages agreed that these maps and plans are village blueprints, a long-term development guide.



Maps of Village Spatial Plans (RTRW Desa) from the community from Ulak Batu Village and Danau Sembuluh II developed during focus group discussions on the Remedy and Compensation Procedure.

This collaboration has also involved developing dialogues between the communities and the two government agencies charged with conservation. The Tanjung Puting National Parks office (TNTP) and the Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA), which has responsibility for conservation activities outside protected areas.

In the discussions with the communities, TNTP now allows communities access and use to agreed areas (*kawasan tangkap tradisional*) within the national park for the collection of non-timber forest products, fishing and even farming although not oil palms, thereby lifting some of the restrictions imposed on their customary rights. TNTP accepts that some villages, namely Paring Raya Village, Parang Batang Village, Tanjung Hanau Village, Banua Usang Village and Ulak Batu Village, have suffered losses from the imposition of the TNTP and see it as part of its 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSR) programme to offset these restrictions on their livelihoods. Based on the results of joint identification exercises with the community and village officials, TNTP has been implementing various CSR programs every year, such as providing:

- 12 outboard engines for traditional fishermen's boats
- Catfish cages (although this failed because the fry provided were not suitable for the Seruyan River habitat)
- Tilapia fry for aquaculture initiatives.

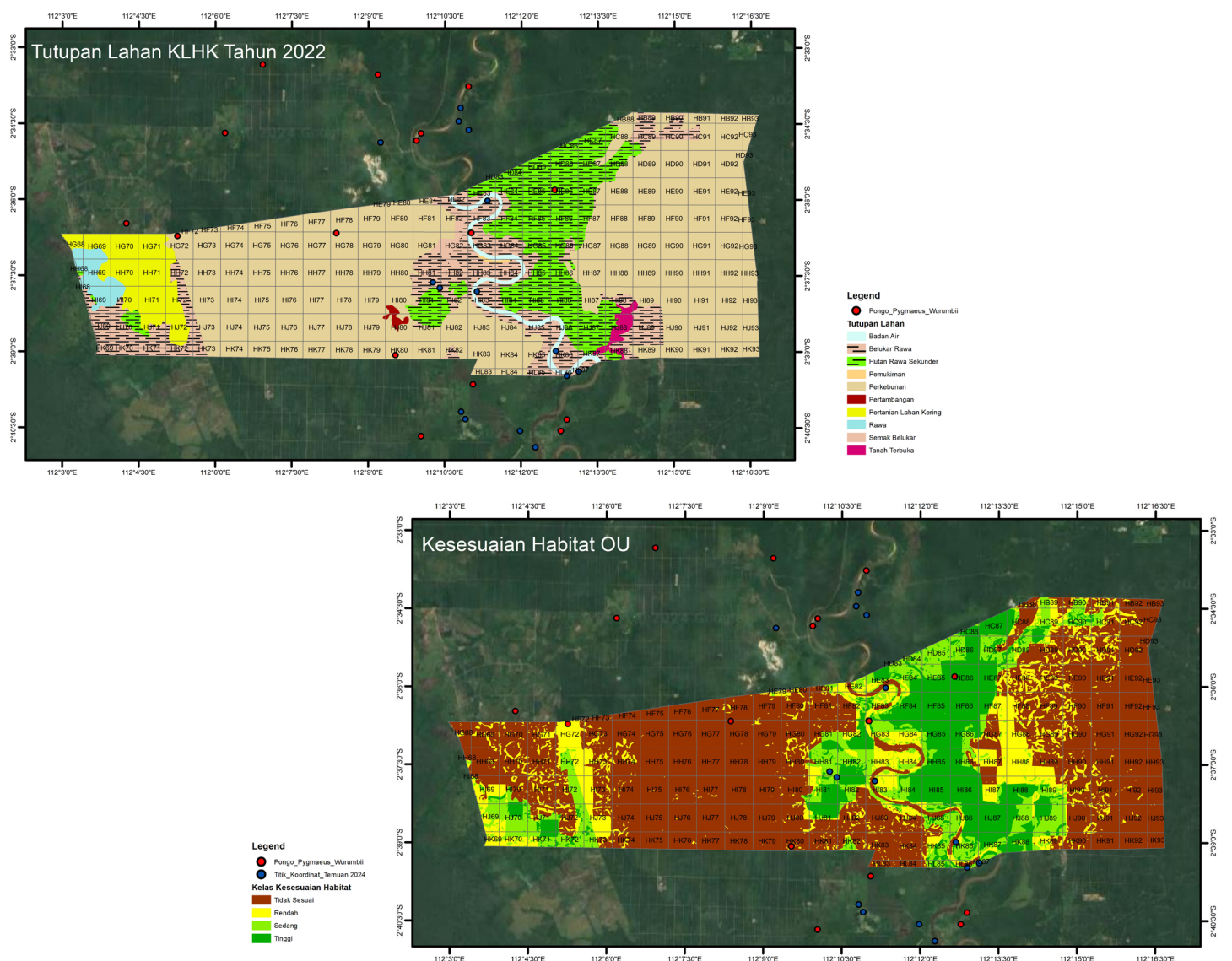
According to the communities, in 2025 TNTP cut back on its CSR provisions due to its implementing budget efficiency measures. Overall, the ongoing negotiations between the communities and the TNTP have

been very positive despite significant challenges, as certain 'delinquent' individuals (*orang oknum*) have been informally selling lands within the National Park to medium-scale palm oil companies, contrary to the will of both the communities and TNTP.

Discussions between the NGOs and BKSDA have also been encouragingly positive. BKSDA has responsibility for monitoring a huge area with a relatively small staff and operating budget and readily appreciates that community monitoring can help them fulfil their job. These discussions became very concrete after community monitoring identified orang utan tracks in the oil palm plantation of PT. Wana Sawit Subur Lestari 2 and orang utan nests in the remnant forests along the banks of the Seruyan river and around Lake Sembuluh. The BKSDA has agreed to:

- Legitimize the communities' environmental assessment data, so that it can be published through the BKSDA
- Invite relevant parties to participate in a multi-stakeholder focus group discussion (FGD) as an effort to build dialogue and find joint solutions and
- conduct an environmental assessment in the four participating villages.

The BKSDA's support demonstrates their recognition that wildlife protection cannot be separated from the protection of land and community living spaces. This collaboration opens up opportunities to build cross-sectoral synergy in protecting areas that are important to both communities and biodiversity.



Map showing Orang Utan nests (red dots) and suspected nests (blue dots) around Parang Batang Village

As part of community mapping and land use planning undertaken through this project, the target communities have also begun to re-imagine their future on the land. As Pak Syahriaf of Ulak Batu Village explained in one Focus Group Discussion:

We do have dreams about our future. We want transport to be improved so we can take our own produce to markets and so be more self-sufficient. To sell the produce from our farms – like fresh vegetables and cattle - and from our fisheries. But also to sell products from the forests like damar resin, rattan, gabaru (eagle wood) and gembor wood. Also we hope the forests can be restored. We see the prospect of wildlife flourishing again. There are still a few orang utans near here, and gibbons (owa), and they will come back in numbers if the forests can be allowed to grow back again. Getting recognition of our land rights is also a priority, so that we can manage our lands and harvest our crops. We want to manage our lands and forests for ourselves.

Other community spokespersons have expressed the hope that the dried-up rivers and lakes in their territories can be restored through replanting trees or naturally regenerating the riparian forests which should anyway have been preserved in compliance with the law. If this dream could be realised it would also provide wildlife corridors for species like gibbons and orang utan that survive in isolated pockets of forests alongside the Seruyan River but are cut off, by the huge swathe of oil palm plantations, from more viable populations in the national park.

Another important initiative resulting from the project has been to trigger the creation of a multi-stakeholder forum including the authorities of five of the villages who live on the banks of Sembuluh Lake along with several of the oil palm companies whose operations impinge on their lands. The forum includes Sembuluh I, Sembuluh II, Tebiku, Telaga Pulang and Terawan, all of which derive an important portion of the protein in their diet from fish in the lake, which they also sell in the local markets. The forum has agreed to collaboration between the companies and the communities to monitor the quality of the waters in the lake which communities are concerned has been polluted by chemicals used in plantations and made turbid with eroded soils due to upriver land conversion. The aim is to improve the quality of the lake, control the spread of the invasive water hyacinth, check that the fish in the lake are suitable to eat and also check the quality of well water.

The lake is so basic to our welfare and livelihoods, noted one resident. We need clean water to look after our domestic animals and not just for our own health.

It is the hope of the villagers that riparian forests can be restored by some of the companies that have planted too close to the banks of the lake. One of the active members of the forum, the palm oil company, PT Sawit Mas Perdana is already developing plans to restore forests in these areas. This multi-stakeholder forum is a unique initiative for having been built from the bottom up but in the long term the aim is to engage with the multiple government agencies that have responsibility for the environment.³⁶

Currently the main focus of community efforts is to resolve their conflicts with the palm oil companies over their lands, smallholdings, labour relations and basic needs, like clean water and adequate farmland, but their hope is that in solving these immediate problems a path can be laid towards a more sustainable and prosperous future.

Conflict Resolution and Remedy Options

In order to address the land conflicts resulting from oil palm expansion, the Government of Seruyan has committed itself through four district regulations to identify and register conflicts, and provide mediation to resolve them. This work has been developed as part of the Jurisdictional Approach with sustained support from the NGO Kaleka and funding through its Mosaik Initiative. As of late 2025, the Seruyan District Government had registered 91 conflicts in 40 villages impacted by oil palm plantations. In one village, Tanjung Hanau, the government has registered no less than nine different conflicts. According to Kaleka, so far 8 of these 91 conflicts – the great majority of which focus on the lack of provision of plasma (smallholdings) – have been resolved and the rest are in process.³⁷



Companies dig so-called 'elephant ditches' around their estates to prevent resentful locals from pilfering fruits from oil palms planted on what they consider their lands. Photo: FPP

As part of our close support work with the 7 target villages, FPP, YMKL and PROGRESS, with the help of indigenous rights lawyer, Asep Firdaus of Safir Associates, have also been providing detailed legal and technical advice to the communities on how to get redress for their grievances. These discussions reveal that land conflicts are highly imbricated. Communities resent that their land rights are not recognised, that concessions were imposed without their agreement and companies took their lands by unfair means, that resources essential to their livelihoods have been destroyed, and that promised smallholdings have been withheld. They are also aware that local disputes complicate their situation. In some communities, village officials have demanded fees to issue land transfer letters to villagers, before they can get compensation for their farmlands from the companies. There are also numerous cases where village leaders have colluded with land brokers operating on behalf of the companies to issue such letters to the wrong people. Further confusion has arisen as the government is yet to properly map all the administrative boundaries between villages, leading to disputes between villages over exactly which lands are theirs. The resulting intra-village and inter-village disputes, and thus divisions, have weakened the capacity of communities to advance their claims and negotiate solutions.

In these circumstances, communities have been remarkably pragmatic about their demands. Realising that restitution of the full extent of their customary rights is unlikely, in the short term, and to avoid exacerbating internal disputes, most village conflict resolution efforts have focused on their long-expressed grievance that, with few exceptions, companies have reneged on their promises to provide smallholdings as part of the compensation for the takeover of their farmlands and forests. For example, the villages of Paring Raya, Parang Batang, and Tanjung Hanau, held joint meetings in an effort to demand the realization of the plasma scheme long promised by PT. Wana Sawit Subur Lestari 2, a member of the Best Agro Group. Previously, Parang Batang village had internal disagreements related to the plasma cooperative of PT. Sawitmas Nugraha Perdana, while Paring Raya and Tanjung Hanau villages had disagreements over village boundaries. However, in the joint meeting the communities of these three villages were able to unite to make a joint set of demands to the company about the allocation of plasma.

Based on this agreement, they collected data of land ownership in the form of community land deeds submitted to PT. WSSL, the land title of Parang Batang village office, the land transfer letters from Tanjung Hanau, and their letter rejecting the list of plasma recipients in PT. WSSL and submitted it all to the Hanau Sub-District Head. There was a positive response from the local government, particularly the Housing, Settlement and Land Agency and the Food Security and Agriculture Agency, regarding the complaint, which led to a field visit and a verification of the land claims. The government team directly verified the extent of the claimed lands in the village and involved the village community in the process.

As a result, the communities from these three villages now always discuss their strategies and work together to fight for their plasma entitlement using the conflict resolution system provided by the Jurisdictional Approach. Representatives from each village have also sent their objection letters setting out their demands to the District Government. This has led to the Government committing to hold a multistakeholder meeting to address the case initially scheduled for August 2025, but because the change of the local government personnel, following the election of a new *bupati* (district head), this meeting is still pending.

Despite the delay, the communities are still insisting on a resolution of the plasma case with PT. WSSL, leading them to resend their letter setting out their demands in the first week of October. They have also raised questions about the areas regulated by the forest area control task force and how this might affect the allocation of plasma lands to the community (see box below). It is known, although not publicly disclosed, that mapping done by the environment office show that PT WSSL 1 & 2 have planted some 2,800 ha outside their HGU.

From the community point of view, their situation has worsened because they also have to deal with employment challenges. Perhaps in revenge for the communities' persisting in their demands for smallholdings, the company announced it was laying off daily casual workers from six villages, namely Bahaur, Paring Raya, Parang Batang, Tanjung Hanau, Banua Usang, and Ulak Batu, for an indefinite period. The communities have been fighting to be rehired because this is their main source of cash income, especially women. The communities further discussed this issue and then sent a mediation letter to the local government and the district manpower office asking them to help resolve this problem. This was a very difficult decision for the community because they were offered re-employment only if they accepted a reduction in their wages from the previous piece-work rate of Rp. 1,000/kilogram to Rp. 350/kilogram. Although they disagree with this reduction, for the time being they want to continue doing this work because it is their main source of cash income. Surprisingly the district manpower and transmigration office (Disnaker) upheld PT WSSL's piece work rate. PROGRESS, along with the international labour union, CNV,³⁸ and Kaleka then held a hearing with the labour inspectorate at the Provincial Manpower Office regarding this situation and working conditions of daily casual workers at PT WSSL 1 & 2. This has led to a field investigation to verify some of the communities' concerns. The layoffs may also be related to the government's recent confiscation of large parts of PT WSSL's estates (see box page 17).

Jurisdictional challenges

The success of the Jurisdictional Approach depends on local government having both the capacity and authority to incentivise and oblige non-RSPO member oil palm growers in the jurisdiction to conform to RSPO standards. In theory the district government does exercise considerable authority over oil palm plantations on State lands outside forests, that have been classed as Areas of Other Use (APL), but it does not have direct jurisdiction over areas classed as Forest Areas, which are under the purview of the Jakarta-based Ministry of Forests. Many other line Ministries also have offices at the Provincial and District levels, which considerably complicates implementation of new palm oil standards.

One of the policies of the current government has been to act vigorously on the recommendations of the Task Force for Discipline in Forest Areas, set up by prior President Widodo, which considers many mining, oil palm and even some forestry operations to be operating illegally. In 2025, over 4 million ha of oil palm plantations, mines and forestry concessions were confiscated by the government and, in January 2026, the President announced he intends to confiscate as much again or more this year.³⁹ So far, about 1.4 m ha of the confiscated areas of oil palm have been handed over to a new parastatal, AgriNas, led by military personnel.

The Ministry of Forests has classed almost 90% of the lands in Central Kalimantan as State Forest Areas and this includes large parts of Seruyan and much of the area that was handed out for oil palm plantations. One of the most affected is Best Agro, whose largest estates PT WSSL 1 & 2, lie between the Seruyan River and the Tanjung Puting National Park. Almost 13,000 ha of these plantations have been confiscated by the government and are now being overseen by AgriNas, which has established a military presence in the area, although the plantations themselves are still managed by PT WSSL (Best Agro) staff.



Signboard stating that 12,994 ha of PT WSSL estates have been confiscated by the Forest Area Discipline Task Force

Some of these oil palms in Best Agro's estates are approaching the time when they will need to be replaced with new younger palms. However, Indonesian law does not allow replanting in forests, so the future of these estates is unclear. Local communities would like it if at least parts of these areas could be restored to their original functions.

Securing Rights to Land

Although Indonesia has signed the main international treaties and conventions which uphold human rights, including the rights of indigenous peoples, and although the Constitution itself upholds indigenous peoples' rights 'so long as they still exist', a comprehensive law has never been passed which affirms these commitments to honour indigenous rights. Instead, a patchwork of regulations have been adopted which delegate this matter to Provincial or District governments and which provide a somewhat tortuous path for communities to secure recognition of their existence and rights to their customary territories and forests.⁴⁰

One of the positive results of the application of the Jurisdictional Approach is that, in 2024, the District Government in Seruyan passed a local regulation (*peraturan daerah* - PERDA) recognising the existence of indigenous peoples in Seruyan and affirming that they have rights to land.⁴¹ In 2025, this was followed by the establishment of a 'Committee on Indigenous Peoples' which has the task of clarifying who these indigenous peoples are and the extent of their lands and territories. In addition, initiatives are underway to recognise 'customary forests' owned by the indigenous peoples in areas where their territories overlap areas designated as 'forest areas' (*kawasan hutan*). Not all communities in the area do identify as indigenous, some because they have assimilated into the national society and no longer exercise their customary laws, others because they are settlers (*pendatang*) and State-sponsored transmigrants who have immigrated into Kalimantan from other islands. However, many of these people also lack land titles and the Jurisdictional Approach is now addressing this challenge through application of the national land titling programme.

The biggest puzzle the district government faces is how to legally regularise the communities' rights to those parts of their customary territories and farmlands which are now overlapped by imposed plantations. Current regulations are unclear about this matter and only state that such overlaps must be dealt with in line with 'local wisdom' (*kearifan lokal*).⁴² Resolving this problem will depend on negotiations with the various companies implicated but an opportunity to reconcile these competing interests in land may come with replanting which is already beginning in some of the older plantations. It is normal practice for old oil palms to be replaced with new seedlings after 25 to 30 years, as the older palms become less productive and too tall to be harvested easily. Replanting is quite costly and implies a pause in income generation from the land for about five years. Most companies take out further loans from banks to cover these costs and avail themselves of a government replanting subsidy, while also negotiating with local authorities and the land agency (BPN) for an extension of their Business Use Permit (HGU). If the Remedies and Compensation required under the RSPO Jurisdictional Approach are to be realised, replanting offers a moment to reconfigure land use.



Clearing old oil palms, usually for replanting, offers a chance for reconfiguring land use. Photo: FPP

Cultural revival

The manner in which oil palm plantations were established in these Dayak villages gave them little control over the process. Since the companies came in armed with government permits, the village administration – the lowest tier of government – could only try to accommodate the imposition as best they could, if they could resist corrupt or deceitful opportunities for personal enrichment. Whether their leaders were corrupted or not, many local residents express resentment at the way their customary rights have been overridden and their leaders failed to defend them. This weakened community cohesion and destroyed people's pride in being Dayak and rightholders with their own independent ways of life.

However, the district government's adoption of the RSPO's Jurisdictional Approach and the efforts of NGOs to rebuild communities' capacity and understanding of their situation has begun to repair some of this cultural damage. Community awareness has increased so people are now more keen to organize themselves and hold joint meetings when they face challenges. This has also helped them deal with a new influx of individuals, claiming connections to President Prabowo, who have come into their villages offering them success in their demands for smallholdings, and offering control of company land confiscated by the Task Force for Discipline in Forest Areas (see box above).

Thanks also to this mobilisation, Parang Batang village is now forming a Farmers' Group to improve their agriculture and animal husbandry. Approximately 15 people are involved in this initiative. Currently, the community is in the process of discussing which land will be used for agriculture and who will be the core administrators. They have also scheduled a meeting with the Hanau Subdistrict Agricultural Extension Officer. The community believes that forming a farmer group for agriculture and livestock raising will help them retain control of their remaining lands and also reduce the costs of purchasing vegetables in local markets. Community leaders have also decided to write up village profiles including the history of their villages because they are afraid that young people do not know their own history and are losing interest in their own language.

PROGRESS has also focused much of its efforts on awareness raising and rights training among the village women, which has led to women having a much stronger voice in village meetings, than was customary.



Women's empowerment trainings. Photo: PROGRESS

In the village of Tanjung Hanau, Tabunan hamlet, there are currently 2-3 women who are actively involved in organizing activities in their village, and around 15 people who are usually involved in these activities. In addition, they have a strong desire to manage the land and natural resources. They are planning to establish a forum for farming or planting crops such as vegetables. In the initial discussions, there were approximately 12 women involved, and the main focus was on preparing the land to be used for agriculture. This community of women was also involved in discussions on biodiversity and the HCV mapping, where women could explain where medicinal plants and fruits are located, where they collect vegetables, and where there is still rattan, which they use to make bags.

In Parang Batang and Paring Raya, village women now actively participate in community decision-making and in meetings related to their efforts to secure smallholdings. In addition, they also learn about workers' rights and labour standards, a vital matter as women make up the majority of daily casual workers at PT. WSSL. In fact, they have become a critical group that dares to voice their concerns to company representatives collectively.



Much of their work has focused on diversifying their sources of income and ways of meeting their daily needs. In Paring Raya and Tanjung Hanau villages, the women also have conducted trainings in how to utilize rattan to make bags. In Paring Raya village, snakehead fish is processed into shredded fish and *amplang* (fish flavoured crackers), including in Ulak Batu village where they also process fish into *amplang*. These products are also introduced when the village government participates in bazaars held by the district. This is done by women in the hope of preserving areas where there are still resources that can be utilized and processed and have economic value for them.

Conclusions

The rapid development of oil palm plantations and associated mills and infrastructure has unquestionably changed the face of Kalimantan, with both negative and positive consequences. Huge wealth has been generated from the sale of palm oil and palm kernel oil but this money has been very unevenly shared. Tax payments have helped fill State coffers and generate foreign exchange for the country. Investors and shareholders have made spectacular returns on their investments. Communities too are not indifferent to some of the gains. Roads and other facilities have become available, which have helped them access markets, education, health, mosques and other services. Some cash has also trickled down to them, through sales of their traditional produce in now more accessible markets, through employment on the estates and, if they are lucky, from oil palm smallholdings provided alongside the huge swathes of palm in the core estates.

On the other hand, the damage to the environment and to human welfare has been disproportionate. Forest loss, dried out peat-swamps, lost rivers and lakes, polluted waterways and the local extinction of much biodiversity has occurred on a devastating scale. Communities' rights and livelihoods have likewise been undermined and too many promises, made when they were obliged to surrender their lands, have not been realised. Smallholdings have usually not been provided and jobs have turned out to be extremely onerous and poorly paid. Palm oil development has also seriously divided communities, destroyed community cohesion, disqualified traditional authorities and weakened local cultures and customary law. The resentment felt by the people cheated out of their heritage is palpable to anyone who takes time to engage with the communities on their own terms. And when their frustration at the indifference of companies and governments to their complaints and appeals turns into demonstrations and protest, the companies and security forces can be ruthless in their repression.



Seruyan is remarkable for having taken stock of these very real harms and deciding to embark on a course of remedy and reform, using the RSPO Jurisdictional Approach as a path towards a more equitable and sustainable future for the people and the environment. The Approach provides space for collaboration between the local government and NGOs to work together to seek remedy and restoration. New norms and procedures - like Free, Prior and Informed Consent, participatory mapping and land use planning and community monitoring - have helped restore a sense of agency to beleaguered communities. New initiatives have sprouted up from the bottom-up bringing communities together to face common challenges and to work with the companies to find solutions. RSPO offers important tools to take stock of losses and provide remedy and compensation for past harms, which - if applied properly - should contribute to conflict resolution and improved community welfare.

What the communities envision is not just a recognition of their rights, much less a return to the past, but a more diversified use of the land, in which their traditional economies and environment can be restored. This will bring not just more secure incomes and village prosperity but also a restoration of rivers, lakes, forests, and wildlife, mixed economies and multiple crops. Moreover, the majority of community members are not outright rejecting the presence of the oil palm companies, they just want them scaled back, more equitable relationships, properly paid and secure jobs, and their share of the plantings established on their lands.

The RSPO Jurisdictional Approach is only designed to improve the management of oil palm plantations and their surrounds, but the Seruyan Jurisdictional Entity has hopes that its jurisdictional approach can also be applied to other sectors such as forestry, aquaculture, farming and other land uses. Discussions have already started with the Forest Stewardship Council, Aquaculture Stewardship Council, the Global Platform on Sustainable Nature Rubber and the Sustainable Agriculture Network. Realising jurisdiction-wide sustainability may be a long term dream but it does set the direction for addressing the real challenges and obstacles facing Seruyan today, which this report has not shied away from exposing. The proverb ascribed to Pacific Islanders seems especially apt. *To know where you are going, you need to know where you are. And to know where you are, you need to know where you have come from.*

Endnotes

1. Djayu Sukma Infantara, Programme Coordinator, Yayasan Masyarakat Kehutanan Lestari (YMKL), djayu@ymkl.or.id; Kartika Sari, Director, Palangkaraya Ecological and Human Rights Studies (PROGRESS), kartika4intang@gmail.com; Suari Rosalia, PROGRESS, suarirosalia02@gmail.com; Deni Kariadi, PROGRESS, denikariadi@gmail.com; Marcus Colchester, Senior Policy Advisor, Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), marcus@forestpeoples.org. We are grateful to Kaleka for comments on a draft. The authors alone are responsible for this text.
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 12. Marcus Colchester, Emil Kleden and Djayu Sukma, 2020, *Preliminary Findings from a Review of the Jurisdictional Approach initiative in Seruyan, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia*, Forest Peoples Programme, Policy Briefing June 2020. <https://www.forestpeoples.org/id/publications-resources/briefing-papers/article/case-study-preliminary-findings-from-a-review-of-the-jurisdictional-approach-initiative-in-seruyan-central-kalimantan-indonesia/>
 13. <https://sy.dkpp.seruyankab.go.id/en/home/>
 14. <https://seruyankab.bps.go.id/id>
 15. This 'project' refers to the work undertaken by FPP, YMKL and PROGRESS with funding from the Arcus Foundation but it builds on, and complements, continuing work undertaken with funds from other donors for securing forest peoples' rights and livelihoods through engagement with the Jurisdictional Approach.
 16. Sungai Pembuang is also the alternative name for the Seruyan River in its middle reaches.
 17. Exactly which companies' licensed areas overlap administrative village boundaries remains uncertain as most village boundaries are not yet officially mapped
 18. Oil palm smallholder programmes have long been highly contested in Indonesia. See for example Marcus Colchester and Norman Jiwan, 2006, Ghosts on Our Own Land: oil palm smallholders in Indonesia and the RSPO, <https://www.forestpeoples.org/publications-resources/reports/article/ghosts-on-our-own-land-oil-palm-smallholders-in-indonesia-and-the-roundtable-on-sustainable-palm-oil/>; The Gecko Project, 2022, 'The Promise was a lie': how Indonesian villagers lost their cut of the oil palm boom, <https://thegeckoproject.org/articles/the-promise-was-a-lie-how-indonesian-villagers-lost-their-cut-of-the-palm-oil-boom/>
 19. RSPO standards (P&C 7.4) prohibit planting on peat after November 2018 and require that prior plantings on peat are managed optimally. A drainability assessment procedure needs to be undertaken to establish which peatlands can be replanted and which should be rehabilitated <https://rspo.org/rspo-drainability-assessment-procedure-version-2.1>.
 20. Asep Firdaus, Emilianus Ola Kleden, Djayu Sukma Infantara, Kartika Sari and Marcus Colchester, 2021, *Human Rights Impact Assessment of oil palm development in two districts in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia: facing the challenges in Kotawaringin Barat and Seruyan*, Forest Peoples Programme, Policy Briefing June 2021 <https://www.forestpeoples.org/publications-resources/reports/article/human-rights-impact-assessment-of-oil-palm-development-in-two-districts-in-central-kalimantan-indonesia/>
 21. <https://www.forestpeoples.org/en/palm-oil-rspo/news-article/2019/blog-does-palm-oil-really-bring-development-new-study-casts-doubt>; <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264837718314923?via%3Dihub>
 22. These maps were generated as part of the Human Rights Impact Assessment (see above).
 23. <https://mongabay.co.id/2023/10/08/tuntut-plasma-pt-hmbp-scorang-warga-seruyan-tewas/>
 24. <https://www.forestpeoples.org/publications-resources/press-releases/article/deadly-clash-between-police-and-indigenous-community-demanding-land-rights-in-indonesian-palm-oil-case-1/>
 25. *Colonial Debris*, Watchdoc documentary film: available on You Tube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aII6_-xz8g
 26. Marcus Colchester, Emil Kleden, Djayu Sukma, Norman Jiwan, Hannah Storey and Lourdes Barragan Alvarado, 2020, *Upholding Human Rights in Jurisdictional Approaches: some emerging lessons*, Forest Peoples Programme, Policy Briefing June 2020. <https://www.forestpeoples.org/id/publications-resources/briefing-papers/article/upholding-human-rights-in-jurisdictional-approaches-some-emerging-lessons/>
 27. Marcus Colchester, Emil Kleden and Djayu Sukma, 2020, *Preliminary Findings from a Review of the Jurisdictional Approach initiative in Seruyan, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia*, Forest Peoples Programme, Policy Briefing June 2020. <https://www.forestpeoples.org/en/jurisdictional-approaches/case-study-seruyan-indonesia>
 28. <https://rspo.org/hcv-scia-ghg-and-luca-guidance-documents-and-tools-for-smallholders-are-now-available-for-download/>
 29. <https://rspo.org/wp-content/uploads/final-guidance-on-social-hcvs-identification-english.pdf>
 30. RSPO Jurisdictional Approach Framework Document <https://rspo.org/launching-the-rspo-jurisdictional-approach-ja-piloting-framework/>
 31. RSPO Jurisdictional Approach Framework Document <https://rspo.org/launching-the-rspo-jurisdictional-approach-ja-piloting-framework/>
 32. High Conservation Value Approach <https://www.hcvnetwork.org/hcv-approach>
 33. Under the HCV approach, companies are expected to contract consultants to carry out assessments to identify areas of HCVs and HCS and then set aside these as 'Management Areas' to ensure they are not converted. According to the HCV-HCS assessment manual, designation of these areas should be done after ascertaining which areas are vital to local communities and then only imposed on their customary areas subject to their consent. See: <https://www.hcvnetwork.org/library/hcv-hcsa-assessment-manual-english-2023>
 34. Andrew F. Bennett, 2003, Linkages in the Landscape: the Role of Corridors and Connectivity in Wildlife Conservation, IUCN, Gland
 35. HCVN, 2024, *HCV-HCS Screening Manual for RSPO Jurisdictional Entities*. Introduction and Modules 1, 2, 3 and 4. ms. See also: <https://www.hcvnetwork.org/workstreams/landscapes-jurisdictions>
 36. These agencies include the District Environment Office (*Dinas Lingkungan Hidup*), the District Fisheries Office (*Dinas Perikanan*), the District Office for Land and Settlement Areas (*Dinas Perkintan*), the Office for Watershed Management (*Badan Pengelola Daerah Aliran Sungai*) and the Office for Natural Resources Conservation (*Badan Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam*)
 37. Kaleka, 2025, *Land, Rights and Resolve: Seruyan's Path to Inclusive Sustainability* <https://kaleka.id/publication/land-rights-and-resolve-seruyans-path-to-incl> see also Kaleka, 2023, *Building a Jurisdiction Based Conflict Registration System in Central Kalimantan*. <https://kaleka.id/publication/building-jurisdiction-based-conflict-registra>
 38. CNV International is linked to the National Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CNV) in the Netherlands <https://www.cnvinternationaal.nl/en>. Like FPP, YMKL and PROGRESS, CNV partners with Kaleka in the Jurisdictional Approach through a grant from SECO.
 39. <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2026/01/07/indonesia-may-seize-another-5-million-hectares-of-palm-oil-plantations-in-2026>
 40. Angus MacInnes and Martha Doq, 2024, REDD+ Alert: *How the World Bank's jurisdictional REDD+ pilot in East Kalimantan discriminates against indigenous peoples*, Forest Peoples Programme, Policy Briefing November 2024. <https://www.forestpeoples.org/publications-resources/reports/article/redd-alert-how-the-world-banks-jurisdictional-redd-pilot-in-east-kalimantan-discriminates-against-indigenous-peoples/>
- See also: PROGRESS, 2025, *Suara Suara Bisu Perempuan*, Palangkaraya. <https://progress.or.id/suara-suara-bisu-perempuan-ungkap-derita-perempuan-adat-akibat-ekspansi-sawit-di-kalimantan-tengah/>
41. Seruyan DPRD PERDA 5/2024

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