



Community–outsider conflicts over forests: Perspectives from Southeast Asia[☆]

Yurdi Yasmi^{a,*}, Lisa C. Kelley^b, Thomas Enters^c

^a RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests, PO Box 1111, Kasetsart Post Office, Bangkok 10903, Thailand

^b Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management, University of California, Berkeley, USA

^c United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Community–outsider conflict is widespread in Southeast Asia with important consequences for people and forests. Understanding the causes and impacts of community–outsider conflict can provide important insights into improving forest governance. This study analyzes seven community–outsider conflicts from five countries in Southeast Asia. All cases involved local communities in conflict with external actors (e.g. logging and mining companies, plantation estates and conservation agencies). Our findings from these cases suggest that conflict often arises as a result of contested tenure, exclusionary economic development and conservation policies, and a lack of coordination among state agencies related to land-use planning. This study underlines the complex nature of conflict, which often involves not only material issues but also deep cultural connections between communities and their land. Conflict impacts were usually very negative and included fear, anxiety, distrust, division between social groups, and high economic and environmental costs. To a limited extent, conflict impacts were also positive, such as where conflict strengthened collective action at a community level and/or increased awareness of the need to clarify tenure. The study provides a number of practical suggestions to address community–outsider conflict and improve forest governance in Southeast Asia.

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1. Introduction

Conflicts over forests are widespread in Southeast Asia, often occurring between indigenous people and/or local communities and external actors, e.g. logging and mining companies, plantation estates and conservation agencies (McCarthy, 2004; Sikor, 2004; Ho, 2006; Ibarra and Hirakuri, 2007; Hares, 2009; Mola-Yudego and Gritten, 2010). Such conflicts, which we term community–outsider conflicts, are traditionally understood to be driven by heightened competition over land and population pressure (Kaplan, 1994; Homer–Dixon, 1999; Peluso and Watts, 2001; Adams et al., 2003) and often result in violence and severe economic and environmental losses (Yasmi et al., 2009; Harwell et al., 2011).

Sound and robust conflict management approaches are required to minimize the negative consequences of conflict but developing these approaches first requires a good understanding of the underlying causes and impacts of conflict (Yasmi, 2003; Druckman, 2005; Gritten et al., 2009). The underlying causes of conflict refer to the fundamental issues being contested by actors (Nie, 2003; Yasmi, 2003). These issues relate to the broader political economy of resource management, differentiating underlying causes from direct causes, or

those factors that more immediately trigger conflict (Pace, 1992; FAO, 2000; Nie, 2003). Conflict impacts refer to the consequences of conflict both for the actors involved and for the forest resources (Alston et al., 2000; Martinez-Alier, 2001; Castro and Nielson, 2003).

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the underlying causes and impacts of community–outsider conflict in selected locations across Southeast Asia. The analysis is intended to help inform policy makers and practitioners in their efforts to develop constructive conflict management strategies. The paper is arranged as follows. It first contextualizes community–outsider conflict at a time of rapid economic development and growth in the sub-region. It then briefly explains the study approach and provides a brief description of each community–outsider conflict case. A comparative analysis of the underlying causes and impacts of conflict follows. Finally, the lessons learned and implications for broader forest management and governance are discussed.

2. Forestry in the broader context of economic development

The forestry sector in Southeast Asia has undergone substantial changes in recent decades in response to broader developments including economic development, globalization and attention to sustainable development (FAO, 2009). The region has enjoyed high economic growth over much of the last 20 years despite some setbacks during the last two financial crises. Also, Asia as a whole has been relatively successful in reducing the number of people living in extreme poverty (UNESCAP, 2008).

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +66 29405700; fax: +66 25614880.

E-mail addresses: yurdi@recoftc.org (Y. Yasmi), lisa.c.kelley@berkeley.edu (L.C. Kelley), thomas.enters@unep.org (T. Enters).

Table 1
Framework for case study selection of community–outsider conflict.

Outsider	Conflict type	Selected case
1. Logging company	Type 1 conflict local community vs. logging company	• East Kalimantan, Indonesia
2. Mining company	Type 2 conflict local community vs. mining company	• Kampung Speu, Cambodia • Thue Thien Hue, Vietnam
3. Plantation estate	Type 3 conflict local community vs. plantation company	• Kbal Damrei, Cambodia • West Kalimantan, Indonesia
4. Government conservation agency	Type 4 conflict local community vs. government conservation agencies	• Phou Gnai, Lao PDR • Kancharaburi, Thailand

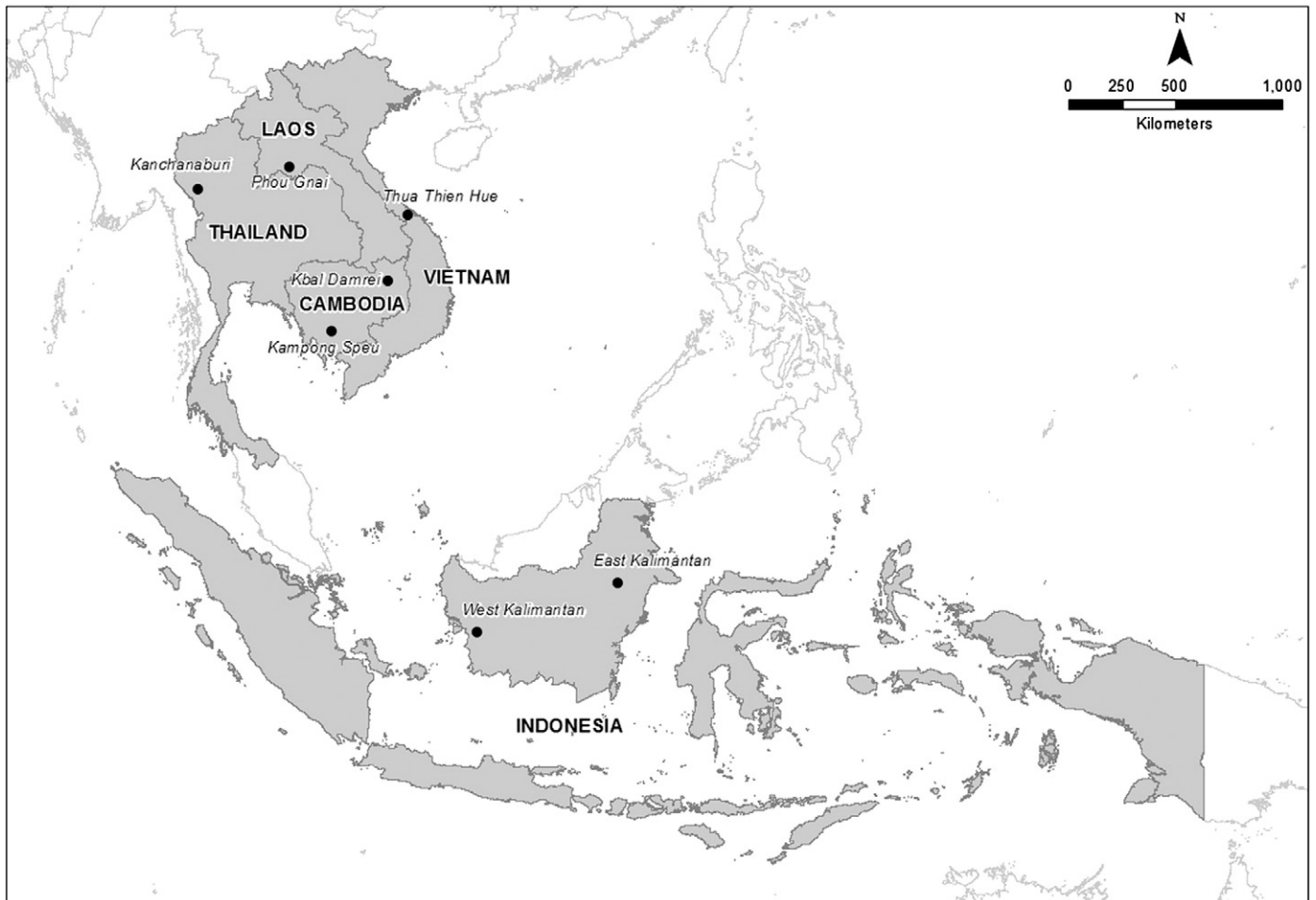


Fig. 1. Case study locations.

The focus on economic development and growth has direct relevance to forests for a number of reasons. Demand for forest products and services has increased due to stronger purchasing power, population growth and higher global consumption. Forests have also remained central to many national economic development strategies in Southeast Asia. Extensive areas of land, including forest land, are being converted for agricultural production or plantation estates such as oil palm and rubber plantation (McCarthy and Cramb, 2009; Gibbs et al., 2010). In particular, additional land is being converted into biofuel plantations. These trends have had a negative impact on forests, particularly natural forests where deforestation rates have remained relatively high (Fargione et al., 2008; RRI, 2009–2010; FAO, 2010). More positively, however, these developments have

forced a growing interest in environmental issues in many countries, an interest reflected in consistent calls for attention to the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Community–outsider conflict plays out in this context.¹ Earlier studies indicate that conflicts over forests, including community–outsider conflict, can derive from pressures for both economic development and environmental protection. In Cambodia, for example, 236 community–outsider conflicts were recorded in 2009 (NGO Forum on Cambodia, 2010). In Indonesia, 359 incidents of forest-related conflict

¹ When we refer to forest we also refer to the land associated with the forest. This reflects the fact that demand for forests is often not only for forest products but also for the potential to develop land.

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