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# The gendered politics of dispossession: oil palm expansion in a Dayak Hibun community in West Kalimantan, Indonesia

by Julia and Ben White

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**The gendered politics of dispossession: oil palm expansion  
in a Dayak Hibun community in West Kalimantan, Indonesia**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the gendered politics of monocrop oil-palm expansion in a Hibun Dayak community in Sanggau District, West Kalimantan (Indonesia). The expanding corporate plantation and contract farming system has undermined the position and livelihoods of indigenous women in the already patriarchal community. The shifting of land tenure from the community to the state and the practice of the “household head” system of smallholder plot registration has eroded women’s rights to land and women are becoming a class of plantation labour. At the same time, as in other cases of expansion of agrarian corporate commodity production, we can discern a familiar pattern of ambivalence between the attractions of regular cash income on the one hand and on the other the loss of resource tenure and autonomy, exploitation and intimidation, which helps to explain the community’s gendered experience of coercion, intimidation, consent and resistance.

*“Kidoh nyorapi kelapa sawit, masi borah lonyu nyorapi”*

(No one cooks oil palm fruit for food, still one cooks rice)

-Mrs. Daum, retold by Mrs. Ayokng<sup>3</sup>-

**Introduction: agribusiness, oil palm and gender**

This paper explores the gendered politics of corporate land acquisition and oil-palm expansion in a Hibun Dayak community in Sanggau District, West Kalimantan. It aims to analyze how the formalized procedures and relationships established with the expansion of corporate oil-palm

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<sup>3</sup> At the request of the respondents all names provided are pseudonyms, including the name of the village where the research was carried out.

ventures interact with existing local patriarchal structures to generate changes in gendered patterns of land rights, division of labour, livelihoods, voice in community affairs and resistance to some of these developments. The study involved a short period of mainly qualitative field research based on interviews with local informants.<sup>4</sup>

Indonesia, one of the world's biggest palm-oil producers besides Malaysia, has converted more than 7.5 million hectares of forest land into oil palm plantations by 2008, with expansion to 8.2 million hectares targeted by the end of 2010 and plans for a further 20 million hectares (Siagian 2008).<sup>5</sup> Oil palm plantations are found mainly in the four large islands of Sumatra, Sulawesi, Kalimantan and Papua, with further expansion planned mainly for the latter two islands. Meanwhile, the provincial government of West Kalimantan has recently raised its target for expansion of oil palm from 1.5 million to 4.5 million hectares. *Ijin Lokasi* (Location Permit) has been issued for 4.2 million hectares, although by 2008, the real amount of area cleared and planted with oil palm was only about 400,000 hectares<sup>6</sup>.

Aside from national companies, many oil palm plantations in West Kalimantan involve foreign investors that from Malaysia (the majority), The Netherlands, and also the United States.<sup>7</sup> Another crucial stakeholder in the oil palm industry is the creditors. Aside from multilateral financial bodies such as World Bank and ADB, oil palm plantation corporations also obtain credit from Indonesian national banks, as well as private international banks such as Rabobank, Citicorp International Ltd., Citibank, Shanghai Banking Corporation, Union Bank of Switzerland, Sumitomo Bank Ltd., Bank of Taiwan, Indosuez Bank –France, ABN-Amro Bank N.V, Japan Asia Investment, The Hongkong Shanghai Banking Corporation, Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi Ltd, among others<sup>8</sup>.

Since the opening of the first oil-palm plantation in West Kalimantan in the 1980s, several systems of production organization and control have been adopted by the oil palm companies, namely PIR-BUN/PIR/PIR-Trans (Nucleus Estate System with or without new settler farmers under the transmigration program), KKPA (Membership-based Primary Credit

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<sup>4</sup> Field work was carried out for a total of one month only during July-September 2008 by Julia, in the context of the Walhi-ISS Short Course in Political Ecology (May-September 2009) in which Ben White was one of the coordinators. More recent information based on further contacts with informants during 2010/11 has been incorporated in this version.

<sup>5</sup> See also the website of the Indonesia Palm Oil Association <http://www.gapki.org>

<sup>6</sup> Borneo Tribune Daily, 26 July 2008. *Ijin Lokasi* or Area Information Permit is the preliminary license issued by Forestry and Plantation Office for a plantation company to conduct a survey on the designated area. In regards to the only real 400,000 hectares of established oil palm plantation, West Kalimantan's Vice Governor made a statement in one of the province's daily newspaper that 40% of the permit/concession issued was in the hand of oil palm plantation brokers. A recent report by LifeMosaic, Friends of the Earth and Sawit Watch (2008), has pointed out that oil palm plantation permits obtained by some companies were actually aimed at clearing forest. In East Kalimantan, of a total area of 1,766,462 hectares allocated to numerous companies under *Ijin Lokasi*, only 124,096 hectares had actually been planted with oil palm. Dillon et al estimate that by 2007 "A total of 22 million hectares of forest was allocated for conversion to oil-palm plantations ... but only two million hectares were actually planted with oil-palm. The remainder had been logged and abandoned" (Dillon et al 2008:5).

<sup>7</sup> The plantation PT. Harapan Sawit Lestari in the southern part of the province is operated by Cargill Ltd. Previously, it was an investment of Commonwealth Development Cooperation (CDC) through DFID before it was handed over to Cargill Ltd in the early 2000s. In the 1990s, cases of conflicts had also occurred between the local community and the respective plantation.

<sup>8</sup> See Prasetyantoko, A. and D. Setiawan (2011)

Cooperative), *Pola Kemitraan* (“Partnership System”/Agricultural Privatization and Revitalization), and more recently the *Pola Akuan* (“Acknowledgement” System). There is some confusion in regard to the latter system as it is not formally known in Indonesian plantation regulations. It shares some features of the Partnership System but the smallholder farmers are unclear of their own smallholder areas. The *Pola Akuan* system was implemented by GP Ltd. in Ampera and, according to respondents in this study, has worse practices compared to those of the other plantation companies.

Studies of these forms of plantation organization in Indonesia have shown that there is a large gap between what is promised to local people and their actual experience, which has often led to the deterioration of local livelihoods and triggered vertical and horizontal conflicts; community vs the company, government and military, as well as inter-community and intra-community conflicts.<sup>9</sup> The establishment of oil plantations on land formerly held and cultivated under customary tenure brings a swift and radical transformation both to the environment and to the social, economic and political structure of local communities. It also brings changes in the constellation of access to and control of land and other resources ownership.

Land, a fundamental issue for many indigenous and other forest dependent peoples, is also key to the debate about oil palm. The complex set of regulations for the management of Indonesia’s natural resources are all formally derived from one ultimate source, Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution, which states:

“Land, water and all natural resources that belong to common pools and public goods are under state control and will be utilized for the maximum welfare of the people”

and thus formally fails to acknowledge customary rights. Article 33, and further legislation passed on the Suharto period, are the main reasons why 70 percent of Indonesia’s enormous territory - including virtually all land used or claimed under customary tenure arrangements by indigenous peoples - continues to be classified as “state-owned forest”; their rights to this land are not clear under Indonesian law, and therefore structurally insecure (Marti, 2008)<sup>10</sup>. Djuweng has argued that perhaps the most obvious aspect of dialogue between the indigenous peoples and the state in Indonesia is that “the state does not recognize the existence of indigenous peoples, whilst the indigenous peoples do not recognize the state claims to their ancestral lands”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See for example UNPFII working paper (E/C.19/2007/CRP.6) on oil palm and other commercial tree plantations, monocropping and its impacts on indigenous peoples’ land tenure and resource management systems and livelihood. NGOs such as West Kalimantan-based Institut Dayakologi, LBBT, SHK, WALHI (Friends of the Earth Indonesia), Gemawan, and national-based Sawit Watch, CORDAID-The Netherlands, CCFD-France, LifeMosaic-Great Britain, WWF, Friends of the Earth International have also published various reports and articles on the impacts of oil palm plantation in West Kalimantan and Indonesia. The latest research on this issue by Martua T. Sirait with the support of CORDAID and University of Amsterdam focuses on conflicts arising in oil palm plantations mainly located in the indigenous territory of Dayak peoples (Sirait 2010).

<sup>10</sup> See Marti, 2008. Indonesia’s population is 220 million people and an estimation of 60 to 90 million people are categorized as indigenous communities.

<sup>11</sup> See Djuweng, 1997. Indonesia government has ratified the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the end of 2007. With the declaration’s non-binding nature however, the government has not yet had to accommodate the principles into regulations on natural resource management.

In Indonesia, as elsewhere, so far little attention has been paid to the gender implications of oil palm plantation expansion or of corporate “land grabbing” more generally. Some reports by Sawit Watch have highlighted the impacts on women, for instance, the exploitation of women’s labour and the ignorance about safety measures which may create hazards for women’s health. In-depth studies are required to better understand how the expansion of industrial monoculture plantations has affected gender roles and relations in the emerging agrarian structures, in particular in access and control of land and other natural resources, the shifting gender division of labour and control over incomes, and strategies of survival and resistance in the face of corporate and patriarchal pressures.

Political ecologists have focused largely on the uneven distribution of access to and control over resources on the basis of class and ethnicity. Feminist political ecology treats gender as a critical variable in political ecology, focusing particularly on its impact in shaping resource access and control, interacting with class, caste, race, culture, and ethnicity to shape processes of ecological change, the struggle of men and women to sustain ecologically viable livelihoods, and the prospects of any community for “sustainable development” (Rocheleau et al., 1996). It draws particular attention to the nature of gendered knowledge, questions of resource access and control, and the engagement between local struggles and more global issues (Leach, 2007). Land rights are crucial for rural women, as a key basis of protection and security for them and their children. The change of ownership from collective to state-codified, individual forms of land allocation and resettlement, has frequently resulted in the loss of women’s land rights (Moser, 1993). These dimensions need to be explored within a broader agrarian political economy framework, as one of the authors has argued in the case of agro-fuels capitalism generally (White and Dasgupta, 2010).

The first oil palm plantation in West Kalimantan was established in Sanggau District in the 1980s and applied the Nucleus-Smallholder system of production organization. This plantation, established through loans from international monetary organizations such as ADB and The World Bank, has been used since as a success story of the nucleus-smallholder system. Since then, oil palm plantation has experienced a rapid expansion to all districts of the province.

Our study is located in Sanggau District and particularly in Anbera hamlet. Following a brief introduction to the study location, subsequent sections of the paper will first explore the process of land expropriation and dispossession. We then turn to issues specifically relating to the experience of women in the establishment and operation of the oil palm plantation, focusing in turn on: the loss of women’s tenure rights, the new gendered division of labour and feminization of agricultural work, the loss of women’s other sources of income, their new involvement in (illegal) scavenging of *berondol* (fallen palm kernels), and women’s responses and resistance.

### **Sanggau District and Anbera hamlet**

Sanggau District is a sparsely-populated region of West Kalimantan covering some 13,000 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of just over 0.4 million according to 2007 statistics (Biro Pusat Statistik 2007). The first large-scale oil-palm plantation in the District was established in Ngabang Sub-district (presently part of Landak District) in the 1980s with an area of 14,000 ha, operated by a state-owned company, PNP VII (now PTPN XIII). Since then, oil palm plantations have expanded until by 2008 there were as many as 20 oil palm companies operating in all of Sanggau’s 15

sub-districts. Four of these corporations are based on foreign investment, fifteen by domestic private investment, and one is state-owned (PTPN XIII).

Sanggau District Government has prioritised further oil palm expansion, as it is considered to bring investment, prosperity and employment to local people. More investors have been targeting this district. Oil palm now dominates the export crop sector in Sanggau District with 145,477 ha (about 11 percent of Sanggau's total land area), followed by rubber (99,059 ha), cacao (3,614 ha), pepper (1,652 ha) and others, namely, hybrid coconut, sugar palm, coffee, candlenuts, and jatropha which each take up a very small portion of the area<sup>12</sup>.

The UNDP Human Development Index places West Kalimantan province 28<sup>th</sup> in rank among 32 Indonesian provinces. The 2007 Human Development Index report of Sanggau District highlighted the gender disparities in education at levels beyond primary school. While the proportions of the population aged 10 years and above who have attended or completed primary school are roughly equal by gender, there are about 30 percent more male junior secondary and 40 percent more upper secondary graduates than female, while graduates of tertiary education are minimal (at less than one percent) for both genders.<sup>13</sup>

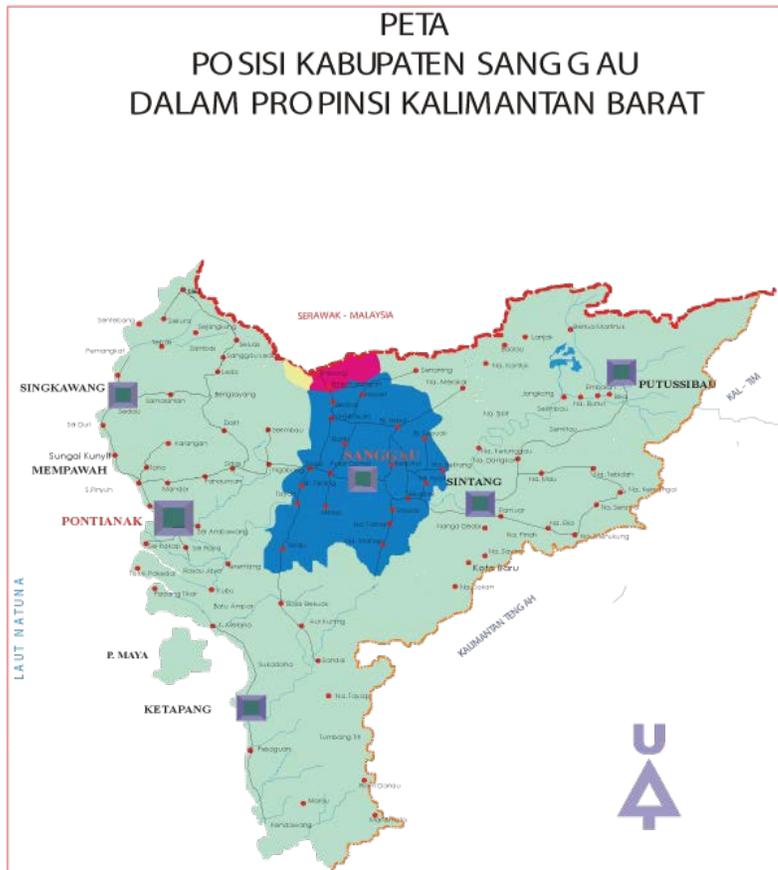
*Fig. 1. Map of West Kalimantan Province showing Sanggau District*

Source: [www.sanggau.go.id](http://www.sanggau.go.id)

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<sup>12</sup> 2007 Data issued by Office of Forestry and Plantation of Sanggau District

<sup>13</sup> Data source: Sanggau District Statistical Office (2007 data)



### *Anbera Hamlet*

Anbera Hamlet (*Dusun*) is part of the larger village agglomeration (*Desa*) called Dabat Village of Tayan Hulu Sub-District in Sanggau. Dabat Village, with an area of 17,671 ha and population of 3,450, is divided into several land management areas: oil palm plantation (5,900 ha), irrigated rice farm (202 ha), dry rice farm (921 ha), pepper and local orange plantations (40 ha), homesteads (350 ha), land located for public/social space (20 ha), and others (9,824 ha). The village managed to obtain the recognition of Sanggau Forestry Office for 3,000 ha of indigenous protected forest and mountainous terrain.

Anbera Hamlet straddles the highway that leads to the Indonesia-Malaysia border. The hamlet is easy to reach and there is frequent public transportation going to the area. The community has a semi-urban character. The expansion of industrial monocrop plantation is one main factor in the shift towards the kinds of urban lifestyles which villagers see, for example, in soap operas on national TV. Cellular phones and motorcycles are the typical indicators of modernity and prosperity of the villagers, although not all households in the hamlet have the luxury of electricity, good education or health services.

The population recorded by the Head of Anbera Hamlet in 2007 was just under 1000 (485 male and 509 female)<sup>14</sup> in 240 households. The community's previous livelihoods were based on smallholder rubber, rice farming and other local agricultural products grown in their indigenously managed territory in sustainable mixed farming systems.

Originally, Anbera Hamlet was not in its present location. Since the 1970s, when the trans-national highway was built<sup>15</sup> and popularly called the "jalan sutra" or silk-road<sup>16</sup>, more and more people moved to the area along both sides of the highway and formed hamlets. Anbera Hamlet is therefore ethnically mixed but the Hibun Dayak peoples form the largest ethnic group, this being part of the customary territory of the indigenous Hibun Dayak peoples. The revitalized Hibun customary structure of Dabat Village falls under a bigger structure of Hibun customary organization called *Dewan Adat Hibun* (Hibun Customary Law Council) that consists of 91 member villages with a total population of approximately 18,502 people<sup>17</sup>

Presently, most young people in Anbera Hamlet reach junior or senior high school. Aside from the (growing) costs of school itself, physical distance and the cost of transport also become a constraint to access to continuing education for the youths of Anbera. Anbera itself only has two elementary schools that are located near the hamlet; for junior high and senior high school levels, the youthshave to go to the nearest sub-district town or the district town which is approximately 2 hours by motor vehicle. Under these conditions, the gender gap emerges at secondary level, as seen in the statistics mentioned above. This in turn has other consequences, such as early marriage among young women. Presently, according to informants, the marriage age of the female community members ranges from 13 to 20 years.

### **Oil Palm, Indigenous People and Resource Conflict**

"The government official asked me if I have a land ownership certificate and I answered that every single *durian* tree, and every single *tengkawang* tree, and every single rubber tree that we or our ancestors have planted are certificates. I am an indigenous person born here. My ancestors have already defended this land for generations." (Indigenous leader, West Kalimantan)<sup>18</sup>

#### *Legal Expropriation through the HGU or Land Use Concession*

The establishment of nucleus zones is formally regulated under the concession or land use right (HGU) issued by the government<sup>19</sup>. Under the 2004 Plantation Act, land use concessions were granted for 35 years and could be extended three times to a total of 120 years. This law has been

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<sup>14</sup> There is some discrepancy between the records kept by the Head of Anbera Hamlet and the number recorded at Dabat Village Office.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with the customary leaders of Hibun Dayak community.

<sup>16</sup> This information was given by an academic who carried out her student field work in the area in the 1980s

<sup>17</sup> Ethno-Linguistics Research Data of Institut Dayakologi, published in 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Marti, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> There are regulations on maximum allocation of area in a concession that can be issued by certain level of government. District government is authorized to issue concession for area maximum to 10,000 hectares, the authority of provincial government is up to 100,000 ha (up from the previous maximum 20,000 hectares), while for area more than 100,000 hectares is in the authority of central government.

superceded by the 2007 Investment Law,<sup>20</sup> which allows a single concession to be valid up to 95 years<sup>21</sup>. These Laws are reinforced by District Government through the issuance of regional regulations, such as the one issued by Landak District of West Kalimantan, Perda No. 10/2008 on *Penyelenggaraan Usaha Perkebunan* (the provision of plantation enterprises), which in Article 24 points 4 and 5 states that plantation HGU is granted for a maximum of 35 years and can be extended for another 25 years if it fulfils the technical requirements.

Once the company has obtained its HGU permit, the local/indigenous community who formerly managed and controlled the land legally lose their access and control over their once customary territory. The Head of Forestry and Plantation Office of Landak District further pointed out that after the expiry of HGU which cause the HGU to be void and the material of the former HGU shall revert to State Land in accordance with the effective regulations.<sup>22</sup> Customary rights are thus abolished permanently by the granting of a concession.

The various plantation systems mentioned above share some common features including the division into a “nucleus” (*inti*) area which belongs to the company and smallholder (*plasma*) area which belongs to the smallholder farmers. The local people who wish to be smallholder oil palm farmers have to surrender a certain amount of their (customary tenure) land in order to obtain a smaller area planted with oil palm trees, such as the 5:2 or 7:2 system which means the smallholder farmer surrenders 5 or 7 hectares in return for 2 hectares of oil palm area, the remaining 3 or 5 hectares coming under the company’s direct control as the “nucleus” zone. Although they have surrendered a larger area of their land in exchange for their smallholder area, the farmers will still have to repay (amortization) credit for the area they obtained, through deductions from their monthly harvest income. Aside from those deductions for the (re)purchase of their land, the farmers will also usually have their harvest incomes deducted by maintenance fees, transportation fees, fertilizer fees, etc; the plantation applies both monopoly and monopsony practices, where the farmers can only buy their inputs from, and sell their palm fruit to, the company. In the KKPA system, this control is exercised by the oil palm farmer cooperative formed by the company.

The latest system, the so-called “Partnership System”, applies a slightly different method where instead of having the smallholders work on their own plots, the company will hire people to work in both nucleus and smallholder zones. Agreement is made on the mode of income sharing; usually the 70:30 system is applied where the company will get 70% of the value of the smallholder harvest, and 30% will be the share of the smallholder.

*Illegal dimensions of expropriation: beyond and behind HGU*

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<sup>20</sup> Marti, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Samon, E. K. and Risnandar, C., *RUU Penanaman Modal Mencerminkan Sikap Mental Inlander*, in *Pembaruan Tani*, edisi 37-Maret 2007. The controversy induces reactions and protests from Indonesia’s civil society, particularly from the environmental activists and peasants/farmers organizations. International financial institutions, such as, World Bank, Asian Development Bank to Japan Agency for International Cooperation (JICA) are among the organizations that continually push for the enactment of the law.

<sup>22</sup><http://kapuaspostlandak.blogspot.com/2009/03/tidak-ada-perjanjian-hgu-perkebunan.html>. Kapuas Post is one of West Kalimantan’s daily newspaper.

Cases of conflicts between local community and oil palm plantation have been recorded in almost all plantation areas in Indonesia. In 2008, Sawit Watch recorded 518 cases of conflict which also involved violence against the local community/smallholder farmers, including women, by military or police.

In Anbera, despite the many and complex regulations governing the operation of oil palm plantations, many irregularities and stories of compulsion and broken promises have been found. These usually become the triggers of conflicts between the company and the local community and even among the local community themselves, for instance, the violation of agreement in the handing over of smallholder area, the manipulation of *derasah*<sup>23</sup> custom by the company, the inconsistent practice of income sharing, the allocation of smallholder plots that are located at great distance (another village) from the smallholder farmer's residence, and the lack of clarity on the credit repayments owed by the farmers to the company. Local people's position is sometimes also weakened by the shifting of plantation ownership from one company to another without the knowledge of the smallholder farmers/local community when there were still problems unresolved between the smallholder farmers and the previous company, such as in the case of Ganda Prima Ltd. with the Anbera villagers. In such a case, the new company will usually avoid being held accountable for the problems of the old one, thus leaving the smallholder farmers' cases unresolved.

One example of irregularities in Anbera is the fact that since the handing over of their customary land to PTPN XIII (then PNP VII) in 1985-1986, more than 20 years later there are still 10 out of 80 Anbera families (as well as others in nearby hamlets) who surrendered their land but have not yet received their promised smallholder plots. Initially, during the community consultation process, the company promised to hand over of the planted smallholder plots within 48 months after they received the local community's land. However, until 1999 (14-15 years after the loss of their land), none of the community members had received the promised oil palm plots. During this period, community members and leaders tried to obtain their rights through peaceful approach to the plantation managers. No legal action was initiated as the community themselves did not have understanding of the legal procedure and they were also afraid of intimidation. In 1999, however the Anbera villagers took their case to court with the help of a couple whose husband was a local Anbera villager returning from military service, and who had contact with a Legal Aid organization based in Pontianak. The (male) community leaders have since been active in advocacy through legal action, sending letters and formal statements to government leaders/institutions, documenting the case and formulating a case chronology, sending information to the media, and organizing regular coordination meeting among the smallholder families. In response to the community's claim, several negotiation meetings were organized by local government or the company, but these were inconclusive. The process was tedious, time-, energy- and resource-consuming, and accompanied by intimidation.

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<sup>23</sup> *Derasah* is a customary rental system of Hibun Dayak community, usually on land. It involves the giving of a type of compensation from the tenant to the land owner (which can be in the form of agricultural yields or cash, based on agreement). *Derasah* custom does not transfer the ownership of the land from the land owner. However, in its practice, oil palm plantation company exploits the customary rental system that gave a misleading notion to the local community. As for the company, disbursing *Derasah* payment to the local community means the purchasing of the people's land, thus, the transfer of land ownership from the locals to the company.

Finally in 2001 an agreement was reached between PTPN XIII and Anbera community. The first smallholder areas were handed over after 15 years to 58 families (out of 80 families) and organized under the KKPA system. The second handover was for 12 families, while the remaining 10 families never succeeded in claiming their rights. The case chronology includes many statements about the dissatisfaction of Anbera smallholder farmers with their allotted smallholder plots which they found to be inappropriate to the standard quality of oil palm plantation, either in the infrastructural condition (roadway, bridge, drainage) or the maintenance of the area. The locations of the allocated smallholder areas, far away from the farmers' residential area, in other hamlets, also have created conflicts between the Anbera smallholder farmers and the local villagers where the new smallholder oil palm farms are located. The smallholder farmers also filed a complaint on the high amount of credit installment charged to them since 2001.

In establishing the plantation, the company approached community leaders, customary leaders and other figures (teachers, religious figures, etc) who were all male, to do the public relations or information dissemination to the other community members. Usually, the leaders/figures would receive incentives (cash, smallholder area, etc) for this work. In responding to problems arising with the local community, the company also takes measures through the community leaders, local government officials, and security officials (military and police). The latest method applied is the formation of a "Task Force" at the community level. The task force is supposed to respond to any problem arising between the community and the company. The members are the representatives of local government, military, police, and the local community leaders (village and customary/*adat* leaders). The members of each task force are supported financially through monthly payments from the company.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of Anbera, the village and customary leaders are members of the task force, but they also have had to undergo a long and tedious process in fighting to obtain their own rights as smallholder farmers. The leaders acknowledged the ineffectiveness of the task force in ensuring that the company fulfils its obligations.

Another reflection of the inconsistency of law enforcement is the fact (documented by the community) that PTPN XIII has actually operated without any HGU permit since its first operation in 1985. The company only obtained its HGU permit in 2003, 18 years after its first operation. Despite this evidence of legal flaw in the company's operation, the community still cannot have their case against the company justly resolved. In 2009, after approximately 10 years of negotiations and meetings, the remaining 10 small-holder farmers were offered Rp 10 million (about US \$ 1,000) per farmer as a compensation for the company's failure to deliver their small-holder plots. Although unsatisfied with the solution, those small-holder farmers finally accepted the compensation for the loss of their land as there was no other option. One farmer stated that they did not receive the full Rp 10 million, as they had to make payments to village leaders who had negotiated on their behalf.

### *Unheard Voices*

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<sup>24</sup> See Sirait, 2010.

In Hibun Dayak communities, there is a taboo with regard to women's leadership roles and participation in local political process.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Hibun Dayak women do not take part in meetings and community decision making processes. Women's main space is normally defined as the domestic domain where daily reproductive tasks are carried out.

The weak position of Hibun Dayak women in community politics put them at a disadvantage when the oil palm plantation company came. During the initial community consultation process before the establishment of the plantation, the women did not participate in the process, and did not have clear knowledge of the plantation establishment plan or a way to voice their opinion about it. The voice of the men was considered to be the unanimous voice of the villagers.

*Serikat Petani Kelapa Sawit/SPKS* is an oil palm farmers' union formed by the oil palm farmers in Sanggau District with the facilitation of NGOs in response to the problems arising in various oil palm plantations operating in the district. The union engages in advocacy activities and campaigns for just practices in the oil palm plantation system. It promotes observance of farmers' rights by the plantation companies and government policies. Due to the system of smallholder registration in the name of household heads (explained below), the SPKS branch of Sanggau District has only 200 female farmers among its 1,025 registered members. SPKS membership is restricted to registered smallholder farmers. The gender-based allocation of tenure rights by the oil palm plantation system has thus led to the exclusion of most women from the organization which might have offered a channel to voice their problems and campaign for their rights.

Mrs. Ayokng recalled what the situation was like during consultations. In her experience, being a woman has closed access to the formal decision making process that determines their fate and future livelihood.

“That I don't know...then, I was still with small children, so I couldn't participate with the others, the PTPN people held meetings at the church that I previously mentioned, it was small then, we called it chapel then, not yet church...then, as it was near, sometimes I went there, when the people had meeting, there were many voices, there were loud voices, my husband was in the meeting then...” (Mrs. Ayokng, 57 years old)

Meanwhile, Mrs. Kusun saw her domestic tasks as the main factor in her inability to participate in the consultation meeting, aside from seeing the presence of her husband in the meeting to be adequate as representative of their household. Her view was shared by many women in the hamlet.

”It's not that it's not allowed, none of us participate, if we already have our husbands (participating) then we need not to (attend the meeting), but if we

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<sup>25</sup> Only one female leadership figure is recorded in the oral history of the community, called *Entulai Ndou' Labaa'*, who appealed to community leaders for the stopping of inter-tribal war. She was afraid to deliver her thoughts to the male leaders until one day where she found an unusual stone with supernatural power that gave her the courage to present herself in the leaders' meeting and call for peace.

wanted to, we could. Then, I was still with small children, nobody was taking care of them. Then, it (the condition) wasn't such as today, it's free now, wherever the people are going, we can just follow and participate in the people's meeting or others" (Mrs. Kusun, 49 years old)

Presently, although the women may be allowed to participate, village meetings and leadership positions are still very much considered men's world, and the women tend also to share this perception. They will participate in formal meetings only when their husbands are unable to attend or if they are the Head of Family, like Mrs. Kusun.

One strong voice of concern was raised by a woman of Anbera when she learnt that the land would be given up to the plantation company. Mrs. Ayokng retold what the woman said then:

Mrs. Daum was the first person who didn't want to give up the land, she didn't want to give away all the land. Don't give up all the land as no one ate oil palm fruit for food, she said, "*Kidoh nyorapi kelapa sawit, masi borah lonyu nyorapi*" (no one cooks oil palm fruit, still one cooks rice). She wanted to keep all of her rubber orchard. So, when her husband and father-in-law were still persuaded [to give up the land], she then moved to [a nearby village], so desperately not wanting to give up the land, she ran away"

Today, men still dominate the village's formal governance structure from the Village Head to the Neighbourhood (RT) Head, as well as the revitalized Hibun customary structure where in the case of Dabat Village, the positions are all filled by men.<sup>26</sup>

Although the women do not have a space in the formal community political domain, yet some of the women, such as Mrs. Dom and Mrs. Ayokng, have shown negotiation skills and also assertiveness when it comes to defending their (or their families') rights in an informal political economic situation.

"It's like this sir, I don't want money, it's not that I have a lot, I don't have much but the most important thing for me is land, because I'm a new comer, I don't have land, so I want to say that for my rubber orchard that has been burned down, "... you can just cut them down and replace with oil palm but on condition that the same area will still be mine" (Mrs. Dom, 46 years old)

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<sup>26</sup> However, within the present larger structure of the Hibun Customary Council, women have been accommodated to sit in the board and a separate division for women's empowerment is established where the personnel responsible for the division are also women. This signifies that Hibun women may have bigger access in decision making process within their revitalized customary structure, although, it may still take some time as Hibun customary belief on women leader is still dominant in the perspective of the male leaders. As one example, when a woman was elected as the Village Head of a Hibun village, the village was said to have experience many problems, both natural and social, and according to the customary leaders, these were due to the violation of the taboo; the woman Village Head should be replaced.

“...then we got two [smallholder plots], one registered in my name and the other in my husband’s. I insisted on that [that one plot should be registered under Mrs. Ayokng’s name], just ask that lady’s husband, they were the ones who supported me to demand a share of my own land, my husband’s parents too, Mrs. B and Mrs. L, and when I did not get the share, I asked the village head to make me an ID card as widow or if it’s not possible, then widower..” [Mrs. Ayokng]

### **Women and oil palm: mothers, workers, scavengers**

“The women were catching fish in the river in the middle of oil palm plantation when suddenly a security guard came and shouted to them, “Return all the fish to the river! None of you has the right to catch the fish here. This river does not belong to you anymore but to the company.” Then the women returned their fish to the river and with a heavy heart, walked home in silence.” (Djuweng, 1991)

Aside from the general social, cultural, economic and environmental problems identified and the related conflicts (Marti, 2008; Sirait, 2010), several gendered dimensions of oil palm plantation expansion in Anbera can be identified.

#### *The Loss of Women’s Tenure Rights*

Although Hibun Dayak women do not have access to communal formal politics, they have traditionally had rights of access to land. Based on information from one of the customary leaders, there is no gender differentiation in land inheritance. The amount of inheritance is usually decided based on which child will take care of the parents. The one who will be in direct care of the parents will inherit more of the parents’ property. In the case of the customary leader interviewed, his fifth daughter will get a greater share of her parents’ property (house, land, etc) than her other siblings, for this reason.

One aspect of oil palm plantation administration with far reaching impact on the gendering of land tenure is the formal system of smallholder registration based on “Family Heads” (KK). In both the PIR-SUS, PIR-TRANS, and KKPA schemes, heads of household are registered as the owner of the smallholder area. Although by regulation, there is no gender restriction on who should be the smallholder participant, or what should be the gender of the household head, however, in practice, the registration normally prioritises the male household head. Hence, for a family which only obtains one smallholder plot (2 ha), the owner will usually be male. Only in cases where the family surrenders a large amount of land, and receives several two-hectare plots, such as the family of Mrs. Ayokng who surrendered 56 hectares of their family’s customary inherited land to PTPN XIII, can daughters be included as smallholder recipients.<sup>27</sup> The majority of women are therefore dispossessed by the smallholder registration system.

#### *Towards Feminisation of Smallholder Agriculture*

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<sup>27</sup> Mrs. Ayokng’s son was one of the 10 remaining smallholder farmers who did not get their share of plot.

When Anbera Hamlet people were still practicing mixed agriculture and largely for subsistence, there was a clear division of responsibilities between men and women. In communal agricultural work, for instance in the *perladangan* or shifting rainfed rice field farming system which is the centre of Dayak peoples' cultural life both men and women were involved in land clearing. Usually the women would be clearing the grass and other smaller brush, while the men would be clearing bigger bushes and trees. Burning the cleared fields would usually be done by men. In planting, again both men and women worked together, and the maintenance (weeding) would be the work of the women, until the time came for harvesting where again men and women would work together.

Dayak rice cultivation does not bring cash income as there is a taboo in the community on sale of self-produced rice. Rice can only be given away for free in response to someone's request. This is a common taboo shared by all Dayak ethnic groups in West Kalimantan. Thus, the self-produced rice is only for the family's consumption or non-market exchange. Meanwhile, in the past, the community's main source of cash income was rubber. The rubber tapping was done both by the men and women, and usually the man will be in charge of the marketing of the latex.

In oil palm cultivation, in contrast, women spend more time in agricultural work than men, especially in maintenance of the trees which requires much time and energy. This was confirmed by Mrs. Dom, another indigenous Hibun Dayak woman of Anbera; the women are the ones who are mostly seen to be going to the field (either oil palm or their other agricultural fields) early in the morning in between 6 to 7 am, and they will usually arrive back at the village at about 4 in the afternoon. They would be spotted with their hoe, machete, and *jarai*, or sprayer tool.

Thus, besides being now the main farmers on their remaining subsistence plots, women are also the main caretaker of the smallholder plots, although the holding often does not formally belong to them, but to their husbands or male children. They also join in their Oil Palm Working Groups<sup>28</sup> activities. The situation is confirmed by the leader of one of the Oil Palm Working Groups. Only in particular condition, for instance where the women are unable to harvest the taller oil palm trees, will the men carry out the work.

“sometimes more women (are working in the fields) than the men, it's true, the men rarely work, it's us the women who work mostly,..., even harvesting is done by women, the men do the cutting, we—the women—do the carrying—of the fruit bunch, and when the trees were still young and short, it's us, the women—who did the harvesting, I myself was a harvester, don't let the old-looking lady over there trick you by her appearance, she is a good harvester, only now that the trees are tall, we cannot do it anymore—Mrs. Dom, 46 years old—

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<sup>28</sup> Smallholder farmers are organized in working groups, and are registered as member of one of the oil palm cooperatives established by the company and farmers themselves. An oil palm smallholder working group consists of 20 to 30 smallholder farmers whose plots are within the same contiguous location, thus enable them to work collaboratively in area and facility maintenance, usually in transportation access maintenance, and harvesting also. Oil palm harvest is being sold in group to the cooperative and each month, the selling of the fruit bunch are paid through the cooperative.

”The men do lots of other work, the women are unable to do the harvesting work, the women do the area clearing work, collecting and clearing the plot from tree branches, clearing the circular area around the trees. The men will do the harvesting work as it is high —Mrs. Ayokng—

”This is the work of the women, to supplement the women’s income as the majority who do such work are women, except for harvesting taller trees then it’s the men who do it. There are also women who do the harvest alone, such as Mrs. Nai—Mrs. Tingaang—

The subsistence agricultural activities are now also becoming the women’s domain, with women are in charge and taking the initiative to cultivate dry rice fields and also being more active in the *pangari* (reciprocal group labour) activities of the community.

“There is only *pangari* group, and usually it is only the women. The men are seldom involved in *pangari*. They only participate in heavy work, such as, building the hut or other *pangari* work that cannot be performed by women. However, as long as the women can do the work, then the women will do it”—Mrs. Tingaang

In Dayak agriculture *pangari* is a system of mutual collaboration in agricultural activities. *Pangari* groups are activated for agricultural activities that require much work and energy, such as *menugal* (seed planting with the dibble stick). The work is done in rotation from one member of the community to the other and the whole village will engage in the *pangari* activity. Presently, in Anbera, the women establish their own voluntary *pangari* group, but with the establishment of oil palm plantation and other changes, *pangari* activity is no longer limited to agriculture; the women have extended the practice to many other activities, including house building.

”(Pangari) is for all, if our friend requests help with ploughing, then we will do the ploughing, and the friend can help in other activity such as clearing smallholder plot, or do the spraying, basically all works that can be carried out in *pangari*. For instance, I and Mrs. Kusun, she helped me to clear the smallholder plot, I can help her in collecting sand as the material for her to build house. I once participated in *pangari* for building house by carrying sand. It was all done by the women. I have also helped in carrying paddy and area clearing” (Mrs. Tingaang)

Also, besides reciprocating work with (the same or another kind of) work, presently, work contributions may be recompensed with cash. For instance Mrs. Bulan whose family doesn’t have a smallholder plot, was paid for her oil palm fruit bunch harvesting work in the *pangari* group.

”(I) participated in the oil palm harvest *pangari*. If we participate regularly, then it is twice in a month, and we are paid Rp 1,500.- per palm fruit bunch” –Mrs. Bulan—

This suggests that *pangari* is losing its formerly strictly reciprocal and non-monetary character, at least in some activities connected to commercial agriculture.

According to female respondents and a village leader, some of the husbands have jobs as civil servants or at one of the five oil palm cooperatives located in the hamlet, running their own small businesses, working as rubber tappers or in village administration. But such jobs are

insignificant in number in comparison to the total male population. Others are working at other plantation companies as staff, plantation security, daily labour, or plantation driver. There are also a number of jobless husbands. According to informants none of the hamlet members have jobs at the PTPN XIII plantation which surrounds their area; as they are still involved in pressing for the issue of their problematic smallholder plots, the company discriminates against Anbera hamlet members and does not recruit any worker or staff from Anbera. Another common occupation is migrant labour, particularly to Malaysia, since the border is only 3 hours away from the hamlet. This applies to both women and men. In the case of women however, there have been some “trafficking” cases where the women later on were sold as sex workers or otherwise exploited. In the situation where the men do not have other employment and the family owns a smallholder plot, usually both husband and wife take care their smallholder plot together.

Presently, traditional agricultural work that does not bring cash income is perceived by the Anbera community (particularly the male members) as female work, while income earning work is considered the domain of men as the main (and even sole) family’s breadwinners. However, in practice, the women also work as oil palm farmers/labourers or scattered oil palm fruit seekers that generate cash income for their family, but this is normatively considered considered only as supplement to their husband’s income.

#### *Women and plantation labour*

In the nucleus zone of the plantation which belongs to the company there are three types of plantation labour: regular (contracted) labour, daily casual labour, and extra unpaid labour. The regular labourer is hired on contract and has a secure monthly salary, while the daily labourer is recruited by a foreman to work in the plantation on a daily basis with one specific task (spraying, area clearing, etc) and paid based on the number of days he/she works. The third type (not formally recognized) is the unpaid family members (spouses, relatives, children) of a hired worker who may assist him/her in the work but are not included as parties in the labour transaction. Although contract-based labour may sound more secure in terms of income and the fulfillment of rights, in many instances the terms of contract are violated by the employer (for example in pay deductions, failure to contribute to medical expenses, etc).<sup>29</sup>

In general there are two groups in the community that become plantation workers. The first one is the smallholder farmers who have not yet obtained their smallholder area. The second is local villagers who are not of local origin, and do not have access to land. The first group of plantation labourers is created by the plantation companies’ failure to hand over the smallholder plots as specified in the contract. Such condition is found not only in Anbera Hamlet or West Kalimantan in general, but also in other parts of Indonesia where oil palm plantations are established.<sup>30</sup> An example from Anbera is GP Ltd.’s practices under the “*Pola Akuan*” system. While waiting for the handing over of their own smallholder areas, the farmers are allocated a certain plot to work on as if it is their own smallholder plot. The smallholder farmer groups are paid for the work they do, either fertilizing, spraying, etc. Hence, they are no different to the daily labourers.

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<sup>29</sup> As also reported in East Kalimantan : Darto, Chica, and Jefri (2008).

<sup>30</sup> See Darto, Chica, and Jefri, 2008.

“I also don’t understand the *akuan* system. The company paid, fertilizing work is paid daily, the clearing of tree surrounding is paid daily. But I don’t want to, because if we don’t do the work, no payment is given. The promise was even if we didn’t work, the company would still pay us. It’s Mr. Yun (the PR officer of GP Ltd.) himself who made the statement, he said that I need not work and I would still get payment, I could just sit at home and still get 30% of the selling price [of the yield]. I told him to just give me my smallholder plot so I would know which and where it was. Although it was far, I could still pay somebody to work on it. (Mrs. Dom)

Mrs. Kusun had years long experience as a casual daily labourer on one of the oil palm plantations. In 1988, her family gave up their land for oil palm smallholder plots and only got their share in 2003. She became a daily labourer in this period until her family got the plots which were registered in the name of her husband, daughter and son. She became so experienced with the various types of daily labour work that she was entrusted to be a daily labour foreman. Meanwhile, her husband was working as contract-based staff of a plantation company.

The second group of plantation labourers includes the Javanese and other in-migrants vor other local Dayak people from other villages/areas. This group takes up plantation labour job as their main source of income as they do not have land or a share of smallholder areas. They work as plantation labourers almost every day<sup>31</sup>.

Women dominate the daily labour workforce; it has become an alternative source of income beside rubber tapping.

”(I) joined the daily labour for seedling and area clearing, because if I don’t go rubber tapping, it’s the only other work available” (Mrs. Bulan, 23 years old)

Many daily labourers are also young. They engage in daily labour particularly during the busy periods of rice cultivation, while the older women spent more of their time in the rice fields.

”It depends on when the work is carried out. During busy times in the rice fields such as right now, older women rarely joined, there are many more young peoples, (it’s for) anybody who wants to join the daily labour work...many women. I used to do daily labour and was paid Rp 6,000.- (USD 0.5) to Rp 9,000.- (USD 0.8) per day” (Mrs. Gi, 20 years old)

Rural women are becoming a class of labour in oil palm plantations. Women play a key social reproduction role in the oil palm plantation community. This is closely related to their low level of formal education and also their (family’s) tenure rights/access. In the case of Anbera almost all women in the hamlet have had experience as daily workers in one the oil palm plantations in the area. From the stories obtained from my informants, at least two generations of Anbera women have worked as oil palm plantation labourers, (for example Mrs. Bulan and her mother). Only one young woman from Anbera has been recruited to a structural company

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<sup>31</sup> Recorded interview with Mrs. Tingaang

position. She is a graduate of one of Java's well-known universities and works in one of the foreign-owned plantation companies.

### *Gendered Division of Labour*

Structural jobs in plantation companies are very much the men's space, starting from the Manager to field workers (field staff, foremen, checkers, general workers), plantation security guards and the police. Oil palm work is labour intensive and requires lots of energy, particularly during harvesting which requires cutting down the stem and midrib of the palm that may weigh at least 5 kg, and the fruit bunch that may weigh from 20-40 kg per bunch. During the process of harvesting, aside from having the energy, one has to be careful not to be hit by the falling stem/midrib after having cut them down, as the sharp spikes along the stem sides may cause serious wounds which take a long time to heal. Hence, during harvesting time, one should be able to cut on the correct side of the stem as well as to stand on the correct side of the tree to prevent accidents.

The harvesting workers are divided into two groups, the group who harvest the fruit bunch from the trees and place them at TPH or point of fruit bunch collection, and the workers who collect the fruits from the TPH and transport them to the factory. These tasks were done by male workers. In the company's own area, the harvesting workers are all male as the work is considered to be beyond women's strength, despite the fact that women do the same work on smallholder plots.

The other work oil palm plantation work which is mostly done by women is spraying and fertilizing. Such work is considered to be easier for women, although in reality it is also heavy work, and no less hazardous as it involves working with highly toxic chemical substances (for pesticides, weedicides, and fungicides), such as paraquat<sup>32</sup> and Roundup, two of the most popular pesticides and weedicides used by oil palm plantation in the area.

“All of the daily labourers are women. We work in groups of 12 persons who do the spraying activity, the men were the foreman, the driver, and the one who filled the poison (pesticide/weedicide) into the sprayer tanks”—Mrs. Tingaang, 29 years old—

The spraying and fertilizing work is almost never carried out with safety equipments, such as boots, mask, head cover, goggle or gloves. Aside from the hot weather that makes wearing protective clothing uncomfortable, the workers have to provide the safety items at their own cost, while their wages are far below the price of the items. The older women recalled daily wages as

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<sup>32</sup> Brand name: Gramoxone. Paraquat (N,N'-Dimethyl-4,4'-bipyridinium dichloride) is one of the listed dangerous pesticides whose use should be prohibited according to WHO and the Pesticide Action Network (PAN). The pesticide is prohibited in various Scandinavian countries, and its use is restricted in the United States where the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has classified it among the products that are possibly carcinogenic to humans. Based on the information from a staff of a GAPKI branch in West Kalimantan, the usage of Gramoxone or Paraquat is due to its low price<sup>32</sup>, while the Plantation Office of West Kalimantan does not have the knowledge on the prohibition set by WHO on Paraquat. Also, none of my female respondents have the knowledge on the hazardous element of the pesticide/weedicide they are using.

low as Rp 1,200.- to Rp 1,500.- per day back in 1985-1986<sup>33</sup> where they had to work from 7 AM to 5 PM. Presently, the payment for spraying work is approximately Rp 26,000.- (US \$ 2.78) per day. Meanwhile, a pair of rubber boots costs approximately Rp 150,000.- or US \$ 15 and cloth mask costs Rp 25,000.- or US \$ 2.5.

”The weather is too hot to wear a mask, we will die from it, sometimes I wonder how people manage to only have their eyes exposed, they are wearing veil, hat, all are covered, because it’s hot. After spraying we have to drink milk and eat egg...usually we buy them ourselves and eat them at home, however with the daily payment only at Rp 26,000.- having to buy milk and egg, it’s not enough, not to mention we have to travel far for the work, buying gasoline, food, sometimes we also bring our own food from home”—Mrs. Tingaang—

All the female respondents in this study had been working as sprayers, either for the plantation company in the nucleus zone or on their own smallholder areas. At the time of interview, two of them had just joined the spraying work as daily labour for one of the plantations near the area several days earlier. They described the unsafe conditions and explained that each worker was obliged to finish ten tanks of spray per day (one tank = 12 litres). There were 12 workers, and 10 out of 12 were female. The sprayer tanks were provided by the company, and not all were in good condition, some were broken and leaking, hence, dripping the poisonous liquid all over the back of the workers. For this job, the workers were paid Rp 26,000.- or approximately USD 2.78 per day of work (usually for 2-3 days) and the payment will be received one month after.

Aside from spraying, female labourers are frequently engaged in land clearing and seedling preparation. Mrs. Bulan worked as a seedling labourer before she married, together with her mother.

“The seedling growing is done in polybag, Rp 50.- (USD 0.005) per polybag, I forgot the year when it was. We can fill 50 to 70 polybags in a day together with my mother. We only need to fill in the stacked polybags, and the number we have completed will be counted at the end of the working day. The working time is from 7 am to 5 pm” (Mrs. Bulan)

Mrs. Gi also worked as plantation labourer before she married, as sprayer and also area clearing.

”Sometimes area clearing, sometimes spraying. We would leave home at 6 am and arrive at the plantation area at 7 or 7:30 am, we had our breakfast first as we brought food from home with the friends. After eating we would work and then return home at 12 noon. From 11 am we would have finished the work and waited for the car. Some were clearing the area around the trees, and some cleared the *gawang*, it was really overgrown” (Mrs. Gi)

”...There is work for clearing the area around the oil palm tree. For this work, payment of Rp 2,500.- per day (US \$ 0.25) is quite high. The salary for clearing

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<sup>33</sup> About US \$ 1.00 – 1.50 at the exchange rates prevailing in the 1980s.

work is Rp 50,000.- to Rp 100,000.- per month (US \$ 5 to US \$ 10). If we often work then we could get Rp 100,000.- per month” (Mrs. Bulan)

The productive labour of these women in commercial agriculture is somehow considered to be only complementary to the insufficient income of their husbands who are regarded as the family’s primary breadwinner.

One issue that particularly troubles women is the mushrooming of the so-called “Café” in their area. Café is the term used to refer to a food and snack stall where the staff also engage in commercial sex with customers. Many of the café women in Sanggau District are local indigenous Dayak women who came from other villages, even from other districts. The women will not work in cafés near their own communities, as the locals may know them. There are also café women who are returning migrant workers, particularly from Malaysia. As may be expected, the presence of these cafés is one important cause both of family problems and sexually transmitted diseases, which is now quite frequent.<sup>34</sup> The hamlet women report that the cafés are particularly crowded during the monthly pay-day, when the smallholder farmers and male daily labourers obtain their pay from the plantation company. Usually, it is the men who have the oil palm fruit bunch transported and sold to the cooperative. They are also the one who generally go to collect their farmer “salary”.<sup>35</sup>

”If the man does the harvesting, he is also the one who transport it and receive the salary, sometimes people are paid for doing the harvest, and this can be used as an excuse to explain to the wife where the money has gone. Well nowadays the money can be for [sexual] affairs...actually just like me and my husband who are both working (on the smallholder plot), those who understand will ask their wives to manage the money or have it given to them; if a man wants to go to cafe, he will just get the salary and spend it all by himself. Then how can the wife and children at home eat? So there is conflict at home, if he arrives from the cafe and hears the wife’s complaint, then the wife will get punched and kicked for having no food at home (Mrs. Ayonkng)

### *The Loss of Women’s Sources of Forest Income*

The assault on local biodiversity by expanding monoculture oil palm has not only caused the disappearance of the people’s source of various locally grown foods, but also the raw materials which local women use to produce local handicrafts for sale. Some Anbera women still are skilled in rattan handicrafts, producing *Jarai* (local basket/carrier) for sale. The destruction of of the hamlet’s surrounding forest has made it difficult for women to obtain the raw material. A *jarai* maker informed that she now has to walk for approximately a whole day to the forest near the community’s protected mountain area in order to obtain rattan. In the past, the rattans were only minutes walk from her house. Her *jarai* work is only becoming a side income and to make ends meet, the *jarai* maker is joining the other women in village in illegal *berondol* scavenging, explained in the next section.

### *Berondol scavenging*

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with one of the health officials in the area.

<sup>35</sup> They commonly call their monthly harvest payments *gaji* (“salary”), a term usually reserved for salaried jobs.

*Berondol* is the local term for scattered oil palm fruits that fall out of the bunch during the harvesting process. All women of Anbera and many from nearby villages have experience as *berondol* scavengers. This (illegal) activity has become a kind of part-time job for some women, particularly the women farmers, and full-time for others. Although there is no social restriction for men to join, *berondol* collecting has become almost exclusively women's space. *Berondol* collection provides women a significant addition to the income their family get from other primary sources such as their oil palm smallholding, rubber tapping, rice farming, small-scale businesses, etc. It has even become the main source of income for some women.

According to Mrs. Tingaang, *berondol* collecting started somewhere around 2003, where oil palm fruit bunch was priced at around Rp 300.- per kg (USD 0.03). Mrs. Tingaang has been collecting *berondol* for approximately two years. At certain times the income that she gets through *berondol* collecting has been a determining factor in making ends meet for her family.

"I don't have a job, (our family) income is also minimal, so [I] search *berondol* for additional income, and the income is quite good. Once, I got Rp 2,400,000.- [US \$ 240] in a month and this was the highest income I got. Then, the (*berondol*) price was Rp 800.- to Rp 900.- per kg, and I could get millions.

"We do both, usually, after returning from working in our smallholder area, we search for *berondol*. The amount is enough to cover the cost of the children's snacks, and my wardrobe and cupboard were also purchased with the income from *berondol*, and the bed mattresses, wood (for housing) and others...a lot, there are those who can buy [gold] necklace, such as Mrs R, the wife of Mr. Sb, she bought a big necklace from *berondol* collecting, buying motorcycle. Because without collecting *berondol*, people won't be able to buy since they don't have smallholder area. It will be impossible for us to eat, like this month, if we don't look for *berondol*, how can I pay my credit at the credit union also? We only got Rp. 107,000 [US \$ 10.70] [from the selling of oil palm fruit] last month"—Mrs. Tingaang—

*Berondol* kernels fetch a power price the regularly harvested palm fruit bunch, usually Rp 800.- per kg of *berondol* (US \$ 0.08) compared to Rp 1,200.- per kg of fruit bunch (US \$ 0.12). Within a day, usually one woman is able to obtain approximately 40 kg to 60 kg of *berondol*, which means they will get Rp 32,000.- [US \$3.20] to Rp 48,000.- [US \$ 4.80] per day. *Berondol* collecting can be done every day whatever the weather and without any sophisticated tools. It only requires lots of energy, a large *jarai*, familiarity with oil palm plantation area, lunch box, electric torch (if one plans to seek and collect *berondol* until evening) and a good dose of courage, as the *berondol* seekers are considered as thieves by the plantation company, hence, the women have to evade the plantation's security officials or police who patrol the area from time to time.

The *berondol* are sold to *berondol* traders or to other smallholder farmers who add it to their own harvest sales. Women whose families have smallholder areas usually will add the *berondol* to their own oil palm harvest delivery.

"We start searching for *berondol* at 12 noon until evening, sometimes until 7 pm. Usually we bring matches for light. The search becomes more fun as the time goes

later. Usually, we can get 6 sacks in a day, and my husband will help to carry them. *Berondol* collection used to be freely allowed” ( Mrs. Tingaang)

Comparing daily wage labour in the plantation and *berondol* collecting, Mrs. Tingaang finds *berondol* collecting is better than daily labour in terms of time efficiency, energy as well as the income obtained.

The only drawback of *berondol* collecting is that the work is considered to be theft, hence, the women will be in confrontation with the plantation’s security personnel. The security personnel now treat the *berondol* seekers as thieves as they are considered to have trespassed on company territory and taken away company property. The women find this response exaggerated as in their perspective, they only collect things that are discarded by the plantation, for the *berondol* are left scattered to rot when no one collects them.

Hence, the women are very cautious in their *berondol* collecting. They avoid doing anything that will attract the security personnels’ attention, for instance by walking as carefully and quietly as possible across the plantation area, whispering or using sign language to communicate among themselves, avoiding the roadway area, and collecting *berondol* in the afternoon after most of the plantation workers and staff have completed their field work.

”We search far from the road. We search the inner area because the security personnel only wait in the roadway. Usually, they follow the path used by the people going to their rice field. They know the main pathway used by the women going to the rice fields, and usually they will wait at the resting point” (Mrs. Tingaang)

The women will be on full alert when they are collecting *berondol*. Any sound of an approaching motorcycle approaching will send them running to hide as the plantation’s security personnel or police patrol the nucleus area by motorcycles.

The security personnel’s responses to the *berondol* women range from psychological intimidation and harassment to neutrality, depending on the individual. The women are often intimidated, being told they will “will be sent to Sanggau” or “will be jailed in Sanggau” if they are caught collecting *berondol*. Such intimidation has created intense fear among some women and made them very vulnerable, including being prone to sexual harassment. One informant mentioned a woman villager who, out of fear, was pressured to have sex with a security personnel who caught her collecting *berondol*.

Another form of intimidation is where the women also had their collected *berondol* confiscated by the group of security personnel.

”Meanwhile, their (security personnel’s) motorcycles were left at another location and they walked to the women’s resting point. There was one experience where two groups of security personnel waited, when the woman passed through one group of security personnel, they asked her to just continue, it appeared that, maybe they communicated with one another by sms, the other group had waited near the village, then there, the group confiscated the woman’s *berondol* so they would need not to transport it too far by motorcycle...it’s unpleasant to carry the *berondol* that far, it’s very heavy. At least it is 40 kg, it’s truly unpleasant, it’s tiring and then had the collected *berondol* got confiscated”—Mrs. Tingaang—

The security personnel may be more lenient in some cases, for instance if the women are considered to have a certain degree of influence, for example, being the relative of a particular influential figure in the community, or when the security personnel are local men from whom the women know well.

“Yes, we are afraid to come across those security personnel, for sure, if we hear the sound of a motorcycle we immediately hide, although we often met them, but there wasn’t any comment from them, it depends on the person, for the arrogant one, if the security personnel is our own villager, then they will not disturb as in my case, usually they know I am the daughter-in-law of Mr. Mt, so I stay relaxed. Usually also, before going, we make the sign of the cross [pray]” [Mrs. Tingaang]

Children who collect *berondol* during school holidays also experience intimidation.

”There are security personnel who came across children of 1st or 2nd grade elementary school age looking for *berondol* during school holiday, moreover, some of them got lost in the nucleus zone as they were chased by the security personnel. The children also had their *berondol* confiscated” (Mrs. Tingaang)

Sanggau Regional Regulation no. 3/2004 on the partnership management of oil palm plantation, Chapter VI, article 11 states that (1) The security management for the organization of the partnership method for oil palm plantation is done by the District Head (Bupati) together with relevant government offices which are members of TP3K (Task Force); (2) The security measure is done by “persuasive, preventive, and repressive methods”. (3) All agreements made should be read and signed by both parties; (4) Before the application of repressive measure as it is referred on point (2), the matter should be dealt with in deliberation through TP3K and or legal security officer, SATGAS/SATLAK, and Customary Council. The locals, including the *berondol* women are not aware of this regulation and the restrictions on the measures that the plantation can impose on them. Hence, any type of measures up to the repressive one taken on the *berondol* seekers can be considered legal.

Usually, the women will go in groups for *berondol* collecting. This gives them a higher sense of security and more courage to confront the security personnel whenever they are intimidated.

”The experience of other women, they quarrel with the plantation security personnel and police because when their *berondol* is confiscated by them, it is then sold to a collector (by the security personnel and police) instead of turning it in to the company as evidence, they sell it for their own benefit (Mrs. Tingaang)

Despite the anxiety during the process of *berondol* collecting, going in groups has also become a social gathering moment on its own for the women and obtaining additional income at the same time. It has become one of the rare occasions where the women meet in groups and work together.

”(I) chose to collect *berondol* because I see my friends enjoying it. They seemed to enjoy it, that’s why I follow. How can we stay at home when all of our friends went to the forest? At the *berondol* collecting place, we can laugh and have fun with our friends also” (Mrs. Bulan)

In May 2010 three members of Anbera Hamlet, a couple and one woman, were arrested, tried and convicted for the theft of 60 kg of *berondol*, worth Rp 60,000.- or approximately US \$ 7. This was the first court case against the *berondol* scavengers. In an interview, one of the lawyers for the three villagers stated that the case should not have gone to trial as based on judicial perspective, the amount of 'material of trial' (the *berondol*) was too small. However, despite the fact that the women were willing to return the *berondol* they collected, the company (PTPN XIII) insisted to have the case tried, then the process was continued by the police to Sanggau District Court. Fortunately, the accused villagers obtained legal assistance from a local NGO that works on local community empowerment and advocacy who provided them lawyers on their defence. Furthermore, the case also caught the attention of West Kalimantan's Regional Representatives (DPD)<sup>36</sup> of National People's Representative Council (DPR-RI), with the assistance from one of DPD members who even sent a Note of Protest (*Nota Protes*) to the Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises (as PTPN XIII is a state-owned company).<sup>37</sup> Following this publicity the three Anbera villagers were released despite the fact that, in the formal statement of court verdict, the two women were sentenced to 1 month jail with 2 months probation, while the man accused of illegal oil palm trading was sentenced to 20 days jail with 2 months probation. The case also was publicised in both local and national media; judging from the way the news was written, the media were also in support of the three local villagers, especially the two women.<sup>38</sup>

The release of the *berondol* scavengers was considered a rare case of successful local resistance against the big oil palm company, as more often the stories are about local communities or NGO workers who helped advocate their cases ending up in prison. In stark contrast to the Rp 60,000.- (USD 7) case which PTPN XIII filed against the *berondol* collectors, on 12 March 2011, when PTPN XIII celebrated its 15th anniversary in one of the luxury hotels in Pontianak<sup>39</sup> (the province's capital city), the Head Director stated that the company was expecting annual profits of Rp 1 thousand billion (or approximately USD 100 million)<sup>40</sup> by 2014. PTPN XIII profits had reached Rp 200 billion or approximately USD 20 million in 2010, and were targeted at Rp 300 billion for 2011 (or USD 30 million). Following the trauma experienced by the *berondol* collectors at the hands of the police and the judiciary, one of the women has now followed her husband to work in a

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<sup>36</sup> Regional Representatives (DPD) is ..., currently, there are four members of West Kalimantan's Regional Representatives at National People's Representative Council (DPR-RI) whom all are women.

<sup>37</sup> See article entitled "DPD-RI Kirim Nota Protes Kepada Kementrian BUMN" (DPD-RI Sent Note of Protest to the Ministry of BUMN), published in Borneo Tribune, dated on 9 August 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Some of the article titles are "Petani Miskin Cari Keadilan" (Poor Farmers in Search of Justice) as published by ... dated on..., "Curi Sawit untuk Bayar SPP" (Stealing Oil Palm Fruits to Pay School Fees) as published by Tribun Pontianak dated on 9 August 2010, "Maling Sawit Terancam Tujuh Tahun" (Oil Palm Thief could be Convicted for Seven Years) as published by Pontianak Post dated on 1 September 2010, "Hanya Merugi Rp 60 Ribu, PTPN 13 Tetap Proses Hukum" (For a loss of only 60 thousands rupiah, PTPN 13 still pursues legal action) as published in Portal Metro Pontianak, 1 September 2010.

<sup>39</sup> See newspaper article entitled "PTPN XIII Optimis Bukukan Laba Rp 1 T" (PTPN XIII is optimistic to book profit of Rp 1 trillion), in Pontianak Post, 15 March 2011

<sup>40</sup> If USD 1 = Rp 10,000.-. as the exchange rate per March 2011 is ...

neighboring village as fertilizer labor of another oil palm plantation and stopped her berondol collecting activity.<sup>41</sup>

### **Money, Ambivalence and Resistance: Paradoxes of Women's Responses to Oil Palm**

#### *Cash Economy and Being "Modern"*

Cash economy has become the main driving force of the women's views and responses towards oil palm in Anbera. The increasing variety of family cash needs, including purchased food, children's education and health services have been the main rationale for the women of Anbera to see a positive side to the coming of oil palm. The older women particularly experienced the effort to support their families when cash economy was very limited in the area as "a truly difficult time". This was particularly evident among the women who are not originally from the hamlet, who initially didn't have land in the village, such as Mrs. Kusun and Mrs. Dom, who later on were able to buy smallholder plots in the hamlet from other villagers.

"We used to eat with rice mixed with cassava, we searched for vegetables in the forest, [we searched for] anything in the forest that time, we ate our own chickens, we obtained fish from the river, before the oil palm plantation came, we truly suffered. We never bought meat, we had to search for it in the forest, by fishing, [if we wanted chicken] we had to raise one ourselves. For pork, if there were people who had for sale, then we could buy, it was cheap then, I forgot how much it was"—Mrs. Kusun—

This respondent's view raises questions about romantic views of indigenous "self-sustainability". Back in 1980s, smallholder rubber could not provide the amount of cash needed by the families. Aside from the low price, the women also identified the drawback of rubber which could not be tapped during the rainy season. Presently, the farmers find it difficult to use their rubber trees as collateral when they are applying for credit to bank or credit union (cooperative) due to the absence of land certificate as it is planted on land in customary tenure. It is different for oil palm smallholder plots. The oil palm plantation has brought in more sources of cash income for families, either as daily labourers or smallholder farmers. Mrs. Ayonkng also recalled the initial support given for the establishment of oil palm plantation due to the promises of higher income.

The Anbera community seem proud to use the term *gaji* ("salary") to refer to what they receive every month from the company either for sale of their oil palm fruit or in payment for daily labour, which does not appropriately fall into the lexical or common socially understood meaning of *gaji*. The villagers find it exciting to receive the payment for their casual labour or their harvest on a fixed day of the month – like a modern-day office worker getting a monthly

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<sup>41</sup> As fertilizer labor, she is paid by the unit of per day work which is Rp 32,000.- (or USD 3.2). There are two types of work as fertilizer labor: fertilizing of the oil palm trees and storing the fertilizer into sacks (20 kg sack = 1 day work unit). For the first, she usually works approximately 2 hours and for the latter, she usually managed to have three sacks of 20 kg each for two to three hours work. All in all, she could obtain approximately Rp 800,000.- (or USD 80) per month. However, she has to provide her own gloves and pail that are needed for the works.

salary. Hence, local peoples' view of 'work', influenced by ideas of 'development', see 'working' as a transactional activity (labour) that results in a salary paid by another party. Thus, self-generating income activities such as subsistence agricultural work no longer fall into the category "work".

"Yes, everything should be bought now, there are no more vegetables obtainable in the forest. But in my own village, there are still many vegetables in the forest, it is still considered as traditional village but many people have started to sell things. But now, there's a news that M Ltd. [an oil-palm company] will be established there...(the people) may have thought that it is nice, in hearing about lots of *gaji*, because M Ltd. respects the people more, so they say. The credit installments will be completed within only three years" (Mrs. Bulan)

"yes, I no longer join the daily labour work since I got married. I feel like I want to join the work, we can gather with friends, receiving *gaji* is also nice (Mrs. Gi)

The past 24 years have provided sufficient experience and knowledge of the practices (both positive and negative) of oil palm plantations in their area and also of the volatility of oil palm fruit price. The women of Anbera are now more aware on the importance of land, the negative (environmental) impacts brought about by the plantation, and have identified alternatives aside from oil palm, including rubber which presently is well-priced and easy to market and also, self-planted oil palm plot.

"I do not want to have it if it is still like this [the plantation malpractices], no more giving away [of land], there is rubber (orchard) and *tembawang* as our land certificate. In the past, our land did not have written document, the plants were the original certificate. Sorry to say that I see this oil palm plantation is only to appropriate the control of our ancestors, our ancestral control over natural resources" (Mrs. Ayokng)

Mrs. Dom made it clear that she would not hand over her family's land to another oil palm plantation that will repeat their unpleasant experience which caused them financial loss (with GP Ltd.) unless the oil palm company can guarantee fair practice.

"I don't want it, (I) no longer have any spare land, my land has been planted with our own self-grown oil palm trees, also rubber. I did buy another plot of forest land, but I won't give it away, there are stones there" (Mrs. Dom)

She is the main manager of her family's land and aside from working in the smallholder plots, she have the lands planted with rubber, orange, also a self-planted oil palm plot to provide variety of income generating sources.

Economic value becomes the key determining factor of the various cash crops' popularity among Anbera women. Rubber is becoming more popular, as they find the rubber tapping work is easier to do compare to oil palm. The women find rubber tapping work to be a more sustainable source of income for the long term compared to oil palm. Cacao is seen as another potentially profitable cash crop.

Presently, one serious issue experienced by residents of Anbera and the surrounding areas is clean water. Once-clear river water has become dirty and muddy since the conversion of upstream area into oil palm plantation. The community is now dependent on well water and also clean water supply from their protected sacred mountain.

”There is advantage and disadvantage of oil palm. The advantage is it generates cash income, the disadvantages are when the soil is destroyed, water is polluted, the once good quality of water becomes bad. The water of Mg river is also polluted at the upper part, during rain the water becomes very murky, how can we get clean water when it is already polluted in that way. Later on, the community of this hamlet will no longer have a source of clean water. Even now, clean water is getting harder to obtain. We are happy when we get cash, but it also truly brings difficulty, especially the water problem (Mrs. Tingaang)

### *Resistance and protest*

In 2001, Anbera villagers carried out an open protest against PTPN XIII by blockading and harvesting a part of the company’s nucleus zone. Only about five women were involved directly in the open protest. The military were brought in to confront the protesting villagers, who were all taken into police detention. After a negotiation between the male villagers who requested for the women to be released and the police, the women were released and sent back to Anbera hamlet, while the male villagers were jailed for a day.

Mrs. Ayokng voiced out her open protest in the village meeting with the company. She also stated her objection to the violation of promises made by the company at the sub-district office.

”I protested in May-June this year [2008], it [the plantation] was managed by GP Ltd. I managed to hold on to the 130 hectares of land, the company planted our land with oil palm but did not maintain it. The company promised us then after it had been planted with oil palm trees, it would be given to the farmers and 10 years after, it was not cleared, not maintained. So we re-occupied it. We did ask for compensation then, but the company said that oil palm plantation did not give compensation, only *derasah* for our previous activity there. The rubber trees were cleared down without compensation, so I took hold of the plantation plot as the compensation of our land, because it belonged to us. The rubber trees were compensated with the oil palm trees, so don’t say that we steal. This was the chance for PS Ltd to have our land sold for business with GP Ltd, I said this at the Yanba sub-district office” (Mrs. Ayokng)

Although Anbera women rarely participate in their community’s open protest, at Sanggau District level, particularly the women who are organized by the SPKS (Oil Palm Farmers Union) do engaged in active participation in open protest against the malpractices of the oil palm plantation companies in the district. Mrs. Rini, a Hibun Dayak woman who lives in a neighbouring village is known for her strong resistance against oil palm plantation company in advocacy for her family and community’s right for their smallholder areas.

“As a teacher working in the village and originally from the village Kampuh, and as indigenous Hibun, my husband and I feel that it is our obligation to react

collectively. We and other teachers in the area as well as the other communities here are members of the cooperative. We were supposed to receive and own an oil palm plot but we still do not know which is our plot. Our land was taken with empty promises, but none of our *adat* leaders have reacted. No wonder, they are members of the Satlak of the company. They became the guardians of the company, not any more our leaders. By joining SPKS, step by step we will gain back our cooperative and we can negotiate with the company to gain a better position.” (Mrs. Rini)<sup>42</sup>

With SPKS, a number of local indigenous women actively participated in the farmers’ advocacy for their rights, including by litigation<sup>43</sup>.

## Conclusions

Prior to the coming of oil palm plantation, Anbera villagers had broader access to and control over the land and forest resources that were managed under Hibun Dayak customary law, including the women whose rights to inherit land were recognized in customary law. Furthermore, aside from staple crops agriculture, the Hibun Dayak communities were mainly dependent on rubber tapping for cash income. Mainly driven by their increasing need for cash income, the male members of Anbera community agreed to give up parcels of their land in order to join oil palm plantation scheme that was told would bring them (financial) prosperity. Oil palm plantation expansion has extended the patriarchal system of the state and the Hibun Dayak community and bars women from participation in direct formal decision making. Given their minimal knowledge of the practices of the plantation system as well as state policies and regulations, the majority of Anbera community members, especially the women, have no direct control over the impacts that come with the establishment of oil palm plantations, leaving them merely as the recipients of its impacts.

The shifting of land tenure from the community to the state via the plantation company and the practice of the “household head” system of smallholder plot registration has narrowed women’s tenure access. Furthermore, the irregular practices and broken promises of the plantation companies have increased the area of appropriated land, reducing opportunities for traditional mixed farming. Meanwhile, the plantation companies’ monopoly and monopsony practices oblige them to sell their oil palm fruit only to the company. These further increases the women’s dependence on men for their livelihood and at the same time, it also increases the women’s involvement in productive work besides their social reproductive role, for instance, in plantation labour and *berondol* collection.

The greater involvement in cash economy, the decrease in available agricultural land and the depletion of local food products as the result of forest destruction have shifted the pattern of food acquisition and consumption. Most foods and other household products are now purchased from local and mobile sellers, including children’s snacks, with cash or credit. The increasing dependence on cash economy for fulfilling daily needs is one factor that influence the women to seek for alternative/additional household income to whatever the family obtains from their smallholder plots or their husbands’ income, by working as plantation labourers or *berondol*

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<sup>42</sup> See Sirait, 2008

<sup>43</sup> Sawit Watch also recorded various women’s struggles against the malpractices of oil palm plantation in other parts of Indonesia, such as in Sumatra, where one of the local women was even in police search list for her active participation in protesting against oil palm plantation.

seekers, even as migrant workers. Further indirect impacts of the plantation industry for the women including increasing social problems, for instance, prostitution and STD.

The litany of prosperity promised by the Indonesian government through plantation expansion is yet to be fulfilled. Oil palm is even regarded as a “commodity of the elites”<sup>44</sup>, of interest to global actors, the national and regional government and the investors. Conflicts continue between the local community, the companies and local government. Within the hierarchy of the plantation industry, the women are located at the level that receives the most impacts brought about by the industry. Yet, as in many other cases of expansion of agrarian commodity production, we can discern a familiar pattern of ambivalence between the attractions of regular cash income on the one hand and on the other the loss of resource tenure and autonomy, exploitation and intimidation, which helps to explain the Anbera community’s gendered experience of coercion, intimidation, consent and resistance.

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