



Conflict Factsheet

Protests against Palm Oil in Indonesia

Type of conflict
Main

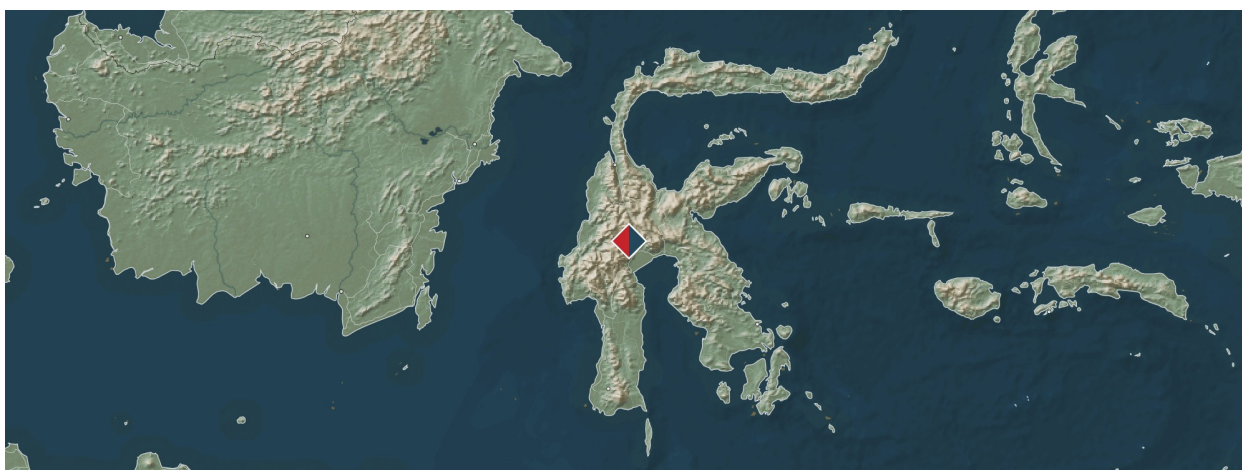
Intensity
3

Conflict Locality
South Eastern Asia

Time
1985 –ongoing

Countries
Indonesia

Resources
Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Forests

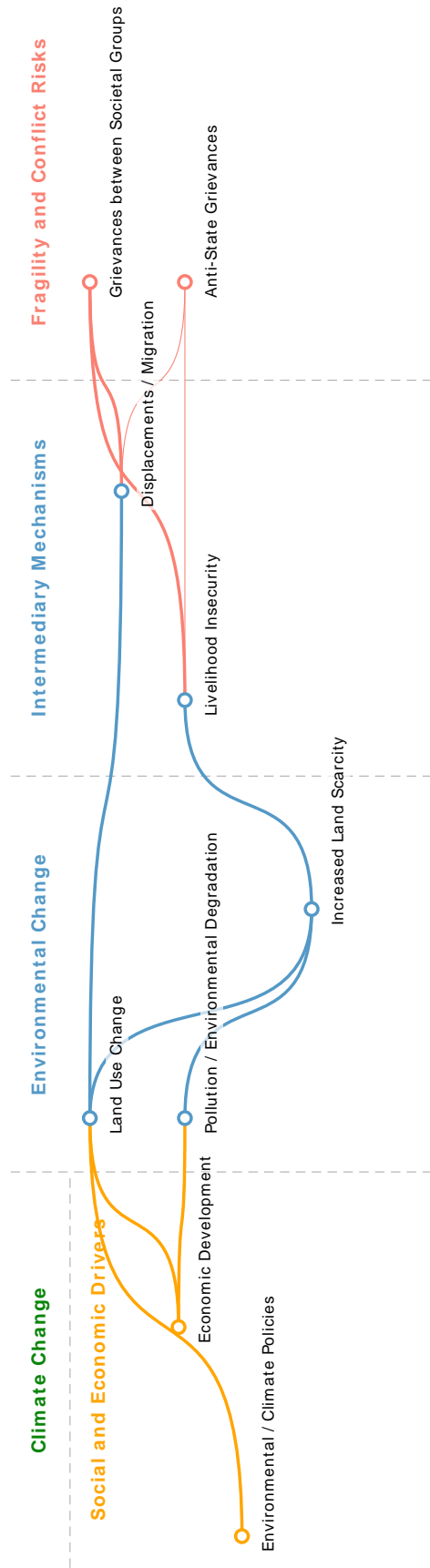


Conflict Summary

Increasing demand for palm oil for use in biofuels, amongst other products, has led to drastic increases in land grabbing and deforestation in Indonesia. Indigenous communities and regional and international NGOs, as well as environmentalists, have protested against the expansion of palm oil production in Indonesia. In some cases, community resistance has caused casualties. There has been little legal progress in slowing down the rates of land grabbing, displacement, and deforestation.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Forests



Insecure Land Tenure



Unresponsive Government



Conflict History

Indonesia is the world's largest palm oil producer and has experienced dramatic increases in deforestation to accommodate increasing demand for palm oil for biofuel and other products in the food and cosmetic industries. Displacement of local residents and the destruction of natural habitats have been issues, which have provoked international NGO criticism and local conflict (see also [Palm Oil Conflict in Kalimantan in Indonesia](#)). The resistance against displacement and deforestation for palm oil plantations has been violent and, in some cases, divided citizens along ethnic lines, reinforcing ethnic tension left from the colonial era.

Palm oil production and deforestation

Between 1985 and 2014, the area of palm oil plantations in Indonesia has expanded from 600,000 ha to between 8.1 and 11.5 million ha ([Hadinaryanto, 2014](#)). In 2014, Indonesia was recognised as having the largest deforestation rate in the world, making it one of the world's largest carbon emitter with 85% of its carbon coming from deforestation alone ([Vidal, 2014](#)). The region of Kalimantan is Indonesia's second largest palm oil producer and has witnessed the impact of land grabbing and deforestation on social cohesion and stability. Between 2001 and 2012, palm oil plantations in Kalimantan increased from just fewer than 100,000 ha to over 300,000 ha ([Vidal, 2014](#)). Rapid deforestation has destroyed the livelihoods of the indigenous Dayak communities who traditionally use the rainforest for rubber tapping.

Numerous conflicts over land

In 2008, 513 active conflicts concerning palm oil were recorded in Indonesia - 166 of which were in Kalimantan ([Fon Achobang et al., 2013](#)). In 2012, 439 conflicts involving palm oil companies and communities were recorded in Kalimantan ([Hadinaryanto, 2014](#)). Numerous cases of torture, kidnappings and murders amongst other human rights abuses conducted by mercenaries hired by palm oil companies have been recorded in palm oil conflict ([Klawitter, 2014](#)). The effects of land grabbing and deforestation on local communities and their livelihoods have led to inter-ethnic competition for land. For example, ethnic tensions and historical conflict for land between the Christian Dayak and Muslim Maudrese communities in Kalimantan have led to violent skirmishes, as land resources dwindle in the context of proliferating palm oil plantations ([Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2010](#)).

International and local resistance

Resistance against the palm oil industry in Indonesia has been international, for example, protestors staged a peaceful demonstration outside the headquarters of Unilever (a large consumer of palm oil for cosmetic products) in 2011 ([Klawitter, 2014](#)). Legal avenues have also been taken by local communities who resist palm oil cultivation and habitat destruction. However, little is being done by the central government to reduce land grabbing and deforestation and palm oil plantations continue to grow, thus fueling conflict with, and between, locals.

Resolution Efforts

Attempts of the public authorities



Government authorities have taken little initiative to reduce deforestation and land grabbing in Indonesia. In fact, they promote land grabbing by granting palm oil companies plantation rights over community lands. Although some regional governments have attempted to improve land rights to regulate deforestation and reduce land grabbing, a lack of effective enforcement and corruption means that attempts remain largely ineffective ([Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2010](#)). For example, following violence in Kalimantan in 2001, the regional government established the legal status of customary land ownership, known as adat. However, despite this decree, adat lands in West Kalimantan were virtually eliminated within three years, dwindling from 6.9 million hectares in 2003 to a scarce 60,000 hectares in 2006 ([Sirait, 2009](#)).

International initiatives

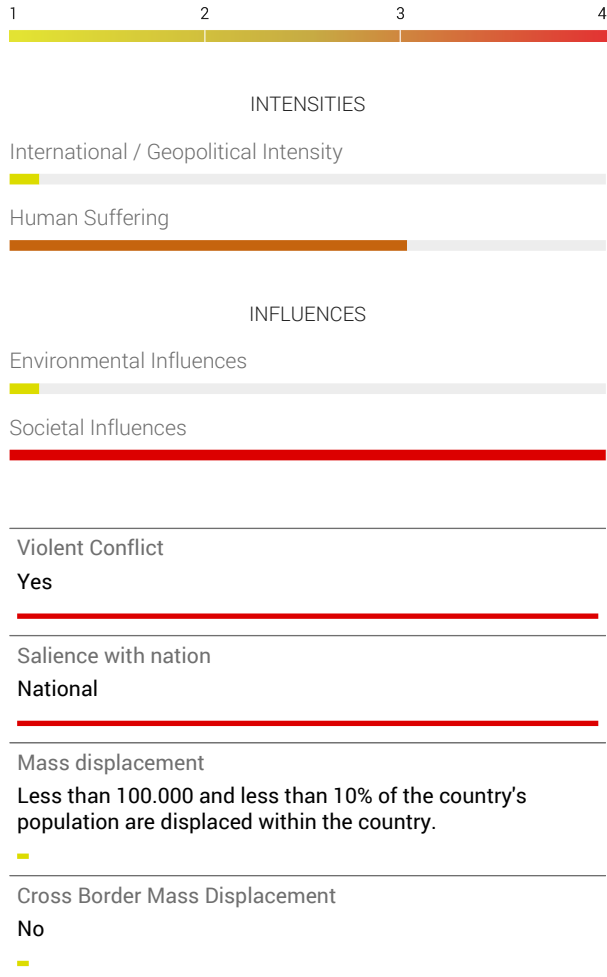
International initiatives have also been established, such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil Initiatives (RSPO). This was established by NGOs and stakeholders, such as Unilever, in 2004, which continues today to act as a mediator between RSPO members and local communities. However, many companies, despite being members of RSPO, continue business as usual and conflicts are left unsettled ([Fon Achobang et al., 2013](#)).

Mediation efforts

Some steps have been taken by Indonesian authorities to mitigate the overall conflict between ethnic groups in palm oil hot spots, such as opening more police stations. Unfortunately, efforts to encourage/mediate negotiations between Maudrese and Dayak communities failed and no long-term initiative to promote peace between the groups has been taken. Greater centralised leadership on the issue of land grabbing for palm oil plantations within the framework of land rights reform and forest protection strategies must be taken on the national level, in conjunction with greater dialogue between ethnic groups at a community level to reduce the occurrence and likelihood of violence.



Intensities & Influences



Resolution Success

Resolve of displacement problems
Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.
-

Reduction in geographical scope
There has been no reduction in geographical scope.
-

Increased capacity to address grievance in the future
The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.
[Progress bar: 100%]

Grievance Resolution
Grievances have been mostly ignored.
[Progress bar: 20%]

Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity
There has been no reduction in intensity
-



Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Mediation & arbitration

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil Initiatives (RSPO) was established by NGOs and stakeholders to act as a mediator. However, many companies continue business as usual and conflicts are left unsettled.

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Social inclusion & empowerment

Some regional governments have attempted to improve land rights to regulate deforestation and reduce land grabbing. However, lack of effective enforcement and corruption means that attempts remain largely ineffective.

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Improving state capacity & legitimacy

Greater centralised leadership on the issue of land grabbing for palm oil plantations within the framework of land rights reform and forest protection strategies must be taken on the national level.

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Resources and Materials

Conflict References

[Palm Oil Conflict in Kalimantan in Indonesia](#)

References with URL

[Fon Achobang et al. \(2013\). Conflict or Consent? The oil palm sector at a crossroads](#)

[Hadinaryanto, E. \(2014\). Special Report: Palm oil, politics, and land use in Indonesian Borneo \(Part I\)](#)

[Klawitter, N. \(2014\). A Tangle of Conflicts: The Dirty Business of Palm Oil](#)

[International Displacement Monitoring Center. \(2010\). New ethnic-related displacement while earlier IDPs struggle to make return sustainable](#)

[Vidal, J. \(2014\). Rate of deforestation in Indonesia overtakes Brazil, says study](#)

[Sirait, T. \(2009\). Indigenous Peoples and Oil Palm Plantation Expansion in West Kalimantan, Indonesia](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/palm-oil-indonesia>