

## Women and Peatlands

### Editorial

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### Articles

Manifesting Ecofeminism in Peatland Restoration: Policies, Actions, and Challenges  
*Myrna Asnawati Safitri*

Women Fighting Peatland Fire: Rural Women's Experiences in Central Kalimantan and Riau Provinces  
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Being Away from Purun: Women's Experiences in Peatland Area of Hulu Sungai Utara, South Kalimantan  
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*Purun* and The Bitter Realities of Women's Struggle in Peatland Areas  
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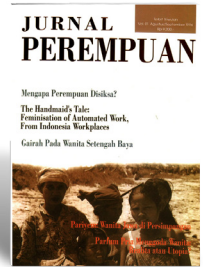
Women Village Facilitator Action on Economic Revitalization of the Women's Group: A Case Study in 3 Peatland Villages, Central Kalimantan  
*Nur Iman Subono, Andi Misbahul Pratiwi & Abby Gina Boangmanalu*

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## Women and the Peatland

Indonesia's peatland areas reach to 22.5 million hectares. It contributes to the 47% of the whole peatland area in the tropical region, and it is considered as a country with the widest peatland area in Southeast Asia. Therefore, the existence of peatland in Indonesia brings important meaning to the global environmental sustainability. Unfortunately, the discourse around peatland rarely surfaces except during certain situation such as during forest and land fires. The emerging discourse on peatland generally evolves around ecological and economical aspects, though its existence has such bigger dimensions, from social, cultural, political, including gender justice dimension. With such extensive peatland areas in Indonesia, it is obvious that peatland has important meaning to the lives of Indonesians, especially for people who live around the peatland area, including women.

As an environmental issue, discourse on peatland has been deliberately discussed for quite some time, at least since the adoption of *the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat* (Ramsar Convention) in the city of Ramsar, Iran, in 1971. Ramsar Convention has emphasized on the importance of prevention from destruction, prevention of the loss of wetland, and the importance of preservation of wetlands as part of sustainable development. Indonesia has already ratified Ramsar Convention since 1991. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classify peatland as a valuable earth's ecosystem due to its highly regarded function for biodiversity sustainability, as source of water, prevention of flood, and to overcome climate change.

Ecofeminism generally identifies the roots of natural destruction, and oppression of women as the result of patriarchy dominance. Inline to Karen J. Warren's view, the hierarchical and oppressive of patriarchy's point of view have oppressed both the nature and women. The destruction of peatland area in Indonesia has happened since the New Order regime, and one of the examples of this was the *Rice Mega Project* that has turned the peatland area in Kalimantan into rice fields. Aggressive development, and disasters such as forest and land fires, that have been going on for decades have accumulated and became legacy of problem to the peatland area in Indonesia that we are facing today.

The biggest land and forest fires in Indonesia in the middle of 2015 was a warning and important threatening signal to the peatland area in Indonesia. This

was then marked by the establishment of the Peatland Restoration Agency (Badan Restorasi Gambut-BRG) by the government of Indonesia in 2016. BRG is a non-structural agency that reports directly to the President that is given mandate to coordinate and facilitate peatland restoration measures in seven provinces, namely: Jambi, West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, Riau, South Sumatera and Papua. BRG's peatland restoration concept acknowledges that land/ soil restoration cannot be implemented solely in its ecological-geological dimension, but it should also consider social recovery of the community as part of the peatland ecosystem. Consequently, then women should also be both beneficiaries and agent in the restoration process.

Women have big interest for environmental sustainability. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, ecofeminism thinkers and activists, argue that women have big stake in environmental sustainability. It is because the gender role charged to women to do parenting and daily life management. In order to give sufficient nutrition for their children and/or family, getting clean potable water, and to meet all daily needs, women would have the interest on the availability and sustainability of natural resources such as water, air, land, and flora and fauna.

Women who live in peatland area are clear depiction of the interrelation between environmental destruction and its consequence to women. One of the local economic and cultures in peatland area in Kalimantan is *purun* weaving (*purun* is one type of grass that commonly grows in peatland area and often used as weaving material). The skill of *purun* weaving is generally done by women, and are usually done during women's spare time of their work in caregiving in their household or family. The destruction of peatland area has caused the diminishing of *purun* that previously grew wild in nature around villages. When *purun* is no longer grow around the village, the women traditional weavers have to procure *purun* from outside of their village, or have to incur extra cost to purchase *purun* for their handicraft materials.

Forest and land fires in peatland areas have cause economic loss and trauma to the community. Women are the group who experience the direct impact of land and forest fires in their daily lives such as draining of water source, destruction of farms, and the extinct of

local natural resources such as fish. Despite of that, the forest fire's prevention programs still disregard women. Though when the fire happens, women also participate in extinguishing fires whether in the farm fields or housing settlement. Women also have to find measure to address the following impacts of forest and land fires to their families. For example, women have to find ways to prevent smoke to get into their homes, or they have to take care of family members who get ill due to the smog coming from the forest and land fires.

The experience of peatland destruction and its impact to communities and women amplify ecofeminism argument such as Ynestra King. King argue that the destruction and/or oppression against human being is rooted in the hierarchal and unequal relations. Similar to the unequal power relation between men and women, the impact of peatland area destruction, forest and land fires, smog, and many others, also describe the power relation in the existing management and use of peatland areas.

Nevertheless, ecofeminism does not stop on the argument of the interrelation between the exploitation against nature and the domination towards women. Ecofeminism also views women's agency in restoring and preserving the environmental sustainability. The experience of women facilitators in the Desa Peduli Gambut (villages that involve in peatland restoration program) show the political women empowerment in finding solutions in addressing structural and cultural challenges in the peatland restoration processes. Ecofeminism offers a transformation to the human perception that act superior against of the nature, through gender justice lenses. Similar call then is also proposed through the knowledge that are presented from women's experiences, as well as their efforts in restoring and maintaining the peatland areas, in the current Jurnal Perempuan's edition. Have a great time exploring! (**Atnike Nova Sigiro**)

Abstracts Sheet

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Myrna Asnawati Safitri  
(Badan Restorasi Gambut dan Universitas Pancasila,  
DKI Jakarta, Indonesia)

**Manifesting Ecofeminism in Peatland Restoration:  
Policies, Actions, and Challenges**

Kode Naskah: DDC 305  
Jurnal Perempuan, Vol. 25 No. 1, Februari 2020, hal. 1-11, 24 daftar  
pustaka

Degradation of peatland ecosystems occurs as a result of excessive exploitation leading to peat drainage and fires. This was influenced by a masculinity perspective in resource tenure and utilization. Ecofeminism presents a different perspective on narratives and inter-relationships of human with nature, including the place of women in them. Injustice that befalls women occur due to unequal power relations in the control and utilization of resources in the peatland ecosystem. This paper discusses the Government of Indonesia's efforts to reduce gender injustice through Peatland Restoration's policy. Two policies are discussed here, namely the Social Safety Safeguard and Peat Cares Village Program. It is concluded that women's participation must be able to resolve the imbalance of power relations among women as well as between gender. This requires sufficient time and everlasting education.

Key words: Ecofeminism, power relation, peatland, peatland restoration.

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Catharina Indirastuti  
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**Women Fighting Peatland Fire:  
Rural Women's Experiences in Central Kalimantan  
and Riau Provinces**

Kode Naskah: DDC 305  
Jurnal Perempuan, Vol. 25 No. 1, Februari 2020, hal. 13-23, 1 grafik, 9  
daftar pustaka

Forest and land fires that repeatedly burned millions of hectares of peatlands in Indonesia were the result of decades of unsustainable peatland governance and management. Rural women and men living on peatlands have different experiences of forest and land fires. Intersectionality between gender and classes, geographical locations, and ethnicity further adds nuances to these different experiences. This article explores women's experiences of fighting forest and land fires in three target villages in Central Kalimantan and Riau provinces where the Peat Care Village Program was implemented by the Peat Restoration Agency. The network of power relations that women must endure and a priori arguments on gendered roles and responsibilities have weakened women's position in fighting land and forest fires. Women do not have access to resources to prevent and fight against land and forest fires, while in reality firefighting activities require the involvement of women, particularly when they happen on their land or living space. Women's experiences of facing forest and land fires are reflected using the feminist political ecology approach to highlight the multifaceted impacts on women.

Keywords: forest and land fire, intersectionality, peat villages, women's access.

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Enik Maslahah  
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Hulu Sungai Utara, Kalimantan Selatan)

**Being Away from Purun: Women's Experiences in Peatland  
Area of Hulu Sungai Utara, South Kalimantan**

Kode Naskah: DDC 305  
Jurnal Perempuan, Vol. 25 No. 1, Februari 2020, hal. 25-34, 4 tabel, 10  
daftar pustaka

*Purun* is a typical plant that grow in peatland area that has important functions for people living in peatland area. The availability of *purun* is now decreasing due to changes in land management and environmental destruction. Almost all of the plantation commodities in the peatlands area, management of peatlands in the forestry, agriculture, plantation and fisheries sectors apply exploitative and pragmatic methods, while ignoring environmental sustainability. Furthermore, environmental damage also occurs due to disasters such as forest and land fires that often occur in peatland areas in Indonesia. One of the damages happen to peatland area is the damage and scarcity of *purun*. As users and beneficiaries of *purun*, women become the affected group that face the impact of peatland destruction. This paper describes the experiences and efforts of women in peatland areas to restore land and restore the existence of *purun* in their villages.

Keywords: women, peatland, *purun*, peatland restoration.

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***Purun* and the Bitter Realities of Women's Struggle in  
Peatland Areas**

Kode Naskah: DDC 305  
Jurnal Perempuan, Vol. 25 No. 1, Februari 2020, hal. 35-42, 2 gambar, 21  
daftar pustaka

This paper aims to examine the elimination process of traditional conservation that has been built for many years by women on peatlands. This article reveals the struggle and multiple burdens of women in conservation, to do reproductive and productive work in the midst of clashing interests in peatland area. Research conducted shows that there is a shift in the mode of production from subsistence toward exploitative hegemony by capitalistic interests, as a product of modern scientific knowledge. Corporations compete for peatland areas to accumulate capital which then threatens the *purun* and the *purun* weaving community of women. This has not only led to degradation of the *purun* ecosystem but also the loss of source of life and cultural identity for the *purun* weaving community. From an ecofeminist perspective, investment policies and regimes with minimum controls have systematically destroyed peat ecosystems, resulting in economic powerlessness and impoverishment of women.

Keywords: *purun*, women and natural resources, women and peatlands.

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**Women Village Facilitator Action on Economic  
Revitalization of the Women's Group: A Case Study in 3  
Peatland Villages, Central Kalimantan**

Kode Naskah: DDC 305

Jurnal Perempuan, Vol. 25 No. 1, Februari 2020, hal. 43-56, 1 tabel, 2  
grafik, 17 daftar pustaka

Peatlands play an important role in the ecological and economic aspects. Peatlands degradation in various regions in Indonesia brings economic issues, especially for women. The involvement of women in

the peatland restoration program as a strategy needs to be reviewed. This study focuses on the involvement of women in the peatland restoration as a village facilitator, mainly on aspects of economic revitalization. This study focuses in 3 Villages in Central Kalimantan Province, Jabiren Village, Tumbang Nusa Village, and Gandang Barat Village. The main question of this research is how are the actions, challenges, and strategies experienced by women as village facilitators in DPG program. Based on in-depth interviews with relevant actors and literature studies, this research finds, 1) the economic revitalization program conducted by women village facilitators build the economic resilience of rural women communities and changes the gender relations; 2) women village facilitators faced structural and cultural obstacles in their action; 3) the program is also the part of political actions for peatlands preservation.

Keyword: women village facilitator, peatlands restoration, economic revitalization, power.

## ***Purun* and the Bitter Realities of Women's Struggle in Peatland Areas**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to examine the elimination process of traditional conservation that has been built for many years by women on peatlands. This article reveals the struggle and multiple burdens of women in conservation, to do reproductive and productive work in the midst of clashing interests in peatland area. Research conducted shows that there is a shift in the mode of production from subsistence toward exploitative hegemony by capitalistic interests, as a product of modern scientific knowledge. Corporations compete for peatland areas to accumulate capital which then threatens the *purun* and the *purun* weaving community of women. This has not only led to degradation of the *purun* ecosystem but also the loss of source of life and cultural identity for the *purun* weaving community. From an ecofeminist perspective, investment policies and regimes with minimum controls have systematically destroyed peat ecosystems, resulting in economic powerlessness and impoverishment of women.

Keywords: *purun*, women and natural resources, women and peatlands

### **Introduction: Peatland Degradation**

With peatlands areas of around 20-21 million hectares (Page & Rieley 2016), Indonesia has the third largest peatland in the world, particularly the tropical region, after the Amazon and Congo Basin with an estimated area of around 8.2% of the land area (Xu et al. 2018). Sumatra and Kalimantan alone have peatlands of around 13 million hectares. Those peatlands are located near the coastal and along the east coast of Sumatra, and the southern and western parts of Kalimantan with acidity levels of around 3-5 Ph (Giesen & Sari 2018). Peat swamp forests have high biodiversity (Page et al. 1999). Peat swamp forests are mostly dominated by local tree species with economic values, such as ramin (*Gonystylus bancanus*), meranti (*Shorea spp.*), nyatoh (*Palaquium spp.*) and jelutung (*Dyera polyphylla*). In the past, people tapped jelutung's sap (Sofiyudin et al. 2012). Jelutung has been promoted as one of the featured peat swaps' commodities during the peat swamp rehabilitation era (Tata et al. 2015). Apart from woody plants, other commercial commodities that thrives and traditionally utilized by the community is *purun* (*Lepironia articulata*). *Purun* is a fibrous peat plant that is also easily found in the neighboring countries, such as Thailand and Malaysia (Goib et al. 2018).

More than three decades, wetlands areas in Indonesia, such as Sumatra and Kalimantan, have been cut down, drained and converted into plantations (Giesen & Sari 2018; Miettinen et al. 2016) by corporations and also small-scale plantations (Miettinen et al. 2016) or left neglected in damaged condition (Giesen & Sari 2018; Miettinen et al. 2016). Industrial Plantation Forest (Hutan Tanaman Industri/ HTI) and palm oil plantations have operated and consumed about 3.1 million hectares of peat swampland. The impact is the increasing rate of deforestation from 2007-2015 of about 4.1% (Miettinen et al. 2016). Timber corporations and palm oil plantations are believed to bring prosperity; however, the development on peatlands has significant ecological damage of impacts such as rapid increased of emissions, and peat fires that causing the declining of economic quality and public health (Giesen & Sari 2018).

As a result of the large-scale management of peatlands for palm oil plantations, minings, and Industrial Plantation Forests, local communities whose lives have been relying on peatlands for so long, have been disrupted. Not infrequently, the interests of local communities are considered incongruent with the interests of the business entities such as large-scale plantations and minings. One of the interests of local

communities that live in and around peat, particularly women, is *purun*. *Purun* (*Lepironia articulata*) is a member of the nut grass (*Cyperaceae*) that grows in marshes and swamps and is often used as woven material such as mats, bags, and other household appliances. *Purun* is a significant source of livelihood in many rural peatlands (Goib et al. 2018). But now the preservation of *purun* is threatened along with the decreasing and destruction of peatlands. As a result, *purun*, as part of the symbol of sustainability, culture, and relations between nature and humans that live in the peatlands, particularly women, is prone to extinction.

Management of massive extractive peatlands that do not pay attention to the sustainability of peat ecosystems have resulted in the degradation of about 6.6 million hectares of peatlands in Sumatra and Kalimantan (Miettinen & Liew 2010). Peatland destruction continues even though the government has made efforts to prevent, to mitigate, and to recover the destructed peat ecosystems. These efforts were carried out among others by issuing Government Regulation No. 71 of 2014 on Protection and Management of Peat Ecosystems. To address this issue, the Government even established the Peat Restoration Agency (BRG) in 2016. BRG used a 3R approach, namely rewetting, revegetation, and revitalization (Giesen & Sari 2018), to restore of about 2.49 million hectares in seven priority provinces for five years.

This paper aims to examine the marginalization process of the traditional conservation regime that for years has been built women's community. Second, analyzing women's struggle in conservation, fulfilling lives' necessities and carrying out its dual role amid the competition and claim over peatlands.

## Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with 20 key informants consisting of: administrators of the *purun* crafters cooperative, *purun* crafters associations, *purun* crafters groups, village facilitators from the Peat Restoration Agency (BRG), and several villagers including flood's victims. In addition to the interviews, to complete the research data, we also conducted field observations, and other secondary data collection, such as data and information from various literatures.

This research uses the critical social analysis method. The framework of this method is to promote Critical Social Theory (CST) as the basis for disclosing social facts

and facts found in the field, such as documents, media, and government policies (Leonardo 2004). The argument for using this method is opposite to the traditional theory that could only able to do descriptive analysis of social phenomena. CST is a social critical theory that can explain social phenomena and reflectively evaluate the normative aspects of phenomena (Horkheimer 1972; Trejo-Mathys 2008; Abromeit 2013), and identify the agents or actors responsible for social transformation process (Horkheimer 1972; Abromeit 2013). In short, this method seeks to understand, analyze, criticize, and encourage structural change, domination, exploitation and injustice of the socio-cultural, economic and political phenomena (Bentz & Shapiro 1998).

This study took location in Pulantani Village, Haur Gading sub-district, Hulu Sungai Utara District, in South Kalimantan Province. The selection of research site was made based on the following considerations. First, Pulantani Village is a village that is threatened by massive industrialization and investment processes. Secondly, the peatlands in this village grow vast number of *purun* and traditionally have become the source of income of the community's family life, especially the women who live there. Third, in this location, the role of women crafters are important — not only as breadwinners of the household economy — but as successors to the tradition of *purun* woven, and also preservation of the peatland ecosystem. Fourth, the location has been forced to undergo rapid transition and transformation both in its biophysical and social landscape driven by the development of commodities such as termed by Hery Santoso (2019) based on fast and intensive agroecosystems, such as palm oil. Fifth, the location is part of a Peat Ecosystem-Based Rural Handicraft Area.

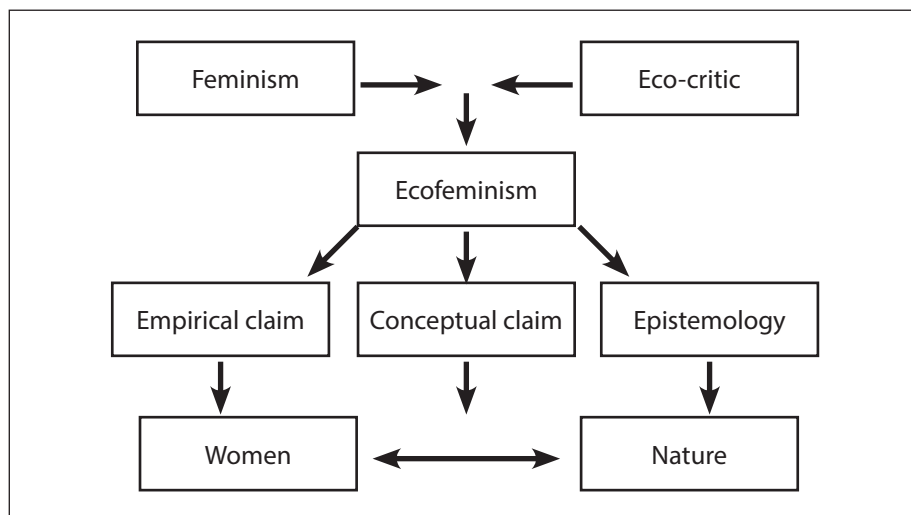
The indicative map of Pulantani Village (Picture 1) is the result of the participatory mapping of the citizen of Pulantani Village. This participatory mapping is part of the Peat Cares Village (DPG) program of the BRG - Kemitraan run by the Epistema Institute for social mapping and Participatory Mapping Network (Jaringan Kerja Pemetaan Partisipatif/ JKPP) for spatial mapping. Data collection in the participatory mapping was carried out through interviews with several key informants who were representatives of the community members of the village; taking the coordinates of the village borders and land usage/control in the village using Global Positioning System (GPS) which was carried out together with the representation of the rural community, through three times Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involving representatives of the rural community.



Second, conceptual claims that focus on the society's construction based on "hierarchy and dualism" (Eaton & Lorentzen 2003), reveal the patriarchal ideology as the root cause of domination of women and natural exploitation (Sari et al. 2019; Sharnappa 2016).

Third, epistemological claims that are centered on the knowledge about nature. In this perspective, women historically have been agrarian farmers (Sari et

al. 2019; Daly 1978). Thus, women support sustainable and renewable agriculture. Aside from that, women are heralded as the saviors of nature. In fact, women were invested with a mission to protect, to preserve, and to conserve the environment (Daly 1978). The perspective of ecofeminism, the basis of claims, and their relationships in the context of the relationship between women and nature can be illustrated in Figure 2.



Picture 2. Ecofeminism, Basis of Claim, and the Relations between Women and Nature

Source: Eaton & Lorentzen 2003

### Starting Point of the Ecological Crisis

"What is this? Straws made of purun? Oo ... Amazing ... I am very interested in developing this product," Mr. Ted<sup>1</sup> said. The brief conversation was revealed when Epistema Institute held a discussion while exhibiting various products produced from peat, such as honey, coffee, and purun crafts.

Mr. Ted's interest was at the opposite of the large business entities, and bureaucracy at the central, sub-national, and local levels. These entities tend to consider purun as a non-commercial commodity without high sale value. Purun is just a home commodity, unimportant, and only suitable for traditional local communities that can only bring in small cash money. Even in the early period of investment regime, peatland had been cleared around the 1960s, without any interest to the potential of peatland ecosystems, let alone purun.

In the early days of the forest exploitation's regime, peatlands were not a stimulating land for timber business entities, or plantations. The business entities

were more interested in exploring over mineral-rich lands. It is because, based on the economic calculations, doing business in mineral-rich lands is more efficient and profitable. However, along with the depletion of mineral areas, and the high economic potential of peatlands began to unfold, the business entity began to expand rapidly. Then since the 1980s the peatlands were being plotted by large concessions. Peatlands are considered as an alternative commodity for capital accumulation (Handoyo et al. 2018).

The operation of business entities, together with various non-legal activities carried out by multiple actors, have impacted on the disruption of peat ecosystems' metabolism. The global market is more interested in natural resource-based products, such as industrial plantations, palm oil, and mining, that has a significant impact on the sustainability of peat ecosystems. The emergence of ecological crisis in peat ecosystems is no longer an assumption and predictive calculation but empirical facts that have occurred in several places, including in the research location.

According to Ulrich Beck (1992), in his book *Risk Society Towards New Modernity*, there are three real impacts from the presence of extractive corporations to the communities living in peatlands, namely psychological, physical and social impacts. Psychic effects occur, such as fear for various communities, including women who struggle with *purun* to support their families. The physical impact such as the dryness rivers during dry season that usually to be used by communities as means of transportation to various regions, and also floods during rainy season that damage *purun* plants. Social impacts such as include the emergence of potential land conflicts with various actors, especially with palm oil companies and industrial plantations forest.

### **Marginalization of Purun and Women**

Since thousands of years ago there have been several communities that have inhabited peatland areas such as Komerling people, Ogan, Malay, Sakai, Bugis, Banjar, Dayak (Noorginayuwati & Saragih 2013), Dani, Asmat, Kamoro and Korowai (Mongabay 2017). They have their own wisdom in managing peatlands so as not to bring ecological or magical disasters to them.

Communities that inhabit peat ecosystems have unique ways of life, different from those that live on land of mineral soils. The farming methods of these communities are also different - not solely because their land is peat and not regular soil. The practice of starting the planting season by clearing land by burning in a certain way have become common practice in their culture and traditions. This practice has been believed to be able to reduce the acidity level of the land, where the burnt ash and lime would become nutrition for the agricultural crops cultivated by the communities.

In addition to ecological awareness factors and the economic considerations of local communities, the existence of peat areas managed by community members are relatively more sustainable than those managed by companies such as palm oil plantations or industrial plantations forest. This is due to the local belief system that pays special attention to peatlands, that demands them to take more care of peat for their lives in the world and the hereafter.

According to stories from the key informants who served as village chiefs, through the indigenous people's beliefs, the peat forests could be preserved and conserved for thousands of years, not being overexploited and not being destroyed. Their beliefs and traditions do allow them to burn land in opening *Pahuman* fields (rice fields or fields) and allow logging for building houses

or just sell them for their living needs. However, people are prohibited from exploiting the nature for enriching themselves.

The people of Haur Gading, according to the story of a resident who lived in Haur Gading, were thought to have inhabiting this area since the period of the Kuripan State Kingdom that existed in Hulu Sungai Tabalong - now the Hulu Sungai Utara District, South Kalimantan Province - in the 14th century. Later on, according to the legend in Haur Gading about Pondok Datuk who guarded the *hapau* (forest), they finally embraced Islam brought by Banjar Sultanate, and identified themselves as Banjar people, or some residents called themselves as Dayak Kampong who spoke Banjar Hulu. They have never been proven to damage the forests there. The peat forests were always well preserved. The beliefs that the way they treat the forest will bring good/bad luck have guided them in managing the peat.

The severe forest fires that once hit in 1998 and 2016 in Pulantani Village, Haur Gading, have destroyed the forests and the peat ecosystems. The fires destroyed nearly 80% of the peat forest area.

We have never been prejudiced by accusing villagers that conduct massive scale burning, because the belief on the existence of supernatural forces that could harm them is far stronger attached in their minds than the seduction for profits that come from the middlemen of the palm oil plantations. (Pulantani Village Head 2019, Interview 27 July)

The people of Pulantani Village, Haur Gading or the Bugis community in Muara Sugihan who want to have a reasonably good economy, choose to invest in a swallow's nest, rather than dismantling the forest and turn it into plantation or mining. They believe that such conduct to dismantle and to destroy the forest, could bring disaster to them. There is some kind of mystical curse from the other inhabitants of nature that would threatens themselves as well as their families, whether in the form of an outbreak of illness or death without any apparent medical cause (Interview & FGD 2019). This belief has become an important part of tradition of preserving tropical rain peat forests in Haur Gading and also the peat swamp forests in Muara Sugihan, particularly in Kuala Sugihan village. The efforts of the Haur Gading community, especially the women's community in preserving peat swamp forest have shown that they have applied traditional conservation regimes in the form of structures, systems, and norms of sustainable peat swamp management while preserving the original peatland ecosystem for years for generations.

However, in the past few decades, this traditional conservation regime has gradually been excluded. The fact shows that after the great fires of the Haur Gading forest in 1998, palm oil corporations entered from outside the area into the *hapau* area, to invest in collaboration with the Government of Tabalong District. The palm oil plantation's activities, according to the story from the residents, were failed when several palm oil seedlings failed to grow properly, many were died due to collapse, and some drowned due to flood. However, the canals that were built for the palm oil plantations' plots could reserve water that are stored in the peat domes that exist in the forest, flowing through these canals.

The drying up of water and peatlands cause the quality of the purun plants to decline, whereas the culture of managing the purun have not only becoming tradition for the Haur Gading community, but also at the same time have become the main livelihood for the women there. The tradition of weaving purun has existed since hundreds of years ago, so the skill of weaving purun is the result of the interaction of the settlers of the Kuripan Kingdom, Dipa State, and Daha State who inhabited the southwestern side of Tabalong River with the peat ecosystem there. The interaction of Haur Gading Community with this extraordinary peat ecosystem has been able to preserve the peat forest area for hundreds of years and remain sustainable.

The operation of Adaro's coal extractive business in the northern upstream of Tabalong River and the palm oil plantations in Tabalong District in the 1990s, have threatened Haur Gading and surrounding areas. Panggang Lake, a reasonably large peat swamp lake in the upper part of Tabalong River has been expanding because of the water discharge spewed by Tabalong River into the lake area were getting bigger. This happened due to the existence of the Coal Mining at the northeast of Tabalong River, and the destruction of peat forests due to fires triggered by the opening of palm oil plantations in the northeastern part of the region. This extractive business practice reduces the ability of water catchment areas in the upstream of Tabalong River, which makes the area around Lake Panggang, including Haur Gading are threatened to sink, and to damaging the purun.

In Pulantani village, Haur Gading sub-district, purun were planted by residents, pegs were used to mark the borders of purun plots of each of the residents. Residents of Pulantani Village or residents from outside Pulantani Village who want to harvest purun in Pulantani fields that are planted by residents, usually asking permission

to harvest and to provide compensation in the form of money depends on the amount of purun.

The population of purun crafters (weavers) in Pulantani Village remain stable even though the production is reduced due to the decrease of purun plants. Women in the village participated in a group of crafters initiated by the Village Government and in collaboration with the Village Facilitator (Fasdes) from BRG and Kemitraan, named Iwan. Since the high needs for purun for weaving is rather high, the residents together with the Village Facilitator (Fasdes) intend to expand 6 hectares area of the new purun farms owned by the crafters group.

Villagers next to Pulantani Village, that is Murung Panggang Village, South Amuntai District, buy purun that grow in Pulantani Village because they have only a few farms in their village. Some raw materials of purun are obtained from several regions in Central Kalimantan. Villagers, for example, in Murung Panggang Village, are discouraged from planting purun due to the rampant stealing of purun. The stealing happened because there were not many purun could flourish in Murung Panggang. In addition to the high need for raw materials of purun for weaving.

At the moment, the women crafters in Pulantani Village are developing a new product made from purun, a purun straw. These purun straws could add the type of purun products that they usually produce. With a relatively higher sale value than other purun products, it is expected that the development of the production of purun straws can motivate women crafters to continue to preserve purun and peat ecosystems. Purung Weaving Crafters Cooperative has also been formed to handle the entire production cycle more efficiently, especially the roasting and also drying processes. Purun drying house is also planned to be built in Banjarm Village, Banjarm sub-district. This drying house is expected could become a device to help not only for drying purun straws, but also to increase some other peat ecosystem commodities in Hulu Sungai Utara such as salted fish, smoked banana (*sale pisang*), fish crackers, *talipuk* flour (lotus seeds), sago, etc.

As an effort to preserve peat, the Peat Restoration Agency, in collaboration with the Epistema Institute, facilitates the formulation of a regent's regulation regarding rural areas in the North Upstream District. Pulantani Village is one of four villages (Murung Panggang Village, Tambak Sari Panji, Tuhuran, Pulantani), which is part of a Peat Ecosystem-Based Handicraft Rural Area based on North Upstream District Regulations No. 10 of

2019 concerning the Establishment of the Rural Area of North Upstream District. The stipulation of rural area policy is a guideline in determining rural area development in North Upstream District. This is a manifestation of the commitment of the local government to develop villages included in the rural area.

### **Women Purun Crafters' Economic Frailty due to Ecological Destruction**

Women in Pulantani Village, Haur Gading, are currently facing difficult situation because the peat swamp ecosystems that support purun habitat are under threat by various extractive works run by business entities. The existence of purun is important because purun serve not only as family's source of economy but also serve as cultural symbol and traditions that have been carried down for generations by their ancestors. The presences of various extractive corporations that were followed by the shrinking living space for purun, have forced some of the crafters to become part of the means of production with low pay and without adequate health security. Currently, the purun crafters are facing challenges to find raw material of purun since the location getting further.

Without change in the peat preservation policy, then purun plants would become scarce and prediction toward labor turn over to extractive industries might turn into reality. Transformation of work of the women purun weavers would cause not only the loss of tradition but also the right of access to justice and natural resources. Modern industrial culture would prey not only the blue-collar labors, but also their identity and culture. According to Sherry B. Orner (1974), the dependence of women purun crafters to the peatlands and the impact felt due to the destruction of purun habitat implies a strong relationship between women and nature.

The interlinkage between women of the purun crafters in Pulantani Village and the peat ecosystem has disclosed clearly that the connection between women and nature is made based on several claims. First, is the epistemological claim (Sari et al. 2019; Daly 1978), where women purun crafters in Pulantani Village have historically been recognized as supporters of the sustainable use of peatlands. The dependence of women crafters to purun that only grows in a good peat ecosystem has indirectly strengthened their role as protectors and conservationists of the peat ecosystems amid the onslaught of massive-exploitative peatland's extraction.

Second, the empirical claim (Eaton & Lorentzen 2003), that the destruction of peat ecosystems in Haur Gading

region has direct impact on women purun crafters, in the form of economic frailty and also ecological deprivation. They have faced not only scarcity of purun, but also decreasing income. They were threatened to change their profession to become labor at palm oil companies and mining - which do not necessarily guarantee their work's welfare and safety. This happened because of the shifting in the mode of production from subsistence toward exploitation, where humans are hegemonized by capitalist interests.

### **Conclusion**

The presence of extractive corporations in Haur Gading region have brought impact on the exclusion of the conservation regime that for many years has been carried out by Haur Gading community, especially the women groups. Those who have been using peat swamps while preserving the ecosystem had to be displaced by the use of peatlands by extractive corporations.

Women in Pulantani Village, Haur Gading, currently are facing difficult situation where the peat swamp ecosystem is being threatened by various activities of extractive businesses. Purun serves not only as source of livelihood but also cultural symbol and traditions that have been carried from generation to generation by their ancestors. There are at least three real impacts from the presence of extractive corporations towards the communities that live in peatlands, namely the psychological, physical, and social impacts. Psychic impact occurs in the form of fearful feeling of the community, including women who on daily basis struggle with purun while thinking about the sustainability of her family's livelihood. The physical impact appeared in dry season when the rivers during that usually are used as means of transportations to other regions becoming dried, and also the floods of *hapau* in rainy season that destroyed purun. The social appeared in the form of latent land conflicts with various actors, especially with palm oil companies, mining, and industrial plantations forest.

The experiences of women in Pulantani Village, Haur Gading, illustrate the close relationship between the women purun crafters and the peat ecosystem. This relationship is made based on two claims, those are the epistemological and the empirical claims. The epistemological claim can explain the historical relationship between women purun crafters and nature as protectors and conservators of peat ecosystems. The empirical claim explains how the destruction of peat ecosystems in Haur Gading region has direct impacts on women purun crafters. The impact appears as economic

frailty and ecological destruction. It can be said that the destruction of purun and the women's efforts to preserve the purun as social identity and the community's economy in the peatlands can be seen as part of the struggle of women in Pulantani Village in preserving the sustainability of the peat ecosystem amid the expansion of corporation that threaten the sustainability of peatlands.

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## End Notes

- 1 The leader of IDLO (International Development Law Organization), an international donor agency that funded the 'development of community legal empowerment in peat ecosystems to increase access to justice (2017-2019)' project, was impressed with the products of the peat community.

### **Expression of Gratitude to Reviewers**

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Jurnal Perempuan (JP) is a quarterly interdisciplinary publication in the English language that aims to circulate **original ideas in gender studies**. JP invites critical reflection on the theory and practice of feminism in the social, political, and economic context of Indonesian society. We are committed to exploring gender in its multiple forms and interrelationships.

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