

# Story from the field



## New research project investigates efforts to promote social inclusion within sustainable production landscapes in Siak and Pelalawan Districts, Indonesia

### Background and Aims

As policy makers around the world search for new ways to address climate and biodiversity challenges linked to agro-commodity production, there is growing interest in exploring jurisdictional sustainability initiatives that promote both environmental sustainability and social inclusion within holistic visions of green growth and development. To deepen our understanding of the dynamics of social inclusion within prominent jurisdictional approaches to sustainability in Indonesia, a new research collaboration was established in August 2023 involving researchers from Universitas Gadjah Mada (Indonesia) and the University of Melbourne (Australia). The research is funded by the Knowledge Partnership Platform Australia-Indonesia (KONEKSI), which facilitates collaboration between Indonesian and Australian researchers in support of enhanced social equity in processes of sustainable development.

The research aims first, to understand how jurisdictional sustainability initiatives intersect with patterns of social inclusion or inequality in sites of implementation. In analysing social inclusion, the global sustainable development agenda takes a broad view of the different and often compounding dimensions of people’s vulnerability beyond economic poverty related to livelihoods. Social inclusion also includes other dimensions of marginality such as geographical isolation, gender inequalities, minority status, disability, and other aspects that might contribute to inequality and affect wellbeing. This broad conceptualisation of social inclusion is illustrated in Figure 1.

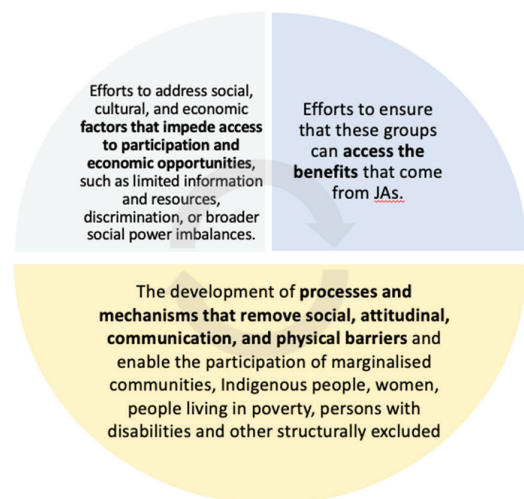


Figure 1: Social Inclusion Conceptualisation

Building from this vantage point, this research examines multiple dimensions of participation and social inclusion, encompassing dynamics of representation and influence within multi-stakeholder governance processes; inclusion and participation in processes of program design and implementation; and patterns of inclusion in access to economic and social development opportunities and benefits facilitated by the program’s activities and interventions. The research explores how jurisdictional sustainability program mechanisms, pathways of participation and associated policy planning processes are being used directly to support these multiple dimensions of social inclusion, while also tackling broader barriers to participation and benefit sharing. This thematic focus is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

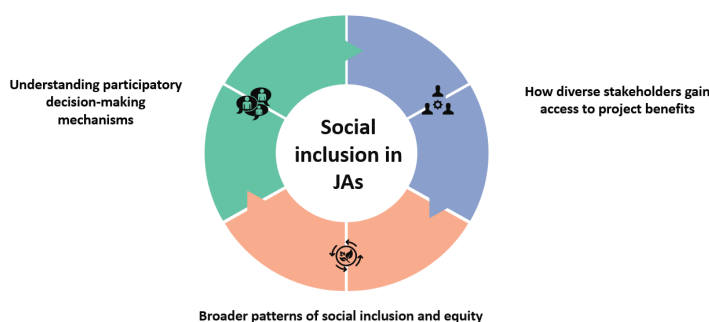


Figure 2: Thematic focus of the research

The ultimate goals of the research are to identify key lessons learned for policy making and implementation about the potential impacts of different approaches to participation and social inclusion in jurisdictional sustainability initiatives.

## The Siak and Pelalawan Program

The Siak Pelalawan Landscape Program (SPLP) was selected as one of two initiatives for investigation. The study encompasses both in-depth analysis of the SPLP, and comparative analysis in which inclusion dynamics in the SPLP are compared with those in another prominent program of jurisdictional sustainability (in Sintang, West Kalimantan). By comparing jurisdictional sustainability programs in two different subnational contexts, the research aims to elicit findings regarding how both the design and implementation of jurisdictional sustainability programs, and broader patterns of social inequality in implementation sites, work together to shape, enable and constrain social inclusion.

## Approach and Progress to Date



*Photo 1. Our research team having discussion with the members of female farmer group (KWT Berkah Bertani) in Mengkapan Village, Siak District. KWT Berkah Bertani is conducting alternative economic activity by producing pineapple processed food such as pineapple jam, syrup, or cookies.*

organisations and from customary communities, many of whom have been involved in or affected by the delivery of sustainability programs. In addition, researchers have spoken with participants directly involved in program activities, such as smallholder farmers and farmer groups, village leaders and others engaged in program activities.



*Photo 2. Interview with a Kampung Mengkapan villager about canal blocking activities on peatland as a way to manage the peatland ecosystem. The activity needs an inclusive approach in the design process, development, and maintenance to ensure its sustainability*

The first phase of preliminary research started in December 2023, and a subsequent period of field research will take place later in 2024.

The research itself has been designed to be socially inclusive, using a variety of research methods to hear from diverse actors, including some of the most vulnerable groups in program sites. These include the female heads of families, older persons, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised social groups. Time, resources and special methods are being used to help reach those marginalised groups that are difficult to access, and who may have less voice and influence compared with others.

Research teams have also met with policy makers, practitioners, business association and company representatives, and individuals from civil society

Themes emerging from early research indicate that significant efforts are being made to promote social inclusion and participation in jurisdictional sustainability programs. At the same time, the implementation context presents significant challenges to efforts to ensure the participation of and distribution of benefits to a range of different people, including youth, women, and other marginalised groups such as people with disabilities or indigenous people. Such challenges include persistent social norms around gender in the palm oil sector, and established practices regarding who is traditionally invited to be involved in decision-making forums in villages and beyond.

Towards the end of 2024, preliminary findings from this ongoing research project will be shared in the form of a working paper/policy brief and stakeholder workshops. In 2025 findings will be shared more widely via a publicly accessible digital platform.