

2. Changing Tides - Waves of Opportunities on a Sea of Oil Palms?

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2.1 Introduction

Livelihoods of forest-dependent people throughout Southeast Asia often show a typical pattern of swidden farming combined with diversified utilization of forest products (e.g. Belcher and Kusters 2004; Belcher et al. 2005; Brookfield and Padoch 1994; Colfer 1997; Colfer 2005; Cramb et al. 2009; Dove 1985; Godoy and Bennett 1991; Gönner 2002; Pattanayak and Sills 2001; Weinstock 1983; Wollenberg et al. 2001; Wollenberg et al. 2004). For a long time, swiddens have been the center of rural livelihood systems in upland Borneo structuring the annual activities through the agricultural calendar (cf. Colfer 1997; Dove 1985; Freeman 1992; Gönner 2002). Swidden agriculture has also been at the heart of ritual and social life. Group work for clearing forests, planting and harvesting rice, and the rituals associated have shaped social institutions and reinforced social cohesion. Yet, 'swidden farming is [only] one element in larger livelihood systems' (Cramb et al. 2009). Access to markets, e.g. for native rubber, rattan or resins had enabled even remote villages to extend their subsistence modes since centuries (cf. Dove 1994: 383-385; von Heine-Geldern 1945; Weidelt 1990: 26; Wolters 1967). Today, typical commodities traded and supplementing subsistence in Borneo are rubber (from *Hevea brasiliensis* Müll. Arg., e.g. Dove 1993; de Jong 2001), rattan (e.g. Bizard 2013; Pambudhi et al. 2004), *gaharu* (resinous heartwood from *Aquilaria spp.*, e.g. Soehartono and Newton 2001) or nests of swiftlets (*Aerodramus spp.*, e.g. Cranbrook and Koon 1999).

'Extended subsistence' (Gönner and Seeland, 2002) along with the diversification of both, cultivated crops, including high agro-biodiversity of rice varieties (Gönner 2002: 122), as well as forest products and non-farm activities has been explained as a risk-minimizing strategy, developed to cope with the uncertainty inherent in these environments, as well as with the typical boom-bust cycles of the commodities traded (e.g. Arnold and Ruiz Pérez 1998; Ellis 1998,

2000; Godoy and Feaw 1991; Homma 1992; Sellato 2001; Stoian 2000). Depending on alternative, more stable income sources, access to markets, as well as reliability and significance of a given resource, the diversity can range from narrow portfolios, such as in the case of *damar* (resin) gardens in Krui, Sumatra (Wollenberg et al. 2001) to locations in Kalimantan with higher degrees of diversification (Belcher and Kusters 2004; Gönner 2002).

According to Ellis (2000: 292) diversification “obeys a continuum of causes, motivations and constraints that vary across individuals and households at a particular point in time and for the same individuals or households at different points in time.” People may diversify their livelihoods out of explicit *ex ante* risk-minimizing strategic considerations or in the form of necessary *ex post* coping behavior as responds to events or shocks (Adger 2006; Dercon 2002; Ellis 2000), though experiences of the latter might lead to new *ex ante* strategies in the future as part of adaptive learning. The ability of reacting to external shocks, while maintaining the overall systemic properties (in the narrow sense of the definition) or general livelihood patterns (in the wider sense), is commonly referred to as resilience (e.g. Adger et al. 2005; Folke 2006; Levin et al. 1998).⁸

The century-long survival of such diversified and resilient modes of livelihoods together with their diverse forest landscapes have been viewed by scientists and NGOs as a promising example of sustainable land use (e.g. Colfer 1997; Michon et al. 1986; Sardjono 1990; Weinstock 1983). Utilizing the safety net functions and the manifoldness of economic (also non-farm) opportunities, combined with necessary assets⁹, diversified livelihoods have been attributed a sound potential to help poor households escape from extreme poverty (Ellis 1998, 2000)¹⁰ and to reduce vulnerability (Cramb et al. 2009: 342). Other authors, however, stressed that alternative, specialized occupations, such as oil palm cultivation, may lead to better livelihoods, especially in terms of income, health care, education opportunities and infrastructure, and, thus, often are preferred by rural households over farming and traditional forest use (Feintrenie et al. 2010; Pambudhi et al. 2004; Rist et al. 2010; Rival and Levang 2014: 20).

Given the massive expansion of oil palm plantations in Indonesia (see further below), as well as the expansion of open pit coal mining in East Kalimantan, the continuity of the Benuaq’s diversified and resilient livelihoods is at a crossroads. New opportunities offered by oil palm and coal mining companies ‘pull’

8 For a comprehensive overview on the conceptual use of resilience, see Brand and Jax (2007). For its possible application in anthropology see Bollig (2014).

9 See the literature on Sustainable Livelihood Approach (Chambers and Conway 1991; Scoones 1998).

10 For a critical discussion of community-based adaptation in the framework of adaptation towards climate change, see Sabates-Wheeler et al. (2008).

especially young people away from extended subsistence farming (Pambudhi et al. 2004), promising modern lifestyles. On the other hand, the massive expansion of these companies into the forest frontiers, combined with often non-transparent and unfair contractual arrangements supported by vested district authorities or corrupted community leaders (Colchester and Chao 2013; McCarthy et al. 2011: 564; Zen et al. 2008) has led to a ‘push’ of people away from their traditional livelihoods (Pambudhi et al. 2004), often causing or contributing to severe deforestation¹¹ and the subsequent loss of livelihood opportunities of traditional landowners (Colchester 2010; Fitzherbert et al. 2008; Obidzinski et al. 2012; Potter 2015: 10-14; Potter 2008; Sheil 2009: 21-24), followed by resistance and conflict (see Haug 2014 and further below).

This chapter examines the detailed dynamics of livelihood diversification, elsewhere described as ‘surfing on waves of opportunities’ (Gönner 2011), and discusses the prospects of smallholder oil palm cultivation as an integrated element of the Benuaq’s extended subsistence, allowing the continuation of a century-old livelihood pattern in the midst of highly dynamic change, rather than its replacement by a sea of oil palms.

2.2 Study Area and Methods

Research Area

The study was conducted in Lempunah, a Dayak Benuaq community in Kutai Barat regency, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The community’s territory covers 9,200 ha south of Lake Jempang, comprising individual plots of swidden fields, secondary forest at various stages of succession between one and more than 50 years, forest gardens of rattan and rubber, mixed forest gardens and some remaining old-growth forest. A mapping inventory counted almost 1,000 forest gardens cared for by a population of approximately 350 people in 117 households (census 1996).¹² A detailed description of Lempunah, including a settlement history of more than 300 years, ethnography and demography is provided in Gönner (2002).

11 The deforestation pattern is complex and depends among other factors also on the history of previous land use, as well as on the particular region in Indonesia. For a comprehensive overview of the role of oil palm plantations regarding land use changes, see Potter 2015, pp. 10-14.

12 Little in- or out-migration was observed over the years, and the village basically remained the same in terms of size and extended families from 1988 until 2015.

Methods

Data were collected between 1988 and 2016, with the most intensive research phase between 1996 and 2000 and annual revisits between 2001 and 2008, one visit in October 2014, as well as telephone interviews in 2013, 2015 and 2016. Socioeconomic data of households were collected through semi-structured household interviews with a census in 1996 and a random sample of 33 percent of households in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2004, and 2006 (Gönner 2002; Gönner et al. 2007). Household interviews from 1996 through 1999 were conducted by the author; the interviews conducted in 2003, 2004, and 2006 were part of a regency-wide monitoring survey in Kutai Barat conducted by local assessors (Cahyat et al. 2007). Earlier data collected by the author between 1988 and 1993, as well as during a field visit in October 2014 were used for overall conclusions. The additional telephone interviews were used for checking new development issues with a special focus on the expansion of oil palm.

2.3 Continuity under Change in Lempunah

Despite or rather due to many events and changes over time, the Benuaq of Lempunah have created a mosaic forest landscape around their village over a period of at least 300 years, reflecting a highly diversified and resilient mode of livelihoods (cf. Gönner 2002, 2011). However, recent large-scale landscape changes from forests to oil palm plantations put the resilience and sustainability observed so far under risk. The main section of this chapter sheds some light on the dynamic livelihood pattern of the Benuaq, as well as on social cohesion and the main events observed in Lempunah over the last twenty five years. This is followed by a brief overview of the ongoing expansion of oil palm cultivation in Indonesia and around Lempunah, including a summary of the social conflicts caused by it and the discussion of possible forms of co-existence of oil palm and more traditional types of land use as Lempunah's current development vision.

Diversification and Extended Subsistence – Surfing on Waves of Opportunities

The general livelihood pattern revealed by integrating individual behavior over the entire community of Lempunah has been addressed as 'extended subsistence' (Gönner and Seeland 2002) based on subsistence swidden farming combined with various market-oriented income sources, such as rattan (*Calamus* spp., *Daemonorops crinita*), rubber (from *Hevea brasiliensis*), wood products

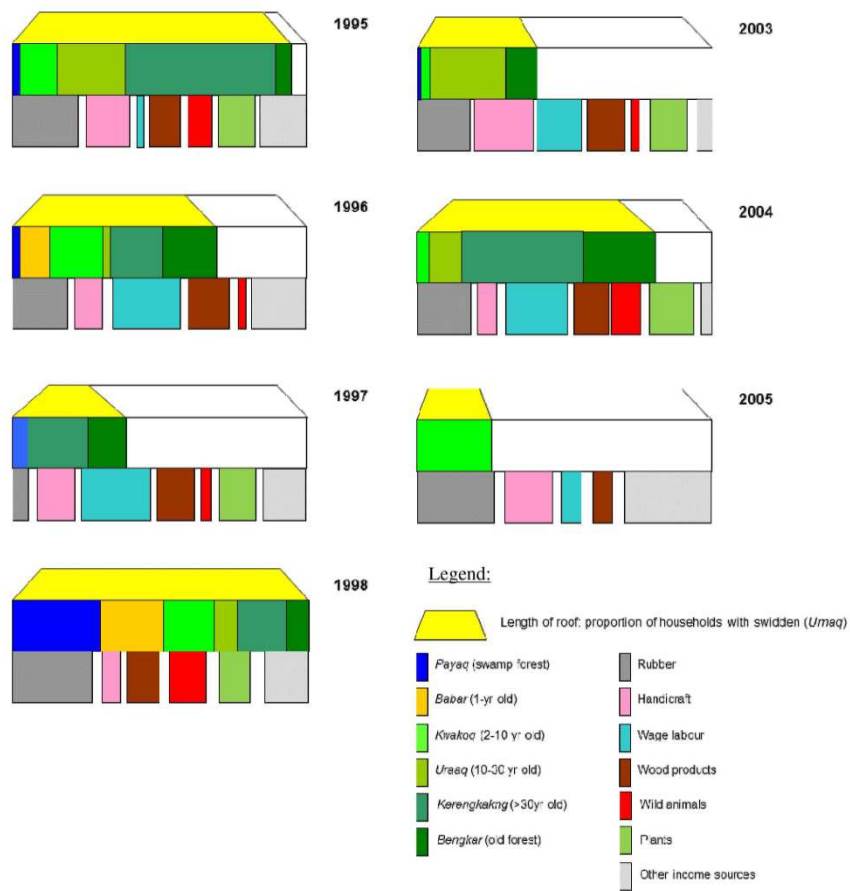
(shingles, beams), handicrafts (ulap doyo - Benuaq language - fabrics woven from fibers of *Curculigo* spp, blowpipes made out of ironwood- *Eusideroxylon zwageri*), game, turtles and tortoises, pet birds and many other forest-based products (see Gönner 2002). Income sources were diversified partially in order to utilize economic opportunities and to minimize risks, but occasionally also due to necessities, e.g. in years of extreme weather events, after harvest failures, in case of urgent cash needs or during bust phases of resource prices. Considering the highly individual rational of decision-making (see Gönner 2002: 96, 110, 157, 169) and the often very short-lived opportunities for new income sources it is not always possible to differentiate between *ex ante* deliberate choice of diversifying and *ex post* coping behavior out of bare necessity (see Ellis, 1998, 2010, cited in the introduction). In addition, the diversification is performed over time and space (i.e. by maintaining a diverse and utilized mosaic forest),¹³ as well as by using the entire work force of the household and the extended family. While some household members are engaged in swiddening, tapping rubber and harvesting rattan, hunting or logging, older children and younger women work in the oil palm's nursery, and grandmothers contribute to the livelihood by weaving ulap doyo fabric to be sold to middlemen, whereas young boys may go electro-fishing on Ohookng River or look for jobs as truck drivers and security guards at the nearby coal mine.

This pattern of multi-dimensional diversification has been described from many other areas throughout Southeast Asia (see introduction above, e.g. Belcher et al. 2005; Brookfield and Padoch 1994; Cramb et al. 2009; Dove 1985; Godoy and Bennett 1991; Pattanayak and Sills 2001; Weinstock 1983; Wollenberg et al. 2004). However, the exact composition of the subsistence elements, based on the annual swidden, and of the diversified income sources has usually not been described and analyzed in detail over a longer period of time.

Figure 2.1 (based on Gönner 2014: 279) visualizes the changes over time – between 1995 and 2005, both in terms of swidden dynamics, as well as the dynamics of principal income sources:

13 For spatial and social patterns, see Gönner 2002: 207-231.

Figure 2.1: Multivariate ‘Resource Longhouses’ 1995-98, 2003-05.



The width of the different columns represents the relative proportions. The length of the roof represents the percentage of households with a swidden in the given year, while the columns of the longhouse's interior stand for the distribution of different forest types cleared for the swiddens. The stilts' width represents the relative importance of income sources ascribed by interviewed households.

The amount of work dedicated to preparing swiddens, especially in old growth forests (*kerengkakng* and *bengkar* - Benuaq language), where felling of

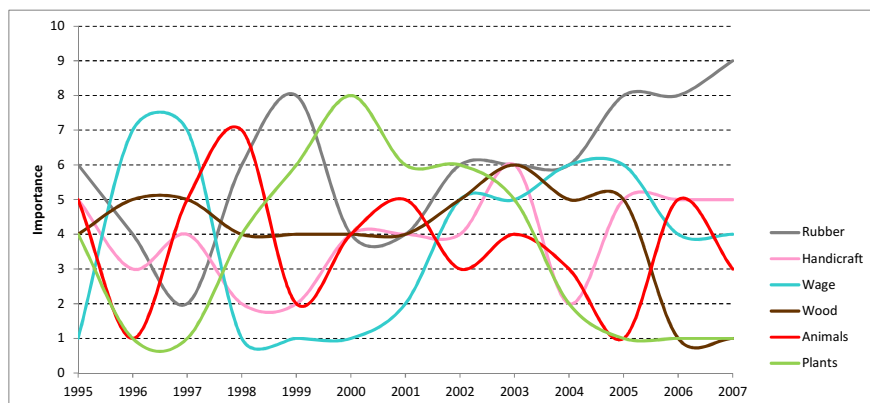
trees is most difficult, depends to a large extent on previous harvests, i.e. remaining rice stocks for food security, as well as on cash income. Only if no alternatives are available, or if large rituals with many guests are planned, such as *kwangkai* mortuary rites or *guguql naitn tautn* ceremonies (all Benuaq language), people invest into the preparation of high yield swiddens in old growth forests. In other years, swiddens in younger *babar* and *kwakoq* (Benuaq language) fallow forest or *payaq* swamp forest (Benuaq language) closer to the village are preferred, or if there is sufficient cash income, no swidden is prepared at all (Gönner 2002: 96, 110). In most years, a sufficient number of households prepares a swidden and, thus, also contributes to the in situ conservation of agrobiodiversity, including rice varieties. After extreme years, such as the drought of 1997, when only few households cultivated rice, the diversity of seeds drops significantly. In 1998, the diversity of non-glutinous rice had decreased by 24 percent and by 49 percent for glutinous varieties compared to 1995 (n=24 households). Re-finding lost varieties – mainly through barter trade with other communities – is difficult and slow. In 2000, the diversity of both types of rice varieties had only slightly recovered (Gönner 2002: 123).

However, swidden agriculture is clearly more than just an economic safety net. The social organization of work around the *umaq* (Benuaq language for swidden), the time spent during preparation, seeding and harvesting, in field huts, often shared by different core families, and the manifold rituals related to swidden agriculture still play an important role in the Benuaq's lifeworld, similar to other Dayak groups (e.g. Freeman 1992 for Iban, Dove 1985 for Kantu', or Colfer 1997 for Kenyah). Rice and its spirit, *Lolakng Luikng*, still are of great ritual importance, especially in the still frequently held *beliatn* (Benuaq language) curing rituals, when rice is offered to please spirits, or as a means for communication with the spiritual world (Gönner 2002: 90). Swiddening also is a highly social activity. Most fields are prepared by groups, generally involving close kin (mainly son-in-laws and own children) and friends as direct neighbors, mutually supporting each other in group work, in cases of sickness, or for protecting the fields against animals (e.g. wild boar or monkeys feeding on the crops).

Kin remains to be the glue of social cohesion in Lempunah. An analysis of family relations in Lempunah's main settlement (RT I/II) in 1996 (Gönner 2002: 54), revealed that 50 core families were all part of the same coherent network of first order relations (parental or sibling connections), while only 10 other core families were not directly linked to the main net, although they are linked by second order (*warsinai* – Benuaq language). This cohesion is reflected in economic activities (e.g. swiddening), ritual life and along conflict lines (see further below).

While swidden farmers are still being depicted as ‘conservative’, ‘traditional’ forest dwellers, who are ‘resistant to change’ (see critical review in Colfer 1983: 84, but also much more recent statements by government officials and oil palm plantation managers), the income generating part of the Benuaq’s ‘extended subsistence’ shows a high level of flexibility and dynamics. Switching between income sources, i.e. the stilts of the ‘resource longhouses’ in Figure 1 is partially driven by external events, partially by economic opportunities or the lack of those. The dynamic pattern itself has been described elsewhere as ‘surfing on waves of opportunities’ as shown in Figure 2.2 (adapted from Gönner 2011: 169):

Figure 2.2: Waves of Opportunities



Trajectories of the importance of income sources in Lempunah at the household level from 1995 to 2007. The scores were ranked by the author based on household interview data and key informant interviews.

The decision to switch between different opportunities and subsistence-oriented activities depends on the individual situation of a household and is driven by availability of and access to resources, market prices, cash demand, food (i.e. rice) security, availability of time and income alternatives, perceived risks, emotional considerations, as well as the success or failure of fellow villagers (Gönner 2011: 170). Many of these ‘waves’ are short-lived, and people need to react swiftly to utilize their opportunities.

The following section provides an overview of events and drivers shaping the ‘extended subsistence’ and the ‘waves of opportunities’ in Lempunah over the last decades.

Events and Drivers Shaping Livelihoods

Table 1 (partially based on Gönner 2002: 83-85) provides an overview of drivers and events observed between 1988 and 2016. Events recorded during the intensive research period 1996-2007 directly correspond to the ‘waves of opportunities’ shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Events and Livelihood Patterns 1988-2016

Years	Events and Income Opportunities
1970s	A logging company selectively cuts timber in the forests around Lempunah. Conflicts are rather small, as the local people are allowed to use the logged-over area for swidden agriculture.
1988	Most villagers harvest rattan (<i>Calamus caesioides</i>) due to high prices. Many families buy household goods, TV sets, boat engines or generators with their income.
1989	Due to new export restrictions, the price for rattan has dropped dramatically. Besides, most gardens are depleted, and many families have sold the goods bought a year before.
1991	Rattan prices are still low. Mast fruiting of Durian trees (<i>Durio</i> spp) provides income from selling fruits.
1992-93	A tree plantation (HTI) combined with a new transmigration settlement clear-cuts several dozen hectares of forest, including burial sites and forest gardens, triggering a serious land-rights conflict.
1994	Clearing for the HTI-Trans project has stopped, although without any financial compensation. A tree bark (<i>kayu lem</i> – <i>Litsea</i> sp c.f. - Benuaq language) is intensively collected due to its good price. The natural stock is soon depleted.
1995	Many myna birds (Common hill myna – <i>Gracula religiosa</i>) are caught and sold to traders. A good price for rubber provides income for most households.
1996	The oil palm company London Sumatra starts clearing forests for establishing plantations. Despite severe resistance and escalating conflicts, villagers also use the opportunities to work as day laborers in the nursery and for land clearing.
1997	Many people still find day labor jobs for land clearing at the oil palm plantation. The clearing of forests is often combined with logging and the preparation of ironwood shingles.

1998	Due to the extreme drought, normally inaccessible swamp forests are visited and thousands of freshwater turtles and tortoises are collected. The animals are sold through middlemen via Banjarmasin to Hong Kong and Singapore. After May 1998, the swamps are inundated again.
1999	After the forest fires and the drought 1997/98 rubber can be tapped again, and many people use this opportunity although the price remains rather low.
2000	The price of rattan (<i>Daemonorops crinita</i> and <i>Calamus caesius</i>) has increased. Gardens of both species have matured over the previous ten years since the last rattan boom, and most villagers decide to harvest their stocks.
2001	Fish caught by electrocution in Ohookng River and the swamp forests around Lempunah is traded, while the selling price of <i>Daemonorops crinita</i> remains high.
2002	The price of rubber has begun to increase. Rattan (only <i>Daemonorops crinita</i>) still fetches a relatively good price, and decentralization offers income opportunities in the new logging boom. The local tourism market is slowly recovering after the forest fires and the political turmoil in the country.
2003	More jobs are offered by the mining company, as well as on the oil palm plantation. At the same time the rubber price continues to increase, while souvenirs (blowpipes, <i>ulap doyo</i> fabric) sell well, too.
2004	No clear wave is visible in 2004. Most households combine wage work at the oil palm plantation (few at the coal mine) with tapping rubber, harvesting rattan and logging. Fish and tortoise populations are depleted.
2005	Ten years after the last larger catches (Jepson <i>et al.</i> 1998) the population of Common hill mynas (<i>Gracula religiosa</i>) has recovered, and more than 100 birds are caught and sold to pet traders. The price of rubber remains at a high level, and many people get at least temporary work at the oil palm and the coal mining company. Some are still engaged in logging.
2006	Logging becomes too risky because of stricter law enforcement in the district. The price of <i>Daemonorops crinita</i> has dropped dramatically due to the replacement with synthetic fibers for the fabrication of café furniture in Europe. ¹⁴ The oil palm company mainly hires migrant workers from other Indonesian islands leaving only few jobs for the villagers.

¹⁴ The case of *Daemonorops crinita* is a good example of Homma's transformation theory with a phase of extraction from nature, followed by cultivation and finally by substitution (Homma 1996).

2007	After more than ten rather weak years, the rubber price has reached a new maximum. In addition, both the oil palm company, as well as a coal mine in the vicinity of Lempunah offer wage labor. Rattan stocks have been largely depleted, and prices are low. New forest regulations have been passed, and illegal logging is being prosecuted severely.
2008-2014	Wage work becomes increasingly important. Some villagers get permanent jobs at the coal mine, while many others work on daily basis at the (old) oil palm plantation. During most of the years rubber remains a main income source, while the price of rattan has declined substantially. In 2013, large areas of Lempunah's forest are cleared for a new oil palm plantation (PT Borneo Surya Mining Jaya).
2015-2016	Rubber remains the main income source. The coal mine has seized its operations, while the new oil palm plantation has stopped clearing forests. Permanent jobs with the oil palm plantations are almost exclusively provided to people from outside the area, but some villagers work on daily labor regimes.

While earlier events and drivers had shaped the Benuaq's environment and socio-economic behavior maintaining a certain continuity of the general pattern, current events put this at risk. For the first time in the settlement history of Lempunah, an irreversible change of the surrounding landscape may occur, mainly driven by the rapid expansion of oil palm cultivation in Indonesia.

Expansion of Oil Palm – Impacts on Livelihoods and Earlier Conflicts

Due to the high global demand for palm oil and the respectively high export revenues, the Indonesian Government aims to increase crude palm oil (CPO) production from 22 million tons in 2010 to 40 million tons in 2020 (Obidzinski 2013), requiring a plantation area of around 15 million ha (2010: 8.385 million ha, Direktorat Jenderal Perkebunan - Kementerian Pertanian 2014). The economic considerations, as well as the involvement of district authorities in the current oil palm boom have been analyzed in detail elsewhere (McCarthy et al. 2011; Potter 2015; Rival and Levang 2014).

Regarding impacts of oil palm cultivation on rural livelihoods examples from various regions of Indonesia provide a mixed picture. While migrant workers from Java, Madura or eastern Indonesia often manage to improve their livelihoods by following oil palm schemes, local communities frequently lose

out (Anderson 2013; Colchester and Chao 2013; McCarthy 2010; Pambudhi et al. 2004; Potter 2015). Villagers – especially the less educated and poor – are commonly left ignorant of contractual arrangements, including payment schemes, and end up without land and without income. Others, not seldom village leaders and local entrepreneurs, quickly adapt and benefit from the new opportunities, be it from paid jobs, compensation payments or direct investment into oil palm cultivation. Hence, the expansion of oil palm plantations may widen social gaps and erode social cohesion.

This general pattern was also observed in Lempunah and its neighboring villages, which the oil palm boom had reached in 1995 with the arrival of PT London Sumatra. Based on a mere recommendation letter of the governor of East Kalimantan at the time, the company had illegally started to convert forest lands, including hundreds of forest gardens into plantation land. Soon a severe conflict developed which led to the months-long occupation of the company's base camp and the violent intervention of special police forces in 1999 (see Gönner 2002; Haug 2014). The conflict had severely undermined social coherence in Lempunah and its neighboring villages. Especially people with few land resources wanted to join the plantation scheme¹⁵, while others who owned many forest gardens rejected the company. A partial schism divided the community, and the conflict led to arson in people's forest gardens during the drought of 1997/98 in order to clear the land of those who were not willing to give it up (Gönner 2000). However, in contrast to all its neighboring villages, Lempunah managed to keep its mosaic forest from 1995 until 2013. Eventually, strong community leadership, support of NGOs, as well as a detailed map of almost 1,000 forest gardens created a significant barrier for the company to enter.¹⁶ After the escalation of the conflict in 1999, the company had temporarily stopped its operations also due to the financial crisis of 1998 (see Casson 2000), and because of (temporary) lack of support by the newly decentralized regency of Kutai Barat, then dominated by Dayak representatives. In an interview in April 2005, a manager of London Sumatra still considered giving up the production plans despite the significant investments (US\$ 22 million, see Haug 2014) over the previous ten years. However, PT London Sumatra's three local branch-companies remained in the district and resumed operations, especially after a CPO factory had opened in Kutai Barat in 2011 (Haug 2014), and initial

15 The foreseen scheme was a so-called *plasma-inti* (satellite-core) scheme (PIR) as explained in McCarthy 2010. Mainly households outside of the first order social network (see above) opted for the oil palm company. Some of them had married into Lempunah and, thus, owned much fewer forest gardens compared to the long-term residents.

16 See the more detailed description of the mapping process and its consequences in Cronkleton et al. 2008.

uncertainties of decentralization had disappeared in favor of enhanced expansion of oil palm plantations.

Despite the earlier conflict between villagers of Lempunah and PT London Sumatra, in 2002/03 more than 20 persons – mainly women and youths – worked as day laborers for the very same company substantially contributing to the respective household income. This figure remained rather constant until 2015, including also members of those families who had originally resisted the oil palm company most during the conflict of 1995-99.

The pioneer phase of the oil palm boom in Indonesia, including many cases as the one described for Lempunah, had led to massive international critique and pressure on the sector. As a direct reaction, various (initially voluntary) standards, such as the RSPO (Round Table for Sustainable Palm Oil)¹⁷ or ISPO (Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil) were developed in cooperation with international NGOs, aiming to consider the rights and demands of local people more adequately while adhering to the principles of sustainability. While in general, oil palm companies behave slightly better today than twenty years ago, the ongoing expansion of oil palm cultivation in Indonesia is far from being without conflict. In 2012, the Indonesian Land Agency BPN (*Badan Pertanahan Nasional*) registered some 8,000 land disputes in the agrarian sector, of which about half are related to oil palm (Colchester and Chao 2013: 9). In Lempunah, this moderate change of attitude and behavior, but also the remaining deficiencies of the oil palm sector can be seen in the development of the last years.

A New Company Appears on the Scene

In 2010, PT Borneo Surya Mining Jaya¹⁸ (in the following called PT BSMJ), received an oil palm concession area of 11,210 ha¹⁹, including large parts of Lempunah's territory. Land-rights conflicts soon developed in Muara Tae and Ponak, two neighboring villages of Lempunah (Borneo Project 2012²⁰). In 2013, forest clearing expanded to the territory of Lempunah, and by October 2014, the

17 See <http://www.rspo.org>

18 The company belongs to First Resources Ltd, listed at the Singapore Stock Exchange.

19 The Decree of Regent of Kutai Barat No. 525.26/K.037/2010 dated January 21, 2010 grants a location permit (*Ijin Lokasi*) to PT Borneo Surya Mining Jaya with total area of 11,210 ha located in Muara Nayan Village, Pentat Village, Lempunah Village, Ponak Village, and Kenyanyan Village. The current Plantation Permit (*Ijin Usaha Perkebunan*) falls under the Decree of Regent of Kutai Barat No. 525.26/K.935b/2010 dated on November 22, 2010 with the same area.

20 <http://borneoproject.org/updates/rspo-fails-to-act-as-muara-tae-is-destroyed>. The case is being tracked by RSPO, see <http://www.rspo.org/members/complaints/status-of-complaints/view/21>.

formerly intact mosaic forest of Lempunah was substantially fragmented, although several larger areas, including the immediate vicinity of the village still remained untouched. According to the former village head and main opponent of PT London Sumatra, no serious conflicts had developed in Lempunah until February 2016²¹ as PT BSMJ had only cleared land agreed upon by the community and forest gardens close to the village were left intact. In addition, dirt roads were constructed by the company upon request of the villagers to allow better access to their swiddens and to a forest spring.

By February 2016, the area cleared in Lempunah by PT BSMJ had not been extended further. However, the initial hopes of the local people had also not yet come true. Neither had the company paid all pending compensation claims, nor offered permanent jobs to local people. Like in many other areas of Indonesia outsiders were preferred as permanent staff. Also the smallholder scheme (on 20 percent of the concession area, see TÜV Nord undated: 27) promised earlier had not yet been initiated.²²

As part of the company's obligations under the RSPO certification system²³, 379.21 ha of so-called high conservation value forest (HCV) were identified in May 2012 and demarcated with sign posts. The HCV includes riparian forest along Ohookng River, forest springs, graveyards, and traditional conservation areas. The identified location coincides with the area most rich in biodiversity (Gönnér 1999, 2002), and the identification process is well documented (TÜV Nord undated). TÜV Nord (undated: 27) claims to have followed the free, prior informed consensus (FPIC) principles stated in the RSPO criteria during the identification process. However, villagers were surprised when they read the sign posts erected around the largest HCV stating that neither swidden agriculture nor hunting was allowed inside as the particular HCV²⁴ was basically confined to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Yet, as the Principles and

21 Interviews were conducted in Lempunah in October 2014, and by telephone on 31 October 2015, as well as on 13 February 2016.

22 Decree 525/645/Hk-TU.P/VI/2012, 25 June 2012 issued by the Regent of Kutai Barat request the allocation of 20% of the concession area to local people. This scheme, sometimes referred to as *satu atap* ([under] one roof, see Potter 2015, p. 21), is favouring the companies compared to the earlier 70:30 *Plasma Inti Rakyat* (PIR) scheme, though is still unclear what the exact smallholder regime considered by PT BSMJ would be.

23 According to the website of First Resources Ltd (<http://www.first-resources.com/>) accessed on 31 October 2015, none of the holding's plantations holds an RSPO certificate. However, it is stated that RSPO certification is intended. In addition, the company had published its own policy on sustainable palm oil at http://www.first-resources.com/upload/file/20150630/20150630105141_79375.pdf.

24 This HCV forests falls under Category 1 and 4. HCV1: areas containing globally, regionally or nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity values (e.g., endemism, endangered species); HCV4: areas that provide basic services of nature in critical situations (e.g., watershed protection, erosion control) (RSPO undated).

Criteria of RSPO state, “great care needs to be taken to ensure that communities retain access to adequate land and resources to secure their basic needs; all such relinquishment of rights must be subjected to their free, prior, and informed consent” (RSPO 2013: 22). Quite obviously, this principle has not yet been fully met.

Lempunah’s Vision

When interviewed in October 2014, most people in Lempunah welcomed the new oil palm company. The attitude of PT BSMJ was clearly different compared to London Sumatra almost twenty years earlier, and – at least in Lempunah – no larger conflicts had occurred so far. Despite the irritation about the strict protection of the high conservation value forest, villagers appreciated the new forest roads and the protection of an important forest spring. In general, people hope to keep essential parts of their forest for livelihoods, such as swiddens, rubber and rattan gardens, as well as *simpukng* forest gardens in the vicinity of the settlement, while utilizing at the same time the new opportunities offered by the company, such as new jobs, income for independent smallholders, compensation for converted forest gardens, as well as improved infrastructure and better healthcare. As elsewhere in Indonesia, especially the younger generation longs for a modern, rather urban lifestyle, including motorbikes, smart phones, internet and fashion with the associated demand for cash (e.g. Pambudhi et al. 2004; Rival and Levang 2014), and, thus, experience the ‘pulling’ character of oil palm companies (Pambudhi et al. 2004). But they also grew up living in and from the forest. They experienced the pleasures of a feast after planting rice, and the taste of smoked game after a laborious but joyful group harvesting day (*ngotapm* - Benuaq language) out on the platform of their field hut. Their lifeworld still includes the highly social participation in curing *beliatn* rites or *kwangkai* mortuary rituals, and many want the best of both worlds, the provisioning services of the forest, and health, education and good income.

2.4 Conclusions – Is there a Change of Tides?

As discussed elsewhere (Gönner, 2002, 2011) the ‘extended subsistence’ of the Dayak Benuaq has created a mosaic landscape in Lempunah over more than 300 years with patches of succession forest of various ages interspersed with hundreds of forest gardens (rattan, rubber, and mixed *simpukng* fruit gardens).

Biodiversity assessments revealed a high level of avian and mammalian diversity comparable to old secondary forest (Gönner 1999). Hence, Lempunah's mosaic forest can be considered, similar to (agro-) forest gardens elsewhere in Indonesia as a sustainable land-use model balancing socio-economic needs, biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The Benuaq's mode of livelihood proved to be resilient in the sense that the general pattern of 'extended subsistence' persisted despite the manifold events and stressors described above. In fact, the latter rather had widened and shaped the portfolio than destroyed it – clearly a form of continuity under change. In addition, social cohesion also remained relatively intact with little in- or out-migration over the last twenty five years, a high level of mutual help in agricultural activities, and – compared to most other regions of Borneo – a still vivid ritual life.

This continuity is now at risk. While in the past, pressures had mainly affected groups of plant or animal species, such as rattans, timber or tortoises without destroying habitats and landscapes irreversibly, the severe land-use changes observed since the clear-cutting for the HTI-Trans in the early 1990s constitute a different quality of change. Although hunting may have brought individual species to local extinction (such as the Sumatran Rhinoceros that was last observed near Lempunah in the 1980s), and logging certainly had led to habitat degradation, the transition from a still highly diverse mosaic forest to an oil palm plantation or, even more extreme in Lempunah's vicinity, to open pit mining is an irreversible shift between two very different systemic states putting an end to any type of resilience.

Even assuming Lempunah's vision comes true and a 'patchwork landscape' (Koh et al. 2009, cited in Potter 2015: 23) develops comprising agroforest elements, swiddens and intensive oil palm plantation, the *umaq* or swidden may play a very different role compared to today. Until the forest clearing started in 2013, old-growth forest (*bengkar*, *kerengkakng*) offering fertile soil was still sufficiently available around Lempunah; old forests which are now lost due to clearing or strictly protected under the HCV scheme. The envisaged patchwork landscape will only leave relatively young fallow forest or bushland for preparing swiddens. A certain trend towards using younger fallow forest, such as *babar* (1 year old) or *kwakoq* (2-10 years old) for swiddening was already observed over the last years (e.g. in 2014), as it allows the combination of wage labor, swiddening and forest use (as in the vision). Access to such forest is typically easier (closer to the village) and the preparation takes less effort, also in terms of group work. On the other hand, using younger fallow forest for an *umaq* also means lower yields (Gönner 2002, p. 101). Hence, having mainly the economic return of land use in mind, some authors expect farmers to ultimately

switch from such ‘patchwork landscapes’ to monocropping oil palm (Koh et al. 2009, cited in Potter 2015, *ibid.*; Rival and Levang 2014: 36-38). This argument is also in line with Rist et al. (2010) and Feintrenie et al. (2010) who emphasize the higher economic returns of smallholder oil palm cultivation (e.g. compared to rubber agroforestry and wet rice cultivation in Sumatra). However, the authors do admit that the long-term prospects and vulnerability of farmers, e.g. due to price fluctuation, remain unclear (also cf. Cramb et al. 2009). In any case, the *umaq* as the traditional economic safety-net is at risk, while it is uncertain whether other strategies of reducing the household’s economic vulnerability will be available instead. Yet, the *umaq* is more than just an economic safety-net. It has been the center of the Benuaq’s lifeworld for centuries. Families used to spend the biggest part of the year with activities related to the *umaq*. Back in 1996, the most common answer in a survey among adults in Lempunah regarding the most important goal in life was ‘a successful swidden providing sufficient food’ (Gönner 2002: 90 footnote 2), and for most families, a successful rice harvest still is the precondition to (co-)host a large ritual, such as a *kwankai* or a *nalitn/guguq*. However, the importance of the *umaq* as the spiritual, social and economic center of the Benuaq’s lifeworld is eroding quickly. A lifeworld that encompasses far more than just livelihoods: a cultural landscape, including sacred sites, the oral history of space, cultural identity, religion, and, last but not least, a unique (agro-) biodiversity are at stake.

In the discussions held in October 2014, it became clear that the people in Lempunah are aware of this threat, and given the resource use and conflict history of Lempunah and its neighboring villages, it is not surprising that the villagers opt for further enrichment of their ‘extended subsistence’ portfolio instead of only choosing or rejecting the oil palm option. However, the addition of oil palm to the Benuaq’s ‘resource longhouse’ comes at a higher risk than any former expansion of the livelihood portfolio (e.g. by integrating rubber or rattan as cash crops). The risk is at least twofold. The ‘pulling’ elements of an oil palm scheme, the – at first glance – economic advantages, the promises of a modern life, the increasing need for cash constitute a driving force for individuals who may want this change for very personal and legitimate reasons. A driving force that may lead to the ‘self-reinforced dismissal of the swidden’ observed by Cramb et al. (2009: 329) throughout Southeast Asia. The second risk is external and depends on the future behavior of PT BSMJ (or its future successors). Is the company ‘entering the house with just one foot’ as the former village head had once stated in a similar situation with PT London Sumatra, or is it more likely that the company will slowly but surely convert all of Lempunah’s forests into a ‘sea of oil palm’? Both pathways are likely to be intertwined, pulling and pushing the future development of Lempunah.

So, how realistic is the vision of a ‘patchwork landscape’? How realistic is it that PT BSMJ will not enter Lempunah ‘with both feet’?

If one compares the attitude and behavior of PT London Sumatra in 1995-99 with PT Borneo Surya Mining Jaya in 2013-15 several important differences can be observed. PT BSMJ conducted a sincere and professional analysis of potential HCV forest areas, involving local representatives through an international auditing company.²⁵ Despite the short-comings reported above, the company applies most principles and criteria of the RSPO standard in Lempunah. Existing land-rights conflicts with the nearby local communities of Muara Tae and Ponak are being mediated and documented in a more transparent way than during the conflicts with PT London Sumatra, basically following the procedures of the RSPO, although the conflict has not yet been resolved (as of October 2015).²⁶ Culturally important sites, such as graves and forest springs were spared from conversion and included sufficient buffer forest around these locations. Old-growth forest and trees important as honey trees (*Koompassia excelsa* Becc. Taub.) were exempted from clearings, although it remains to be seen whether bees keep using those trees now often standing alone.²⁷

On the other hand, so far, only some 25 percent of the area allocated have been cleared by PT BSMJ, and more severe conflicts may lie ahead, similar to the ones in the neighboring villages.²⁸ Unfulfilled expectations of the villagers in terms of sparing forest and forest gardens close to the settlement, compensation payment, and the promised smallholder scheme may further aggravate the situation.

What could be factors to ensure that oil palm cultivation does not necessarily replace existing forms of land use? As Anderson (2013) states, it remains to be seen whether traditional land rights are being better acknowledged under international auspices compared to the frontier behavior of oil palm companies during the first phase of oil palm companies during the mid-1990s. Given the high risk communities face in such an arrangement, intensive communication among the parties involved, clear and transparent rules (including FPIC²⁹), the

25 Though see the shortcomings in terms of communicating the HCV to the entire community.

26 <http://www.rspo.org/members/complaints/status-of-complaints/view/21> accessed on 31 October 2015.

27 The protection of honey trees was discussed and promised during the HCV discussions (see TÜV Nord, p. 23).

28 According to the plans of PT Borneo Surya Mining Jaya, large areas of Lempunah’s forest will be cleared in the next years (TÜV Nord, p. 11).

29 FPIC is not required by the new national ISPO standard (see <http://www.ispo-org.or.id>).

sincere recognition of traditional land rights, fair smallholder schemes³⁰, good (local) political governance, sufficient agricultural extension services, adequate and sensitive attitude on the companies' side, close and independent monitoring, possibly by NGOs, as well as formalized mediation and arbitration procedures are indispensable preconditions for any kind of co-existence between smallholder oil palm cultivation and traditional forest use.

Like many other communities throughout Indonesia, Lempunah clearly is at a crossroads. Whether the community will be given the chance to fulfil its own vision of achieving better livelihoods through adding oil palm cultivation to its 'resource longhouse', remains to be seen. The overall trends of modernisation and commercialisation of land use are not very promising. On the other hand, Lempunah has shown remarkable and highly adaptive continuity of its livelihood patterns in the face of a constantly changing world and successfully resisted earlier attempts of large-scale forest conversion. The community's flexibility, its relatively high social cohesion and conflict history, as well as its clear vision may provide a fair chance for a self-determined path as an alternative to the usual trend of replacing existing and well-functioning livelihood systems with monocropped oil palm.

The sea of oil palms might be rough, but the people of Lempunah are skilled surfers on the waves of opportunities, at least, as long as such opportunities exist.

30 See the literature on implications and requirements of the various smallholder schemes including recommendations in Colchester and Chao 2013; Cramb 2013; Feintrenie *et al.* 2010; Lee *et al.* 2014; Li 2015; Potter 2015; Rival and Levang 2014.

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