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Where Policy and Culture Collide: Perceptions and Responses of Swidden Farmers to the Burn Ban in West Kalimantan, Indonesia

Abstract

Catastrophic uncontrolled fires are a leading social-environmental challenge that now occur even the humid tropics. In 2015 extensive Indonesian peatland fires commanded national and international attention and resulted in a ban on all burning in the country extending to traditional farmers practicing small-scale fire-based agriculture on mineral soils. However, the impacts of, and responses to, the ban on these fire-dependent communities is not well understood. Understanding the mental models of communities exposed to environmental change, and its corresponding policy responses, can provide salient insights into the place-based experience of change to identify contested perceptions and serve to improve the distributional equity of associated impacts. We assessed the mental models of Dayak farmers in Kapuas Hulu, Kalimantan, in three distinct landscape contexts: i) oil palm (OP), ii) national park (NP), and iii) transition (T) sites. These locations enabled insights into how different contemporary landscape contexts and livelihood opportunities are related to experiences and coping strategies. We collected data using the Conceptual Content Cognitive Mapping approach in two communities in each landscape context (n = 24 participants per landscape), and 72 interviews in total. Results show that the NP and T sites were most similar, whilst the OP communities held distinct perceptions of fire. In addition to the agricultural value of fire, cultural and relational values are associated with fire use across sites and would be severed through fire prevention. Finally, we show that the burdens of the burn ban for farmers and forests were most pronounced in the NP

23 and T sites where farmers are most reliant on traditional agriculture, have the fewest livelihood
24 alternatives and least external support to fight uncontrolled fires.

25

26 **Keywords:** Burning fallows, swidden agriculture, peat fires, mineral soils, mental models, fire
27 policy, Dayak communities, West Kalimantan, Indonesia

28

29 **Introduction**

30 Catastrophic wildfires are a leading social-environmental challenge in Indonesia (Martin
31 2019; Tacconi and Muttaqin 2019) and are predicted to increase in extent and frequency globally
32 (Jolly *et al.* 2015). In Indonesia, their significance has been recognized at the local, national, and
33 international levels (Edwards and Heiduk 2015). In 2015, extensive uncontrolled fires occurred
34 on Indonesian peatlands, covering at least 875,000 hectares (Peat Restoration Agency 2016).
35 Transboundary toxic haze arising from the burning peatland disrupted the economy, school
36 provision, and burdened the public health and daily freedoms of the local and regional
37 population (Glauber 2016; World Bank 2016). The haze induced approximately 100,000 cases of
38 premature death and significant long-term irreversible health defects (Kopplitz *et al.* 2016; Uda *et*
39 *al.* 2019). During the event, carbon emissions from burning peatlands surpassed those of the
40 entire European Union (Huijnen *et al.* 2016). The transboundary nature of the haze affected the
41 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region including Singapore and Malaysia,
42 which put diplomatic pressure on Indonesia to take action (Kapoor and Da Costa 2015).

43 The severity of the 2015 mega-fire event prompted the Government of Indonesia to
44 initiate a number of policy responses, including a ban on all use of fire in land management
45 (Presidential Instruction no. 11/2015) (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia 2015).

46 Although motivated by and targeted to mitigate the extensive peat fire and (toxic) haze problem,
47 the instruction blanket ban thus included fires on mineral soils used by small-scale traditional
48 swidden farmers (Oeji 2016; Sutan 2016). The swidden mineral soil system is distinct from the
49 diverse contemporary forms of land management in terms of its agricultural management and
50 associated actors that now occupy peatland frontiers and are associated with peat fires.

51 Swidden agriculture involves rotational land clearing with a slash-and-burn technique
52 (locally called *tebang dan bakar*) (Colfer *et al.* 2015). The practice is contested, and
53 representations are polarized, from those that stigmatize swidden as a ‘backward’ land
54 management technique (Dove 1983; Kull 2004; German 2010) to those that advocate its
55 contribution to biocultural diversity and local food autonomy (Perfecto and Vandermeer 2010;
56 Padoch and Pinedo-Vasquez 2010). Across the tropics, fire-based agriculture is critical for local
57 food security yet access to fire is potentially threatened by panacea approaches and conservation
58 policies (Carmenta *et al.* 2019). Indeed, policy targeting is a key requirement of effective and
59 equitable environmental governance, panacea responses are ill-advised (Ostrom 2007; Jefferson
60 *et al.* 2020), and fire-prohibiting policies have created adverse outcomes in other contexts.
61 Perverse outcomes have included creating more illicit conditions surrounding burning to the
62 extent that burning becomes riskier for farmers (Kull 2004; Carmenta *et al.* 2019), favoring
63 ecologies that themselves are more fire-prone (e.g., see Rai *et al.* (2019) and introducing
64 sanctions for burning that create ethical dilemmas (Carmenta *et al.* 2020). In these ways, the burn
65 ban has potentially important implications for the agricultural practices, food security, and
66 livelihoods of mineral soil farmers engaging in small-scale swidden practices.

67 In Indonesia, Dayak indigenous communities living throughout West Kalimantan have
68 been practicing swidden agriculture on mineral soils over generations (Conklin 1961; Siahaya *et*

Commented [dB1]:

69 *al.* 2016). Neither the impacts of the ban on these fire-dependent communities nor the coping
70 strategies mobilized by Dayak farmers in response are well understood. Understanding the
71 mental models of farmers exposed to environmental change (i.e., increasing fire risk associated
72 with landscape change and climatic events) and its policy responses can provide salient insights
73 into the place-based experiences of and responses to that change. Further, it can remedy a lack of
74 congruence between policy and practice that can otherwise be propagated, for example through a
75 misunderstanding of the local realities of small-scale farmers, their fire use, and management
76 practices (Carmenta *et al.* 2011; Thung 2018). We assessed the mental models of Dayak farmers
77 in Kapuas Hulu, Kalimantan, in three distinct landscape contexts, close to: i) oil palm, ii)
78 protected areas, and iii) transition sites (i.e., mosaic of forest and oil palm). The locations
79 enabled insights into how different contemporary landscape contexts and livelihood
80 opportunities associated with oil palm transitions are related to place-based fire experiences and
81 coping strategies. Understanding the perceptions of Dayak farmers in relation to the burn ban
82 can generate new knowledge that could inform more equitable, nuanced, and targeted policy
83 responses to be formulated in the different landscape contexts that we address.

84

85 **Methods**

86 **Mental Models**

87 The information, perceptions, opinions, and ideas that a person holds are collectively
88 known as mental models, which help us navigate and make sense of our world. Although mental
89 models are held by individuals, they are formed through the social interactions of community
90 members in a particular place with similar social, cultural, and environmental experiences
91 (Quinn 2005, 2011). Mental models provide knowledge of specific phenomena, offer guidelines
92 to interpret various situations and indicate the framework that people use to explain how the

93 world works (Roskos-Ewoldsen *et al.* 2006; Jones *et al.* 2011). They are the basis for the
94 establishment of social norms that in turn influence decision-making processes, including
95 decisions related to natural resource management (NRM) (Halbrendt *et al.* 2014; Gray *et al.*
96 2015; Bennett 2016). Understanding others' mental models can be challenging, however, since
97 people may not be conscious of the full range of details. NRM scholars and practitioners have
98 assessed mental models to help address and mediate contested perceptions around resource use
99 and improve the equitable distribution of burdens related to environmental change, resource
100 access, or policy responses among stakeholder groups (Carlton and Jacobson 2016; Friedrichsen
101 *et al.* 2017). A recent review of techniques to reveal mental models through cognitive mapping
102 strategies suggests the exercise has value in helping people understand their own ideas and the
103 nature of conflicts (Biedenweg *et al.* 2020).

104 Mental models often include three dimensions: *corpus*, *praxis*, and *kosmos* (Toledo 2002;
105 Barrera-Bassols and Zinck 2003). *Corpus* focuses on local cognitive systems and perceptions.
106 *Praxis* focuses on procedural strategies, for example the practices associated with the use and
107 management of natural resources, and can include adaptation strategies (e.g., following
108 environmental or policy change) (Barrera-Bassols and Zinck 2003; Vuillot *et al.* 2016). *Kosmos*
109 focuses on local belief symbols and rituals and includes the interaction between values and social
110 relations that contribute to cultural and spiritual identity (Rappaport 1979; Toledo 2002; Lewis
111 and Sheppard 2005). *Kosmos* is related to the community's understanding of the role of spiritual
112 beings mediating the relationship between humans and non-humans in a given landscape
113 (Johnson 1992). By using a framework grounded in the dimensions of *corpus*, *praxis*, and
114 *kosmos*, mental models then give an insight into the different dimensions of reality as understood
115 and practiced by the participants. Understanding the connections among these dimensions in

116 mental models is important to understanding decision-making processes within a group and
117 assists interpretation of responses to environmental or policy changes (Abel *et al.* 1998;
118 Kolkman *et al.* 2005). Differentiating among these dimensions enables identification of cultural
119 flexibility that could suggest ways the community could adapt to a policy response, and ways in
120 which policy interventions can be designed to be more equitable. Mental models can also
121 provide an overview of stakeholders' perceptions of the cause-and-effect dynamics of a NRM
122 phenomenon and the interaction of policy in a complex social-ecological system (Jones *et al.*
123 2011; Elsayah *et al.* 2015; Prager and Curfs 2016).

124

125 **Conceptual Content Cognitive Mapping (3CM)**

126 3CM is a methodological tool to gather information on the mental models held by
127 individuals and communities (e.g., see Kearney and Bradley (1998); Kearney *et al.* (1999);
128 Tikkanen *et al.* (2006); Kant and Brubacher 2008) and to explore how individuals embedded in a
129 place think about and experience resource management problems and policy interventions
130 (Biedenweg and Monroe 2013). It provides an opportunity for participants to explore and
131 articulate their own perceptions through the combination of selecting and grouping cards and
132 interviews to enhance equity in environmental governance (Bennett 2016). As well as using
133 3CM, we also practiced participant observation during our stay with our study communities,
134 taking part in farming activities to gain farmers' trust and systematically record their farming
135 practices.

136 We used a structured 3CM method with a set of cards which each had a color photograph
137 and a label in the Indonesian language making it easier for participants to focus on exploring,
138 visualizing, and organizing their own perceptions of the burn ban phenomenon. The card set (see
139 Supplementary Material Table 1) ranged from the external agents involved in implementation

140 and enforcement of fire policy (e.g., police, government, etc.) to the traditional agricultural
141 practices of the farmers (e.g., rituals, type of fallow, etc.). The set of cards was determined
142 following a literature review and interviews with relevant stakeholders (e.g., academics in the
143 field, NGO representatives, and community members). We was then tested the refined set of
144 cards through three focus groups in a neighboring community with similar characteristics (e.g.,
145 rural Dayak farmers subject to the burn ban).

146 Cognitive mapping strategies can use as few of 14 participants (Biedenweg *et al.* 2020),
147 but typically range from 30 to 50 (Hundemer and Monroe 2020). Individuals are asked to select
148 the cards that are most meaningful to them, but if each person has a set of cards, groups of
149 people may engage in this technique at the same time. Follow up discussions where participants
150 explain their groupings are more effective with individuals. Data can be analyzed by coding
151 similarities and understanding themes or by quantitative analysis. We conducted individual
152 interviews with 12 participants in each of six villages and used both thematic and quantitative
153 analysis to discern trends and similarities. Based on the concepts of saturation and “information
154 power,” (Malterud *et al.* 2016) coupled with our mental model framework, we felt that 72
155 participants provided sufficient information in each of the participating communities.

156 We followed the procedure as explained by Kearney (2015): we first proposed a specific
157 scenario to each participant (n = 72): “Imagine that you are telling someone from another
158 community about your experience. What things would you want them to know about how your
159 community perceives the burn ban?” Next, we asked participants to select cards from the set of
160 50 and group them into themes that represented their answers. No specific guidelines were given
161 to specify the number of groups (i.e., the collections of similar themed cards), or the number of
162 cards in each group. For example, a participant may choose a "police" card derived from the

163 theme "implementation and enforcement" to be combined with a "type of fallow" card derived
164 from the theme "traditional agricultural practices." The cards selected and their groups represent
165 the structured knowledge and interpretation of the burn ban held by the respondent. We asked
166 each participant follow-up questions after the scenario placements to enhance our understanding
167 of the logic connecting the groups.

168

169 **Study Population and Sampling Framework**

170 Data were collected by the lead author over seven weeks in June and July 2017 in six
171 communities in Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The region offered an ideal case for
172 understanding the implications of the burn ban since its experienced implementation, and
173 advocacy campaigns led by police officials with the explicit warning: "Do not burn forest and
174 land. Burners will be sentenced to 15 years and a fine of IDR 15 billion (\pm USD 1,000,000;
175 2018)." The region is a mosaic of landscapes emblematic of its frontier nature, with distinct
176 configurations of extents of oil palm and protected land that allowed us to explore how these
177 different land uses and associated livelihood opportunities are related to perceptions and
178 responses to the burn ban. We selected two communities living close (\sim 15 km) to a National
179 Park, two communities living close (\sim 15 km) to extensive oil palm plantations, and two
180 communities living in transitional areas (i.e., an area in the middle of the main route between the
181 National Park and an oil palm plantation, with a landscape that is a combination of (mainly)
182 forests and plantation crops (National Park, Oil Palm, and Transitional communities hereafter).
183 The main source of livelihood for the National Park and Transitional communities is farming
184 alongside other uncertain sources of income such as selling forest products and rubber latex. The
185 main source of livelihood for the Oil Palm communities is working as laborers in oil palm

186 company plantations in addition to farming and selling crops or forest products. This selection
187 provided the variation of context in reliance upon agriculture and access to alternatives,
188 important factors in shaping responses to the burn ban (van Vliet *et al.* 2012; Rogers 2016).
189 Within each community, participants were selected with purposive sampling (Guest 2015),
190 which we are is appropriate because we were interested in capturing the responses of key
191 informants from both male and female farmers and customary and administrative community
192 leaders to enhance our understanding of the diversity of perceptions of the burn-ban. In each
193 community we selected 12 respondents from these four categories (Table 1).

194

195 **Data Analysis**

196 We analyzed 3CM data using Hierarchical Clustering (Johnson 1967) through
197 Anthropac's average linkage clustering procedure, which computes the average similarity
198 distance matrix between cards and visualizes them in Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) patterns
199 (Aldenderfer and Blashfield 1984; Borgatti 1996). Each MDS pattern indicates the relevance of
200 cards that were important to the participants and this forms the basis and representation of the
201 mental models (Kearney and Kaplan 1997). We collected mental model data from individuals
202 within six communities in different landscape contexts, which we then aggregated to the
203 community level to afford an understanding of the collective perceptions and practices and to
204 enable inter-community comparison. We analyzed a variety of MDS patterns and selected the
205 solution that created three groups based on the average number of card groups formed by the
206 participants. Participants chose an average of 22 cards out of 50 cards and typically arranged
207 them into three (70%) or four (30%) groups. Each group of cards can include any of the
208 dimensions of corpus, kosmos, and praxis with a moderate number of cards (± 5) to provide
209 clarity of interpretation.

210 We analyzed the data from the different communities separately to explore whether
211 communities varied in the way they perceived and were impacted by the burn ban. As with other
212 semi-quantitative approaches to understanding stakeholder perceptions, the researcher has a
213 significant role in determining the final solution, based on case knowledge and the coherence of
214 the groups. Despite the limited number of participants, we used the answer from the follow-up
215 questions and fieldnotes as the basis of analysis in order to provide the details of explanation
216 required by this study. The questions and scenario were about the condition of their community
217 rather than of the individual, so that the answers analyzed can be considered to represent the
218 community's perceptions. This is supported by the results of the competence matrix analysis
219 from Anthropac that indicated that all participants in each category belong to a single culture
220 (Table 2).

221

222 **Results**

223 Respondents across sites selected on average 21 to 23 cards to be grouped, namely
224 National Park sites (n=23), Oil Palm (n=21), and Transitional (n=22). In each site type, 3CM
225 analysis identified three distinct clusters (themes) representing how perceptions of the burn ban
226 were organized in the mental models of community members (Fig. 1). Many of the cards within
227 the clusters were consistent between sites, allowing for a consideration of the emergent thematic
228 resulting from this broad overlap. The thematic areas associated with the three cluster themes
229 were: 1. The relational value of fire: fire as culture and identity; 2. Local institutions and
230 autonomous fire management; and 3. Impacts and a sense of injustice (Fig. 1, Table 3). Although
231 these commonalities pervade, some specific differences associated with the sites and landscape
232 contexts were evident.

233

234 **Cluster 1: The relational value of fire: fire as culture and identity**

235 The cards constituting Cluster 1 were common to all sites: seeds, ritual, agricultural
236 practice procedures, fire, and fertilizer (Table 2). Participants from the three sites explained that
237 knowledge about fire is an integral cultural part of their traditional intergenerational agricultural
238 practices (i.e., corpus dimension). Fire clears remnant vegetation and creates natural fertilizer
239 considered essential to support crops. The respondents also discussed the ritual significance of
240 ancestor rice seeds, seeds that have been passed down from generation to generation and must be
241 planted every year. For them, ancestor rice seeds are the personification of their fallow protectors
242 and will determine the success of the harvest. As one participant explained: “We believe it can
243 bring bad luck if we do not plant ancestor rice seeds. Even if, for example, somebody [is] getting
244 married and moving into a new house or new village, he or she will take ancestor rice seeds with
245 him or her, even if only a pinch.” Participants could not imagine how to plant rice if the fallows
246 were not cleared of remnant vegetation through fire. Several participants had tried not to burn the
247 fallows and instead relied on chemical fertilizers that were considered inferior, as they said the
248 harvest was not as good as when they burned the fallows, and they had to buy more rice to meet
249 the needs of the household.

250 Fire is important for other forms of ritual. Participants explained that after all the
251 community members have finished burning their fallows, usually in the last week of August or
252 the first week of September, they gather to perform the “washing the charcoal ritual.” This ritual
253 was mentioned in all sites. To perform the ritual, each family carries the charcoal from their
254 respective fallows to where the ritual is held. The customary leader delivers some prayers of
255 thanksgiving to the spirits. The prayers convey that the initial and most intense process in the

256 planting process has been completed. The fallows have been burned, and the remains have
257 become a useful fertilizer for the seeds of the rice. The chanting of prayers continues while the
258 community members put charcoal on their feet and then wash it away with water. As the
259 symbolic acts are completed, the farmers express hope for the next stage, which is planting the
260 rice. The ritual continues with feasting on traditional food and drink as a sign of gratitude.

261 Through the 3CM process, several observations characterized the communities living
262 close to oil palm plantations. Despite the similarities in the cards within this cluster (theme),
263 these communities had additional cards relating to oil palm, harvest, and type of fallow. This
264 result suggests that for these communities the function of fire is more than the creation of natural
265 fertilizer and ritual. These farmers work every day in company-owned oil palm plantations. They
266 have limited time to move every year to open a large fallow. As a result, they choose to manage
267 smaller fallows and only plant and harvest ancestor rice seeds. Smaller plot sizes produce smaller
268 harvests, but this is not a problem since people from these communities earn extra income from
269 their employment at the oil palm plantations. Although the size of their fallows is smaller, fire
270 remains an important tool to reduce vegetation and create fertilizer for the ancestor seeds, which
271 also serves to preserve their cultural identity. However, in Oil Palm sites, respondents contended
272 that the use of fire has decreased over time since they have more livelihood options and no
273 longer open new fallows each year.

274

275 **Cluster 2: Local institutions and autonomous fire management**

276 Cluster 2 had the most similarity in the cards representing all three sites indicating a
277 shared perspective across sites. This cluster highlights the rules in use, traditional management
278 practices, and local institutions that constitute fire management in swidden systems. It helps to

279 explain why people across sites felt the burn ban was an unnecessary intervention. Participants
280 explained that to maximize the utility of fire they follow procedural norms (i.e., *praxis*), namely
281 reciprocal cooperation to manage fire. As households select their fallows, they communicate the
282 locations to community members and organize into working groups of variable sizes, typically
283 with farming neighbors. Work groups follow reciprocal customs of exchange and cooperation.
284 As one participant explained: “If you send three people from your family to my place, tomorrow
285 I will send three people to your place. When burning the field, we cannot do it alone, we need a
286 lot of help from others [within the community].”

287 In terms of fire management, work groups serve to create fire break boundaries on each
288 side of the fallow to prevent unwanted fire spread (e.g., to adjacent rubber gardens). Fire breaks
289 are made by clearing two to three meters width of vegetation. Creating clean fire breaks is the
290 most difficult stage and requires high labor investment. Burning begins after fire breaks have
291 been established following agreed work schedules. Before burning, the farmers repurpose tanks
292 used for spraying herbicide to carry water to the burn sites. Burning begins early in the day, after
293 the damp of the night has passed, preferably on a day with some wind to help speed up the
294 burning process. Farmers analyze wind direction and start burning from the side that they deem
295 most vulnerable to fire escape (e.g., more combustible land), or that presents the most risk (e.g.,
296 next to someone else's field). The members of the work group position themselves around the
297 fallows, each with a water tank. From their vantage points they monitor where the fire may
298 spread beyond the intended boundaries.

299 Traditional fire management practices are also related to rubber tree planting and
300 customary law. The combination of swidden agriculture and rubber trees is common in all sites,
301 primarily due to the dissemination of both local and superior rubber tree seedlings initiated by

302 local agencies and NGOs. Customary laws support the efforts to contain fires from spreading
303 into assets held in rubber plantations. This customary law has established sanctions that are
304 targeted to farmers whose fires escape and damage neighboring rubber plantations. Sanctions are
305 usually in the form of a fine (that serves as compensation) and are calculated based on the
306 number and age of the damaged rubber trees. To avoid sanctions, participants explained that
307 there are social norms, rules between the farmers who want to burn their fallows and the owners
308 of neighboring rubber gardens. These rules included inviting or notifying the owners of
309 neighboring rubber plantations about the burning schedule – failing to do so can result in
310 sanctions, especially compensation if the fire spreads. Next, if the owner of a rubber tree
311 plantation has been invited or informed, he or she must be present when the adjacent owner
312 burns the fallow, to help monitor the fire since their presence annuls the need for compensation
313 should the fire spread.

314

315 **Cluster 3: Impacts of the burn ban - a sense of injustice**

316 The National Park and Transitional communities held the most similar perceptions within
317 cluster 3, whilst the oil palm communities were most distinct (i.e., shared only four of the cards).
318 This theme represents the impacts of the burn ban and the sense of injustice related to the ban
319 and its enforcement. Participants in all landscapes explained that they felt accused of being to
320 blame for the peat fire and haze catastrophe, especially in West Kalimantan. They argued that the
321 burn ban should not apply to them because they have an ancestral and cultural system that
322 regulates burning, safeguards the environment and does not damage other people. The sense of
323 injustice was further pronounced due to the ambiguity surrounding the burn ban. The ban had

324 taken various forms of implementation and created confusion and unease among local
325 communities, especially for those who are vulnerable.

326 This confusion was illustrated by the selection of cards related to police and weather in
327 the National Park and Transition Sites. In the former the card ‘national park’ was also present,
328 and participants said that police and national park officers allowed them to burn the fallows but
329 burning had to be done progressively through a sequence of smaller burns (i.e., a two-hectare
330 fallow would have to be burned over two days). However, all participants highlighted the
331 infeasibility of this solution, explaining that a successful burn is highly dependent on climatic
332 conditions. It is difficult to predict the dry days that are necessary to complete a good burn (i.e.,
333 one in which all remnant vegetation is removed) due to unpredictable weather. For the farmers,
334 the solution presented burdens including slowing the field preparation process and complicating
335 the rotation schedule for community members. They have to finish burning before the rainy
336 season comes to prevent the seeds that have been planted from rotting or not growing properly.
337 Confusion also arose when police allowed the communities living in the Transitional sites to
338 burn in small patches but with an additional condition such as only in the morning. For the
339 participants, this solution did not solve the problem because a successful burn requires the dry
340 conditions and some winds, neither of which occur in the morning.

341 The lack of adequate solutions and assistance from the state meant that across sites
342 farmers continued with their long-standing burning practices. In at least two cases, this has led to
343 conflict with the police, mainly in the Transitional communities where open fallows were along
344 the roadside and therefore easier to target. In one example, community members were burning an
345 area of land, maintaining the fire within the intended limits through customary fire management.
346 The police arrived and threatened to arrest them if the fire was not immediately extinguished.

347 Community members responded forcefully to the threat, emphasizing that fallow clearing by
348 burning supports their sole source of income and food security. In the other example, conflict
349 with policy resulted in the arrest of a community member. The police had circulated warning
350 letters banning burning the fallows along the roadside, especially on certain days in August 2016
351 in anticipation of a state official due to be passing through the region. However, community
352 members already had burning schedules and they were hurrying following weather cues and
353 time, so they continued burning. The police arrived mid-burn and some of the farmers ran away;
354 however, one person was arrested and taken to the police station. Angry community members
355 then followed and protested, demanding the release of the detained farmer. In each instance the
356 police conceded or compromised their position and excused the farmers.

357 For people living in the Transitional and National Park communities the burn ban was
358 anticipated to impact their agricultural practices, concerns which might have been heightened by
359 the presence of the police and fear of enforcement. This was represented by the harvest and type
360 of fallow cards in these two communities. In the interviews, the participants confirmed their
361 worry that the burn ban would affect their harvests. They felt they had no choice but to continue
362 to burn, but they changed the type and location of the fallows. The impact was distinct for
363 participants living close to the national park, who chose to stay in last year's fallows. They said
364 that because the fallows had been managed last year, they did not require as much fire, and so
365 would likely not attract the attention of the police: "Since there was the burn ban, I noticed that
366 many people opened the same fallow [not shifting], because the fires were not too big, but the
367 expenses for fertilizers and herbicides became bigger." There was a trade-off between harvest
368 size and avoiding police intervention. However, farmers experienced uncertainties related to

369 securing additional income if the harvest in the existing fallow was not sufficient. In this way the
370 burn ban introduced additional burdens to already marginalized small-scale farmers.

371 Other perverse outcomes included those in Transitional communities, where in response
372 to the fear of sanction, farmers began to choose plots further from the roadside – plots that were
373 typically mature fallows (e.g., five to ten years), or primary forest. Before the ban fallows were
374 routinely placed adjacent to the road (usually young fallows <5 five year) allowing for easier
375 access and harvest transportation. One swidden farmer noted: “Nowadays, many people open
376 fallows deep inside of the forest. Rarely anyone wants to open a fallow by the side of the road.
377 They fear of being caught by the police.” The farmers believed this was the best solution to
378 obtain a satisfactory harvest, as primary or older secondary forests are usually more fertile and at
379 the same time allowed the farmers to avoid the police.

380 In contrast to the Transitional and National Park communities, Oil Palm communities did
381 not express concern about the police enforcing the law. Participants said it was natural for the
382 police not to worry about their burning activities because they only open small plots and have
383 other livelihood alternatives, such as work on oil palm plantations. In addition, these participants
384 said that the palm oil companies helped them to extinguish fires by joining in mutual cooperative
385 activities to protect their adjacent oil palm plantations. The communities inform the company,
386 and the company sends the firefighters with fire extinguishers. This emphasizes that the burn ban
387 has the strongest negative implications for those already most marginalized and least resilient
388 communities, thus exacerbating existing inequalities and injustices.

389

390 **Discussion**

391 **Interpreting stable and vulnerable states in Dayak's mental models**

392 The process of selecting cards and discussing the groupings enabled the Dayak villagers
393 to articulate their ideas about farming and the burn ban. Our interpretation of their mental models
394 enables us to lend a new insight to this policy. The perceptions of community members
395 expressed in Clusters 1 and 2 represent a “stable state” on the meaning, role, and practice of fire.
396 In these stable state clusters, the three dimensions of corpus, kosmos, and praxis together denote
397 the utilities, identities, institutions, and interactions that traditional fire management creates. For
398 example, corpus is represented through hereditary and experiential local knowledge about using
399 fire to burn leftover vegetation that has been cut down to fertilize the land and kosmos is
400 represented by the function of fire as ritual and regeneration of ancestor rice seeds. For Dayak
401 communities across sites, kosmos builds on a common perception of fire as a catalyst for natural
402 fertilizers useful for ancestor rice seeds. The cultural obligation to plant ancestor rice seeds that
403 must be passed to future generations is the embodiment of belief systems where ancestor rice
404 seeds are the personification of the fallow protectors. The practice of ritual after burning the
405 fallows is a representation of the fulfillment of cosmological values related to the relationship
406 with the spirits, which in the Dayak belief system has been and will continue to be a positive
407 outcome of the burning process. Praxis is noted through aspects of community reciprocal
408 cooperation, experience of fire incidents, and customary law. These three dimensions represent
409 how the Dayak communities manage the environment in relation to traditional agricultural
410 practices. A difference was evident in Oil Palm communities where the use of fire had declined,
411 there was less dependence on fire, and oil palm afforded other livelihood possibilities and a
412 pathway to alternatives when presented with the fire ban.

413 The mental models also showed the shift in perceptions that occurred after the policy
414 change was introduced through the burn ban. This situation reflects a “vulnerable state” as
415 represented in Cluster 3. Interviews with community members highlighted feelings of injustice,
416 which arose as a result of the external disruption to the traditional stable state of corpus, kosmos,
417 and praxis in customary fire management. Additionally, the implementation of the burn ban
418 created injustices because compliance with the ban is seen as unreasonable, unrealistic, and
419 inconsistent with local corpus, kosmos, and praxis. Impact dynamics include perverse outcomes,
420 such as how the Dayak changed their agricultural practices as a result of their own negotiations
421 among corpus, kosmos, and praxis, which stem from their perception that the ban is unfair,
422 confusion, and contact with police. Communities living close to the national park had direct
423 contact with the police, which caused them to extend rotation cycles or shift field locations away
424 from fallow sites close to the road further into the forest. For Oil Palm communities, the shift
425 from permanent to semi-permanent practices was reinforced by their more diverse and more
426 stable sources of outside income.

427 The stable state has long been part of the Dayak’s daily life and culture and has been
428 impacted through exposure to the burn ban. The stable state and understanding of fire are not
429 transformed on exposure to the burn ban – as witnessed through farmers’ resistance and conflicts
430 with police officials. To retain their rightful traditional practices that have meaning for corpus,
431 kosmos, and praxis through, for example, delivering community relations and connections to
432 ancestors, ensuring food security, and providing income, Dayak communities have made the
433 decision to continue to burn despite the burn ban. When sanctions were imposed in the form of
434 threats of incarceration and fines communities successfully mobilized in protest. However,
435 particularly in the National Park and Transitional sites communities were forced into more

436 vulnerable conditions of food security, and to environmentally and economically unsustainable
437 agricultural practices.

438

439 **Insights for Future Fire Policy**

440 A simple, one-size-fits-all national policy response to environmental challenges is rarely
441 appropriate (Ostrom 2007). Rather, more targeted and nuanced interventions in polycentric
442 governance arrangements are likely a better fit, including for fire management (Tacconi 2016;
443 Jefferson *et al.* 2020). We have shown, the corpus, kosmos, and praxis dimensions of burning on
444 mineral soils in Kalimantan have stable states that do not easily shift with policy change. Our
445 results highlight that fire has significant cultural and relational value and is associated with
446 traditional agriculture and food security that banning fire infringes on. Further, we show that the
447 equity dimension of banning fire is not evenly distributed and is only viable in communities
448 engaged with oil palm production or receive support from the oil palm private sector to manage
449 uncontrolled fires.

450 Our analysis highlights ways in which policies that are more sensitive to local and
451 indigenous ways of life can be developed. By understanding the burning practices of small-scale
452 farmers across the dimensions of corpus, kosmos, and praxis, policy makers can identify
453 approaches that align better with local customs, build on local institutions for fire management,
454 and that are more equitable as a result. While mitigating uncontrolled fires is imperative,
455 recognizing that mineral soil farmers were not responsible for the peat fire and haze disaster
456 could help better target intervention effort to peat land managers and abate perceptions of
457 injustice. Interventions that enable the survival of customs (e.g., the ancestral seeds) yet serve to
458 mitigate the risk of uncontrolled fires may be more equitable.

459 Further, our results highlight that undesirable outcomes of prohibitive policy are not only
460 humanitarian but also ecological. The ban resulted in farmers relocating their fields away from
461 the road into the primary forest. Other studies have shown the direct and indirect negative effects
462 of policy prohibiting traditional farming practices with fire in different contexts (Thrupp *et al.*
463 1997; Cramb *et al.* 2009; Carmenta *et al.* 2019). Swidden communities have historically been
464 coerced to abandon their traditional practices in order to comply with conservation standards
465 rather than a recognition of the role of shifting cultivation in the persistence of biocultural
466 diversity (Padoch and Pinedo-Vasquez 2010).

467 The burn ban as top-down policy potentially exacerbates inequalities among swidden
468 communities. We show that the burn ban disproportionately affected the most marginalized
469 communities reliant on swidden agriculture for livelihoods and household food security. Another
470 law that potentially has a similar impact to the burn ban is the omnibus law on job creation
471 passed by the Indonesian government in 2020. This law has a potentially negative impact on the
472 quality of the environment through weakening legal instruments regarding environmental
473 protection (e.g., it recentralizes environmental permits and downgrades the penalties for
474 concessionaires with fire on their lands) and the rights of local communities (Indonesian Center
475 for Environmental Law 2020). The law bans all burning, including small scale traditional
476 agricultural burns thus potentially punishing traditional farmers who still use burning to clear
477 land. This law has the potential to negate the practice and knowledge of swidden agricultural
478 practices of local communities to manage their natural resources.

479 There is a need for multi-stakeholder involvement including government agencies, local
480 governments, and local communities to be directly involved in the process of formulating
481 policies on the use of fire in agricultural practices. The government needs to recognize the

482 swidden communities and their traditional rights related to traditional livelihoods through the
483 principles of sustainability, justice, and legal certainty. The participation and role of the local
484 communities, especially those that still use fire in agricultural practice, should be encouraged,
485 especially in the process of design and implementation of fire policies. The approach to
486 formulating fire policies through local wisdom-based mechanisms can be effective and efficient.
487 A potentially more sustainable and more equitable solution would be to incorporate the local
488 utility, relational value, practice, and management of fire into adapted and targeted interventions
489 (Kull 2002; Barlow *et al.* 2012; Carmenta *et al.* 2013).

490

491 **Conclusion**

492 We identified a stable state of traditional fire management perceptions that is central to
493 local livelihoods, agricultural practices, and cultural identities of Dayak communities in West
494 Kalimantan, and a chronic misfit between the burn ban and the stable state perceptions of fire
495 management are pervasive across our study sites. We show that perceptions of inequity and
496 injustice in relation to the burn ban are particularly pronounced in those communities most
497 dependent on traditional agriculture. The Dayak farmers' perception that the burn ban was
498 designed and enforced without considering their perspective contributed to their mobilization in
499 protests and ultimate rejection of the policy. Our results suggest that fire management can
500 potentially result in perverse outcomes through the instability and confusion that farmers
501 reported and suboptimal outcomes for subsistence farmers, creating negative social and
502 environmental consequences. A more flexible policy approach is required that would enable
503 small-scale mineral soil farmers to address and mitigate risks associated with fire management
504 while maintaining their traditional beliefs and practices that have been part of their socio-cultural

505 life for generations. This is particularly necessary given that the burn ban itself was in response
506 to chronic fire events that occurred in entirely different landscape dynamics on peat soils by
507 multiple actors using fire in non-swidden systems largely in pursuit of oil palm establishment.
508 The distinctions between sites in perceptions of the burn ban suggest that future research could
509 focus on understanding what other factors, in addition to location in the landscape, contribute to
510 these distinctions.

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523

524 **Informed Consent:**

525

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