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Hosted by Dr Roman Carrasco

Oil Palm Expansion in Indonesia

Assessing Livelihood and Environmental Impacts from the Smallholder Sector



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About the speaker:
Janice recently completed her PhD at ETH Zurich, Switzerland. Her main research interests are in smallholder agriculture in the rural tropics, land use change in Southeast Asia, tradeoffs between conservation and development, and sustainable certification of agricultural production. She is currently a consultant/postdoc working on oil palm expansion in the tropics.

The rising demand for palm oil has fueled a rapid expansion of oil palm agriculture in the tropics, especially in the region of Southeast Asia. Indonesia is currently the world's leading producer and exporter of palm oil as a result of a phenomenal expansion of its oil palm plantation sector. While the oil palm industry has contributed significantly to Indonesia's economy and rural development, rapid expansion of oil palm plantations has also led to major environmental impacts and social conflicts with local communities. This talk explores the impacts on livelihoods and the environment from the smallholder oil palm sector, which represents a substantial proportion of Indonesia's oil palm plantations (~40%), and experiences higher rates of expansion (11% annual increase) compared to large-scale plantations (5%). To understand how to develop the smallholder oil palm sector towards a more sustainable pathway, I ask the following questions: (1) What are the challenges faced by smallholders in sustainable certified oil palm production? (2) What are the constraints to smallholder oil palm yields and incomes? (3) What are the environmental impacts from oil palm smallholdings? (4) What are the environmental and socioeconomic outcomes from different pathways of smallholder and large-scale industrial oil palm expansion? The research presented here contributes towards a better understanding of Indonesia's smallholder oil palm sector and emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary approach towards understanding agricultural expansion in the rural tropics

