

Corruption in Social Forestry in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Social forestry is envisioned as a governance reform to empower rural communities to improve both the forest condition and their quality of life. In Indonesia, however, its implementation has been plagued by a number of governance-related issues including corrupt practices among various actors. Drawing on programs implemented in Java, we delve into the types and mechanisms by which corruption has occurred (or occurs) in various social forestry activities. Tracking experience across several phases of social forestry, the corrupt practices were initially performed among the field foresters and the higher hierarchies. These corrupt practices were later imitated by other actors, who increasingly considered them as normal and acceptable practices. In contemporary social forestry programs, corruption is conducted by diverse stakeholders, including smallholder farmers, public officials and other authorities among the bureaucracy, as well as non-government organizations. Corruption has significant bearing on policy initiatives and programmatic outcomes, as it inhibits the implementation of formal rules and norms of social forestry. Our historical tracing provides better insights into why corruption is not only a social forestry-related challenge but also a part of a larger societal problem as it has been normalized and deepened over decades.

KEYWORDS

Corruption; Community forestry; Law enforcement; Governance; Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social forestry has emerged as one of the main government policy priorities in Indonesia for rural development and sustainability. It is envisioned as a governance and tenure reform initiative in the forest sector. It focuses on distribution of the state's forest land to local communities and smallholder farmers to achieve distributive justice regarding control over the forest resources (Resosudarmo et al., 2019). In general, social forestry policy in Indonesia aims to achieve dual policy objectives, i.e. improving the wellbeing of local communities and rehabilitating the forests (Widyaningsih et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2023). Following decades of experimentation and trials, 2007 marked several new social forestry schemes for different targeted beneficiaries (either individuals, groups of farmers, or villages). The schemes have been implemented formally and were fine-tuned to incorporate different local needs. In addition, several innovations and new models have been explored to achieve the ambitious targets of 12.7 million hectares of community-controlled forests (Ragandhi et al., 2021).

However, the outcomes so far are mixed at best, and rarely support livelihood and conservation. Numerous scientific inquiries show the limited livelihood options for smallholders (Resosudarmo et al., 2019; Sahide et al., 2020a), due to the formal designs of social forestry, such as various rigid administrative and management aspects of programs and lack of participation of intended beneficiaries (de Royer et al., 2018; Erbaugh, 2019; Maryudi et al., 2022; Moeliono et al., 2023). Recent studies also

examine challenges facing social forestry implementation beyond its formal rules and norms. For instance, Kusuma et al. (2023) indicate deep-rooted corrupt practices that have hindered intended outcomes. We use this as the point of departure for our research. We specifically aim to delve into the types and mechanisms by which corruption takes place in social forestry programs in Indonesia. More specifically, we examine how corrupt practices have become acceptable daily norms, applied and adapted into various forms by various social forestry stakeholders. As Ashforth & Anand (2003) theorize, deviant actions (corrupt activities) can increasingly be seen as acceptable daily norms through routinization, rationalization (building arguments that the actions are reasonable according to normative rules), and socialization to obtain wider societal approvals (details in Section 2). In this research, corruption is broadly understood as the misuse of public authority for private gain (Siebert & Elwert, 2004; Søreide, 2007; Transparency International, 2010). It manifests in various forms, including bribery, extortion, embezzlement, manipulation, fraudulent practices, and coercion. In some cases, corruption interlinks with collusion to create rents that one may appropriate.

Scientific inquiries on corruption in the Indonesian forestry sector remain scant. The existing research is centered around the nature (types/ forms) of corruption, the actors/agencies involved, and the associated socio-economic and environmental impacts (Rasmussen et al, 2017; Santika et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020; Maryudi & Myers, 2018; Sheng et al, 2016; Williams & Dupuy, 2018). More importantly, there is a notable lack of research specifically addressing corrupt practices in social forestry (Meehan & Tacconi, 2017; Sundström, 2016). In the global context, research on corruption in social forestry is also sporadic, at best (for instance Klooster, 2000; Bulkan & Palmer, 2012; Sunam et al., 2013; Basnyat et al., 2023). Our study in Indonesia would provide a complement analysis, providing a more comprehensive understanding on the issue.

Unlike previous studies, we further traced the extent and mechanisms by which corruption occurs beyond current social forestry programs. This also covers their phases of experimentation and trials. We spotlight a case of the different phases of social forestry programs implemented in state forests in Java managed by the state company Perhutani: 1) experimentation and trials (1970s-1990s), 2) company-village co-management (1999-2017), and 3) government-administered social forestry (2017-present) (Section 3). Borrowing perspectives from sociological theories, we also explore the normalization process of corruption, where deviant behavior gets entrenched as an integral part of society, including how they build legitimacy so that corruption is considered a fair activity within society. With this historical sketch, we provide more comprehensive insights into why corruption is not only a social forestry-related challenge but also part of a broader societal problem as it has been institutionalized over decades. Our research might also provide an alternative explanation on why forest policies often fail to achieve their positive objectives, despite numerous reform attempts. Before going further, in the following section we provide theoretical considerations for our study.

2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 Definition of corruption

One of the commonly used definitions of corruption is provided by Transparency International, which defines it as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain” (Søreide, 2007; Transparency International, 2010; Siebert & Elwert, 2004). This definition entails unethical behaviors, such as embezzlement, bribery, conflict of

interest, and forgery (Gorsira et al, 2018; Rose-Ackerman, 2008; Basnyat et al, 2023). An action can be said to be corrupt if it deviates from formal duties, is 'improper' or 'non-compliant' with regulations, and aims to obtain financial benefits (rents) in the form of money or gifts from others for oneself or one's cronies (Palmer, 2005; Guerrero & Oreggia, 2008). Corruption is also considered a "leakage" of resources in the form of unofficial fees, facilitation payments or even free time from public services that should be provided for social purposes (Langseth, 2006). For example, in the forestry sector, corruption will channel forest revenues into the wrong hands and will increase the costs and risks of forest management (Irland, 2008).

There are two types of corruption: grand corruption and petty corruption. Some authors associate "one bad apple spoils the barrel" to explain that existing studies attribute the causes of corruption to "bad apples" (i.e. flawed individuals) or "bad barrels" (i.e. flawed systems structures) (Langseth, 2006; Robbins, 2000; Meehan & Tacconi, 2017; Schoeneborn & Homberg, 2016). Research that follows the "bad apples" approach generally considers that the locus of explanation is on individual agents and their self-motives, and/or limited capacity to understand the moral dimensions of corrupt practices in a given situation (Irland, 2008; Kustanti et al., 2023; Langseth, 2006). This kind of corruption is common in many places, involving payments to low-level officials to obtain licenses that should instead be granted free of charge (Sørreide, 2007; Sundström, 2016). These payments are often referred to as "facilitation payments" and are considered legitimate, or there are innumerable "checkpoint" extortions, which are individually small but represent a large cumulative burden on legitimate activities (Langseth, 2006; Irland, 2008; Sørreide, 2007; Sundström, 2016).

Meanwhile, research that follows the "bad barrel" approach tends to place the locus of explanation at the structural or systemic level, for example by investigating the structures institutionalized in a particular organizational or national context as the cause of corrupt practices being more likely to occur (Langseth, 2006; Meehan & Tacconi, 2017; Schoeneborn & Homberg, 2016). For example, a company that has been granted a forest concession (through a legitimate process) may have to pay a bribe to speed up the process of issuing the actual permit (Irland, 2008; Meehan & Tacconi, 2017; Sundström, 2016).

Petty and grand corruption are often interlinked. The former might foster a corrupt culture that eventually facilitates the latter. Conversely, grand corruption can institutionalize petty corrupt practices at lower levels, effectively embedding them into local norms (Robbins, 2000; Kustanti et al., 2023). Corruption might consist of both collusive and non-collusive actions. Collusive corruption involves collaboration and mutually-beneficial agreements between the parties involved (Smith et al., 2003; Irland, 2008). This form of corruption has a systemic impact because it includes secret arrangements designed to perpetuate corrupt practices, potentially affecting the entire system (Irland, 2008; Sundström, 2016). In contrast, non-collusive corruption occurs when corrupt practices are executed by individuals or entities independently, without coordination or agreement with others (Smith et al., 2003; Sundström, 2016).

From a legal perspective, corruption can be further categorized into: 1) corruption with legality, and 2) corruption without legality. The former occurs within the confines of a legal framework, often exploiting loopholes or ambiguities in the law to achieve corrupt objectives. The latter, in contrast, encompasses actions that clearly violate legal standards and regulations. Parties involved in collusion may manipulate ambiguities in rules to make their actions appear legitimate, thus avoiding direct legal violations (corruption with legality), or they may engage in clearly illegal activities such as bribery, coordinated fraud, or criminal conspiracy (corruption without legality)

(Basnyat et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2003). On the other hand, non-collusive corruption, in terms of legality, can involve exploiting regulations to justify actions that are ethically dubious but legally permissible (corruption with legality), or it may involve clear breaches of the law by individuals, such as bribery and embezzlement (corruption without legality) (Smith et al., 2003).

2.2 Corrupt activities in the forest sector

Corrupt activities in the forestry sector are often associated with "illegality". According to Tacconi et al. (2016), illegal forest activities are defined as "all illegal actions related to forest ecosystems, forest industry, timber and non-timber forest products.". The definition encompasses a range of activities from the licensing stage to forest management and production chains. In the context of social forestry, various activities are prone to illegality, such as preparation of a farmer group eligible for social forestry and management plans, application of a social forestry permit/ license as well as a range of management operations, harvest activities, and disposition of products (Djamhuri, 2008; Basnyat et al. 2023).

However, in the context of forest management, the term "illegality" is complicated and often ambiguous. For example, legal initiatives in the forestry sector are not always justified and some communities may accept some illegal initiatives (such as firewood collection from indigenous communities in protected areas) (Sundström, 2016). Irland (2008) points out that illegal actions often occur in contexts of poverty. They can result in "people collecting wood for building materials and firewood where it is prohibited, carelessly, recklessly and uncontrollably", due to people's ignorance of forest boundaries and the laws that bind them. A potential problem in discussing the illegality of forest management is the risk of blaming smaller parties, while larger parties are better able to hide their activities, and will continue their illegal actions (Richards et al., 2003).

On a small scale, illegal activities in forest management in Indonesia are often facilitated by corrupt practices of forestry officials (Siebert & Elwert; 2004). These practices have largely become a daily habit or the norm (Sundström, 2016). Because it involves local communities and is an integral part of their livelihoods, there will be a social development process involving traditional leadership (Kustanti et al, 2023), which is then referred to as the development of alternative norms or "rotten institutions" (Robbins, 2000) or "hidden institutions" (Basnyat et al 2023). According to this definition, corruption is no longer considered abnormal, even though it violates existing regulations according to the positive law. In this context, we understand corruption as an activity that "circumvents" the law in order to gain one-sided benefits, so that unlawful activities become commonplace (Kustanti et al., 2023). Therefore, the term "illegality" is still ambiguous and not understood by the community, which causes "petty corruption" to still occur at the local level.

Bribery and extortion are a form of petty corruption in forest management in Indonesia. Bribery is the provision of benefits, in the form of money, valuable materials or anything else to improperly influence actions or decisions either directly or indirectly (Langseth, 2006; Søreide, 2007). Bribery is the most commonly recognizable form of corruption and can be initiated by anyone, whether the community or forestry officials (Langseth, 2006; Sadigov, 2017). Communities bribe forest officials because they want to speed up any process amidst their limited understanding on the rules related to forest management, or do not want to go through normal procedures, or want to have certainty that their problems will be resolved (they will have control by maintaining access to resources and processes) (Ribot & Peluso, 2003; Guerrero & Oreggia, 2008; Basnyat et al, 2023). Meanwhile, the initiation of other forms of corruption such as

embezzlement, nepotism and extortion, relies heavily on the initiation of public officials and sometimes uses threats of violence or exposure of corrupting information to encourage cooperation (Sadigov, 2017; Langseth, 2006).

In many cases, corruption in the forestry sector flourishes because forestry officials are given enormous monopoly and discretionary powers with limited official oversight especially in remote areas, leaving very little opportunity for public scrutiny (Transparency International, 2010; Williams & Dupuy, 2018). Given the demand for bribes at the local level, it is opportunistically used by officials working under unclear rules that allow them to create abuses and can lead to another form of corruption: extortion of the public (Rose-Ackerman, 2008; Langseth, 2006). In turn, local people are victimized and made more vulnerable by these bribes and extortions. More often, they are forced to pay bribes because bureaucrats perceive them as easy targets, believing that they lack the knowledge, financial resources and social connections to refuse bribe requests (Peiffer & Rose, 2018). On the other hand, communities are forced to bribe or accept extortion from low-level officials for many reasons, including the need to obtain better services from public officials, or even to get exemptions from the application of the law (Guerrero & Oreggia, 2008). Bribery is an effective way of getting authorities to turn elsewhere who are willing to bribe them, while the community does something that should not be done (Guerrero & Oreggia, 2008).

2.3 Normalization of corrupt activities

Corrupt behavior, especially petty corruption, continues to occur in the forestry sector because it has become a habit at the local level. Petty corruption becomes an activity that is considered normal and accepted in the community, even as a way to access forest resources illegally (Kustanti et al., 2023). When viewed from a socio-cultural context, corrupt activities may not appear or be considered as corruption (de Sardan, 1999), because they are institutionalized in such a way that they appear natural as alternative norms in daily life (Robbins, 2000; Kustanti et al, 2023). Therefore, the theory of "normalization" is powerful to explain how deviant behavior is considered normal and an integral part of social life (Prabowo & Cooper, 2016).

Ashforth & Anand (2003) theorize that normalization consists of three phases: 1) institutionalization; 2) rationalization; and 3) socialization. Institutionalization of corruption generally consists of three stages, i.e. the initial act; embedding corruption in structures and processes; and routinization of corrupt activities (*ibid.*). When an act of corruption is committed for the first time in a social interaction (organization), there is likely to be cognitive dissonance among the perpetrators. Once the act is tolerated, or even condoned, it will gradually become an integral part of the memory of social interaction and daily activities and is likely to be reused in the future as a routine activity, or *vice versa* (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). For instance, lowly-paid forestry officers often accept bribes from communities seeking access to illegal forest products in order to cover their field operational costs, including patrols and other forestry activities (Ali & Nyborg, 2010; Kumer et al, 2013; Nuesiri, 2022).

When corruption has become part of the organization, the members look for ways to rationalize corrupt actions (e.g. by denials and building arguments) to be considered as reasonable according to normative rules (*ibid.*). Lowly-paid forestry officials and those who engage in bribery often justify their actions by claiming that they are not violating the law and that their activities do not harm the state. Instead, they argue that these practices facilitate or expedite forestry processes and activities (Kustanti et al, 2023; Ravenel, 2004; Siebert & Elwert, 2004).

The final phase of normalization of corrupt activities, as Ashforth & Anand (2003) argue, is socialization through co-optation, incrementalism and compromise. Co-

optation is a process by which members of an organization/society are induced (given some kind of reward) to change their perceptions and attitudes while absorbing new norms, values and beliefs instilled by the organization to maintain the existing corruption framework. New employees might be instructed by their senior colleagues on how to reduce operational costs by accepting bribes, which they may perceive as a reward for facilitating the briber's business activities (Ali & Nyborg, 2010). At the incrementalism stage, members of the organization/society are induced to gradually increase the frequency of their corrupt activities to get used to the newly acquired norms, values and beliefs. In certain regions, when bribes are perceived as gifts and there is no legal action against such gift-giving, both bribers and bribe-takers increasingly operate within this alternative norm (Ali & Nyborg, 2010; Basnyat et al., 2023).

At the compromise stage, members of the organization/society are already self-motivated and will even put their best efforts into corruption (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). Frequent receipt of bribes leads perpetrators to become accustomed to such practices. Consequently, when they do not receive bribes, they may attempt to coerce potential victims into providing them or even resort to blackmail, leveraging their authority (Grant & Billon, 2021; Kumer et al, 2013; Tacconi et al, 2019). In other words, they do not need others to instill new norms, values and beliefs, because they themselves have become the living embodiment and identity of the culture of corruption (Prabowo & Cooper, 2016).

3. BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL FORESTRY, RESEARCH LOCATION AND METHODS

3.1 The social forestry programs

Social forestry has undergone several phases. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, social forestry in Perhutani forests were centered around usufruct access to cultivate agricultural crops in between forest plants, especially in the post-harvest stage (Ragandhi et al., 2021). Formally, the farming parcels were made free for interested farmers and their distribution was directly regulated by field forest rangers (*mandors*). The mixed-cropping practices had to be abandoned after 2-3 years, and participating farmers moved to new post-harvest locations.

A formalized social forestry program was adopted in 2001. The program was named as *Pengelolaan Hutan Bersama Masyarakat* (PHBM), centered around a formal contract between Perhutani at the district level (*Kesatuan Pemangkuan Hutan/ KPH*) and a formally-registered farmer group, called *Lembaga Masyarakat Desa Hutan* (LMDH), whose membership was made exclusive for a specific village.¹ In the program, the short-term agricultural cropping was maintained; distribution of agricultural parcels was regulated by the group committee. The co-management mode also promised the so-called benefit-sharing mechanism; 25% of the company's profits from the jointly-managed forests were to be disbursed into the group (Sahide et al., 2020b). Furthermore, the co-management of social forestry enabled the participating parties (KPH and the farmer group) to agree on specific cooperation contracts/ arrangements (*Perjanjian Kerjasama/ PKS*) that were not stipulated in the main agreement.

Amidst growing concerns about limitations in the village-company joint forest management approach, two new programs were launched in 2017, directly overseen and licensed by the government (Ministry of Environment of Forestry): 1) Recognition and Protection (Kulin KK), 2) *Izin Pengelolaan Hutan Perhutanan Sosial* (IPHPS). The former is a rebrand of the company's co-management approach whereby the

¹ Cross-village membership was prohibited

government only legalizes terms and conditions (rights and responsibilities) of the participating farmer groups.² The latter, in contrast, is a social forestry permit granted by the government. It thus bypasses Perhutani as the permit holders are directly accountable to the Ministry (see Ragandhi et al., 2021). It allows cross-village membership of participating farmer groups. This permit-based social forestry has been considered to offer more secure tenurial rights to the participating groups (Ota, 2019; Rahayu et al., 2023). More importantly, it promises more benefits. For instance, it stipulates more share (70%) of the sales of main products. However, IPHPS permit holders are obligated to pay both land and harvest taxes to the state, in contrast to Kulin KK in which the taxes are paid by the state company. Farmer groups are entitled to choose either program, upon the government's approval.

3.2 Research location

We conducted our research in KPH Blitar, a Forest Management Unit (FMU) in East Java Province that manages more than 57 thousand hectares of state forests extending across three regencies, namely Blitar, Tulungagung and Malang³. KPH Blitar is also one of Perhutani's FMUs with the highest number of social forestry licenses (Kulin KK & IPHPS) in Java (MoEF, 2022). Approximately two-thirds of the forest area is classified as non-productive forest areas, while a third is covered by mainly teak (*Tectona grandis*) and a small amount of pine (*Pinus merkusii*), damar (*Agathis borneensis*) and mahogany (*Swietenia mahagony*). According to the government's indicative maps, half of the total forest area is to be included in the government's social forestry programs (MoEF, 2022). In some cases, as a part of their co-management program, local farmers have also planted fast-growing tree species and non-timber products, such as coffee, cloves, avocado, sugarcane, corn, and forage for self-consumption and commercial purposes.

The village of Sumberwono⁴ was specifically selected due to the following reasons. First, many of the village's farmers have been involved in all the phases of social forestry from experimentation and the village-company co-management (PHBM) to the current government's social forestry programs. It is our aim to present a historical sketch, showing how valuable their experience is for us to compare and contrast potential corruption practices in different phases. Secondly, the state forest within the village is uniquely administered by two different FMUs, i.e., KPH Blitar and KPH Kediri. In 2007, a farmer group named LMDH-Wonomulyo (exclusive membership of farmers living in Sumberwono) was established to participate in Perhutani's co-management social forestry. It eventually managed roughly 1,300 hectares. From our initial observation we found various types of land/ forest uses by different groups of farmers, including those from the neighboring villages, indicating potential competition among the people. LMDH Wonomulyo was later split into two new groups, i.e., LMDH-Wonosegoro (later granted with Kulin KK, a rebrand name of the co-management), and KTH-Wonogiri (granted with the permit-based IPHPS).

3.3 Methods

Preliminary fieldwork was conducted in March 2023. It was aimed at familiarizing the researchers with the case and the people, observing the general forest/ land uses by

² As continuation of the joint-management social forestry, membership of a farmer group, as previously mentioned, is exclusive for a specific village

³ In Java, forest administration does not necessarily synchronize with government administration. In some cases, there are more than one FMU within a district. In other cases, the forest area of a FMU is extended to cover more than one district. It is thus uncommon that the forest of a village administered by more than FMU

⁴ All names (place and person) in this research pseudonymized

the people. During this initial phase, contacts were also made with the Village Head, farmer groups committees, and officials from KPH Blitar to consult areas for further research exploration and identify potential key informants. The main fieldwork was conducted between October and November 2023. In this phase, we conducted face-to-face interviews and direct observations. At the village level, we interviewed a total of 30 people ranging from committees of farmer groups, the current and former village authorities, and farmers (see Table 1).

We aimed to get an understanding about the case across different phases of social forestry. For that purpose, we selected the first contacts based on two main clusters: older and younger generations. We used their referral and recommendation for the eventual informants. A similar approach was used when selecting key informants from the forest authorities with the current officials as the first contacts. Besides the local communities and forest authorities, we further interviewed sources from a non-government organization who were involved in facilitating local farmers groups to prepare the application for the social forestry programs.

The interviews heavily involved an investigation/confession-oriented approach (Walsh & Marquez, 2022) to elicit a detailed and accurate account of an event of corruption from both the victims and suspects. Due to the highly sensitive nature of corruption, we employed a psychological approach, ensuring mutual trust between interviewers and interviewees as well as a comfortable interview setting, to encourage informants to disclose sensitive information (Maryudi & Fisher, 2020). A sense of similar interviewer-interviewee background (e.g. family, origins, views on specific contemporary issues) greatly facilitated the conversation. We further convinced interviewees that the information would solely be used for academic purposes and recommendations for improvement on the current social forestry policy and practices (Babbie, 2013).

Table 1. Key Informants for each research stage

Stage	Type of interviewee	Number of interviewees
Preliminary fieldwork	Perhutani	2
	NGO	2
	Group Committees	2
	Village head	1
Main fieldwork	Perhutani	3
	NGO	3
	Group Committees	7
	Old generation farmer	4
	Young generation farmer	7
Total		30

Information was gathered and validated/triangulated through several approaches. Direct observations were conducted by participating in group/community activities. In fact, we observed several “transactions” of corrupt activities during the research. We hence ensured and maintained respectful relationships with research subjects to uphold their rights, including around well-being, safety, privacy, and justice, as well as the right not to be misled by the researcher (Kanazawa, 2018; Neuman, 2014). For instance, when a specific transaction was observed, we chose to remain silent and continued research so as not to exert social pressure on the informants (Neuman, 2014).

We further utilized *Whatsapp* communication after the fieldwork in light of new important information (such as photos and other empirical evidence of transactions) emerged. Personal experience was further useful in this research. In fact, two authors

are currently at the top management level (at the central and KPH levels) who followed their respective careers from the field level. They possess experience and deep understanding of social forestry phases as well as forest activities in the field, as well as access to sensitive data and information that are rarely made public. To avoid imbalanced power relations between the researchers and the interviewees, during the fieldwork, we introduced ourselves as students from a university, rather than persons from the forest office. We further handed the formal letter from the university for obtaining the research permit, prior to the fieldwork.

4. CORRUPT PRACTICES AND NORMALIZATION PROCESSES

4.1 Social forestry trials and the co-management program

4.1.1 Illegal land-leasing and crop-sharing levies

Since the 1970s, Perhutani (KPH Blitar) has granted short-term (2-3 year) usufruct free access of agricultural cropping on (post-harvest) compartments, in exchange of their labor for reforestation. Allocation of farming parcels were directed by the company's field rangers (*Mantris*, and more specifically *Mandors*). In our research site, demands for parcels outnumbered their availability and competition to obtain a parcel was quite fierce.

An older farmer reflected that a bribe was necessary to get a favor from the *Mandors*. Not only did this involve the informal land-lease fees, but a fraction of the harvests of agricultural commodities were also handed over to them, as either largesse or an appreciation for prioritizing them in using the forestland as opposed to other interested farmers. The practices had become new norms. The farmers cross-transferred their experience on dealing with competition for the parcels. Another farmer admitted that he did not know the formal rules of agricultural cropping in the forests but clearly mentioned the high prevalence of illicit payments:

"Of course I have made such a payment. It was common practice; it was no secret. All farmers did it. In fact, there was no way we could get a farming parcel without paying a certain amount of money. We - the farmers - had to even compete among ourselves as available parcels were limited.... It was who was willing to pay more who had the highest chance of getting it ... At the end of the day, the whole community learned that certain payments to a forest officer was required to obtain a farming parcel."

On the other hand, the *Mandors* had been tempted by the informal arrangements and saw it as a new opportunity to monetize the distribution of the formally-free farming parcels to earn extra income, despite being prohibited by the company. When confirmed, a *Mandor* did not deny such practice but attempted to provide the following rationalization:

"Look, facilitating the program covering a vast area required a lot of money, substantial financial resources. We needed money for travel as we live far from the workplace. Where did it come from? The company did not allocate any budgets. At the same time, our salaries were modest, unlikely to self-fund the travel costs".

A member of the farmers' group added that the forest officers were willing to accept the illicit payments in return for successful reforestation outcomes. Although the practices are commonly understood, we were limited in our ability to quantify the money in these transactions due to the limited documentary evidence. Nevertheless, the numbers might provide a confusing picture given inflation over the past five

decades (including the hyperinflation that occurred in the late 1990s). While we were unable to provide a more accurate estimation, it is important to underline the effects of such payments. In fact, the farmers were reluctant to abandon their farming parcels after the reforestation arrangement was initially agreed upon.

More importantly in our research context, informal lease holding had increasingly become entrenched among the farmers. The practice was prohibited by the forest office. In fact, illicit trading of farming parcels began unabated. The co-management social forestry introduced in the late 1990s was in part aimed to eradicate the practice. In fact, as stipulated in the co-management agreement with Perhutani signed in 2007, the practice is prohibited, but it continues to thrive. Land lease/sale became common, involving tens of million IDR per hectare,⁵ depending on the accessibility, slope and soil conditions. Our field observations and tracing indicated multiple changes of ownership on some farming parcels. Most farmers interviewed in this research disagreed with the notions that they traded forest lands. The wider community even considered the land lease as a social security system, i.e., a form of mutual assistance among the farmers particularly when one needed quick cash, for instance when needing to pay school tuition fees for their children. A parcel-selling farmer claimed:

"It is not trade of farming parcels, absolutely not. It is only a recompensation for our work in clearing the land to make it ready for farming activities. This has been a decades-long norm, even practiced by Mandors or Mantris. It is the same. They did, so why we wouldn't we?"

A source from the company at the KPH level reflected that such practices occurred everywhere, not only at our research site, but stating that similar justifications are common. He also admitted his inability to enforce the regulation on the ground. Interviews with a member of the farmers' group committee and a source from an NGO pointed out the lack of supervision or absence of strict sanctions. This notion was enhanced by a farmer who reflected:

"I was offered a lot by a fellow farmer...I hesitated at first but the fact that many farmers here had been doing this without facing legal sanctions persuaded me to proceed with the transaction."

The co-management social forestry helped to formalize/legalize illicit crop levies. In our research context, there is strong evidence on the normalization of corrupt activities. A company-farmer group's specific contract No 137/PKS/KPH Blitar/2007 stipulated that the company is to obtain 30% of the net profits of the crop harvests. In practice, as admitted by the group chairperson, farmers were obliged to pay roughly 240,000 IDR per hectare. He argued that it was a fair arrangement as the group was obligated to contribute to management activities, such as reforestation and forest patrols, without budget allocations. However, the farmers claimed that they were never consulted and added that the harvest levy was a unilateral decision by the group committee.

As regulated by the committee, the collected money was mainly deposited to the forest office with a small fraction distributed to the collector, village officials and as group savings (see Table 2). The public narrative built within the community is that Perhutani formally leased its forestland for agricultural cropping. The forest office denied this claim, stating that the money was allocated for formally paying the annual land tax and crop tax, which are Perhutani's obligation to the state.

⁵ In 2024, USD 1 equals to approximately IDR 15,000

Table 2. Distribution of money collected from crop harvests

No	Receiver	Portion (%)
1	Perhutani (KPH office)	77.5
2	Village officials	7.5
3	Levy collector	7.5
4	Group treasury	5.0
Total		100,0

[Source: interviews with group committee]

4.1.2 Cuts of planting wages

Since the 1980s, KPH Blitar has experienced failures in conducting reforestation initiatives, resulting in more open forest areas. This was one of the chief reasons the company experimented with social forestry to begin with, namely by involving local people in forest rehabilitation efforts. Formally, tree planting was budgeted; wages provided for planting workers. However, the wages were rarely disbursed to field rangers to mobilize the workers. There have been cases of wage cuts in Sumberwono, directly conducted by the KPH's Head of Administration (*Kepala Tata Usaha*) to increase the office's (informal) tactical budgets. A mandor admitted that the planting wages were slashed by 50%. In fact, the tactical budgets were quite important for the (KPH) forest office, and allocated for, for instance, hospitality/banquet funds for important guests and served as an offering/bribe to the higher-rank officials at the provincial level. Another source from Perhutani rhetorically tried to rationalize the wage cuts:

"... If you have guests from out of town, for example, where else would you get the money if not from tactical expenses? It was especially when we had to entertain important guests, while using other budgets was not possible. The office needed money to be deposited for such purposes."

The wage cuts had been practiced for years, inherited from one official to their successors. More importantly, at our research site, new norms and values were instilled along the structural management lines. Further wage cuts were committed by the lower level officers, i.e., *mantris* and *mandors* for personal uses. A mandor confessed that the wages rarely reached the farmers and added that some mandor had to deceive the farmers explaining that no budgets were dedicated for tree replanting. They instead made the farmers replant for free with the threat of destroying their agricultural crops in the case of refusal or replacing them with other farmers.

During the co-management model, implemented amidst waves of demand for governance reform, the wage cuts persisted albeit at different scales using different mechanisms. The planting wages were fully disbursed by the treasurer to field rangers (*Mandors*). It was, however, simply a camouflage because 25-30% of the money had to be deposited back informally to the forest office for the aforementioned tactical budgets, under "a special verbal direction/instruction" (*ada titipan pesan*) from the Head of the KPH. A forest officer tried to comprehend the wage cuts as a wicked problem, a continuation of past experience that had been deeply-rooted as a culture and norms within the forest company.

4.1.3 Bribes for illegal harvest permits

KPH Blitar offered a more formal mechanism to the farmer group to regulate the aforementioned woody plants/trees. A profit-sharing deal – adopting the similar arrangement for Perhutani's main trees – was exercised under a specific contract (see Section 3.1). The deal was agreed with the forest office and community to receive 40% and 60%, respectively, from the sales. The trees were formally registered in the company's management plans. Any harvest in a specific year was planned a year in

advance and officially recorded and reported. The harvest can only be made under formal instruction (*Surat Perintah Kerja/SPK*) from the Head of the KPH to a lower forest manager (called an *Aspeh*). In Sumberwono, however, the formal procedures were frequently bypassed. Under the request from the farmers, the field ranger (*Mantri*) issued the so-called harvest permit/letter (*surat penebangan*) without a formal order from the Head of the KPH. Transactions with a timber buyer were arranged under the table by both farmers and the field ranger, by passing on the obligation to pay the harvest levies/taxes to the government. An informal reward⁶ were provided by both the farmers and the timber contractor to the field ranger for facilitating the informal transactions.

4.2 Corruption in the new social forestry programs

4.2.1 Unofficial fees for processing a social forestry permit

Regulations of the new social forestry program that were introduced directly by the government stipulate new application processes and procedures. Although the application is free of charge, it is not simple and straightforward. Several documents and papers have to be prepared. They include general information on the groups and the members and detailed documentation, delineation and mapping of the requested forests. The complex steps and procedures open up opportunities for corruption to occur, as our case shows.

In Sumberwono, the chairperson of the co-management farmer group sought to continue the existing arrangement. Facilitated by the company (KPH Blitar), the chairperson applied for the rebranded Kulin KK program, proposing the management of 1,200 hectares of forests. Unhappy with the existing and unequal land distribution model, many member farmers opted out of the group and sought the permit-based IPHPS model, considered as best-suited to their interests. Between 2017 and 2022, a local NGO assisted the breakaway group (KTH - Wonogiri) with funding from a donor. It also created a working group tasked with the necessary activities to secure an IPHPS permit. At this stage, some key persons of the group (the committee members), took the initiative to collect funding from the member farmers. It was unclear if the money was to fund the documentation processes as the NGO had obtained supporting funding for its activities. More importantly, in our research context, any type of levies is prohibited in the social forestry regulations.

Some farmers were afraid if the initiatives had been regulated formally. They claimed that they were barely invited to discuss and agree on the group's rules and regulations. They were nonetheless persuaded to change their initial perception toward the levies with the future benefits when the social forestry permit is eventually secured. A farmer mentioned:

"We were informed that the management of this land will eventually be under the IPHPS social forestry, instead of Perhutani [co-management] ... we were convinced by the committee that the future arrangement will benefit us more, as we do not need to pay levies like the current model, and many more [benefits]. We are prepared to allocate funds needed to facilitate the social forestry permit."

The group committee argued that the money collected from the farmers were used to fund the group delegates to deliver their social forestry proposal directly (in person) to the Ministry office in Jakarta in 2018. A member of the IPHPS working group tried to

⁶ Locally called as *uang rokok*, which can be literally translated as cigarette money. In the broader society, this term is widely known as a token of gratitude for "sweat" equity.

rationalize the levies:

“We were accustomed to paying various levies during our time with Perhutani, during which LMDH collected crop shares. We used to provide ‘cigarette money’ or food allowances to Perhutani officers as well as financial compensation to the Mantris or Mandors when they inspected the forests ... the money we collected from the farmers is used to finance the team to travel to Jakarta to secure the permit, with which we no longer will be required to pay any crop levies to Perhutani”

He cited the previous informal levies as a reference, indicating a nuanced tolerance to corruption. The group chairperson added moral legitimacy by claiming that the initiative was a result of deep deliberations and advice from the NGO and several village elders.

The social forestry permit was eventually granted to the farmer group at the end of the same year. However, the permit covers only 845 hectares out of the proposed 1,200 hectares.⁷ As such, the farmer group is obliged to carry out re-gazettement, boundary marking and remapping that should be self-funded. The biggest costs relate to the installation of permanent/ concrete boundary markers (as stipulated in the ministry regulations). In 2019, the group committee decided to sell the government social assistance⁸ of roughly 12 tons of free maize-seeds valued at more than 500 million IDR, instead of distributing them freely to the farmers. We, in fact, directly witnessed people lining up to purchase the seeds at the terrace of the IPHPS office with the transactions overseen by a member of the group committee.

There have been rumors of corruption in sales, as no financial report has been made. As expressed by several farmers, only temporary markers (made of bamboo splits) were installed, instead of the required concrete markers. Standardized markers were eventually installed with another grant from a donor agency. A source from the NGO shed light on the potential for corruption:

“The markers, as regulated by the Ministry, are standardized cement [concrete] markers. They were procured with the funds we obtained from our donor [anonymized]. We are aware of the initiative from the group committee in selling the corn seeds, but we have insight into their reasoning. Regarding allegations of corrupt practices, it is better for us not to comment. We have limitations in our ability to intervene, as our role is primarily supporting the group”.

4.2.2 Fraud/embezzlement of land and crop-harvest taxes

The IPHPS permit holders are obligated to collectively pay both land and crop-harvest taxes to the government office. For that purpose, the committee began to collect contributions from the member farmers to generate revenues for the group. Our research was able to verify that the group had paid the land taxes amounting to IDR 32 million/year, although no evidence on the crop levies was found. More importantly, financial reports were rarely ever produced by the committees. There is indeed a notion of poor administration/bookkeeping, but further exploration signaled this element as a mode of corruption.

In fact, interviews pointed out that farmers from Sumberwono had to pay 200 thousand IDR, whereas those from the neighboring villages were obligated to provide

⁷ The rest was allocated for farmers who stay with the co-management model (Kulin KK)

⁸ The government, not necessarily the MoEF, regularly provide social assistance to poor farmers, such as seeds, farming tools/ equipment and subsidized fertilizers

more contributions, amounting to 300 thousand IDR/hectare/year. There is no clear rationale for how the different contributions were defined. The farmers have never been consulted. Our source from the group committee indicated that farmers from the neighboring villages benefited from the permit, which should exclusively be enjoyed by the people of Sumberwono. In fact, the explanation can be easily countered as IPHPS permits allow cross-village membership.

Interestingly, the financial contribution is also applied to the farmers under the other group (Kulin KK social forestry), who are not the direct beneficiaries of the IPHPS social forestry. This indicates the "incrementalism", i.e., the group committee members are induced to gradually increase the frequency of their corrupt activities. Several farmers indicated that they are not overly bothered with the financial contribution, citing similar arrangements from the former arrangements.

"...we were informed that the responsibility for the tax now lies with the IPHPS group committee. Such a contribution has become a routine, not too different from what we have paid in the past...what matters to us is that we are still able to work with the land."

This clearly points out how financial levies for farming in the forests have become an integral part of the memory of social interaction and normative rules within the community. Several other farmers were reluctant to pay the contribution, but compromised to do so, otherwise risking themselves of not getting the government aid/subsidies that were channeled through the group committees (see the following section). In fact, they were required to show the payment receipt of the taxes for the distribution of the government aid.

4.2.3 Maldistribution of external aid

Poor farmers of Sumberwono have sporadically received external aid and subsidies from various government agencies and ministries. Fertilizers are the item most desired by farmers. Over the years, however, they are not readily available during the planting seasons. There are problems related to supply and distribution. When available, they are often priced much higher than the regulated prices. In some cases, the government assists most vulnerable farmers by distributing subsidized fertilizers channeled through registered farmer groups. In Sumberwono, this becomes an arena for corruption, particularly among those who are entitled to receive the subsidies and how much.

As regulated, subsidized fertilizers are only to be used for agricultural crops planted on private farmland, ruling out state forest farmer groups such as the IPHPS permit holders. To qualify for the subsidies, the committees of KTH-Wonogiri established a shadow/camouflaged farmer group, Gapoktan-Wonogiri, with the same organizational structures and memberships. Detailed membership and land status must be recorded as a basis for the quota for a farmer group to eventually receive benefits. The proposal is submitted to the District Agricultural Service, which later orders district-level distributors to channel subsidies to a local fertilizer kiosk that collaborates with the farmer group. The farmer group committee conspired with the kiosk owner on how to receive the subsidized fertilizers and how much of it would be allocated to them, including in the case of using the distribution process to compel the farmers to pay the contribution to the land and harvest taxes.

As previously mentioned, priorities were made for the farmers who paid the contribution (showing the payment receipt). By paying a higher contribution, farmers obtained the full quota of eight bags/sacks of fertilizers (5 urea and 3 phonska/NPK). Some farmers were even willing to double the contribution so long as they obtained

more subsidized fertilizer. A farmer said:

"We are not fully informed about how much the subsidized fertilizer is provided. The committee mentioned that the group was granted only 50% of the total needs. There is indeed a competition to get access. Farmers are willing to pay it at any price that is lower than that of the non-subsidized fertilizer. We also have no problem in paying the land taxes and will even contribute more so long as we get the proportional increase on the allocation of subsidized fertilizer."

In contrast, farmers were penalized (only to receive half of the quota) when paying less. Complaints and protests were dissuaded with arguments that as a forest-based farmer group it does not qualify for the full quota despite the fact that the group has falsified itself as an agriculture farmer group. The unfortunate farmers eventually paid the subsidized fertilizers even at higher prices than that of the maximum retail prices set by the government for non-subsidized ones. This is because non-subsidized fertilizers are not always available at the markets.

We found that some farmers were forced by the kiosk owner to pay IDR 118-125,000 and IDR 120-130,000 respectively for a sack of urea and phonska, while the highest retailed prices are set by the government at IDR 112,500 and IDR 115,000. The government has tried to curb maldistribution of subsidized fertilizers by introducing a farmer card and an Electronic Data Capture (EDC) machine but there have been technical problems in implementing them as farmers are not familiar with it. In practice, the use of ID Cards is still allowed but this was exploited by the group committee by adding additional documentation, i.e. the aforementioned tax payment receipt.

4.2.4 Illegal fees for unofficial tree harvests

In IPHPS social forestry, tree harvests must be clearly outlined in the group's annual work plan that must be approved by the ministry. While the harvest plans are in review, some farmers have cut some trees from their respective farming plots with an illegal discretion from the group committee as long as they pay harvest levies set at 1.5 million/stack⁹.

In fact, the group committee encouraged their members to cut as many as they wish in view of potential strict limits imposed by the government once the working plan is approved. Formally, Perhutani (KPH Blitar), as stipulated in IPHPS regulations, is entitled a 30 percent share from any harvests of trees planted during the co-management social forestry period. However, the forest office decided not to claim its share as the harvests were not formally reported. Interestingly, Perhutani field rangers exploited this opportunity to get some additional incentives from the harvests. The illegal tree harvests showed that both the group committee and Perhutani officers maintained the old method of reaping profits from illegal activities. A group committee member mentioned:

"Cutting trees is permissible with an approval from the IPHPS group committee. If the work plan is not approved yet? No problem. In fact, the Mantris encourage us to cut more. They need extra income. As an IPHPS group committee member, being overly rigid with the rules is not advisable, as Javanese culture maintains a strong sense of tolerance..."

⁹ A stack is approximately 7 m³ of small size wood or 4 m³ of large size wood

Another added:

“The local community is accustomed to this practice. In the past, when Mantris/Mandors came during harvest time, it was a clear signal of cigarette money. Although this location is now under IPHPS social forestry, the community cannot neglect their role in assisting us to access the forest land for farming, a sentiment rooted in past practices before the implementation of IPHPS.”

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the previous section, we presented various types of corruption in social forestry, the extent/magnitude, and the mechanisms by which they have occurred, and are still occurring. The types of corruption have become more diverse across the different phases of social forestry, occurring in several forest management activities from farming, forest replanting, licensing and harvesting of forest products. They manifest in various forms, such as illegal levies/ taxes, bribes and cordial services, extortions, embezzlement/misuse of authority and social aids, and taking of others' entitlements that are centered around or linked with the distribution of farming parcels, reforestation labor, and harvest-levies. The mechanisms have become more diverse and sophisticated, including the use of apparently legal means. Furthermore, corruption has involved more actors/perpetrators, not only forest-related authorities but also a few local elites and even ordinary social forestry farmers themselves.

Corruption has been studied in many disciplines with different perspectives employed to understand the nature of why it occurs. In criminology-law research, corruption is linked with the misuse of entrusted power for private gain (Søreide, 2007; Siebert & Elwert, 2004). Most of the corruption cases in the studied social forestry cases have occurred in this way. From political theory, corruption is often viewed as a mechanism of power and domination, i.e. principal-agent relationships (Rendtorff, 2010). Across different phases of social forestry at the case study site, this mechanism has manifested in the forms of forest officer-farmer and committee-farmer relationships.

Corruption can also be explained through socio-cultural logics of gift-giving for expedited or preferential services (Peiffer & Rose, 2018) and solidarity networks (Sissener, 2001). We also found such forms of corruption, e.g. cigarette money and illegal transactions of farming lots among farmers. In the context of governance, corruption can arise in the event of lack of law enforcement and minimal supervision (Williams & Dupuy, 2018). Furthermore, as our case also shows, the lack of clarity in technical regulations governing forest management allows forest officers to exercise discretionary power, which can facilitate corrupt practices (Rose-Ackerman, 2008; Langseth, 2006). We further identified the limited understanding of social forestry programs, i.e., their rights and responsibilities as a significant contributing factor to the prevalence of corrupt practices.

Our research shows corruption in social forestry in Indonesia can be attributed to most of the aforementioned factors, including weak law enforcement, the abuse of entrusted power, and low income of officials. Further to this, corruption has also been explained through a sociological lens, but studies in this research field are relatively sparse (Heath et al., 2016). Our study, which extends into a sociological approach of normalization (Ashforth & Anand 2003), hence positions itself as contributing to building the body of literature on corruption. It specifically analyzes the origins of corrupt practices and how corrupt activities persist over time. According to sociological studies, corruption can increasingly be seen as acceptable daily norms produced

through routinization, rationalization and socialization. Corruption thus becomes a new legitimate norm. Our study found that illegal land taxes and crop harvest taxes have been tolerated, both voluntarily (due to the program's limited impact or the temptations of obtaining a better return) and involuntarily. In fact, they have been repurposed over a period of more than four decades and are strongly entrenched with societal memories to eventually become reasonable/ acceptable rules.

Overall, corrupt practices in the current programs are not occurring in isolation. They are instead inherited from the previous social forestry models. As it turned out, the illegal land taxes and crop levies were institutionalized at a larger scale and rationalized as a formal contribution from the farmers to either group committees or the forest office. Our case evokes a shift from “bad apples” to “bad barrels” as corruption has become institutionalized within organizations (Langseth, 2006; Robbins, 2000). Moral and technical legitimation/rationales have provided the hospitable environment fostering individual motives and organizational support for the institutionalization of corrupt activities (Kustanti et al., 2023).

Our historical tracing provides better insights into why corruption might not only be a social forestry-related challenge but also a part of a larger societal phenomena as it has been tolerated over decades. As Aspinall (2019) argues, corruption in Indonesia is deeply-embedded within wider political, social, and economic relationships. While our case is from a single village, corrupt practices might be the tip of an iceberg of practices, and there are many more cases to uncover in other settings and different scales. Despite the significant efforts dedicated to improving forest sector governance, corruption and other forms of illegality continue to linger (Maryudi & Myers, 2018; Tacconi et al., 2019). Social forestry policy in and of itself is a part of these governance reforms, but our case has revealed that it does not eradicate corrupt practices.

While it is not our main aim, it is corruption that might also be a key factor undermining the implementation of social forestry policies, rendering them ineffective. Literature on social forestry from other places points to the systemic adverse impacts of corruption (Irland, 2008; Sundström, 2016). Indications of such a linkage are also there to see in our case. For instance, illegal timber cuts in the research location were triggered by corruption motives, by both farmers and forest officers. Redistribution of farming lots to farmers also poses huge challenges (Kusuma et al., 2023). However, these impacts often go unrecognized by both the perpetrators and the community because such practices have been normalized and are perceived as beneficial by the parties involved (Smith et al., 2003; Irland, 2008). They often prohibit the implementation of formal rules and norms of social forestry.

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