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Behaviour matters: Psychological explanations for recurring forest and land fires in Indonesia

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Recurring forest and land fires in Indonesia are of particular global concern and have become an environmental and humanitarian crisis. They have caused multi-level (local to global) and multi-sector (e.g. Economics, Politics, Environment, Livelihood and Public Health) damage. Particularly, they have generated significant carbon emissions and are linked to a tangible loss of forest cover, undermining climate change mitigation efforts and sustainable forest management initiatives. Anthropogenic sources, such as

clearing land through burning (burning behaviour), is one key underlying cause. While it has been the remit of small-scale subsistence agriculture for millennia, burning behaviour is now practiced by increasingly diverse stakeholders (from small-scale farmers to large agribusiness companies) as a means of land management, often in already fragmented and degraded landscapes. In response, the Indonesian government has pursued political measures aimed at modifying (in actuality, forbidding) burning behaviour. Yet, policy outcomes are underperforming and Indonesia continues to grapple with recurring fire events. Lack of knowledge on the psychological mechanisms behind burning behaviour might underlie such outcomes. Building upon theory of planned behaviour (TPB), norm activation model (NAM)

and past burning behaviour (PBB), we examined possible mechanisms through surveying 151 Indonesian small-scale farmers. We identified attitudes, norms, efficacy, awareness and PBB as important psychological drivers behind burning behaviour. This finding offers important psychological insight for designing more effective, nuanced and targeted policies/interventions to mitigate and prevent forest and land fires in Indonesia.

Biography

Bambang Trihadmojo is a current Arryman fellow at Buffett Institute, Northwestern University, US. He also has a demonstrated history of working in think tank industry. His works span from human dimensions of transboundary haze to human migration. Beyond that, he has longstanding interests in environmental behaviour and environmental justice. His work currently focuses on adaptative and resilient mode of productions among rural households in Brazil and Indonesia.

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