

## Stakeholder Salience in a Multistakeholder Initiative of the National Forestry Council of Indonesia

Tatag Muttaqin<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Emma Soraya<sup>1</sup>, Budi Dharmawan<sup>3</sup>, Ahmad Maryudi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sebijak Institute (Research Center for Forest Policy & History), Faculty of Forestry, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Jl. Agro, Bulaksumur No. 1, Yogyakarta, Indonesia 55281

<sup>2</sup>Forest Department of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, Muhammadiyah Malang University, Jl. Raya Tlogomas No. 246, Malang, Indonesia 65144

<sup>3</sup>Department of Agricultural Economics and Social Sciences, Jenderal Sudirman University, Jl. Dr. Soeparno No. 63, Purwokerto, Indonesia 53123

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### Abstract

*This study analyzes the roles and positions of stakeholders in decision-making processes within the National Forestry Council (Dewan Kehutanan Nasional, DKN), a forest-related multistakeholder platform in Indonesia. It considers stakeholders' power, legitimacy, and urgency. The research employed a qualitative case study, centered around in-depth interviews with 27 key informants with diverse backgrounds involved in the DKN. The study found that despite being designed to facilitate democratic and inclusive decision-making, the engagement of stakeholders in the DKN is heavily dominated by powerful government actors. Several stakeholder groups, such as NGOs and academics, may actively participate in decision-making processes, but they do not meaningfully influence and capacity to determine the organizational policy directions. This is related to an imbalance in the distribution of power among stakeholders in DKN. Even though this organization promotes the principle of inclusivity, the reality is that the presence and influence of the government are still the dominant factors in determining policy directions. This study confirms the importance of the stakeholder salience analysis approach in the context of multistakeholder initiative organizations such as the DKN, which allows recognition of power dynamics and domination among stakeholders within the DKN so that decisions made truly reflect the common interests of all parties involved.*

*Keywords: multistakeholder, Dewan Kehutanan Nasional (DKN), stakeholder engagement, power asymmetry, forest governance, Indonesia*

\*Correspondence author; email: [tatag@umm.ac.id](mailto:tatag@umm.ac.id)

### Introduction

Since the end of the 1990s, environmental and forest-related civil organizations in Indonesia have gained leverage on important policy issues. They have exercised ways to establish new platforms for fostering good forest governance. More specifically, they aimed to challenge the state's dominance in forest management which they believe has led to the massive loss and degradation of the country's forests (Fisher et al., 2019; Sahide et al., 2016; Moeliono et al., 2023). One of the hallmarks of good governance is involving various societal elements in policy processes (Munene & Thakathi, 2018; Yami et al., 2021); they are positioned prominently in efforts to promote good forest governance (Matsvange et al., 2016; Erbaugh, 2019). In fact, the conceptions of "good governance" have become a key driving factor for the establishment of various forms of multistakeholder initiative organizations (Yami et al., 2021). These emerging initiatives not only create space for dialogues and debates but also generate new forms of formal institutions across sectors with various interests. In this

paper, we chose the Indonesian National Forestry Council (*Dewan Kehutanan Nasional*, DKN) as a focal case of a multistakeholder initiative. It is a cross-stakeholder organization that is envisioned to bring together various stakeholders (business groups, non-government organizations (NGOs), scientists/academics, local communities, and government representatives) to exercise potential solutions to the country's forest-related challenges and problems.

DKN was established in 2006 during the 4th Indonesian Forestry Congress (Figure 1). Initial expectations were sky-high that the DKN provided a promising multistakeholder governance model for deliberative forest policy processes. Although it had great potential as an effective governance forum as it was formally instituted by the government, the organization has faced a variety of challenges and issues impeding its performance. Muttaqin et al. (2023) argued that its current set-up is very fragile due to a number of institutional problems, specifically its inability to maintain public trust and a lack of necessary resources to sustain its

activities. They further found that the DKN has failed to provide equal opportunities for all stakeholders to participate in decision-making processes. This paper further delved into why the DKN failed to achieve the envisioned goals by characterizing the participants and how they interacted within it. In many instances, social interactions within the so-called multistakeholder arena are influenced by actors with significant power resources (Schusser, 2013; Kähkönen, 2014). In many policy arenas, the powerful participants often impede other stakeholders in attaining their policy goals and objectives (Ekayani et al., 2016; Betsill & Corell, 2017; Laraswati et al., 2022). They dominate any final decision that is eventually presented as a collective decision (Barlow, 2022).

More specifically, this paper assessed the stakeholder salience and mapped out the significance of the DKN participants/stakeholders. The stakeholder salience framework (SSF) (Mitchell et al., 1997) was developed in the context of management/organizational studies. Stakeholder salience refers to the degree to which decision-makers prioritize and attend to the claims of stakeholders, based on their perceived level of power, legitimacy, and urgency (Agle et al., 1999; Kujala et al., 2019). It helps reveal the dynamics and networks of stakeholder relations. Analysis of stakeholder salience involves the identification of three dimensions of stakeholders, i.e., power, legitimacy, and urgency (Khurram et al., 2019; Kujala et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; del Águila & del Sagrado, 2023). Stakeholders who possess significant power, legitimacy, and urgency in decision-making are regarded as having high salience (Shafique & Gabriel, 2022; del Águila & del Sagrado, 2023). In our context, power is defined as the ability of stakeholders to impose their will in influencing the decisions of an institution (Krott et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2018; Marshall, 2018). Legitimacy refers to the extent to which a stakeholder's actions or claims are deemed desirable, appropriate, or in line with a specific system of social norms, values, or beliefs that have been constructed by a society (Goodstein et al., 2009; Suddaby et al., 2017; Tallberg &

Zürn, 2019). Furthermore, the attribute of urgency pertains to the degree of importance placed on the claims or demands of stakeholders based on their criticality and time sensitivity, requiring immediate attention (Agle et al., 1999; Campbell et al., 2020). In certain contexts, stakeholders who have urgent interests and require immediate resolution of the issues they raise may have higher salience. Urgency can influence an organization's attention to and response to such stakeholder claims or interests (Mitchell et al., 1997; Agle et al., 1999; Chen et al., 2020; del Águila & del Sagrado, 2023).

Based on the attributes, the SSF shows which stakeholder counts in a multistakeholder engagement platform. According to the analytical framework, the more attributes a stakeholder holds, the more likely is to determine the outcomes of the multistakeholder platform. The framework further categorizes potential stakeholders into four groups, i.e. latent stakeholders, expectant stakeholders, definitive stakeholders, and non-stakeholders (Figure 2). In the analytical model, *latent stakeholders* are considered to have a low impact and are less likely to have a significant influence on the decision-making processes. They are further classified into three sub-categories: dormant, discretionary, and demanding stakeholders, depending on the attributes they respectively possess. In addition, moderate impacts are to be expected from *expectant stakeholders* with two attributes. There are also three types within this group: dominant, dependent, and dangerous stakeholders. Furthermore, the most influential actors in an organization are those who meet all three analytical attributes; they are called as *definitive stakeholders*. Besides the three classes, there could be actors who might not hold any of the attributes; they are considered as *potential stakeholders* or *non-stakeholders*.

## Methods

This study combined a theory-driven qualitative method (MacFarlane & O'Reilly-de Brún, 2011) and an analytical–empirical approach (Krott, 2000). It was a highly inductive approach, centered around the use of specific

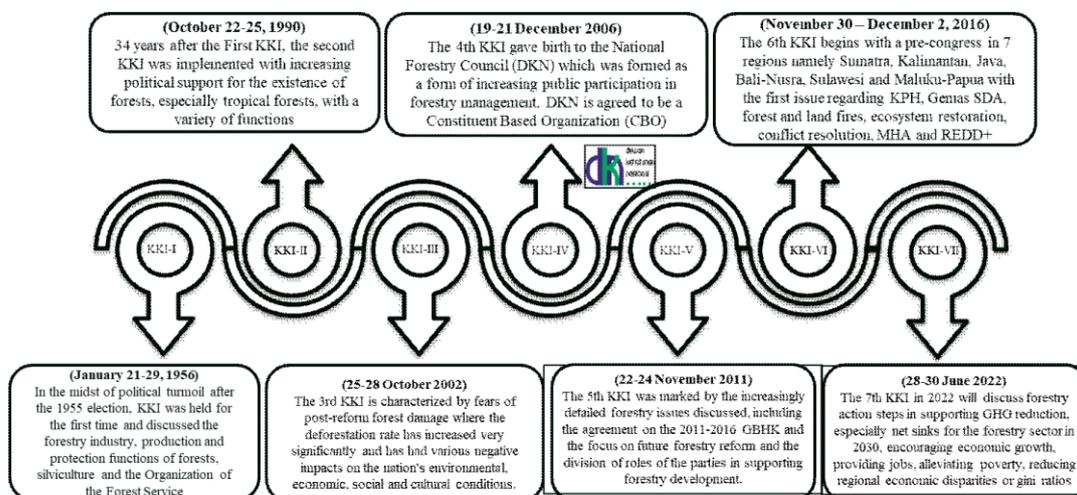


Figure 1 The dynamics of forest governance themes in the Indonesian forestry congress.

theories to explain certain patterns of social-political events (Krott, 2000), in our context is stakeholder salience (Mitchell et al., 1997), and validated through “observations from all the senses” (Connell, 1997) of the “empirical reality” (de Jong et al., 2012). This combined approach is increasingly used in forest policy analysis (for instance see: Suprpto et al (2023). In the research, we focused on the engagement/involvement, roles, influences, and positions of the DKN stakeholders in the decision-making processes. These focuses relate to the three key attributes for determining the stakeholder salience, i.e., power, legitimacy, and urgency. For this, we conducted in-depth interviews with “well-placed sources” who were purposely selected with the consideration that they could provide comprehensive insights and information on the focal study case (Patton, 1990; Campbell et al., 2020). In total, we interviewed 27 DKN constituent members, commissioners, and forestry observers (Annex 1), The interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify the research themes. They were complemented with reviews of relevant DKN documents and reports. In this research, we determined the salience levels of the DKN constituents. In the initial phase, we identified their key attributes (power, legitimacy, and urgency) to determine their salience typologies/levels: latent, expectant, and definitive stakeholders (Table 1).

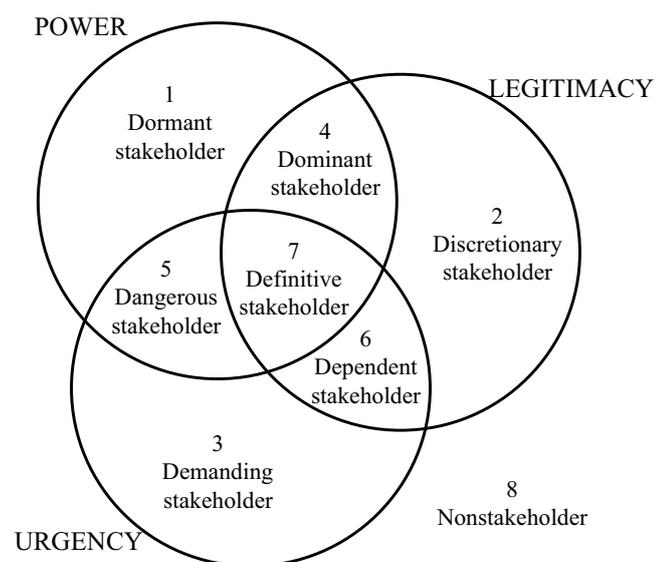


Figure 2 Stakeholder attributes and typology (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Table 1 Stakeholder typologies in the salience stakeholder model

Stakeholder class	Salience	Typology	Attributes
Latent	Low	Dormant	Power
		Discretionary	Legitimacy
		Demanding	Urgency
Expectant	Moderate	Dominant	Power & legitimacy
		Dangerous	Power & urgency
		Dependent	Legitimacy & urgency
Devinitive	High	Devinitive	Power, legitimacy, & urgency

## Results

To discuss the role, influence, and position of stakeholders in DKN, our first step is to categorize the interview transcriptions based on stakeholder attributes. The multistakeholder and multi-interest situation in DKN, with different resources, creates an imbalance of power within DKN (Table 2). For example, DKN has weaknesses in terms of financial resources which lead to a high dependence on government financing, in the end, every DKN activity must wait for a supply of funds from the government. This makes it difficult for DKN to be an inclusive and democratic forum to facilitate mutually beneficial decision-making between stakeholders. Our informants provide an overview of DKN's work priorities in the forestry governance system and its suboptimal contribution to the forestry policy process. However, we found that DKN is currently far from being a strong institution due to institutional problems that affect its performance. DKN's contribution is still not optimal in the forestry policy process. The main cause is institutional problems that impact DKN's performance. As a result of these problems, we found that DKN is currently far from being a strong institution as a balancing institution but as an institution that (only) plays a role in legitimizing ministry policies. This problem also hampers DKN's performance in carrying out every planned activity.

“... DKN has not played an optimal role in contributing to forestry and environmental policies ...” (Interviewee No 7).

The problem of unclear funding sources exacerbates DKN's difficulty in organizing all its constituents. Coupled with the vast geographical condition of Indonesia, this makes the mobilization of constituent members limited. As a result, constituents who have their own funding sources will dominate and potentially result in individual programs being considered as institutional programs, thus legitimizing the program and placing it in a more favorable position. In this context, DKN faces a major problem in creating an inclusive and democratic policy forum that can facilitate decision-making in favor of the common interests of stakeholders, especially in terms of limited resource allocation.

“... DKN has a work program, but it cannot be implemented because there is no financial resource support ...” (Interviewee No. 1).

“... DKN's dependence on the government is very high, meaning that there is great potential at this time DKN has no bargaining power with the government because it is related to budget needs ...” (Interviewee No. 19).

In principle, DKN must treat all constituents fairly and provide equal opportunities for decision-making. However, the conditions mentioned above indicate that there is a possibility that one constituent will dominate every decision taken collectively. Therefore, we identify the attributes possessed by each DKN constituent to conduct further analysis to describe the interests of stakeholders in DKN. This aims to ensure that the interests of all parties are fairly considered in decision-making.

**Mapping DKN constituent attributes into the stakeholder salience framework** In this section, we will provide a more detailed analysis of the salience of DKN constituents based on the stakeholder salience framework. Each constituent has different attributes for carrying out its function as a DKN member. To illustrate the condition of the constituents, Figure 3 shows a typology of each constituent from the SSF based on their attributes. From Figure 3, it can be observed that each constituent has a distinct role and influence in decision-making within DKN. Constituents that belong to the definitive stakeholder class possess all three attributes: power, legitimacy, and urgency. As a result, these constituents have a crucial interest in decision-making and exert significant influence. Constituents belonging to the expectant stakeholder class possess two attributes and hold important, but relatively less significant importance than definitive stakeholders. Constituents belonging to the latent stakeholder class only have one attribute and have relatively less importance in decision-making.

The combination of constituent attributes is used as the basis for classifying and determining the level of importance of each constituent. Based on the SSF framework, the classification includes three categories, namely latent stakeholder, expectant stakeholder, and definitive stakeholder.

*Latent stakeholder* In the context of the stakeholder salience framework, latent stakeholders have a very low level of salience because they only have one attribute. Based on the SSF, latent stakeholder typologies are divided into three, namely dormant, discretionary, or demanding. The results of the analysis show that community constituents are included as latent stakeholders and have a demanding typology or only have urgency in DKN. This means that community constituents who are latent stakeholders have minimal influence in decision-making in DKN because they do not have power and legitimacy. If stakeholders do not have the power or legitimacy to support their urgency, then the urgency will be very difficult to realize in an institution (Mitchell et al., 1997). Based on our findings, constituents of

the community who lack power and legitimacy are less prioritized in carrying out their functions as members of the DKN. This is because power and legitimacy are two crucial attributes that determine the salience of a stakeholder in decision-making processes. Without these attributes, the community constituents may have limited influence and may not be able to voice their concerns effectively. As a result, their interests may not be well-represented in the decision-making process, which can lead to decisions that do not fully consider the needs and concerns of the broader community.

“... among other constituencies, community constituencies are the weakest because they do not have the capacity to push for their interests. ...” (Interviewee No 17)

“... In reality, the role of DKN is less favorable for the community, especially indigenous peoples. ...” (Interviewee No 26)

According to the stakeholder salience framework, other constituents that fall into the latent stakeholder category are academics and NGOs that are classified as discretionary or only have legitimacy attributes. Discretionary stakeholders have no power to influence and there is no urgent need for them to actively participate in DKN. Academic legitimacy comes from their ability to collect and share research evidence. In the context of DKN, academic constituents play a role in providing academic recognition to legitimize the decisions taken by DKN.

“... Whatever the political stance or policy, it must be academically defensible and accountable. Academics are the spirit of truth ...” (Interviewee No 17)

In the context of DKN, NGOs classified as latent stakeholders have legitimacy attributes that come from their understanding of issues in society. This allows NGOs to provide support and voice the interests of the community even though they do not have urgent power and urgency in DKN.

“...Well, NGOs are a bit smarter than academics, because they have to talk about theorization so that it can be studied scientifically. ...” (Interviewee No 8)

The academic and NGO constituents are perceived as impartial and unbiased parties when it comes to providing certain recognition in the DKN context. However, despite this, they do not possess the urgency and power to influence the decision-making process within DKN. Furthermore, based on the results of our identification, we did not find any constituents classified under the dormant typology or those with power limited only to the scope of DKN.

Table 2 Empirical evidence of stakeholder attributes of DKN

Stakeholder attribute	Power	Legitimacy	Urgency	Stakeholder salience
Government	High	High	High	Definitive stakeholder
NGOs	Low	Moderate	Low	Expectant stakeholder
Academics	Low	Moderate	Low	Latent stakeholder
Communities	Low	Low	High	Latent stakeholder
Business	Moderate	Low	High	Expectant stakeholder

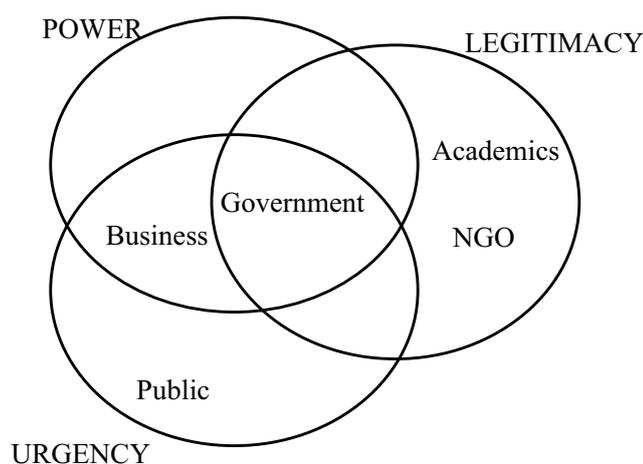


Figure 3 DKN stakeholder typology according to the MAW model.

*Expectant stakeholders* Expectant stakeholder is a stakeholder classification that is classified as moderate because it has two attributes (Mitchell et al., 1997). The expected stakeholder typology consists of three classifications, namely dominant, dependent, and dangerous. Based on the identification results, business constituents are included in the classification of stakeholder expectations that have a dangerous typology or have power and urgency attributes. In this classification, there are no constituents who have dominant or dependent typologies. The power attribute possessed by business constituents comes from their ability to create their own sources of funding, while the urgency possessed relates to the need for legal certainty and clear policies in forest management so that they can carry out investment and business activities properly (informant 11, 12).

“... When looking at the conditions of each constituency, it is the role of funding that intersects most with the Business and Government constituencies. ...” (Interviewee No 12)

Based on the dangerous typology possessed by business constituents who lack legitimacy, there is the potential that they will use their financial power to coerce and even use violence to resolve the urgency they face. These potentials increase when the business constituency does not get support or agreement from the authorities in obtaining the legality of forest management that they want. In such situations, business constituents tend to prioritize their own interests and ignore the possible impacts on the surrounding community or environment. Therefore, better efforts are needed to resolve the urgency of business constituents by prioritizing the principles of justice and sustainability for the surrounding community and environment.

*Definitive stakeholder* A definitive stakeholder is a key stakeholder that has all the attributes in DKN. Constituents that have all the attributes of definitive stakeholders are government constituents that have power in forest-related decision-making because they have the authority to make

policies and regulations related to forest management. In addition, the government has legitimacy in decision-making as it is considered a representative of the people and is responsible for protecting the public interest. The government's role as the definitive stakeholder in forest management is crucial. They have the power to make policies and regulations that can greatly influence the management of forests and their resources. As a result, governments have a responsibility to ensure that their decisions are in line with the public interest and do not only benefit certain groups or individuals. Legitimacy is also an important factor in government decision-making processes, as they are accountable to the public and must justify their decisions to the people they represent. The legitimacy and power of governments can also be influenced by other stakeholders, such as NGOs and academics, who can provide expert opinions and advocacy to influence policy decisions. However, ultimately, the government has the final say in the management of forests and their resources.

The government also has an urgency in making decisions related to forest management because it needs to maintain the sustainability of the forest as a natural resource that is very important for the country and society. This means that decisions taken by the government must consider long-term interests and must take steps to protect forests from unsustainable exploitation.

In the SSF, stakeholders who have power and legitimacy will be the dominant members of an institution and will be given priority in carrying out all the urgencies they have. This is because they are considered to have great influence in the decision-making process, and have the authority to make policies and regulations related to forest management.

The findings show that DKN currently experiences a very high dependence on government programs, where DKN can only be involved in the implementation of these programs with support from the government. In every activity carried out by DKN, DKN tends to always wait for funding support, especially from the government and businesses. However, if an activity does not get support from the government, it will be very difficult for DKN to carry out the activity. DKN's dependence on government programs and financial support from government and business is seen as a mistake for DKN as an institution, because it reduces DKN's ability to take independent action and produce innovative programs.

“... Please note that DKN is not a government organ. It would be a mistake if the activities carried out by DKN had to wait for financial support from the government. ...” (Interviewee No 11)

## Discussion

This paper is the result of a qualitative study that evaluates the salience of stakeholders involved in the decision-making process by DKN. We found that the constituencies of NGOs, academics and communities have low salience in DKN. This category excludes the constituents of NGOs and academics, because their presence is indispensable in providing academic recognition of forestry issues as well as providing input or voicing community rights. Their legitimacy is an important attribute in stakeholder analysis, therefore, NGOs

and academics indirectly have a big role in the decision-making process in DKN. Important to consider in decision-making, it is important to note that these two constituencies lack power and urgency, so they are latent compared to the more prominent stakeholders. Meanwhile, the community constituency is different from the previous two constituencies, because it has high urgency, but is not supported by power and legitimacy that can protect their interests. Community constituents really need an immediate response from DKN, but the absence of power and legitimacy causes community constituents to be unable to influence every decision in DKN. While communities may not always be involved in decision-making (Barasa et al., 2016; Razavi et al., 2019), they must be prioritized in every decision taken. Communities will be in direct contact with forest areas, so any forestry policies made will directly impact their daily lives.

Business constituents have medium salience because they collectively have two attributes (power and urgency). In this framework, business constituents are considered dangerous stakeholders who have the potential to use their power to influence DKN decisions without considering the impact on society or other stakeholders. To manage business constituents who are in the dangerous stakeholder typology, DKN needs to develop appropriate strategies and tactics to identify the needs and interests of business constituents, communicate with them openly and transparently, consider their input in decision making, and maintain good relationships with them. In this way, DKN can reduce the risk of negative impacts on the community or other stakeholders and create mutually beneficial relationships with business constituents.

Government constituents are stakeholders with high salience because they have all attributes (power, legitimacy, and urgency). As the definitive stakeholder in DKN, the position and dominance of government constituents are very important in determining the direction of policies and actions to be taken by DKN in forest management. Government constituents have the authority and power to issue regulations and policies related to forest management. The dominance of government constituents in DKN can influence decisions taken by DKN as an institution. Decisions taken, may be more inclined to follow government policies and interests, rather than considering the interests of other constituents. This can lead to injustice in the decision-making process and give rise to feelings of dissatisfaction and distrust from other constituents towards DKN. However, it cannot be denied that the presence of government constituents provides enormous benefits to DKN and other constituents. Academics firmly recognize that in recent years the creation of collective agreements requires the management of stakeholders who have salience by an institution (Freeman, 2010; Mitchell & Lee, 2019; Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022). The position and dominance of government constituents in the DKN can have mixed impacts. Therefore, there is a need for appropriate supervision and regulation to ensure that the interests of all constituencies are accommodated fairly and equitably in the decision-making process and implementation of national forestry policies.

Thus, government constituents as stakeholders with high salience play an important role and have the potential to

control every DKN decision-making. Government constituents as definitive stakeholders will easily marginalize other constituents who do not have power. Unlike the constituents of society who tend to be latent with their urgency and must make more efforts to approach other constituents with power. The problem of excessive government domination results in an imbalance in decision-making, abuse of power, and a lack of participation from other parties interested in forestry.

The potential that we describe above, of course, will cause pros and cons within the scope of DKN and forestry observers. However, if these conditions do not receive attention, it will have an impact on reducing the performance and level of public trust in DKN. Considering the presence of DKN as a forum for parties in creating good forestry governance and realizing community welfare and sustainable forests, the condition of DKN, which is dominated by one constituent, is a form of deterioration in DKN's performance. Therefore, we encourage improvements to the DKN institutional system so that DKN decisions remain participatory in nature where all stakeholders can play a fair role in making decisions, so that power imbalances that may occur in DKN can be immediately avoided.

## Conclusion

In general, multistakeholder initiatives, such as the DKN, are designed as governance innovations to facilitate dialogues and the exchange of ideas among diverse stakeholders, fostering inclusive decision-making. They are widely promoted as platforms for co-creation and mutual learning, emphasizing democratic policy-making processes. Within a multistakeholder initiative, engagements among stakeholders are expected to be based on equity principles. Indeed, it is not easy to manage diverse actors with different interests and goals. Hence, there is every risk that the dialogue platforms fail to ensure democratic and inclusive decision-making. This is particularly true when the participants (stakeholders) do not have equal opportunities. As such, multistakeholder initiatives are often used to legitimize the interests of certain powerful actors as a collective agenda. In this study, we also found that the DKN, which was envisioned as a democratic and power-free institution, is in fact steered by powerful actors, i.e., representatives of the government. There has been a solid body of studies, including our own on the failure of so-called multistakeholder initiatives to produce the expected objectives due to the dominance of specific actors. This study deep-dives into the characteristics of the DKN participants that eventually shape the social relations within it. By employing the SSF model, this study was successful in identifying the critical stakeholders and their key attributes so that they are able to influence and steer the DKN. Looking at the initial goals that it was established as a co-creation arena to bring together different stakeholders to find solutions to the country's forest-related issues and problems, the current domination by a certain stakeholder proved to be a step back of the DKN. We thus encourage improvements in its set-up to ensure equal roles and meaningful participation by the participants.

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Annex 1 List of interviews

No	Code	Position
1	DS	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Academics/Lecturers at the Faculty of Forestry IPB
2	JFO	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Academics/Lecturers at Gunadarma university Jakarta
3	YJ	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Academics/Lecturers at Hasanudin university Makassar
4	AK	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Academics/Lecturers at Patimura university Maluku
5	EF	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Academics/Lecturers at Gadjah Mada university Yogyakarta
6	PIS	DKN Presidium Council constituency of NGO KARSA
7	NC	DKN Presidium Council constituency of NGO Watala
8	TKS	DKN Presidium Council constituency of NGO Santiri Foundation
9	RH	DKN Presidium Council constituency of NGO KKI WARSI
10	DR	DKN Presidium Council constituency of NGO KEHATI and Bisnis
11	HK	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Academics/Lecturers at the Faculty of Forestry IPB
12	DV	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Bisnis
13	DYN	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Bisnis
14	AKR	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Government
15	AJ	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Government (Founder)
16	HH	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Government
17	AST	DKN Presidium Council constituency of NGO (Founder)
18	JG	DKN Presidium Council constituents of Community ( Balnusra Region)
19	ARN	DKN Presidium Council constituents of Community (Sulawesi Region)
20	MMP	DKN Presidium Council constituents of Community (Maluku Region)
21	HS	NGO Javlec
22	MAM	NGO FKKM
23	ME	NGO Pijjar Lentera
24	AKU	Lecturer in Forestry UNKHAIR
25	OA	DKN Presidium Council constituency of Academics/Lecturers at Sumatera Utara University
26	GS	DKN Presidium Council constituents of Community (Kalimantan)
27	NA	DKN Presidium Council constituency of NGO/KA POKJA RAPS