

# **Ethics of Deforestation:**

## Moral Evaluation of Dutch Stakeholders' Degree of Moral Consideration for Deforestation in the Amazon Region



*Figure 1: Aftermath of forest fires in the Amazon (Vox, 2019)*

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## List of abbreviations

EUET: Ecologically Unequal Exchange Theory

DZ: *Duurzame Zuivelketen*

FTT: Forest Transition theory

FAO: Food and Agricultural Organization

NZO: *Nederlandse Zuivel Organisatie*

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

TUS: Theory of Universal Subjectivism

UN: United Nations

VTB: *Vereniging Tropische Bossen*

## Summary

The recent alarming increase in deforestation rates in the Amazon has attracted much political and media attention worldwide. This worrying trend impedes international efforts that aim at ensuring global sustainability, including the preservation of land ecosystems, combatting climate change and ensuring sustainable consumption and production. Unsustainable consumption and production patterns in the Netherlands are incentivizing the extraction of natural resources in the Amazon, leading to negative ecological impacts. The aim of this thesis is to find morally-just and legitimate future policies by morally evaluating stakeholders. A stakeholder analysis was carried out in order to discern the problem perception, proposed solutions and political influence of relevant Dutch stakeholders, pinpointing to the dominant Dutch discourse. The stakeholders' perspectives were compared to two morally-opposing socio-environmental theories in order to delineate stakeholders' degree of moral consideration. This thesis argues that Forest transition theory (FTT) has a low degree of moral consideration as it mainly prioritizes short term nationalistic human interests, while disregarding the resulting spatial and temporal environmental spillover effects. Ecologically Unequal Exchange Theory (EUET), on the other hand, prioritizes global ecological integrity over national economic growth, demonstrating a high degree of moral consideration. Comparison of the stakeholders' statements with either theory thus allowed for a moral evaluation of stakeholder perspectives. The results suggest that Dutch stakeholders' moral consideration for deforestation in the Amazon ranges from moderate to high. This means that all the stakeholders acknowledge that Dutch companies are profiting from deforestation in the Amazon, but not all stakeholders support economic concessions in order to decrease deforestation. Current Dutch policies often do not reflect this degree of moral consideration, as stakeholder pointed to policy inconsistencies. The following future morally-just policies had the most support from stakeholders: making Dutch agriculture more sustainable and circular, resolving policy inconsistencies and internalizing environmental costs into the consumer price. These insights can be incorporated into future legitimate and morally-just policies for a global sustainable future.

## Introduction

The recent alarming forest fires in the Amazon have attracted worldwide political and media attention (Irfan, 2019). The increased intensity of forest fires is linked to a rapid increase in deforestation rates in the region, hence the fires were not usual fires for agricultural purposes as some political players have claimed (Barlow, Berenguer, Carmenta & França, 2019). Agricultural expansion and the growing international demands for agricultural products are the biggest drivers of tropical deforestation (DeFries, Rudel, Uriarte, & Hansen, 2010). This development is worrying for the whole world, as the Amazon rainforest provides ecosystem services both locally and globally, such as carbon storage, climate regulation and providing natural medicines (Foley et al., 2007). Deforestation is connected to many ethical concerns, as short term human interests and the intrinsic value of nature collide (Katz & Oechsli, 1993).

A central challenge for sustainability is preserving forest ecosystems and the services that they provide us while enhancing food production and increasing socio-economic development (Lambin & Meyfroidt, 2011). In 2015 the United Nations (UN) adopted seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 13, combatting climate change, is impeded by deforestation in the Amazon because, through sequestering carbon, the Amazon rainforest acts as an important carbon sink which can help combatting global climate change (Houghton et al, 2000). Deforestation, on the other hand, releases more carbon into the atmosphere and thus exacerbates climate change (Houghton, 2000). Protecting the Amazon rainforest is also particularly important for SDG 15, protecting life on land, as the Amazon is the most biodiverse region on earth (Garda, Da Silva & Baião, 2010). SDG 12, ensuring sustainable consumption and production, is intertwined with this topic because the international demand for agricultural products is the biggest driver for agricultural expansion and tropical deforestation (Kaimowitz, Mertens, Wunder, & Pacheco, 2004; Nepstad, Sticker, & Almeida, 2006; (DeFries et al., 2010). This is reinforced by the fact that developing countries with relatively higher levels of agricultural exports sent to more-developed countries, exhibit greater rates of deforestation (Jorgenson, Dick, & Austin, 2010). The developed world thus plays an important role in the fight against deforestation in developing countries.

The Netherlands, in size relatively a small developed country, is the second largest exporter of agricultural products in the world (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2019). Furthermore, the Netherlands is the fourth largest importer of soybeans in the world (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2019). These soybeans are mainly used as cattle feed to produce higher value commodities such as milk and meat products (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2019). The Netherlands imports soy mainly from South America, with Brazil being the biggest trade partner of South America (Rijksdienst, 2019).

Dr. Tim Boekhout van Solinge from *Vereniging Tropische Bossen* (VTB) stated that it is almost impossible for economic actors in Brazil not to be indirectly involved with some illegal and immoral activities, such as violation of land rights of indigenous people, illegal deforestation or even modern slave labor (Rietveld, 2019). This impedes SDG 16: promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies. All in all, it is evident that Dutch consumption and production patterns, through international trade, are incentivizing illegal and immoral activities in the Amazon, including illegal deforestation.

The Netherlands thus bears a responsibility for correcting these issues. Therefore a moral evaluation of key Dutch stakeholders' perspectives on the responsibility of the Netherlands is justified, as these stakeholders can influence future policies. The aim of this thesis is to offer recommendations for

future morally-just legitimate policies by ethically reconciling the different stakeholders' proposed solutions. Incorporating stakeholders' insights ensures a large support base and improves the legitimacy and quality of future policies (Runhaar et al., 2006). To come to a coherent conclusion, this thesis is guided by the following research question:

To what degree do key Dutch stakeholders' show moral consideration for deforestation in the Amazon region?

This thesis first discusses the moral social contract Theory of Universal Subjectivism (TUS), that was proposed by van den Berg (2011). TUS proposed different degrees of moral consideration, from only being concerned about oneself to being concerned about future global generations as well as animals. The expanded moral circle of van den Berg was modified and applied in the moral evaluation of two morally-opposing socio-environmental theories: Ecological Unequal Exchange Theory (EUET) and Forest Transition Theory (FTT). FTT and EUET have opposing views on the relationship between globalization, economic growth and the accompanying impacts on the environment. This thesis argues that the core ideas of FTT and EUET also fall on opposite sides of the spectrum of moral consideration, as FTT is mainly concerned about current nationalistic human interests, whereas EUET places global ecological integrity above economic growth. By assigning a degree of moral consideration to each theory, this thesis connects the two theory and adds a new moral perspective on the theories.

According to the analytical framework, the degree of moral consideration can be discerned from the congruency between the stakeholders perspectives and the core ideas of either FTT and EUET. A stakeholder analysis revealed the problem perceptions, proposed solutions and political influence of each stakeholder. Relevant information was obtained by reviewing grey literature and conducting interviews. The solutions that most stakeholders supported were morally evaluated using the analytical framework. The most supported policies that also have the highest degree of moral consideration, are recommended to be incorporated into future policy developments in order to decrease the negative impact of the Netherlands on deforestation in the Amazon.

## Theories & concepts

In order to see how international trade between the Netherlands and the Amazon region relates to economic, environmental and ethical concerns, three theories will be discussed. First the Theory of Universal Subjectivism (TUS) is discussed to create the foundation for the moral evaluation of the other two theories. The other two theories, Forest Transition Theory (FTT) and Unequal Ecological Exchange Theory (EUET) both focus on the relationship between the environment and socio-economic development, but have opposing views on the merits of globalization, economic growth and modernization. This theoretical discussion thereby adds value to existing research by giving a new moral perspective on FTT and EUET. This is done by assigning a degree of moral consideration to both FTT and EUET, using TUS. In the end the theories are brought together in the conceptual framework, which

incorporates the debates around FTT and EUET in a innovative way. The conceptual framework is consequently operationalized in the analytical framework for evaluating of stakeholders' degree of moral consideration towards nature.

### Theory of Universal Subjectivism (TUS)

This is an ethical theory in which van den Berg proposes that future humans and animals worldwide should be included into the sphere of moral concern. This sphere of moral concern is made out of different degrees to which moral concern can be applied. This concern can range from purely egocentric to include concerns for both present and future humans and non-human animals. The name of this theory at first seems to be paradoxical. It namely seems hard to imagine how a subjective moral theory can be applied universally.

To understand this theory one must image being in the “worst-off position of any kind of victim” and then imagine ways in which society could be improved to reduce all suffering (van den Berg, 2011). Ideally, there would be a universal consensus, through subjectively experiencing what it is like being the worst-off in society, to reduce all suffering. These victims, according to van den Berg, should include all present and future generations worldwide as well as non-human animals. “Universal subjectivism can be a guideline in order to live a ‘no harm lifestyle’ and to build a no harm global society” (van den Berg, 2011).

This theory is however not easy to apply. This is partly due to the resistance to societal change by people who benefit the most from international inequalities (van den Berg, 2011; Moellendorf, 2002). This theory can nonetheless still show society what it should strive for when dealing with ethical and environmental issues, such as deforestation and environmental degradation (van den Berg, 2011).

In relation to deforestation in the Amazon, this theory shows that Dutch stakeholders should comprehend the impacts that the Netherlands is having on the Amazon and take responsibility for these global impacts on humans and animals worldwide, both presently and in the future. The figure below displays the expansion of the moral circle that was proposed by van den Berg (2011).

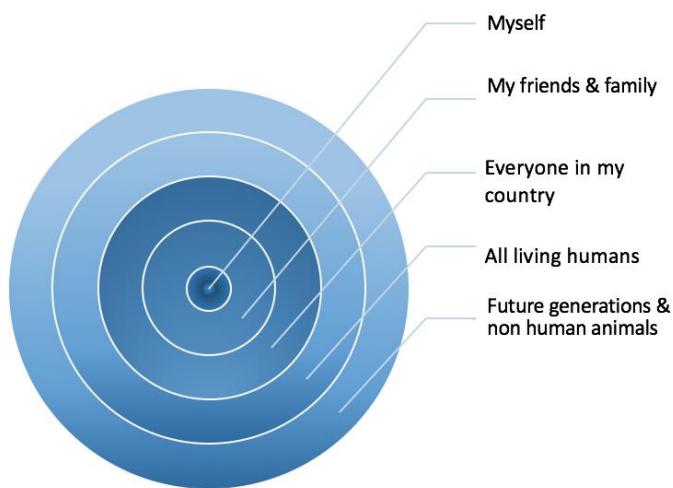


Figure 2: Expansion of the moral circle (van den Berg, 2012)

## Forest Transition Theory (FTT)

FTT posits that as developing countries become more modern, the total area of forest first declines and in later stages will start to expand again as population and economic growth start to diminish (Perz, 2006). Four pathways have been identified on which this transition can happen:

1. The forest scarcity path
2. The economic development path
3. The state forest policy path
4. The globalization path

Each transition path will be briefly described and will then be followed by the main points of critique. The critique will be based on ethical concerns and empirical evidence.

### The forest scarcity path

The forest scarcity path posits that the value of forests will increase when forests get scarcer and that the forest sector will respond to this market incentive through reforestation (Indarto & Mutaqin, 2016). The main problem with this path is that deforestation leads a permanent loss of biodiversity, which cannot be reversed through reforestation. This is particularly detrimental in a biodiverse region such as the Amazon rainforest. Deforestation not only has implications for the instrumental value of nature, such as the potential permanent loss of undiscovered life-saving medicines due to extinction of specific herbs (Buenz, 2005), but it also has implications for the intrinsic value of nature. The instrumental value of nature only includes in how far nature serves human interests (Attfield, 2018).

A non-anthropocentric view of nature, on the other hand, includes nature's intrinsic value (Katz & Oechsli, 1993). The forest scarcity path mainly focusses on the instrumental value of nature (e.g. the value of nature is measured in how far nature serves human interests), as it disregards the permanent disappearance of biodiversity resulting from deforestation. FTT sees the destruction of nature as a means for development. The theory then suggests that the resulting scarcity of nature's instrumental value be a good incentive for humans to protect and restore forests. This anthropocentric view on nature, which only looks at the instrumental value of nature, has led to the dilemma between economic development and nature conservation in the first place (Katz & Oechsli, 1993). Instead, Katz & Oechsli propose that nature preservation policies should instead be founded on the non-anthropocentric principle that nature has an irreplaceable intrinsic value on its own (1993).

### The economic development path

The economic development path presupposes that economic development will lead to more off-farm jobs that will attract rural people to urban areas and that the resulting rural labor force scarcity would encourage reforestation (Rudel et al., 2005). Conversely, it has recently been shown that urban population growth, counterintuitively, correlates with rises in deforestation rates (DeFries et al., 2010). This can be explained by the fact that rural outmigration can increase less labor-intensive, but highly inefficient land uses, such as cattle ranching replacing traditional agriculture (Grau & Aide, 2008).

What is more, a recent study on the compatibility between different SDGs suggests that economic development and environmental sustainability are incompatible when the focus merely lies on economic growth and consumption as measures for 'development' (Spaiser, Ranganathan, Swain & Sumper, 2017)

Furthermore, this path posits that, through development and modernization, more effective agricultural technology can be deployed. The resulting agricultural intensification would result in land-sparing and reforestation (Indarto & Mutaqin, 2016). There is a little caveat in this theory, however, as agricultural intensification can also incentivize further agricultural expansion and deforestation, as the agricultural yield and agricultural land rent per hectare increases (Morton et al., 2008). This could also raise future conservation costs, as compensatory schemes need to be adjusted to the increased land rents as a result of agricultural intensification (Phelps, Carrasco, Webb, Koh & Pascual, 2013). The belief that technology will solve anthropogenic environmental problems can also be regarded as an excuse to continue business as usual and as a refusal to take responsibility.

### The forest policy path

In the state forest policy path, governments play a central role by implementing policies to promote and preserve forest cover (Indarto & Mutaqin, 2016). However, these national land use regulations may merely displace deforestation to other developing countries through adaptations in the patterns of international trade (Lambin & Meyfroidt, 2011). Another problem is that some countries do not show enough political will to implement forest preservation policies in the first place, such as Brazil that recently reduced the legal reserve requirements (Freitas, al., 2018).

### The globalization path

The globalization path postulates that, through increased international trade, sharing of ideas and migration, deforestation would shift into reforestation (Indarto & Mutaqin, 2016).

Knowledge sharing has its own implications. As we have seen earlier, the importation and implementation of modern technologies for agricultural intensification offer both solutions and problems. This importation of western technologies may also displace traditional land use practices. This is especially problematic, given the fact that some indigenous Amazonian agroforestry techniques, by being carbon-negative and working harmoniously with nature, could serve as solutions for future sustainable agriculture (American Chemical Society, 2008).

The movement of wealthier people to rural areas, enabled by globalization, would raise the demands for the aesthetic value of the forests, thus creating an incentive for preserving and promoting forests (Indarto & Mutaqin, 2016). The idea of ecotourism is an example of this as it also centers on the aesthetic value of nature (Indarto & Mutaqin, 2016). Ecotourism is, however, a western construct and may displace traditional views on nature as a foundation for local livelihoods (Cater, 2006).

Globalization, through increasing the integration with the global market, leads to an increase in the exportation of agricultural products to global markets (Perz, 2006). As already touched upon in the introduction, countries with higher export rates of agricultural products sent to developed countries correlate with higher deforestation rates (Jorgenson, Dick, & Austin, 2010). In this way, wealthy countries drive deforestation in poorer countries by importing agricultural products (Mills Busa, 2013).

In essence, Forest Transition Theory (FTT) is based primarily on studies on Western modernized countries and thus has a bias that leads to the prescription of Western ideas on development that may not be applicable to the context of developing countries (Perz, 2006). In this way, FTT views third world societies as backwards, because these countries are not yet modernized like Western countries. FTT can therefore be regarded as Western-centric. FTT predominantly regards deforestation and environmental degradation as means for human development. FTT assumes that modernization and development would eventually lead to a national solution for deforestation, while it disregards the intrinsic value of nature and the spillover effects that modernization has on other developing countries and future generations. FTT can furthermore be regarded as an excuse for continuing business as usual and refusing responsibility for the resulting environmental effects, advocated by the inaccurate assumption that modernization would eventually lead to environmental improvement.

### Ecologically Unequal Exchange Theory (EUET)

EUET posits that more powerful developed countries have a disproportionate amount of access to the natural resources and sink capacity in developing countries (Givens, Huang, & Jorgenson, 2019). This allows environmental costs of unsustainable practices of developing countries to be externalized and exported to developing countries (Jorgenson et al., 2010). Empirical studies have provided support for this theory (Jorgenson et al., 2010; Rice, 2007). More specifically, this theory has also been applied to deforestation, demonstrating that the flow of forestry exports from developing to developed countries has led to a relatively higher deforestation rate in developing countries (Shandra, Leckband & London, 2009). This theory also acknowledges that environmental harm is being displaced, not only spatially, to other countries, but also temporally, to future generations (Hornborg, 2009). These spatial and temporal dynamics are commonly referred to as environmental load displacement (Givens et al., 2019; Hornborg, 2009). Reducing the ecological footprint, according to EUET, requires a reduction in the flow of resources to rich countries and a decrease in consumption and economic growth (Givens, 2019). This argument of reducing economic growth to preserve ecosystems, following EUET, implies that concessions in human interests have to be made to support the intrinsic value of ecosystems.

As for the Amazon region, Bunker has demonstrated that environmental degradation and underdevelopment in the Amazon are both a result of “modes of extraction organized in response to world-system exchange opportunities” (1985, p. 250).

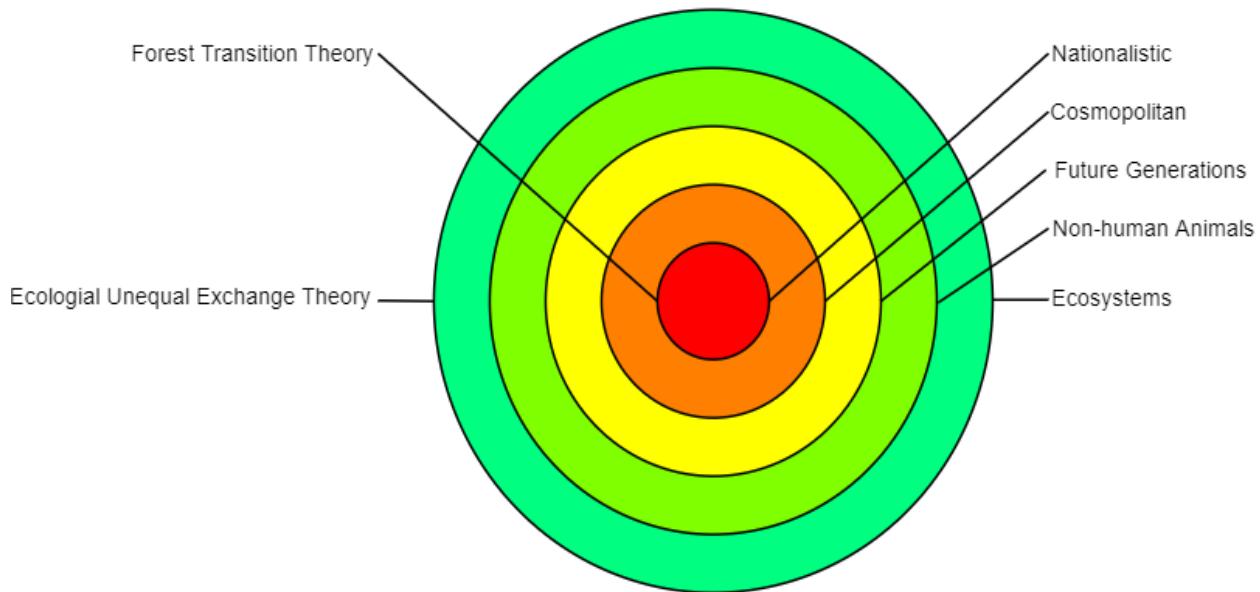
By acknowledging the temporal and spatial effects of current human actions on ecological integrity, EUET already shows a higher regard for nature than FTT. EUET can furthermore be regarded as *ecocentric*, as it proposes to make concessions in human interests for the sake of ecological integrity, placing ecosystem integrity above short term human interests.

### Conceptual framework

According to Silvern (cited in Cater, 2006), there is no universal or unique understanding of the relation between development and the environment. FTT poses that development is ultimately good for the environment, while EUET poses the opposite. Power relations between different social groups have an

enormous effect on shaping any preconceived perspective on the natural world (Cater, 2006). Power relations between different stakeholders are therefore important for explaining how public perception is being formed.

In the conceptual framework below, the two respective theories are placed on a spectrum from purely nationalistic and anthropocentric to ecocentric in a modified version of the expanded moral circle, which was initially put forward by van den Berg (2011). From the discussion on FTT, it became clear that this theory views environmental degradation as a means for development. FTT furthermore disregards cross-national and temporal spillover effects of national development. Due to these anthropocentric and nationalistic characteristics of FTT, FTT is placed in the middle of the modified moral circle. EUET, on the other hand, does show regard for the effects that international trade and economic growth has on the integrity of ecosystems worldwide, both presently and for future generations. EUET can therefore be placed on the outer ring of the moral circle, due to the cosmopolitan concern of EUET for future generations and entire ecosystems.

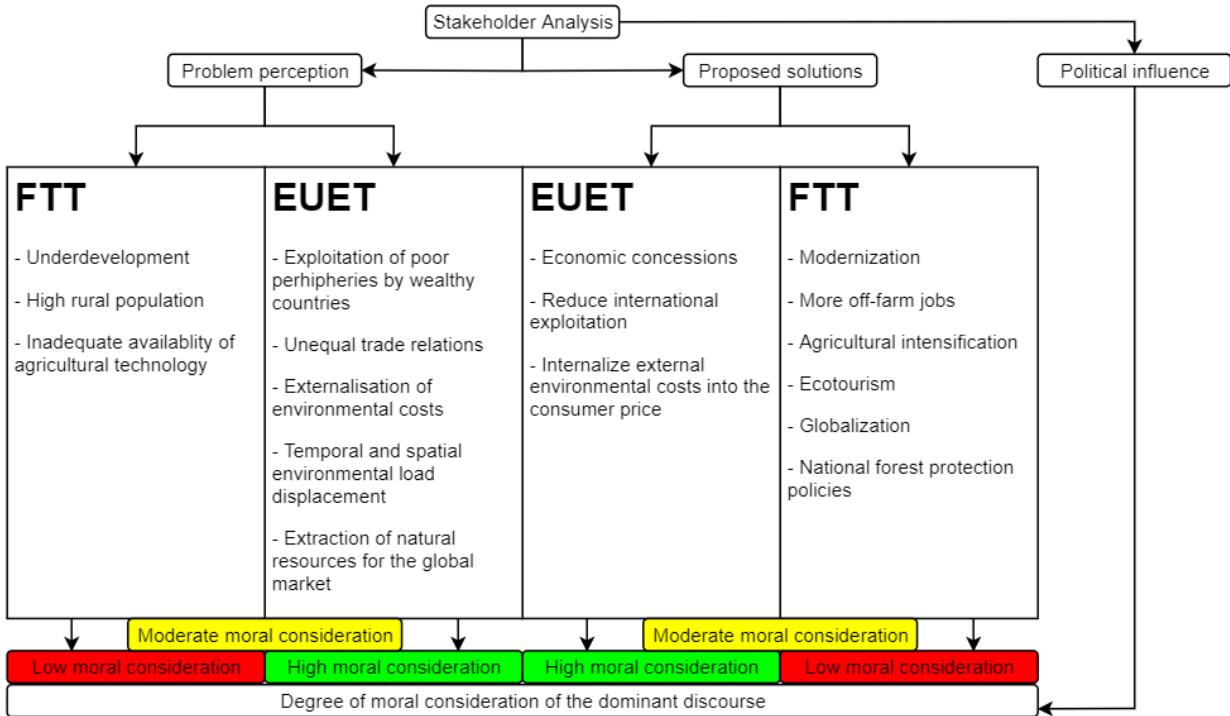


*Figure 3: Modified version of the circle of moral consideration, which was initially proposed by van den Berg (2011). FTT and EUET correlate with different degrees of moral consideration.*

#### Analytical framework for assessing stakeholders' degree of moral consideration

The preceding conceptual framework is operationalized in the following analytical framework shown below. As the figure shows, a stakeholder analysis was carried out in order to delineate the degree of moral consideration of the dominant Dutch discourse. The dominant discourse can be discerned from the political power of stakeholders. When multiple stakeholders share certain problem perceptions and proposed solutions, they have more power in shaping the dominant discourse through their combined political influence. The problem perception and proposed solutions are correlated with the ideas of either FTT or EUET, in order to get an indication of the degree of moral consideration of stakeholders. EUET and

FTT correlate with a high and low degree of moral consideration respectively. When stakeholders' perspectives fall between both theories, they demonstrate a moderate degree of moral consideration.



*Figure 4: Analytical framework for assessing the degree of moral consideration of the dominant Dutch discourse on the responsibility of the Netherlands for deforestation in the Amazon.*

## Methods

### Stakeholder Analysis

According to Runhaar et al. (2006), the following activities can be part of a stakeholder analysis:

- Definition of the policy problem
- Identification of actors that are involved in the topic
- Identification of formal tasks, competences, interests, goals, and problem perceptions of the actors involved
- Inventory of relationships between stakeholders
- Identification of interdependencies between actors.

In this thesis, the main focus lies on the problem perception, proposed solutions and political influence of key Dutch stakeholders. These aspects are namely important in order to discern the dominant discourse

on the moral responsibility of the Netherlands for deforestation in the Amazon, as was shown in the analytical framework. The problem perception and proposed solutions that stakeholders have, was correlated with either FTT or EUET, using the analytical framework. Consequently, the degree of moral consideration of the stakeholders could be deduced.

Stakeholders were asked in an interview about to which extent they were included in the policy formation process. Hence the interviews exposed the amount of political influence of stakeholders. The political influence of a particular stakeholder determines how much power this stakeholder has in propagating a particular perspective, thereby shaping the dominant Dutch discourse. Runhaar et al. identified the following types of stakeholders at the national scale (2006):

- Public actors at the national level are ministries and governmental agencies.
- Market actors are represented at the national scale by lobby groups of industries of national importance.
- Civil society is usually represented at the national scale by environmental NGOs or Trade Unions.
- Knowledge providers at the national scale are universities and research institutes.

For the sake of impartiality, for every type of stakeholder outlined above one relevant Dutch actor was chosen. Firstly, since the impacts of the Netherlands on deforestation in the Amazon is an international issue, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was chosen as a relevant public actor. Secondly, the Dutch dairy industry is an important market actor, since the input of South American soy in the dairy industry is associated with deforestation in the Amazon (Nepstad et al., 2014). The *Nederlandse Zuivel Organisatie* (NZO) is used as an example of a lobby group of national importance. The NZO is affiliated with the *Duurzame Zuivelketen* (DZ), which released a relevant report on the topic of soy importation. Thirdly, a relevant NGO in the Netherlands regarding tropical deforestation is *Vereniging Tropische Bossen* (VTB). Herman Savenije was interviewed as a representative of this NGO. Lastly, an academic expert, Dr. Marjanneke Vijge from Utrecht University, was interviewed to give an indication of the position of knowledge providers in this topic. In the table below summarizes the relevant stakeholders and representatives of this thesis.

Relevant types of stakeholders	Actors in this thesis	Representative
Public actor	Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs	The Minister of Foreign Affairs
Market actor	Nederlandse Zuivel Organisatie	Duurzame Zuivelketen
Civil society actor	Vereniging Tropische Bossen	Herman Savenije
Knowledge provider	Utrecht University	Dr. Marjanneke Vijge

Table 1: The different types of relevant stakeholders at the national scale together with the stakeholders that were analyzed in this thesis and their respective representatives.

### Stakeholder Interviews

The selection of stakeholders that were interviewed involved a balance between data quality, availability and time restraints. One major drawback of this study is a bias in discourses is created because of the

small number of participants. The interviews therefore do not aim to provide a representative perspective from all parties involved in this topic.

Before starting the interview, the interviewees were asked to sign a consent form for recording and using the provided information in this thesis (see Annex I for the consent form). The interviewees knew beforehand what the thesis was about and always reserve the right to revoke statements, keep certain information confidential or to remain anonymous. These measures have insured that the information from the interviews is ethically obtained. The interviewees were asked the same questions using a semi-structured question list to avoid bias (see Annex II for the semi-structured question list).

### Grey Literature

Firstly, the problem perception, proposed solutions and political influence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was discerned from a recent letter to the parliament from the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

Several market actors were approached to be interviewed but none of them agreed. Therefore the document of from the DZ was used to discern the problem perception and proposed solutions of the Dutch dairy industry (DZ, 2019). Critical attention was paid to whether the statements within this report corresponded with actual commitments or were in fact a form of 'green washing'.

## Results Stakeholder Analysis

### Public Actor: Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The tasks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are: communicating on behalf of the Dutch Government with foreign governments and international organizations and coordinating and carrying out Dutch foreign policies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has publicized a policy document which includes information pertaining to the position of the Dutch government on the issue of taking responsibility for deforestation in the Amazon (Blok, 2019).

### Problem perception

The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Blok, acknowledges that the Netherlands is an important international importer of agricultural products and that this trade can be associated with deforestation, forest degradation and ecosystem conversion (2019). Blok further states that, due to their large combined trading power, Dutch companies can stimulate the prevention of deforestation by conducting trade more sustainably (Blok, 2019).

## Proposed solutions

Blok first of all stated that policies should pay equal attention to ecological, economic and social aspects (2019). He then proposed the following aims for forest preservation policies (2019):

- Establishing a more productive and efficient sustainable circular agriculture
- Making trade chains more sustainable
- Stimulate legal and sustainable timber harvesting.
- Sustainable financing of forest management (so that the economic value of the forest encourages its conservation)
- Searching for alternative protein sources.
- Supporting Dutch companies to exert market influence in order to decrease deforestation
- Making sure that agricultural trade does not lead to deforestation
- Promoting sustainable inclusive growth and climate action worldwide
- Working together with Dutch knowledge institutions and interest groups with an understanding
- Creating more policy coherence in the broad and complex field of existing EU forest preservation policies
- Making European agricultural trading chains more transparent
- Addressing domestic trade flows and consumption patterns
- Creating a single trading block in the EU and thereby levelling the playing field

## Political influence

Blok argued that the EU should consider global developments that could impede international efforts for preserving and restoring forests worldwide, such as food supply (and prosperity) for the growing global population which will demand more agricultural area (2019). The minister therefore proposed that the EU should conduct more targeted and intensive diplomacy in order to coordinate the aforementioned goals with growing consumer countries and trade blocks such as Mercosur and ASEAN (Blok, 2019). This indicates that the Netherlands needs to collaborate with the other EU member states in order to influence global policies, because the political power of the Netherlands alone is not enough.

Furthermore, because Blok proposed creating a more levelled playing field within the EU, it is evident that the Dutch economy would lose a competitive advantage if the other EU member states do not agree on levelling the playing field. In this sense, the Netherlands is likely trapped with other countries in a political stalemate where nationalistic economic interests impede reducing the negative impacts of trade on ecosystems in the Amazon.

## Market Actor: Nederlandse Zuivel Organisatie (NZO)

The *Nederlandse Zuivel Organisatie* (NZO) is a collaboration between Dutch dairy companies and dairy farmers. This union of the dairy industry is affiliated with the *Duurzame Zuivelketen* (DZ), which released a report about responsible soy (DZ, 2019). This report is relevant for discerning the problem perception and proposed solutions of the Dutch dairy industry.

### Problem perception

In their report the DZ says that soy cultivation in South America is sometimes accompanied by deforestation, damage to other special nature and careless use of pesticides (2019). The DZ further stated that only 2% of all soy in the world is produced responsibly (2019). Due to the small volume of responsible soy, it cannot be processed separately and the responsible soy is thus still mixed with non-certified soy (2019).

### Proposed solutions

The DZ states that the Dutch dairy sector has only used 100% responsibly certified soy since 2015 (2019). Due to the mixing of certified and non-certified soy, the dairy sector does not purchase the responsible soy physically, but just buys certificates for accounting purposes (NZO, 2019).

Towards 2025, the Dutch dairy sector is working on land-based dairy farming, which means that dairy farmers must be largely self-sufficient in providing protein to their cows (2019). This limits import of animal feed from outside Europe (NZO, 2019).

### Political influence

Unfortunately the reports of the DZ and NZO did not provide relevant information about the political influence of the Dutch dairy industry. However, both Savenij and Vijge stated in their interviews that Dutch market actors have a considerable amount of political influence in Dutch politics. Even the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that cooperation with market actors is vital (Blok, 2019), highlighting the fact that market actors have a large voice for sharing their view in the policy formation process.

### Civil Society Actor: *Vereniging Tropische Bossen* (VTB)

The information that followed from the interview with Herman Savenije from VTB is summarized below. Herman Savenije is an expert in the field of forestry in the Netherlands.

### Problem perception

According to Herman Savenije of VTB, protection of the Amazon rainforest is important for global sustainability, preserving biodiversity and for the prosperity of people living in the Amazon. The Netherlands bears a responsibility for the Amazon rainforests through the importation of products from the Amazon region. The Dutch economy namely relies heavily on the importation of natural resources from abroad. These products are used to boost the Dutch economy. Meanwhile, the exploitation of natural resources in the Amazon has implications for the environment, nature and people in the Amazon. These social and environmental costs in the Amazon are externalized, meaning that these costs are not included in the price that consumers pay in the Netherlands. This leads to an overproduction of what is socially desirable.

Dutch agriculture transformed majorly after the second world war, due to the fact that institutions were put into place to incite industrialization and intensification of agriculture in order to increase food production and food security. Because of these institutions, a lot of farmers are trapped

and cannot produce more sustainably even if they wanted to. What is more, Dutch farmers had to scale up in order to keep up with competition and therefore had to take loans from banks. Banks thereby obtained a lot of control over how farmers are conducting their businesses. These banks generally demand farmers to produce as profitable as possible, which impedes efforts to make Dutch agriculture more sustainable.

Global inequality, lastly, remains an important problem that leads to environmental degradation worldwide, according to Savenije. The exploitation and exportation of natural resources from poor peripheries to rich countries namely exacerbates poverty in these exploited regions.

### Proposed solutions

Savenije said that the external environmental costs should be internalized into the consumer price in order to incentivize the Dutch agricultural sector to produce in a more sustainable manner. Taxing unsustainable products would also help consumers make more sustainable choices. Savenije cautioned that Dutch consumers with a low disposable income could be disproportionately affected by these measures. Thus it must be concurrently ensured that sustainable products become more affordable for lower income classes. According to Savenije, making sustainable agriculture more mainstream, as it currently still is a niche market, could mean that these sustainable products will become more affordable in the future.

When questioning if concessions in economic growth are warranted to ensure the integrity of ecosystems, Savenije responded that the economy can be made more sustainable by shifting from a material-based economy towards a more service-based economy. Reductions in economic growth, in this way, could not be strictly necessary in order to protect ecosystems in the Amazon. However, some material wealth remains necessary to ensure that vulnerable people have access to a certain degree of decent living. Concessions should therefore not be imposed on people that are living below or close to the poverty line. It is important, however, that developing countries do not follow the traditional trajectory that Western countries have followed by exploiting other countries and natural resources. It would namely not be sustainable if every country developed the same way as Western countries did.

For solving global inequalities that lead to environmental degradation, global collaboration is necessary for internalizing external costs of unsustainable trade practices. The Netherlands has already committed itself to collaborating with other countries in order to solve these global issues of inequality and environmental degradation through signing international agreements, such as the SDGs.

### Political influence

From the interview with Herman Savenije it became clear that VTB acts as a network between experts and interested parties for sharing knowledge regarding issues in tropical forests. The VTB's role is thus to act as a network in which its constituents can share relevant information and experiences so that interested parties can use that knowledge to the benefit of society. VTB's main interest is thus that relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, are well-informed and can make well-informed decisions.

According to Savenije, VTB does not try to exert political pressure. Rather, the VTB solely tries to share information as objectively as possible. According to Savenije it is therefore not VTB's goal to exert political influence. Through objectively informing policymakers the VTB, nevertheless, has an important position in influencing Dutch policies related to tropical forests.

## Knowledge Provider: Researcher Utrecht University

The following key points are derived from the interview with Dr. Marjanneke Vijge from Utrecht University. She is specialized in sustainability governance in the developing world at the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development. She has previously worked at the UN for the Food and Agricultural Organization and she is currently investigating inconsistencies between policies in developing countries and the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Problem perception

A big problem in international politics for preserving the Amazon, according to Vijge, is incoherence between policies. This means that on the one hand countries have committed to sustainability goals, but at the same time still try to profit from international trade due to commercial interests. These commercial interests can run counter to the SDGs. Agricultural expansion, for example, remains one of the biggest drivers of deforestation in the Amazon. As mentioned earlier, the Dutch economy depends partly on the input of these primary products from the Amazon region. This incoherence between policies can also be found in the example of the European Union giving subsidies to the dairy industry, while there is a call from certain politicians to reduce the amount of livestock to meet nitrogen emission limitations in the Netherlands. Meanwhile the environmental costs of the dairy industry are not accounted for. Previous policies of the Dutch government also made it so that farmers had to scale up and these Dutch farmers are now often trapped in a dead end. These farmers cannot make their businesses more sustainable while staying economically viable.

### Proposed solutions

A solution for solving incoherence between the SDGs and future policies, which is already being implemented in the Netherlands, is the SDGs check. This check aims at making policymakers more aware of the implications of potential policies for the feasibility of achieving the SDGs.

Another solution that Vijge mentioned, is making the Dutch agricultural sector more sustainable. This can be done by making the agricultural sector more circular and thereby relying less on the import of agricultural products from the Amazon. This might mean a reduction in domestic agricultural production and economic growth in the Netherlands, but economic concessions could be necessary according to Vijge. Vijge also showed support for taxing unsustainable practices and products in order to steer the market and help consumers make more sustainable choices. Although special attention has to be paid to inequality, as people close to the poverty line can be disproportionately negatively affected if they are not considered enough when costs rise.

The developed world bears a big responsibility for bringing about global sustainability, according to Vijge, partly because the developed world has a relatively large amount of resources disposable. Part of the program called REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) is that developed nations provide a monetary incentive for developing countries to preserve forests and the global ecosystem services that they provide. The developed world does not bear all responsibility, however, as developing nations are also required to have enough political will to cooperate with these international policies. Vijge also acknowledged that agricultural intensification can have negative consequences in developing countries. Instead, agroforestry can offer solutions by incorporating trees or shrubs on pasturelands, thereby benefiting biodiversity and reducing soil erosion. Vijge also noted that,

according to some studies, agroforestry can be even more profitable in certain contexts than conventional agriculture.

### Political influence

The role of researchers in the field of sustainability is to disseminate information as objectively as possible so that policymakers can make well-informed decisions. In the Netherlands, according to Vijge, there is a gap between the academic world and the political world. The influence that academic researcher have on shaping policies should therefore be bigger. The academic and political world can be made more intertwined though creating more collaborative projects. Lastly, Vijge noted that academic reports should include summaries for policymakers so that these reports can have more impact on policy formation, because many policymakers are not able or willing to read full academic reports.

## Discussion

This section first discusses the problem perceptions and proposed solutions of each stakeholder in order to distill the moral stance of each stakeholder, using the analytical framework for assessing the degree of moral consideration. Subsequently the morality of the most dominant Dutch discourse is discussed. This sections ends with the limitations and theoretical and policy implications of this thesis.

### Degree of moral consideration of stakeholders

Below follows a discussion on the problem perceptions and proposed solutions of each stakeholder in order to surmise to which theory, either FTT or EUET, the stakeholders' statements best correspond with. This exposes the degree of moral consideration of stakeholders according to the analytical framework.

#### Public Actor: Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

By acknowledging that the Dutch economy has negative effects on ecosystems in the Amazon region (Blok, 2019), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs demonstrated some degree of moral consideration. However, the Minister did not mention unequal trade relations, inequality nor the externalization of environmental costs as underlying problems.

The proposed solutions, in essence, aim at reducing the ecological damage that the Netherlands causes through international trade. The proposed solution of making Dutch agriculture circular, for example, has the effect of reducing ecological damage abroad. Moreover, addressing domestic trade flows and consumption patterns also has the aforementioned effect. What this exactly entails remains vague. The minister did not explicitly state that economic losses were warranted for preserving ecosystems, nor did he propose internalizing the environmental costs into the consumer price.

All in all, it appears that the Minister is aware of the fact that the Dutch economy is responsible for ecological damage in the Amazon. The Minister proposed measures to decrease the impacts of the

Netherlands. However, this stakeholder's problem perception and proposed solutions are not exactly congruent with EUET. Nonetheless, this stakeholder's statements neither shared any characteristics with FTT. This stakeholder therefore shows a moderate degree of moral consideration according to the analytical framework.

#### Market Actor: *Nederlandse Zuivel Organisatie* (NZO)

The NZO did acknowledge that soy extraction is "sometimes" associated with ecological damage in the Amazon (DZ, 2019). The NZO therefore acknowledged that they bear some responsibility for the environmental harm in the Amazon due to importing soy from South America. This problem perceptions comes close to the ideas of EUET.

For the proposed solutions, the DZ pointed to the fact that the Dutch dairy industry is only using certified responsible soy. However, this certified soy is not bought physically, rather the Dutch dairy industry buys certificates for accounting purposes. According to Tim Boekhout van Solinge of the VTB, even the certified soy is extracted in an irresponsible manner (Rietveld, 2019). Therefore this solution is not really effective for reducing the environmental harm that the Dutch dairy industry is causing in the Amazon. However, the NZO is also working to reduce the input of soy from abroad by making the Dutch dairy industry largely self-sufficient in providing protein sources for their cows. This reduces the international exploitation of the Amazon. This proposed solution comes close to EUET. However, there was no mention of internalizing environmental costs nor economic concessions. Therefore the NZO's degree of moral consideration is not congruent to EUET but shares some characteristics with it.

All in all, it can be deduced that the NZO shows a moderate degree of moral consideration, as they did acknowledge the environmental effects of importing soy from South America, but did not propose serious solutions that would decrease profits. These serious solutions should have included internalizing environmental costs or economic concessions to be truly morally considerate.

#### Civil Society Actor: *Vereniging Tropische Bossen* (VTB)

The problem perception of VTB is quite congruent with EUET, as Savenije was highlighting how inequality, international trade relations and the extraction of resources is exploiting the Amazon's people and ecosystems. He furthermore stressed how the displacement of environmental impacts and externalization of environmental costs increases environmental damage.

The proposed solutions of Savenije also reflected the ideas of EUET, proposing ways to reduce international exploitation by internalizing external environmental costs into the consumer price. Though Savenije did not explicitly state to be in favor of economic concessions, the systemic change of society and internalization of environmental costs would undoubtedly lead to economic losses to some market actors who currently profit from the exploitation of the Amazon rainforests.

Because VTB's problem perception and proposed solutions are very congruent with EUET, it can be concluded that this stakeholder has a high degree of moral consideration for the ecological impacts in the Amazon region resulting from trade.

Knowledge Provider: Researcher Utrecht University

Vijge viewed policy inconsistencies as a huge problem standing in the way of global sustainability. These policy inconsistencies often occur due to the fact that commercial interests conflict with SDGs. By highlighting that economic interests stand in the way of real progress and achieving sustainability, the problem perception of Vijge is quite congruent with EUET.

Furthermore, the proposed solutions also reflect the ideas of EUET. Vijge namely pointed out the fact that developed nations bear a lot of responsibility for solving the exploitation of natural capital and should compensate developing countries for preserving natural capital and the ecosystem services that they provide. The proposed solution of making Dutch agriculture more circular and relying less on import, reduces international exploitation. Vijge said that in the end some economic concessions in the Netherlands are necessary in order to reduce its impact on ecosystems in the Amazon. Vijge furthermore showed support for internalizing environmental costs (taxing unsustainable product).

All in all, Vijge's problem perception and proposed solutions are very congruent with the core ideas of EUET, and therefore reflect a relatively high degree of moral consideration according to the analytical framework.

### Dominant Dutch discourse

It is hard to determine which stakeholders have the most influence in shaping the dominant Dutch discourse. However, the dominant discourse is also dependent on the combined political influence of stakeholders that voice the same views.

The most prevailing problem perception among stakeholders was that the Netherlands, through importing agricultural products from the Amazon, bears responsibility for deforestation in the Amazon.

The most prevailing proposed solution for this problem was that the Dutch agricultural industry should become more sustainable and circular and thereby less reliant on import from the Amazon. All stakeholders within this study showed support for this solution. This measure has a high degree of moral consideration as it tackles the environmental impacts.

Almost all stakeholders mentioned that policy inconsistencies should be resolved. It is striking that there are still inconsistent policies or institutions standing in the way while there is an overall consensus among stakeholders that the Netherlands should reduce the ecological harm that it is causing in the Amazon. The subsidization of the dairy industry was mentioned by Vijge as an example of a policy that is inconsistent with the SDGs.

Lastly, the VTB and Utrecht University both showed support for internalizing environmental costs into the consumer price, which would mean that the imported soy from South America would become more expensive for the Dutch dairy industry and Dutch consumers. This measure thus entails an economic concession for the sake of the environment and therefore shows a high degree of moral consideration.

### Limitations

Firstly, due to the scale of this thesis, only a small number of stakeholders were analyzed, which meant that a bias in discourses is a limitation of this study. Future studies could complement this thesis by investigating more stakeholders and thereby providing a more representative perspective from all parties involved in this topic.

Secondly, stakeholders may feel pressured to portray themselves as morally-just, fearing being

called out otherwise. It is hard to assess whether the statements of the stakeholders truly represented their inner convictions or that the stakeholders were merely responding to outside pressures, such as negative public opinion or other factors. More specifically, for market actors changes in consumer demand are of particular importance. According to national statistics, consumer demand for sustainable foods is increasing (RIVM, 2016). Moreover, due to the negative perception on globalized and industrialized food production, there have been counter-reactions in consumer demand, such as a call for more organic, sustainable and local foods (WRR, 2014). This may be an alternative explanation for why market actors are committing to more circular and sustainable food production. Market actors may be merely reacting to consumer trends, rather than that their efforts are truly grounded in a moral belief to minimize environmental harm. In addition, it could also be the case that market actors, foreseeing future policies and global trends, are proactively making reforms because these changes will be required in the future. In this way market actors want to be ahead of the curve in order to obtain a competitive advantage. It would thus have been interesting to ask critical questions to these market actors to test this hypothesis, but none of the three approached market actors responded to requests for an interview.

Thirdly, the analytical framework used in this thesis for assessing the degree of moral consideration is novel and therefore needs to be fine-tuned by being put more into practice in future studies. Despite the analytical framework being novel and untested, the results are still valid.

## Implications

### Theoretical implications

The analytical framework that this thesis proposed can be implemented in future studies for assessing the degree of moral consideration of other stakeholders for the effects of international trade on deforestation rates in developing countries. This thesis has therefore laid the groundwork for future moral evaluations of other stakeholders' degree of moral consideration. Incorporating stakeholders' insights into policies improves the quality and legitimacy of these policies (Runhaar et al., 2006). A moral evaluation of stakeholder insights, using the analytical framework proposed in this thesis, will furthermore ensure that future environmental policies meet a high degree of moral consideration.

### Future morally-just policies that stakeholders support

Below follows a summation of three future morally-just policies that have the largest support base among the stakeholders that were analyzed in this thesis.

Firstly, all stakeholders supported the idea that the Dutch agricultural industry should become more sustainable and circular and thereby less reliant on import from the Amazon.

Secondly, most stakeholders said that policy inconsistencies should be resolved. Vijge mentioned that the subsidy for environmentally-unfriendly dairy farmers runs counter to the SDGs. Another example of a policy that runs counter to the SDGs is the potential trade deal with MERCOSUR countries, which will drastically reduce the import duty on Brazilian beef, from 45% to just 7.5% (European Commission, 2019).

Thirdly, internalization of environmental costs had support from half of the stakeholders. This means that a tax is imposed on unsustainable products, such as Brazilian beef, making these products more expensive and less attractive for consumers.

## Conclusions

This thesis investigated the degree of moral consideration of key Dutch stakeholders' for deforestation in the Amazon region. This thesis morally evaluated stakeholders' degree of moral consideration by correlating their problem perceptions and proposed solutions with two morally-opposing socio-environmental theories: FTT and EUET. This thesis argued that FTT has a low degree of moral consideration, as it prioritizes short term nationalistic human interests. EUET on the other hand has a high degree of moral consideration, as it prioritizes the integrity of ecosystems globally over short term national economic interests.

The results showed that none of the stakeholders' statements shared any characteristics with FTT, meaning that none of the stakeholders showed a low degree of moral consideration. It was further found that the VTB and Utrecht University both had a high degree of moral consideration because both actors stated problem perceptions and proposed solutions that were very congruent with EUET. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the NZO both showed a moderate degree of moral consideration, as their problem perceptions and proposed solutions were not quite congruent with EUET. All the stakeholders acknowledged, implicitly or explicitly, that the Netherland is profiting from deforestation in the Amazon, but not all stakeholders agreed that internalizing environmental costs and serious economic concessions in the Netherlands are warranted to decrease deforestation in the Amazon.

The aim of this thesis was to find legitimate and morally-just future policies that have the biggest support base among key Dutch stakeholders. An ethical evaluation of stakeholders' proposed solutions revealed which potential policies had the highest degree of moral consideration. The dominant Dutch discourse was found to have a high degree of moral consideration for deforestation in the Amazon. Future policies can reflect this degree of moral consideration by incorporating the following policies that stakeholders support. Firstly, all the stakeholders showed support for making the Dutch agricultural sector more sustainable and circular. This is a morally-just policy, as it reduces the negative ecological impact that the Netherlands has on the Amazon, by reducing the extraction of resources from the Amazon. Secondly, three out of four stakeholders supported resolving policy inconsistencies. Thirdly, internalizing environmental costs into the consumer price was supported by half of all the stakeholders. The moral evaluation introduced in this thesis can also be applied to other stakeholders to get a more representative view of all Dutch stakeholders' perspectives and to reveal more morally-just policies in the future.

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## Annex I: Consent Form



### Consent Form

This form is to make sure that you have been given information about this research project. It is to confirm that you know what the project is about and that you are happy to take part.

Please check the boxes you agree with below:

- I know what this thesis is about, with as title: "The Ethical Responsibility of the Dutch for Deforestation in the Amazon Region".
- I consent to participate in this research project and for the information I provide to be used in the project's analysis and outputs.
- I consent to the interview being recorded, to be safely stored (encrypted) for the duration of this project.
- I am aware that I do not have to answer all the questions that I am asked, and I reserve my right to refuse or cease participation in the interview process, and to request keeping certain materials confidential.

Indicate yes or no by writing a circle around the appropriate letter:

Do you wish to remain anonymous? Y/N

Please sign below to confirm the information given above is correct:

Interviewee

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Researcher

Mateo Groot

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Groot".

6 – 12 – 2019

## Annex II: Interview Questionnaire:

### Problem perception

**What are the main problems that have led to the fact that the Netherlands plays an important role in deforestation in the Amazon?**

**Why should we care about the Amazon?**

### Supposed solution

**Would further development in South American countries solve deforestation?**

**Should the Netherlands make economic compromises? (Reduce input to livestock industry)**

### Political influence

**Do academic experts/NGOs/market actors have much influence on shaping Dutch policies on rainforest protection in the Amazon?**

**What stakeholders have the most political influence in shaping Dutch policies?**

**Do you feel included in the policy formation process?**