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Collaboration between NGOs and village governments in the conservation of customary forests in the Datuk Sinaro Putih customary forest, Bungo Regency, Jambi

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to obtain a clear picture of the forms of collaboration and identify the barriers and challenges experienced by the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) CAPP, the Ecological Justice Foundation, and the village government in preserving the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Forest in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency. Based on the description, identification, and analysis of the research problem, this study used a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through desk research, field research, observation, interviews, and documentation. The Datuk Sinaro Putih Indigenous Community is a community that is wise in protecting its forest and environment. They possess local wisdom values in preserving the natural environment, including customary philosophy and rules as guidelines for forest and environmental protection. The establishment of customary forests and forbidden areas is an effort to preserve the environment and protect the remaining forest. Furthermore, customary oaths are held to maintain community unity in protecting the natural environment. Inhibiting factors include limited human resource capacity, individual/group interests within the institution, and weak coordination and interaction between NGOs and related institutions (stakeholders).

INTRODUCTION

In many countries, native forests have become climate buffers, preserving biodiversity (Fernández-Llamazares et al., 2021; Harris et al., 2021; Maring, 2022; Zhu et al., 2021). In Jambi Province, Indonesia, there is an indigenous community that is very consistent in preserving its customary forests, namely the Datuk Sinaro Putih indigenous community. The Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Law Community is a traditional society still bound by community ties (*rehtsgemeenschap*). This community has customary institutions, jurisdiction, customary laws, and regulations that are still adhered to. This community also carries out logging in the surrounding forest area. Datuk Sinaro Putih is the customary leader of the local community, a title passed down from generation to generation. He also controls the customary forest and all related levies within the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Law Community. This community is descended from the

Minangkabau people who arrived in the area hundreds of years ago and have lived there for generations to the present day. The territory of the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Law Community includes three hamlets: Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Baru Pelepat Hamlet, and Lubuk Telau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency, Jambi (Ridwan, 2025). To honor the uniqueness of local culture in the era of regional autonomy, the Bungo Regency Government, Jambi, issued Bungo Regency

Regulation (Perda) Number 3 of 2006 concerning the Datuk Sinaro Putih Indigenous Community. This regulation serves as the legal basis and evidence of government recognition of the Datuk Sinaro Putih Indigenous Community's existence (Ridwan, 2025).

The customary forest they protect serves both conservation and customary functions, and its management is for customary and village needs. The Batu Kerbau Customary Forest, as part of the

Datuk Sinaro Putih Indigenous Community, has now received recognition from Bungo Regency through Bungo Regent Decree Number 1249 of 2002, which confirms the Batu Kerbau Forest as a customary forest and its management by the indigenous community. For its achievements in maintaining forest and environmental sustainability, the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Law Community received the Kalpataru Award from the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Megawati Soekarno Putri, in 2004. Meanwhile, the Dusun Baru Pelepat Customary Forest is still undergoing confirmation (Adnan, 2008). This is in line with the results of indigenous community conservation practices such as the Tembawang Forest in Kalimantan, the Cerekang Customary System in South Sulawesi, and Sasi in Maluku, which also consistently demonstrate the effectiveness of customary institutions in protecting biodiversity (Akhmar et al., 2022; Roslinda et al., 2024; Saptanno & Timisela, 2024). Likewise, in various other parts of the world such as West Africa, Brazil, South Africa, and New Zealand (Hosen et al., 2020; Kühnert et al., 2019; Powers et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2021).

The strategic role of NGOs within the public policy framework has long been present in forestry policy and presents many challenges (Adni et al., 2025; Davila et al., 2024; Kleinschmit et al., 2021; Mbidzo et al., 2021; Rahayu et al., 2023). Various forestry policies and programs have been implemented in Indonesia (Afni et al., 2022; Dewi et al., 2022; Lawasi et al., 2025). But to date, they lack adequate formulation for effective implementation. Berbagai konflik kehutanan dan lahan masih sering terjadi di Indonesia (Arizona & Illiyina, 2024; Gunawan et al., 2024; Halomoan et al., 2025; Rahmani et al., 2022; Ruswandi et al., 2021).

Ministerial Regulation No. 83/2016 concerning Social Forestry regulates five forestry program schemes that provide opportunities for communities to manage and benefit from forest products. These schemes include Community Forests (HKm), Village/Nagari Forests (HD/N), Community Plantation Forests (HTR), Customary Forests, and Partnerships. However, the Social Forestry program, which aims to address territorial issues, improve welfare, and conserve forests, has not yet brought about the desired changes. This is due to a lack of in-depth studies on the program's

impact and implementation (Fauzi, Chandra, Khatimah, & Wicaksono, 2019).

By complementing government efforts through advocacy, community empowerment, policy engagement, and the protection of indigenous peoples' rights, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become crucial actors in forest conservation worldwide. Environmental NGOs have advanced community-based forest governance, helped resolve conflicts, promoted sustainable livelihoods, and influenced forestry policies to ensure social equity and biodiversity conservation across Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Mbzbain & Tchoudjen, 2021; Bari et al., 2024; Doucet et al., 2024; Dressler, 2021; Harada et al., 2022; Toumbourou & Dressler, 2024; Visweswaran & Laerhoven, 2024; Chacowry, 2023; Richards, 2023; Wachira et al., 2024). In this regard, the CAPP Foundation for Ecological Justice is one of Indonesia's leading environmental organizations that actively supports indigenous communities and customary forest governance.

The CAPP Foundation for Ecological Justice, an NGO, was founded on May 13, 2003, by several civil society organizations, journalists, and community organizations, focusing on advocacy campaigns against forest monoculture and the pulp industry. Through collaboration between local-national-international networks, the advocacy campaign strategy has successfully influenced several national and international policies in the forestry sector, such as the review of MIGAS investment (the World Bank's business unit for private company insurance guarantees) for the establishment of a pulp mill in South Kalimantan Province and the Cooperation Agreement between PT REKI (an ecosystem restoration company) and the Batin Sembilan Indigenous Community in Jambi Province to stop land ownership conflicts between them. The model for handling land ownership conflicts between PT REKI and the Batin Sembilan community became a reference for the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) for the formation of Regulation No. 84/2015 concerning Handling of Land Ownership Conflicts in Forest Areas, an initial policy from this Ministry that specifically regulates the handling of conflicts in forest areas, in addition to the Circular Letter of the Minister of Environment and Forestry No. 01/2015 which was previously issued to prioritize a

non-confrontational and persuasive approach in handling land ownership conflicts.

During the implementation period of September–December 2025, the CAPPa Ecological Justice Foundation conducted a series of integrated capacity-building and community empowerment activities to strengthen customary forest governance. These activities included training on developing Social Forest Management Plans (RKPS) for indigenous communities, a workshop on developing business models for customary forest enterprises, and a collaborative learning workshop involving representatives from seven customary forest locations to facilitate knowledge exchange and the dissemination of best practices. In addition, CAPPa organized the traditional village performance of Numbuk Lesung Ponging as a cultural event aimed at reviving indigenous traditions and strengthening local identity as an integral component of customary forest conservation. Collectively, these activities demonstrate CAPPa's integrated approach, which combines institutional strengthening, economic empowerment, knowledge sharing, and cultural preservation to support sustainable customary forest management (CAPPa Ecological Justice Foundation, 2025).

Based on this explanation, the NGO CAPPa provides farmer group development through capacity building and community empowerment, such as training in preparing RKPS (Social Forest Management Plans) and developing customary forest business models for the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Law Community, so that customary forest communities can contribute positively to supporting forestry policies, such as social forestry programs. This aligns with the principle of regional development that seeks to support bottom-up planning with a partnership pattern to achieve good governance. NGOs are also involved in various policies in various locations (Muttaqin, 2021). This ensures that government-centered policies are in line with the real experiences of forest area communities.

METHODS

The location of this research is the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Forest in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency. This location was chosen due to the successful

collaboration between the CAPPa Justice Ecology Foundation (NGO) and the village government in the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Forest Conservation program in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency.

The research method is essentially a scientific way to obtain data for specific purposes and objectives. This research is qualitative descriptive, focusing on detailed and in-depth descriptions of conditions and what actually occurs in the field. This type of research captures a variety of qualitative information through careful and nuanced descriptions. The data collected are in the form of words, sentences, or images that convey meaning beyond simply numerical statements of quantity or frequency. Several tables are also presented, but these are only descriptive in nature to support the qualitative descriptions presented. Some of the qualitative data is based on direct observation of the research subjects and in-depth interviews with several informants and respondents. Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. The informant selection technique used was purposive sampling, a selection process based on the assumption that the informant is someone who truly understands or is relevant to the research problem or object. Informants were sought based on specific criteria established by the researcher, and the researcher knew the identity and whereabouts of those who qualified to serve as informants.

Informants from the Customary Forest Management Agency were selected for this study to gather information on the collaboration between Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the village government in preserving the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Forest in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency. The next informant was the Head of the NGO CAPPa, an Ecological Justice Foundation, which oversees Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency, as the Head of the NGO is tasked with addressing customary forest issues, in accordance with his education and expertise. The final informant was the community of Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency, to be a neutral party in assessing the cooperation between the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) CAPPa Ecological Justice Foundation and the village government in the Conservation of the Datuk Sinaro

Putih Customary Forest in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency.

Data analysis is carried out by systematically searching and collecting data obtained from interview results, field notes, and documentation, images, photos, and so on, by organizing data into categories, describing them into units, synthesizing them into patterns, choosing what is important and what will be studied, then making conclusions that are easy to understand by oneself and others. Activities in analyzing qualitative data include collecting data related to research, checking the data obtained, whether it is in accordance with what is expected, grouping data to answer questions about a study, conducting discussions and formulating the data obtained, and drawing final conclusions about the data studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

NGO–village government collaboration in customary forest conservation

Customary forests are forests located in the territories of indigenous communities in Indonesia. These forests hold significant ecological, social, and cultural value for the communities living around them. One characteristic of customary forests in Indonesia is that they cannot be sold or transferred to other parties. The law governing customary forests in Indonesia is Law Number 9 of 2021 concerning Social Forest Management, which legally recognizes customary forests as part of the cultural heritage of indigenous communities. The Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Forest in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency, is an area inhabited by indigenous communities and holds local wisdom values related to environmental conservation.

Furthermore, the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Forest in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency, also exemplifies the importance of customary forests in supporting the livelihoods of indigenous communities. Customary forests are valuable assets that must be protected and managed properly. The recognition and protection of customary forests in Indonesia play a crucial role in maintaining the sustainability of forest ecosystems, biodiversity, and strengthening the cultural identity of indigenous communities. Therefore, collaboration between various parties, including the government, indigenous communities,

and NGOs, is crucial for maintaining and properly managing these customary forests.

The NGO Cappa Justice Ecology Foundation first launched the “Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA)”, an alliance focused on the potential of forest and agricultural landscapes to mitigate climate change, provide community benefits, and protect the environment. Within the context of customary forests, CLUA plays a key role in supporting social forestry and customary forests through strengthening institutions and mechanisms. CLUA supports social forestry through strengthening institutions and mechanisms, enabling communities to play an active role in sustainable forest management.

According to Arrido Hakim, Head of CAPPAs Social Media and Youth Participation Network: “So, the CAPPAs program is a collaboration with CLUA, or the Climate Land Use Alliance, or the TERA-CF program, which is supported by the Environmental Management Agency (BP-DLH). This activity is a collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. So, CAPPAs has seven locations that are assisted, including the Bush Panjang customary forest and the Batu Kerbau customary forest. Well, that's in Bungo. There is a forest in Dusun Baru, the original customary forest in Tanah Tumbuh, and there are three customary forests in Kerinci: the Bukit Tinggii, Bukit Gedang, and Tiga Luhak Kamantan customary forests. The goal, first, is to compile a document, but a customary forest management plan document. Actually, this document is for legality at the Ministry of Forestry. It is more or less similar to the work plan for customary forest management groups in customary forest locations. There is an RKPS format. So the RKPS is compiled, and then there will be an RKT, a work plan. “There is also the formation of annual business groups, workshops, collaborative learning workshops, and workshops on developing business models or customary forestry businesses. It's all part of the collaboration that's been established”.

Arrido Hakim continued, explaining: CAPPAs has organized several training programs. First, CAPPAs doesn't just appear out of nowhere; they come to the community out of the blue. This process requires the direct consent of the indigenous peoples and customary institutions. So, first, we consult with them, explain our program, the events

from start to finish, for example, and present it to the community in December. Then, regardless of whether they agree or not, we provide support. Regardless of whether they agree or not, we're here, for example. This is called the FBIC Free and Informed Consent process. That's the first step. Second, there's the preparation of the Regional Work Plan (RKPS) and the preparation of the RKPS. Communities were trained, and from the outset, they were asked, "What is the RKPS?" Third, there was the establishment of KUPS (Indigenous Community Forest Management Units); fourth, there were workshops on monitoring and participation in customary forest management; fifth, workshops on business model development; and fifth, collaborative learning activities. Sixth, there were collaborative learning activities for customary forests in seven locations supported by CAPPa.

On May 19, 2024, the NGO Cappa Justice Ecology Foundation held a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on Free and Informed Consent (FPIC) at the Pelepat Village Office, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency, with the aim of strengthening customary forest management in the area. The event was attended by various stakeholders, including the Directorate for Customary Forest Area Determination and Forestry Rights (PKTHA) of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK), the Regional Development Planning Agency (BPD LH), CAPPa, and representatives of indigenous communities. Yuli Prasetyo Nugroho, Head of the Sub-Directorate for Customary Forest Area Determination and Forestry Rights, emphasized the importance of collaboration to empower indigenous communities through needs-based programs. The discussion also addressed challenges faced by the community, such as the lack of government support and the need for patrol vehicles to prevent illegal logging. This was conveyed by Saprin from the Belukar Panjang Community Empowerment (MHA). Anas from the Dusun Baru Pelepat Community Empowerment (KPHA) highlighted the issue of clean water access, which only covers a small portion of the population, while Zaki from the Belukar Panjang Community Empowerment (KPHA) expressed the community's disappointment over the lack of support to date.

In addition, the meeting discussed follow-up plans to improve customary forest management,

including strengthening the capacity of indigenous communities to manage their customary forests in the region. The main objective of this agreement is to promote the recognition and protection of customary institutions and to enhance the capacity of indigenous communities to sustainably manage their customary forests. Through the Social Forestry scheme, indigenous communities are given access and opportunities to utilize customary forest areas, which not only helps preserve the environment but also supports sustainable community economic development. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry is committed to supporting communities in developing realistic and beneficial work plans and exploring productive economic potential, such as planting mahogany and coffee. Farida Ariyani from the Community and Village Empowerment Office of Bungo Regency emphasized the importance of needs-based programs for sustainability. "We must analyze community needs to ensure sustainable programs", she explained.

Participants agreed that these programs must be designed to improve community welfare without compromising forest sustainability. Hendryk P. Harahap from KPHP Units II and III of Bungo Regency highlighted the importance of accurate data and documentation to support empowerment programs and the formation of Social Forestry Business Groups (KUPS), which can help communities become more self-sufficient.

According to Mr. Hermaini, Head of the Batu Kerbau Customary Forest, he explained "With support from various parties, it is hoped that this program can improve the welfare of indigenous communities without sacrificing forest sustainability. This FGD is expected to be the first step in formulating concrete solutions for sustainable customary forest management that benefits the community. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry, together with CAPPa and other relevant parties, is committed to facilitating the preparation and approval of planning documents for Indigenous Communities (MHA), including those planning to form Social Forestry Business Groups (KUPS). Activities such as seminars, workshops, and other meetings will be held jointly to share information, strengthen partnerships, and encourage effective cooperation in protecting forest areas, empowering indigenous communities, and supporting sustainable

development in the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Forest, Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency.

This joint agreement represents a concrete step towards strengthening the capacity of indigenous communities to manage customary forests in the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Forest, Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency. Through this agreement, it is hoped that customary forest management can be implemented more effectively, thereby supporting sustainable development in the region. The following are key points from the CAPPa Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for Capacity Building of Indigenous Communities/Management Groups of the Belukar Panjang Customary Protected Forest:

1. Approve all activities to be carried out by the Cappa Keadilan Ekologi Foundation until December 31, 2024.
2. Explore business potential based on the local wisdom of the Belukar Panjang Customary Protection Forest.
3. Develop a work plan and business management plan for the Belukar Panjang Customary Protection Forest.
4. Involve women and youth in the business management of the Belukar Panjang Customary Protection Forest Management Group.
5. Encourage the formation of local facilitators/leaders.
6. All activities will involve various parties, including: KPHP Units II and III of Bungo Regency, the Bungo Regency Environmental Service, the Bungo Regency Community and Village Empowerment Service, the Pelepat Regency Government, the Batu Kerbau Village Government, the Indigenous Community, and other relevant parties.

Furthermore, the Cappa Justice Ecology Foundation will conduct activities in the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Forest in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency, until December 31, 2024. Saprin, the manager of the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Forest in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency, explained: "So, first, CAPPa provides the first program, the KUPS (Cultural Development Plan), and second, the RKPS (Regional Development Plan). The KUPS program is designed to establish

customary forest management based on customary law. The RKPS includes activities managed by CAPPa in collaboration with customary forest managers. There are training programs in Kerinci and Jambi. The RKPS includes a program for establishing farmer groups. Farmer groups are part of the RKPS, but to date, their implementation has not been signed. This is because Datuk Rio did not participate in Jambi. Throughout Jambi Province, those developing customary forests participated in training in Kerinci, Jambi, and Batu Kerbau Kolah, without assistance from the village government. CAPPa informed us about the existence of forest management. This custom has been established through the tradition of Datuk Sinaro Putih, which was agreed upon by the indigenous community". Management methods are governed by customary law. CAPPa then sought the villagers' opinions on customary forest management, and they acted as our liaison with the Minister of Villages, who oversees the environment.

KUPS (Social Forestry Business Groups) and RKPS (Social Forestry Management Plans) are two interrelated elements in the context of social forestry in Indonesia. KUPS are business groups developed by communities surrounding forests to sustainably utilize forest potential, while RKPS are forest management plans developed by the communities themselves to manage KUPS activities. The activities of the Cappa Keadilan Ecology Foundation are supported by Sartawi, Head of the Village Consultative Body (BPD) of Batu Kerbau Hamlet.

In their collaboration, the village government, Cappa NGO, and traditional community leaders, while in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, consistently invited and held inter-village discussions, followed by village-level discussions. The results of these village-level discussions reached agreement and approval from many community members. They can collaborate with Cappa NGO, government, and traditional leaders, and the community can form mutually agreed activities, which can be sustainable and protect the forest as well as preserve and empower local culture in the village, can improve and achieve the goals of progress and education in the village with good cooperation with Cappa NGO.

The intervention and support provided by the NGO CAPPa to the Datuk Sinaro Putih indigenous community involves reactivating indigenous groups

or communities, including efforts to revive cultural practices, traditions, and values that may have faded or disappeared.

According to Arrido Hakim: “The first form of support is to increase the capacity of indigenous groups or communities. Institutions, such as group structures and so on, if existing ones are still active, are reactivated and strengthened. Second, within the area, groups within the area are strengthened in relation to the management of their customary forest areas. For example, if we forget the boundaries, we remind them, and then we remind them of the existing potential. Third, we focus on efforts. In terms of efforts, we assess the potential that can be developed within the customary forest”.

The government's recognition of indigenous communities and all customary regulations within it support indigenous communities in preserving their environment based on socio-cultural principles that have been passed down from generation to generation. Bungo Regency Regional Regulation Number 3 of 2006 concerning the Datuk Sinaro Putih Customary Law Community, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency, contains all provisions of the Datuk Sinaro Putih customary community regarding community life and management of natural resources.

These results also support the opinion of Rahayu et al. (2023), who stated that NGOs should be viewed as policy actors and not simply implementing organizations. CAPPa helps translate national social forestry policies into locally relevant governance practices through the implementation of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes, the facilitation of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and ongoing engagement with government institutions. With the assistance of NGOs, policy implementation can be tailored to the local institutional context. This is demonstrated by the collaborative development of RKPS and KUPS.

Then, this collaborative process aligns with the framework proposed by Doucet et al. (2024), which states that successful collaboration between NGOs and local governments is influenced by institutional roles, communication, trust, and shared goals. This study found that collaborative principles exist, such as village deliberations, stakeholder consultations, and participatory decision-making. These principles enable village governments, traditional leaders, and

indigenous communities to reach agreement on management.

Furthermore, Visweswaran and Van Laerhoven (2024) state that an institutional design perspective must be adapted for NGO interventions. They argue that NGO interventions should avoid standardized institutional approaches and instead align with local socio-cultural institutions. CAPPa interventions are based on customary governance systems, not externally imposed conservation models, as demonstrated by the use of FPIC, the revitalization of customary institutions, and the strengthening of indigenous community organizations. These cultural methods support the legitimacy and sustainability of customary forest governance.

Factors hindering collaborative forest governance

1. Limited human resource capacity

Limited human resource capacity is a significant challenge to collaborative customary forest management. This includes a lack of forestry experts, a lack of understanding of forest management concepts, and managerial skills at the field level. Based on an interview with CAPPa, the following statement was made: “In Pelepat District, particularly in Kerbau Hamlet, there is still a significant shortage of skilled forestry technicians with competency certificates. This monitoring workshop is expected to encourage the availability of competent experts. Competent foresters will be awarded competency certificates by the NGO, the Cappa Keadilan Ecology Foundation”.

In remote areas, the lack of experts can hinder the implementation of effective forest management technologies and practices. Therefore, forestry experts play a crucial role in assisting indigenous communities to manage their customary forests sustainably and sustainably, while ensuring their rights are protected.

2. Lack of managerial and entrepreneurial skills

The lack of managerial and entrepreneurial skills is a significant challenge to customary forest management. Indigenous communities often possess traditional forest knowledge but lack the modern management skills and business orientation to manage forest resources sustainably and profitably. An interview with Saprin, the manager of the Datuk Sinaro Putih customary forest in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency,

revealed the following statement: “These indigenous communities lack experience in long-term forest management planning, including management plan development, monitoring, and evaluation. Indigenous community organizations lack strong and transparent structures to effectively manage forest resources, including decision-making, benefit sharing, and conflict resolution. Our difficulties in accessing larger markets for non-timber forest products and other forest products also hinder the development of forest-based businesses”.

Customary forest managers need to have the skills to efficiently manage forest resources, including planning, implementation, and evaluation. By improving their managerial and entrepreneurial skills, indigenous communities can manage their customary forests more effectively and sustainably, providing greater economic benefits to their communities.

3. Lack of understanding of the concept and implementation of customary forest management

Lack of understanding of the concept and implementation of customary forest management is often a major obstacle to conservation and maintenance efforts. This is due to several factors, including a lack of effective outreach, a lack of easily accessible information, and differing perceptions between indigenous communities and other stakeholders. Based on the following interview with CAPPA: “Socialization of the concept and implementation of customary forest management is often uneven and ineffective”. The information disseminated may not reach all levels of the indigenous community, or may be delivered in language that is difficult to understand. There are differing perceptions between indigenous communities, the government, and the private sector regarding customary forest management. This creates conflicts of interest and hinders collaborative efforts in customary forest management. Some indigenous community members have limited knowledge of ecological concepts, natural resource management, and sustainability principles. This can impact their understanding of the importance of sound customary forest management.

There is a need to improve understanding of the principles of customary forest management, including related regulations and policies. By

improving this comprehensive understanding, it is hoped that customary forest management can be more effective, sustainable, and provide optimal benefits to indigenous communities and the environment.

4. Resource imbalance

An imbalance between the resources held by various parties in the collaboration (e.g., government, indigenous communities) can hinder the achievement of collaborative goals. The following is an interview with Hermaini, Head of the Batu Kerbau Customary Forest: “The rights of indigenous communities in the Batu Kerbau customary forest are often not fully recognized by the state, or existing legal protections are ineffective in preventing the exploitation of forest resources by other parties. Ultimately, the influx of economic interests from outside parties, such as plantation or mining companies, often ignores the rights of indigenous communities and results in the conversion of customary forest lands into commercial land”.

Imbalances in customary forest management can trigger conflicts between indigenous communities and other parties, including the government and companies. Imbalances in customary forest management are complex issues that require holistic and sustainable solutions. By recognizing the rights of indigenous communities, protecting customary forests, and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits, it is hoped that sustainable forest management can be achieved and provide prosperity for all parties.

5. Weak coordination and interaction between ngos and related institutions (stakeholders)

Weak coordination and interaction between NGOs and related institutions in customary forest management can hinder successful collaboration. This can be caused by various factors, such as differing goals, working methods, and a lack of effective communication. This lack of interaction between institutions can lead to overlapping activities, wasted resources, and a lack of synergy in achieving shared goals. The following is an interview with Hermaini, Head of the Batu Kerbau Customary Forest: “There is no effective forum or platform for sharing information and experiences between NGOs and related parties. NGOs may have different agendas, and this can lead to misalignment in forest management strategies. Weak coordination

also hinders the achievement of shared goals in customary forest management”.

This study identifies barriers that provide important insights into the challenges associated with collaborative forest governance. Doucet et al. (2024) state that some of the key factors hindering NGO-government collaboration are inadequate coordination, ineffective communication, and institutional capacity gaps. The fact that limited human resources, poor interagency coordination, and unequal access to financial and technical resources are consistently identified as key barriers affecting the implementation of customary forest management programs supports this notion.

Similarly, Harada et al. (2022) emphasize that sustainable customary forest conservation depends on legal recognition and ongoing institutional support. Although CAPPa has helped improve institutions by creating Regional Work Plans (RKPS) and Regional Community Development Plans (KUPS), management limitations and a lack of technical expertise have limited the program's sustainability.

From a policy perspective, Rahayu et al. (2023) stated that NGO effectiveness largely depends on the responsiveness of government institutions and the consistency of policy implementation at various levels of government. The study found that policy implementation at the village level was less effective due to inconsistent support from relevant government institutions and limited coordination among stakeholders, despite the establishment of collaborative mechanisms.

Furthermore, Visweswaran and Van Laerhoven (2024) note that when local capacity is weak, or community organizations lack adequate management capabilities, externally supported conservation initiatives often face institutional challenges. This study reinforces the argument that strengthening customary institutions alone is insufficient without developing human resources, entrepreneurial skills, and organizational management.

CONCLUSION

The Datuk Sinaro Putih Indigenous Community is a wise community in preserving its forests and environment. They possess local wisdom values in preserving the natural environment. These values include the existence of

customary philosophies and rules as guidelines for forest and environmental protection, the establishment of customary forests and restricted areas as an effort to preserve the environment and protect remaining forests, and the implementation of customary vows to maintain community unity in preserving the natural environment. Factors hindering cooperation between the NGO – the Ecological Justice Foundation and the Village Government in preserving the Datuk Sinaro Putih Indigenous Forest in Batu Kerbau Hamlet, Pelepat District, Bungo Regency include limited human resource capacity, individual/group interests within the institution, and weak coordination and interaction between the NGO and related institutions (stakeholders).

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