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**Research article** 

# Community's Participation in the Determination of Customary Land Rights in Singingi River Basin

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This research aimed to uncover the issue of low community participation in, and regional government commitment to, the determination of customary land rights in Singingi river basin through regional regulations as mandated by Resolution of the Constitutional Court No. 35 of 2015. The researchers employed a qualitative approach through interviews with customary land owners, Kuantan Singingi Regency government apparatus, and a Riau Malay Customary Institution representative in Singingi and Singingi Hilir Districts. The results indicate several barriers on the part of the community to participation in policy-making regarding customary land: community's apathy; community's lack of knowledge and understanding; strong, deeply-rooted paternalism; lack of reward (follow-up) for community's participation; community's low sense of responsibility; community's unawareness of the mechanism of expressing aspirations; community's limited access to information; and lack of support from community elements which were supposed to empower the community, such as, nongovernmental organizations and mass media outlets. Meanwhile, some barriers also originated on the bureaucracy's part: no public space allowed by the existing bureaucratic system; the bureaucracy's inclination to refuse community's participation on account of high cost involvement; and the bureaucracy's poor understanding of fundamental meaning of participation.

Keywords: participation, community, bureaucracy

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#### INTRODUCTION

The state's neglect of the customary land rights of *adat* law communities to certain territories has been going on for a long time, and this leads to a colossal destruction to the order of life of these communities. In essence, *adat* law communities (*Masyarakat Hukum Adat*, MHA) have a multidimensional relationship with their respective territories. To them, land serves not only as an economic resource but also as an integral part to their lives. According to the Inquiry Team of the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), the neglect of *adat* law communities' relations with their land and territories, the origins of control over their land and territories, and agrarian political history have all this time been responsible for the overall destruction of their lives (Tim Inkuiri Nasional Komnas HAM, 2016).

The state's recognition of *adat* law communities' rights commenced back in 2012. As stated by the Inquiry Team of Komnas HAM, an important landmark in the national agrarian politics is the issuance of Resolution of the Constitutional Court No. 35 of 2012, which obligates the state to grant due recognition to the customary territories of *adat* law communities.

From the historical trajectory since the *Domein Verklaring* (Domain Declaration) in 1870, the Basic Agrarian Law of 1960, Law No. 5 of 1967, and Law No. 41 of 1999 have yet to realize sovereignty of *adat* law communities over their territories. Resolution of the Constitutional Court No. 35 of 2012 has served as a critical mark of the return of *adat* law communities' sovereignty hope over their territories (Tim Inkuiri Nasional Komnas HAM, 2016). However, this resolution of *adat* law communities' rights to their customary forest zones be set out in a regional regulation on the designation of *adat* law communities and their customary territories (Cahyaningrum, 2015).

The ratification of the regional regulation on the designation of customary zones on which Indonesian customary forests lie has been underway at a slow pace despite the urgency of the regional regulation for the improvement of adat communities' prosperity. The fact that no legal product has been in place has set an impediment to designations of customary forests (customary territories), making the role of regional governments in customary forests designation indispensable (rmibogor.id, 2018). In the case of Kuantan Singingi Regency, the response of the government to the making of regional regulations or any other rules for legalizing customary territories is categorized as low, and this serves as a chief barrier. Assistant I of the Kuantan Singingi Regency government Erlinto stated that to adat law communities, customary land occupies a strategic position as it is the only asset which is profitable and fixed in its state. Adat law communities can use

customary land for improving their prosperity (pelitariau.com, 2014). Erlianto went on explaining that in Kuantan Singingi Regency, customary land in each *kenegerian* (village) has long existed, but the regional government has yet to legally acknowledge it, or, in other words, there has been no customary land rights recognized (pelitariau.com, 2014).

Customary land in Singingi River have existed since time immemorial. Even based on the account of Wan Ghalib, the area was once ruled by Singingi Monarchy, one of the 14 monarchies that once ruled Riau, through the reigns of Dt Jelo Sutan and Dt Bendaharo (Halkis, 2006). Customary land in Singingi community is known by the term *concang latiah*, referring to a certain territory within certain natural borders which is passed down from generation to generation through the mother line (Halkis, 2006). Oemala (2007) stated that the customary land in Singingi is the supreme heirloom of several tribes of a historical background based on the incoming pedigree of each penghulu adat (chief of adat) far before the entry and development of Islam. The customary land existing today is a compound of some pieces of customary land under the tenure of the Piliah Nan Limo and Melayu Nan Ompek tribes. The customary land in Rantau Singingi with its preserved customary land status to date is a perpetual heirloom of the community. The pieces of communal land in Rantau Singingi are not standalones but a combination of rantau unit parts (Oemala, 2007).

The existence of the customary land held by *adat* law communities is at peril since occupation of this customary land by businesspersons is still underway, ultimately ending up in conflicts. One case of such customary land occupation by investors took place in Pangkalan Indarung Village, Singingi District (Kuansingterkini.com, 2013). The *adat* law communities around Singingi River basin are fervently hoping that their customary land rights be recognized and defended by the regency government. They ask that head of regency Mursini defend the recognition of their customary land rights through Regional Regulation on the Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW) of Riau Province (www.detakriau.com, 2017).

The government of Kuantan Singingi Regency has yet to show a serious commitment despite the demand of the *adat* law communities residing in Singingi River basin that it should recognize their rights to the customary land and despite the many laws and regulations established by the Central Government to support the legalizing of *adat* law communities' rights to customary land, including the following.

1. Circular Letter of the Minister of Forestry No. SE.1/Menhut-II/2013 to governors, regency heads, and mayors (Surat-Edaran-Menteri-Kehutanan-2013-Tentang-Putusan-Mahkamah-Konstitusi, 2013) and Regulation of the Ministry of Forestry No. 62 of 2013, which stipulates that customary forests are separated from state forests according to a regional regulation (Perubahan atas Peraturana Menteri Kehutanan Nomor P.44/MENHUT-II/2012 Tentang Pengukuhan kawasan Hutan, 2013)

- 2. Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs No. 52 of 2014, which explains that the existence of an *adat* law community is determined by a regulation of regency head/mayor (Pedoman Pengakuan dan Perlindungan Masyarakat Hukum *Adat*, 2014)
- 3. Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture/National Land Agency No. 9/2015, which regulates the procedure of assigning customary land rights to *adat* law communities and to communities present within a forest zone, a plantation zone, or the like (Tata Cara Penetapan Hak Komunal Atas Tanah Masyarakat Hukum *Adat* dan Masyarakat yang Berada Dalam kawasan Tertentu, 2015).
- 4. Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 88 of 2017 on the resolution of land disputes within a forest zone, which reasserts that communal land tenure is set out under a regional regulation (Penyelesaian Penguasaan Tanah dalam kawasan Hutan, 2017).

Based on the description above, the political commitment of the Kuantan Singingi Regency government seems to be weak, but, on the other hand, the community's participation in the fight for communal land tenure is still perceived as minimal. Hence, it is deemed necessary to inquiry into, and reinforce, the community's participation in the determination of a communal land zone in order for the *adat* law community's customary land rights to be protected and recognized by the state's law.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Problems with Community's Participation in Policymaking

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identified two principal community groups reluctant to participate in public affairs (Cropley & Phibbs, 2013): 1) those who are willing but unable to participate for reasons of a) cultural and language barriers, b) geographical distance, and c) disability or socioeconomic status (e.g., insufficient technological, information, and communications resources for them to participate for reasons that a) they have a little interest in political affairs, b) they are short of time; c) they see no benefit or personal relevance in political affairs, d) they believe others would keep interests of theirs, and e) they do not believe that the Government would make the best use of their inputs.

Sirajuddin et al. in (Rumesten, 2012) make a reference of several problems a community might encounter in the context of low participation in law-making:

- 1) community's apathy;
- 2) community's lack of knowledge and understanding;
- 3) strong, deeply-rooted paternalism;
- 4) an absence of reward (follow-up) of community's participation;
- 5) community's low sense of responsibility;
- 6) community's unawareness of the mechanism of expressing aspirations;
- 7) community's lack of access to information; and
- 8) lack of support from community elements which are supposed to empower the community, such as, non-governmental organizations and mass media outlets.

Besides, the following bureaucratic issues also hinder community's participation (Rumesten, 2012):

- a. the bureaucratic system in place has yet to provide a space for the public;
- b. there has been no community's participation on account of high cost involvement; and
- c. the bureaucracy's poor understanding of the fundamental meaning of participation.

### Adat Law Communities and Customary Land Rights

In an Arizona article it is stated that the term masyarakat hukum adat, or adat law community, originated in the community classification taught by adat law scholar Cornellis van Vollenhoven. The social group later known as masyarakat hukum, or law community (rechtgemeenschappen), is a community whose entire members bound as a unit by an applicable law. If the law used is an *adat* law, then this community is called an *adat* law community (adat rechtgemeenschappen) (Adlin. & Yusri, 2019). Pujosewo opined that an adat law community is a community which forms spontaneously within a certain region, arbitrarily or ungoverned by a higher ruler or another ruler, with or without immense solidarity between its members, regards non-community members as outsiders, and allows only its members to exploit the region as a wealth source. Exploitation by outsiders requires approval and the outsiders' paying a certain reward that might take the form of recognition or the likes. This community develops characteristics typical to adat law, namely, communal life and strong bond between members due to genealogical, territorial, and

genealogical-territorial factors (Rosmidah, 2010). Quoting Ter Haar, Ferry Aries Suranta stated that *adat* law communities or associations mostly prevail with their respective *adat* laws on the basis of territorial or genealogical ties and/or a combination of both (Adlin. & Yusri, 2019). Satjipto Rahardjo proposed four juridical clauses that set the criteria for an *adat* law community existence: a) as long as existent; b) keeping abreast with community's development; c) in accordance with the principle of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia; and d) regulated by legislation (Abdurrahman., 2015)

Adat law communities have, among others, basic rights related to their living space, namely, customary land rights, as set out under Article 3 of the Basic Agrarian Law of 1960. In Articles 1 and 3 it is stated that the exercise of the customary land rights and similar other rights of *adat* law communities, insofar as they prevail in reality, must be in such a way that it befits national and state's interest, based on national integrity, and must not be at odds with other higher laws and regulations (Rosmidah, 2010).

Customary land rights or *beschikkingsrecht* across all the Indonesian archipelago are the highest rights to land. Only a tribe (*stam*) or a village or a group of villages (*dorphenbond*), and never an individual, is entitled to these rights (Vollenhoven, 2013). The characteristics of customary law rights are most evident outside Java and are basically described as follows (Vollenhoven, 2013).

- 1) Only the law community concerned, along with its members, is entitled to freely use the uncultivated within plots of land its territory (beschikkingskring). For example. the law community might clear a patch of land, construct a house, collect/pick up the products, hunt, keep a livestock, to name a few.
- 2) Outsiders (*vreemden*, i.e., non-members of the law community; they include indigenous people who are not members of the law community concerned, e.g., people coming from other villages) are only entitled to using the land with approval from the law community concerned. Without approval, they are considered as committing a breach.
- Outsiders—occasionally also members—are obliged to pay a recognitie (i.e., cash, material, or goods to an individual/body/law community as recognition of the individual/body/law community).
- 4) The law community is responsible for certain crimes committed by aliens within its territory.
- 5) The law community cannot forsake its customary land rights.
- 6) The law community's customary land rights are still applicable to well-cultivated pieces of land within its territory, but the attachment power of

#### the rights could either remain strong or recede.

In conclusion, customary land rights are a set of authorities and responsibilities of an *adat* law community with regards to the land within its territory. Every member of the *adat* law community has the rights to manage and extract benefits from the land and natural resources existing within the *adat* law community's territory. Outsiders reserve no rights unless with approval of the *adat* law community concerned (Sahrina Safiuddin, 2018).

(Ginting, 2012) quoted van Vollenhove's ideas on customary land rights (*beshisckingrecht*) as follows.

- 1) *Beschikingrecht* to a piece of land is reserved only by legal associations and not individuals.
- 2) *Beschikingrecht* cannot be forsaken permanently.
- 3) Beschikingrecht can only be forsaken temporarily for reasons other than loss of income which must be coupled with payment of customs imposed by outsiders according to the prevailing adat law, and the customs must be paid to the legal association controlling the piece of land.

Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 5 of 1960 on Agrarian Basics grants conditional recognition to customary land rights in the following ways: first, existence requirement, that is, the customary land rights are recognized as long as it exists, and, second, implementation requirement, that is, it is used for the national and state's interest based on national integrity and not at odds with other higher laws and regulations (Rosmidah. 2010). Maria W. Sumardjono in (Abdurrahman., 2015) outlined the criteria for the subsistence of customary land rights as follows:

- 1) the existence of an *adat* law community with certain characteristics as customary land rights subject;
- 2) the existence of a piece of land/territory within certain boundaries as customary land rights subject; and
- 3) the existence of *adat* law community authority to take certain predetermined measures.

# Regional Government's Authority in the Determination of Customary Land

The regional government's authority in determining customary land is detailed as follows:

- 1) Making regional regulations to determine a customary land zone
- 2) This is as set out in Circular Letter of the Minister

of Forestry No. SE.1/Menhut-II/2013 to governors and regency heads/mayors and Regulation of the Minister of Forestry No. 62 of 2013, which explains that an *adat* forest is to be excluded from a state forest after the ratification of a regional regulation (Sukirno, 2016).

- 3) Determining the existence of an *adat* law community
- 4) This is as set out in Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs No. 52 of 2014, which explains that the existence of an *adat* law community is determined based on a head of regency/mayor regulation (Sukirno, 2016).
- 5) Establishing a team for the inventory of the control, ownership, use, and exploitation of land (IP4T)
- 6) As stated by Noer Fauzi Rachman, the IP4T team is formed by the governor and head of regency/mayor to determine an *adat* law community along with its designated customary land as set out in Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture/National Land Agency No. 9/2015, which regulates the procedure for the assigning of customary land rights to an *adat* law community and to communities existing within forest and plantation jurisprudences or others (Sumardjono et al., 2016)
- 7) Cooperating with the Central Government-formed Team of Forest Land Resolution Implementation Acceleration (www.hukumonline.com/pusatdata, 2017).

#### **RESEARCH METHODS**

The research employed a qualitative research method. It started with enrolment of research informants by purposive sampling. The informants selected were those who were considered to have the knowledge of the community's participation in the determination of rights to customary land in Singingi River basin. The informants are described below.

No	Informants	Number of Informant
1	Member of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) of electoral districts of Singingi-Singingi Hilir	1
2	Representative from the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda) of Kuantan Singingi Regency	1
3	Representative from the Land Office of Kuantan Singingi Regency	1
4	Customary land dato	5
5	Representative of Riau Malay <i>adat</i> institution of Singingi- Singingi Hilir Districts	1
6	Heads of villages in Singingi-Singingi Hilir Districts	2
7	Heads of Singingi and Singingi-Hilir Districts	2
	Total	13

Data collection was carried out in two ways: 1) to obtain primary data, the researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the informants mentioned in Table 4 guided by some questions and 2) to obtain secondary data, the researchers collected documents related to community's participation in the determination of customary land in Singingi River basin. As stated by Meriam, data collection process and data analysis process in a qualitative research study are two simultaneous processes. Hence, all the data collected from various sources through the interviews and document study would at the same time be analysed and subsequently visualized for a precise, accurate interpretation (Creswell, 2002). The qualitative data analysis to be used was a narrative one, which, as stated by (Neuman, 2003), consists of five stages: 1) sort and classify; 2) open coding; 3) axial coding; 4) selective coding; and 5) interpret and elaborate.

Following Neuman's five stages, the researchers conducted the following. First, select and classify the data gathered from key informants from the elements determined. Second, perform open coding on the research informants' response regarding community's participation. Third, conduct interviews on barriers to community's participation in the determination of customary land rights in Singingi River basin.

Fourth, select the coded data by data selection according to the theme and framework until a whole collection of data were gathered for interpretation (selective coding). Fifth, perform interpretation and elaboration on the collected data to draw accurate conclusions (interprets and elaborate).

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#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The research findings show that there were some problems with community elements' participation in policy-making as stated by Edi Sugiharto. Weak participation was observed in all reaches, starting from customary land *dato*, to Riau Malay *adat* institution, to community members in Singingi River basin.

1) Community's apathy

The community's apathy was shown by the community's lack of eagerness in getting the customary land recognized in the national law through regional regulation-based legalization. The community's tendency toward apathy was not without reason. The community's apathy stemmed from their fear of the corporation which has been occupying its customary land since the New Order era and from the suspicion that the regional government and security forces favoured the corporation over the community. Adopting an apathetic attitude toward customary land management was seen appropriate, as there was the fear that concern with customary land rights would bring a detrimental effect from the corporate, regional government, and security forces pressures instead.

2) Community's lack of knowledge and understanding

The customary land *dato* and the community members in Singingi River basin were unaware that the Constitutional Court has mandated that customary land must be protected under the scheme of regional regulation or at the least decision of head of regency. Partly due to their law level of education, the customary land *dato* did not understand that it is necessary that their customary land should be protected under regional legal products. Over the time, these customary land *dato* relied singly on *tambo adat*-based recognition of customary land ownership, whereas the Constitutional Court required that customary land must be protected through regional regulations.

a. Strong, deeply-rooted paternalism

The customary land *dato* and community members in Singingi River basin were living in a strong paternalist culture toward the regional government. At a meeting with the head of Kuantan Singingi Regency, Mursini, the *dato* requested for a fight for their customary land through regional regulations, but no desirable response had been received. The *dato* were reluctant to express their aspiration again as they did not want to "bother" the regency head with their aspiration, although expressing this aspiration is appropriate according to the Constitutional Court. This proved the strong paternalism within the culture toward the regional government.

b. An absence of reward (follow-up) for community's participation

An absence of a follow-up from the government element for the aspirations expressed was also responsible for the community's apathy. The community members believed that they had made every effort but the outcome had been a disappointment. Disappointed, the *dato* and community members developed an apathetic attitude toward the regulation-making process related to customary land.

c. Community's low sense of responsibility

Some of the *dato* and community members had a poor understanding on the importance of customary land rights recognition within the national law. Some of them were not too concerned with the protection for customary land provided by the state as long as they enjoyed what little benefit shared by the corporation which had been exploiting their customary land since the New Order era. The customary land *dato* even ignored the community members' growing grievance over the use of their customary land by this corporation.

d. Community's unawareness of the mechanism of expressing aspirations

The customary land *dato* and community members along the course of Singingi River had no knowledge of the legal steps they should have taken to protect their customary land. For example, there was a confusion of which form was to be used between regional regulation and simply decision of regency head, or which path to be taken between members of the DPRD of Kuantan Singingi Regency and regency head. In 2018, they even sent the Ministry of Forestry a letter regarding their request of live crops at 20 percent from the corporation controlling their customary land. This was improper since the land they disputed was not state-owned land, but customary land that had yet to be protected by the national law. The first step they should have taken was seeking protection for their customary land through regional legal products.

e. Community's limited access to information

The customary land *dato* and community members in Singingi River basin also had a limited access to information regarding the importance of regional legal product presence for the protection of their customary land. This was proven by their unawareness that Decision of the Minister of Forestry No. 35 of 2012 recognizes the existence of customary land rights and mandates the devising of regional regulations for the protection of customary land. They were also unaware of the follow-up regulations issued by the Central Government to realize the Minister of Forestry decision above. This was caused by their poor knowledge and ability to access information via Internet media as well as other media.

f. Lack of support from the community elements which are supposed to empower the community, such as, non-governmental organizations and mass media outlets

The *dato* conceded that they were highly supportive of the effort to get their customary land protected through regional legal products, but they lacked supporters unlike other regions which had managed to establish regional regulations related to their customary land rights. For instance, there was no non-governmental organizations like *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara* or mass media outlets moved to support their cause in fighting for their customary land rights through regional legal products.

Furthermore, findings also show that bureaucracy had hindered the community's participation in fighting for their rights to the customary land in Singingi River basin through regional legal products. This happened in the following ways.

a. The bureaucratic system had yet to provide a space for the public

The bureaucratic apparatus, who served as this research's information, seemed to dread assuming a role in the fight for the protection of the customary land in Singingi River basin through regional legal products. The reason expressed was that the talk of customary land was highly susceptible to conflict, hence he was averse to discussing this matter with the community. The same impression was also displayed by the regency head when the community expressed aspirations regarding the customary land. No follow-up the community expected had been in place.

b. Zero community's participation on account of high cost involvement

The bureaucratic apparatus was of the view that the management of customary land would involve many community members and a long time. The customary land measurement would also be costly. It was deemed that the economic cost involved would be very high if the community was directly involved in the fight for the customary land. Social cost, too, would also be high since it would trigger customary-land conflicts within the community. Contrary to this view, Singingi ruler, Datuk Bendaharo, stated that all conflicts can be resolved as were the many past customary land-related conflicts which were entirely resolved. This statement indicated that the high-cost reason the bureaucracy was worried about was not completely right.

c. The bureaucracy's poor understanding on the fundamental meaning of participation

Participation is basically a must in a democratic country. Hence, the expression of the aspiration to protect customary land through regional legal products must be appreciated. The *dato* were not informed of the customary land matters in the 2018 Riau Province spatial planning. Therefore, they were unaware of the opportunity to protect the customary land via the regional spatial planning. As a result, the customary land in Singingi River basin remained of a state forest status. This definitely disadvantaged the *adat* law community which is entitled to the customary land.

### CONCLUSIONS

The research findings show that there were some problems with community's participation in the policymaking related to the determination of customary land in Singingi River basin, and these problems were exacerbated by the bureaucracy apparatus' tendency to hinder the community's participation.

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