



Participatory conservation in the Semliro Traditional Village, Rahtawu Village, as an effort to preserve culture, environment, and land

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ABSTRACT

Background: The beauty of a Rahtawu Village certainly poses a threat from the are increasingly a rapid human activity to meet life's needs. The Dukuh Semliro community formed an effort to preserve the nature of Mount Muria, namely by building the Semliro Traditional Village. The aim of this research is to find out the role of participatory conservation carried out by the Semliro Traditional Village in an effort to preserve its ancestral heritage with efforts from cultural, environmental, and land acquisition aspects. **Methods:** The method applied is descriptive-qualitative, with the research object being the Semliro Traditional Village in Rahtawu Village, Gebog District, Kudus Regency, Central Java. Data were obtained through direct observation in the field and a literature study. **Findings:** The research results show that Semliro Traditional Village is an extension of efforts to preserve culture, environment, and land in Kudus Regency, especially Rahtawu Village. The level of participation of the Semliro Traditional Village community is quite low; this is also followed by the still low level of activity or behavior of the traditional community in terms of conserving their agricultural land resources. **Conclusion:** The Rahtawu Village community is a making efforts to preserve the Muria forest by enforcing norms in cultural aspects. Participatory conservation needs to be encouraged to restore environmental degradation that occurred in Rahtawu Village through Proklim (the Climate Village Program) and the formation of traditional villages. The policy regarding restrictions regarding land ownership for residents outside Rahtawu is expected to be able to minimize the negative impacts of massive development and support the potential of the tourism sector in Rahtawu Village.

KEYWORDS: cultural preservation; environment; land acquisition; participatory conservation; semliro traditional village

1. Introduction

The environment is a unity of space in are objects, or non-living things, and living things, including humans and their behavior, that affect the dynamics of life and the welfare of humans and other living things on earth (Mutakin, 2006). Environment can also be interpreted as the state around organisms, including flora and fauna is a that interact with those organisms (Dewobroto, 1995). Another meaning is a series of external factors that

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affect a living organism (biotic factors) and inanimate variables (abiotic factors) such as temperature, rainfall, sunlight intensity, wind, and ocean currents (Mulyanto, 2007). Life is currently in a critical period due to imbalances between the a abiotic and biotic factors such as deforestation, soil destruction, pollution, species extinction, global warming, and other problems that threaten the balance of the earth's ecosystem, where humans and other living things are located.

In essence, a study on community participation in conservation area management was conducted by Peranginangin in 2014. Using a content analysis study of a number of laws and regulations on forestry rolled out in the reform era, Paranginangin (2014) concluded that the government recognizes the existence of other actors (especially communities) who play a role in the management of conservation areas; the community has the opportunity to submit suggestions, information, and considerations related to the management of conservation areas; and community empowerment carried out by the government has not supported the realization of ideal collaborative management.

The State of Indonesia is a multicultural and multiethnic country whose indigenous communities have existed until now to maintain the local wisdom inherited from the ancestors, and there are recorded more than 500 ethnicities (Suryadinata, 1999). These indigenous peoples exist and do not stand alone; they interact with each other and depend on each other (Juhadi, 2007). Indigenous peoples have a wealth of knowledge about managing and utilizing natural resources effectively, efficiently, and based on the sustainability of natural resources for future generations. The wealth of knowledge in the form of local wisdom is a very valuable heritage to always be preserved and used as a guideline for people when interacting with nature. Almost every community has distinctive local wisdom as an adaptation strategy to the environment (Hilman et al., 2019). The way of life of people in the customary village area who always maintain the trust of their ancestors in a way of life that is harmonious with nature is something that needs to be emulated by other communities outside the customary village area so that they can live a wise and harmonious life with nature.

Local wisdom is present as a guardian or filter of the global climate that plagues human life (Sartini, 2004). The values of local wisdom are wise, imprinted, and followed by community members (Henderson et al., 2012). To know the value of local wisdom in an area, you must be able to explore it in the daily lives of its people (Maryani and Yani, 2013). This is important because indigenous peoples have intellectual copyright on the basis of their ideas that involve local wisdom and their survival with nature (Abdillah, 2001).

Rahtawu Village, located on the slopes of Mount Muria, is one of the natural attractions in Kudus Regency. Its unspoiled natural characteristics make the village have an interesting natural beauty. As a result of human intervention and processes of human indifference, there is damage to natural ecosystems and the biodiversity in them. Changes in the ecosystem in the Muria area can be seen in the destruction of land and the environment in the region. Thus, to preserve culture as a heritage from our ancestors, participatory conservation is needed as cultural and environmental protection.

Rahtawu Village, especially Semliro Hamlet, has formed an effort to preserve the nature of Mount Muria, namely by building the Semliro Traditional Village. In the plan, the Rahtawu Village Government will determine four village criteria (Pancasila Village, Traditional Village, Modern Village, and Santri Village), having previously been named a Pancasila village where cultural and religious diversity can coexist in harmony and peace (Hartopo, 2022).

The goal to be achieved is to find out how the role and participation of the community in the Semliro Traditional Village of Rahtawu Village contributes to efforts to preserve culture, environment, and land collaboratively. The results of the research can practically be input for the Rahtawu Village Government in charge of environment and forestry in discussing conservation of biological resources and ecosystems in Mount Muria. Various information obtained from the research can be input in discussing the results of village deliberations when formulating how community participation in environmental and land management will be regulated so that the Semliro Traditional Village can continue to be

sustainable and the community around the Customary Village gets economic, social, and ecological benefits. As for academics, the research results are expected to contribute knowledge, especially in the field of environmental policy and social policy related to the management of environmental, cultural, and land conservation in the Semliro Traditional Village and improving the welfare of the community around the Semliro Traditional Village area.

2. Methods

The qualitative descriptive research method in this research has as its research object the Semliro Traditional Village in Rahtawu Village, Gebog District, Kudus Regency, Central Java. The data source used in this research uses literature studies from previous research. This research focuses on participatory conservation promoted by traditional village principles aimed at protecting culture, environment, and land by local communities in Dukuh Semliro, Rahtawu Village.

Direct observations were carried out on October 14, 2023, in Rahtawu Village. This village, located on the Muria Slope, has various potential resources; therefore, participatory management between policymakers and the local community is very necessary. The synergy initiated by various crucial aspects, including culture, environment, and land, is something that must be conserved by all aspects of society in order to achieve balance.

The analysis and identification in this research are aimed at finding out forms of community participation in maintaining culture, protecting the environment from quality degradation, and acquiring land from foreign parties who are not local residents.

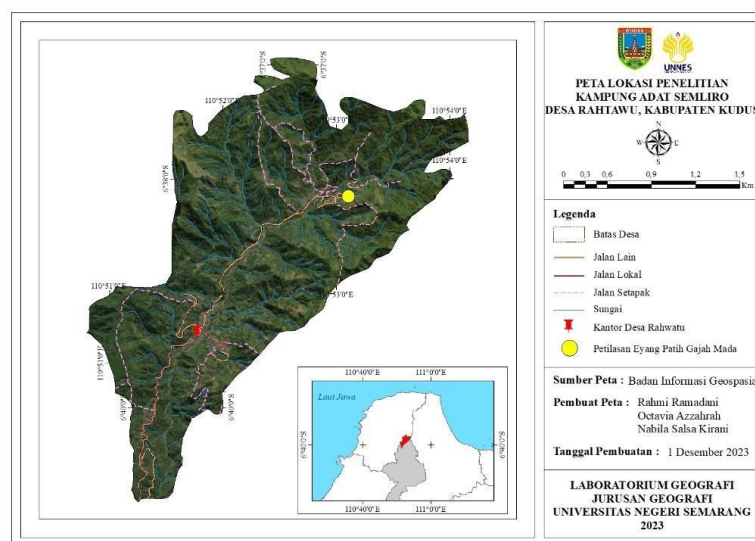


Fig 1. Location

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 General Description of the Semliro Traditional Village

Rahtawu Village is a village on the western side of the Muria Mountains, directly connected to the peak of Songolikur Peak, precisely in Gebog District, Kudus Regency, Central Java Province. Rahtawu village has four hamlets, namely Gingsir hamlet, Wetan Kali hamlet, Krajan hamlet, and Semliro hamlet. Administratively, Rahtawu Village has an area of 1,610.75 hectares and a population of 4,989 people. In detail, the male population is 2,504, while the female population is 2,485. Judging from the number of families (heads of families), Rahtawu Village has a population of 1,327 families (BPS, 2022). Most of the population is made up of farmers. Robusta type coffee is a superior commodity in Rahtawu

Village. Not only Robusta type coffee, but the Rahtawu community itself has now started to develop Arabica type coffee, which adds to the superior products in Rahtawu Village with a height that is very sufficient for Arabica type coffee plants. People also still rely on forests as a means of livelihood to fulfill their daily lives, such as hunting, gathering, and farming, because Rahtawu has very large forests (Pratama, 2020). The majority of the Rahtawu Village community is Muslim, with 4,848 adherents (BPS, 2022). Islam as a religion for the people of Rahtawu Village has very strong roots as Muslims who are devout and serious in carrying out their worship. This can be seen from the even distribution of places of worship in each RW. Rahtawu Village's natural tourism is attractive because of its natural beauty; there are many waterfalls and the Gelis River, which is still clear, as well as charming mountain views (Wibowo and Ma'rif, 2014). The Rahtawu area is formed by extreme contours and is located in a mountainous area with large trees that are hundreds of years old. The mranak tree is the most commonly found indicator of the beauty of the Muria Mountains. Rahtawu Village consists of a green valley surrounded by steep mountains. Very interesting tourism potential can be developed in Rahtawu. Rahtawu Village, with an altitude of over 1000 meters above sea level, means visitors can enjoy the beautiful natural panorama of the mountains with clean, fresh, and cool air.

Rahtawu Village, apart from being famous for its natural tourism, always spoils the eyes of tourists who come to visit. Apart from that, Rahtawu Village is also famous for its religious tourism. In contrast to the Colo Village area, which is famous for its Islamic religious tourism with the Sunan Muria Tomb, Rahtawu itself is famous for its Kedjawen, marked by many recitations from wayang figures such as Petilasan Eyang Sakri, Eyang Abiyasa, Eyang Semar, Eyang Patih Gajah Mada, and others. As a result of human intervention and human indifference, forest ecosystems and the biodiversity within them are damaged, and landslides claim human lives. One of the cases of land shifting in Kudus Regency occurred in Rahtawu Village. Landslide areas must be converted into conservation protected areas so that they are free from agricultural activities, housing and infrastructure development (Riani, et al, 2013). Ecosystem changes in the Muria area can be seen from the destruction of forests in the area (Widjanarko, 2016). The beauty of Rahtawu Village certainly poses a threat from the increasingly rapid human activity to meet life's needs. Various conservation efforts have been carried out, one of which is the establishment of the Semliro Traditional Village, which is located in Dukuh Semliro, Rahtawu Village. This hamlet is the highest in the Muria Mountains. It has abundant natural potential and has opportunities in all aspects, such as tourism and environmental conservation.

The issue of traditional territories in general is that their existence is often threatened (Suwarlan et al., 2020). Even though in several areas of Indonesia, traditional territories often have conflicts, the residents of Dukuh Semliro are confident in their choice. The formation of the Semliro Traditional Village is not without reason, because in Dukuh Semliro there is a historical place in the form of a hermitage or recitation of Grandfather Gadjah Mada Sapto Hargo, commonly known to local residents as Mbah Modo.

The position of traditional villages to preserve their territories is autonomous, having the authority to regulate and protect their respective territories from various threats, challenges, obstacles, and other things (Udytama and Nugraha, 2022). The position of the Semliro Traditional Village is, of course, under the authority of the Rahtawu Village government, which has full authority over regional aspects, especially regional conservation of both the natural environment and social and religious patterns. Semliro Traditional Village is an extension of efforts to preserve culture, environment, and land in Kudus Regency, especially Rahtawu Village. The background to the formation of the Semliro Traditional Village is due to local residents' anxiety about their land, which has the possibility that in the future it will change hands to outside parties. Since the formation of this traditional village, there are several things that residents outside Rahtawu Village must comply with. One of them is that residents from outside the village are prohibited from opening any business in the traditional village area. Individuals who wish to enter the Semliro Traditional Village area are still permitted, but on condition that they bring benefits

to local residents and, of course, protect the surrounding nature by not destroying the environment of the Semliro Traditional Village. Not without reason, the people of Dukuh Semliro learned from previous experience when outside residents, who initially built businesses only on the riverbanks, gradually began to plunder the forests of the Muria Mountains. Therefore, it is hoped that the existence of the Semliro Traditional Village can support sustainable development efforts by preserving nature. Don't forget to preserve culture as an ancestral heritage with religious potential in the Semliro Traditional Village, namely the recitation of Eyang Patih Gadjah Mada.

3.2 The Role of Indigenous Peoples in Participatory Conservation

Article 33 paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution as a constitutional basis that requires that the earth, water, and natural resources contained therein be controlled by the state and used for the greatest prosperity of the people, the implementation of forestry always contains the soul and spirit of people, justice, and sustainability. Therefore, the implementation of nature conservation must be carried out on the basis of benefit and sustainability, peoplehood, justice, togetherness, openness, and integration based on noble and responsible morals. Community involvement in forest resource management, in principle, is a form of integrating community participation into the forestry development system within the framework of strengthening economic, environmental, institutional, and social communities. However, Guthiga (2008) mentions that community involvement in nature conservation management is still a debate between emphasizing the need for conservation and meeting the needs of local communities.

Basically, participation is not just one-way socialization or mobilization to involve citizens in a development program. This is in line with what Shahdan said in Rohman et al. (2009): participation is often misinterpreted as mass public presence or moving people to gather and do something (mobilization).

The need for community participation is expressed by Hardjosoemantri in Najih et al. (2006), namely that, in addition to providing valuable information to decision-makers, community participation can reduce the possibility of unwillingness to accept decisions. In relation to the management of conservation areas, the goal to be achieved is to reduce conflicts between the government and the community.

The relationship between the level of conservation of indigenous peoples and the level of participation of the people of Semliro Indigenous Village shows that the level of correlation between the two variables is in the medium category. This shows that the level of participation carried out by the Kampung Adat community affects the conservation activities carried out by the local community. The higher the level of participation, the higher the conservation activities carried out by the community in terms of environmental processing, culture, land, and forest resource conservation efforts. Based on the results of literature studies, the participation rate of Kampung Adat communities is quite low. This is also followed by the activities or behaviors of indigenous people, who are still low in terms of conservation of their agricultural land resources. The conservation activities of indigenous peoples that they carry out are only at a simple stage; for example, they cultivate minimum land, rarely use fertilizers, and cultivate land only in traditional ways obtained from generation to generation from their parents (Titit, 2014).

3.3 Participatory Conservation in Cultural Aspects

Participatory conservation is an approach to environmental conservation that actively involves the community in the decision-making and implementation of conservation programs. In the cultural context, participatory conservation can be interpreted as an approach that involves the community in efforts to preserve cultural heritage (Lily, 2104).

Society plays a very important role in safeguarding cultural heritage. The active role of the community in the preservation of local traditions not only involves maintaining the physical and material cultural heritage but also the sustainability of the practices, knowledge, and values contained therein.

The people of Rahtawu Village have their own ways of both managing and utilizing forest products. The people of Rahtawu Village use their customary and cultural norms in managing the forest. This culture has been traditionally used and implemented by their ancestors to protect their environment, called local wisdom. Sahlan (2009) found in his research that local communities have local wisdom that prioritizes the principles of forest balance and sustainability, which can encourage their citizens to be involved voluntarily and collectively in preserving the surrounding community forests.

The people of Rahtawu Village make efforts to preserve the Muria forest by enforcing cultural norms. By exploring the social capital of the people of Rahtawu Village, including social norms, beliefs, and networks related to Muria forest conservation efforts, In addition, the development of the Semliro Traditional Village, earth alms, splices, not responding to puppets, and not cutting trees carelessly are forms of social capital related to efforts to preserve the Muria forest.

Research conducted by Mochamad Widjanarko from the Faculty of Psychology at Muria Kudus University shows that the social capital of the people of Rahtawu Village is in the form of social norms, beliefs, and networks. This social capital is reflected in the form of earth alms, splices, not responding to puppets, and not cutting trees carelessly. Rahtawu Village is still very thick with Javanese culture, one of which is the traditional ceremony of Earth Alms, which must be done every year, and one of the conditions in the procession must be Tayub Art. If these conditions are not met, the community believes it will invite distress in the village.

Earth alms are a form of social activity carried out by the people of Rahtawu Village as a form of gratitude for the crops obtained. Splice is a form of social activity carried out by the people of Rahtawu Village as a form of solidarity between residents. This activity is carried out by helping each other in daily activities. Not considering wayang is a form of social activity carried out by the people of Rahtawu Village as a form of respect for ancestors. Not cutting trees carelessly is a form of social activity carried out by the people of Rahtawu Village as a form of responsibility for the environment (Widjanarko, 2016).

The Semliro Hamlet community of Rahtawu Village strictly obeys the culture or testament such as the existence of a prohibition forest and the grave area of Patih Eyang Gadjah Mada, mandates about simple lifestyles, prohibitions on deeds, during ceremonies and objects, and due to violations of traditions such as feelings of guilt, has created a harmonious life with the social environment and natural environment, so that the environment is preserved.

3.4 Participatory Conservation in Environmental Aspects

Rahtawu Village has a physiographic location on the Muria Slope, which causes facilities and accessibility to be limited. The local government then carried out various economic development efforts through policy and empowerment. Economic development is defined as an effort to increase per capita income by processing economic power into economic potential (Sukirno, 2002). Realizing that the potential of Rahtawu Village is more than just a village located on the Muria Slope, the government and local residents then formulated efforts to conserve the environment before the quality decline occurs.

The environment is everything around humans that has a direct or indirect influence on their survival. In the context of conservation, the environment is one of the things whose balance is now threatened. Fulfilling human needs without considering sustainability has a major impact on the emergence of environmental degradation and the emergence of new

problems. Semliro Traditional Village has a role in saving the environment through participatory conservation. In principle, traditional villages implement villages that still maintain the fundamental traditional values that are adhered to as guidelines for living life. These fundamental values are based on the history passed down from generations to ancestors (Nurhilmiah et al., 2021). It was suspected that the arrival of investors from outside Rahtawu Village would cause environmental damage; therefore, a final fortress was created for the residents of Dukuh Semliro to protect local nature and culture through the formation of a traditional village.

This policy does not completely prohibit the entry of investors or investment in Rahtawu Village, but it has several limitations, one of which is that development carried out by investors must have a positive impact on local residents living in Rahtawu Village. Problems resulting from development that does not pay attention to boundaries have been seen in the existence of development on river borders, which ultimately spreads and destroys forests (Widjanarko, 2016).

Meanwhile, the Mount Muria Protected Forest is a protected forest area that has been designated by the government through Minister of Forestry and Plantation Decree No. 359/Menhut-II/2004 dated 1/10/2004. From its function as a buffer zone to the habitat of various natural species that are able to survive in it, which continue to reproduce and are likely to survive, According to data (BKPH, 2016), the area of protected forest on Mount Muria in Kudus Regency is 1288.9, which since 2011 has continued to decline.

Table 1. The area of protected forest in Muria Mount

Year	Area (Ha)
2011	2.117,40
2012	2.117,40
2013	2.117,40
2014	1.288,90
2015	1.288,90

(Source: BKPH, 2016)

This problem is handled seriously through the establishment of traditional villages to limit the entry of investment with the aim of exploitation. Apart from that, the decreasing area of protected forests has resulted in damage to environmental resources, and the increase in the intensity and quality of disasters such as floods, landslides, and droughts in the past two decades has become a serious threat to local communities. Rahtawu's local wisdom is also described as a cultural artifact, and the myths surrounding it are its destiny as the land of Kadewan (Widjanarko, 2022). This creates public confidence in maintaining the balance of the ecosystem.

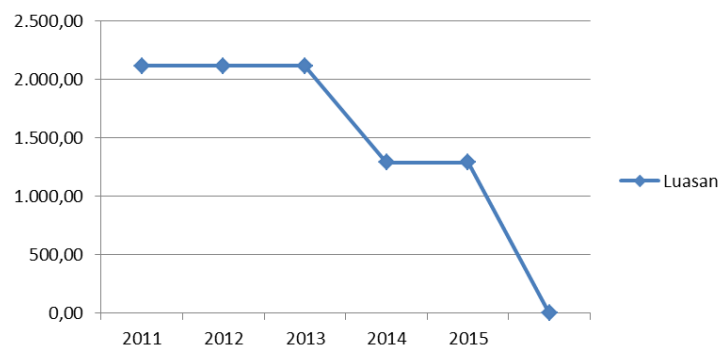


Fig 2. Chat of the area protected forest in Muria Mount

(Source: BKPH, 2016)

In 2021, the Kudus Regency Government believes that participatory conservation needs to be encouraged to restore environmental degradation that occurred in Rahtawu Village through Proklim (Climate Village Program) and the formation of traditional villages. These policies will certainly not be successful without the participation of the Rahtawu Village community.

3.5 Participatory Conservation as a Preventive Effort for Land Acquisition

Land resources, especially for the tourism sector in Rahtawu Village, are promising if managed well, considering that the Muria Slope landscape is considered to have the potential to attract tourists. This will, of course, result in investor interest in investing capital or even acquiring land in the Rahtawu Village Area. It is hoped that the establishment of restrictions regarding land ownership for residents outside Rahtawu will be able to minimize the negative impacts of massive development and support the potential of the tourism sector in Rahtawu Village. This policy is certainly a participatory conservation effort to maintain the balance of the ecosystem in Rahtawu Village. Apart from that, it is also estimated that the existence of massive development by investors who come will have various negative impacts on both environmental and economic aspects for the indigenous residents of Rahtawu Village.

The policy of establishing traditional villages in principle is to minimize the arrival of investors and lead to land acquisition. If investment occurs by parties who are not native to Rahtawu Village, these parties must be willing to follow the limits set by the government and local residents, especially in managing resources. People who have a high awareness that the land they live on is priceless know that without conservation efforts, disasters and environmental degradation will certainly become more widespread and cause losses for the indigenous people of Rahtawu Village.

Restrictions on land rights and ownership in Rahtawu Village are solely to maintain the balance of the ecosystem in the village. The existence of surviving natural species and protected forests in the area needs to be conserved in a participatory manner to ensure their continuity is maintained as before.

4. Conclusion

Semliro Traditional Village is an extension of efforts to preserve culture, environment, and land in Kudus Regency, especially Rahtawu Village. The level of participation of the Semliro Traditional Village community is quite low; this is also followed by the still low level of activity or behavior of the traditional community in terms of conserving their agricultural land resources. The Rahtawu Village community is making efforts to preserve the Muria forest by enforcing norms in cultural aspects. Participatory conservation needs to be encouraged to restore environmental degradation that occurred in Rahtawu Village through Proklim (the Climate Village Program) and the formation of traditional villages. The policy regarding restrictions regarding land ownership for residents outside Rahtawu is expected to be able to minimize the negative impacts of massive development and support the potential of the tourism sector in Rahtawu Village.

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The author declare no conflict of interest.

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