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The role of conflict resolution actors in the development of strategic management for the utilization of forests and register 38 land in Gunung Balak, East Lampung

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Abstract: Indonesia, as one of the world's largest tropical forest nations, faces significant challenges in forest conservation due to extensive exploitation and land-use conflicts. This study aims to analyze the role of key actors in the success of the Forest and Land Rehabilitation (RHL) program in Gunung Balak Register 38 Protected Forest, Lampung Province, and to develop a strategic management model to strengthen institutions in addressing future rehabilitation challenges. Employing the Soft System Methodology (SSM), this qualitative research explores complex, unstructured problems and identifies solutions for sustainable forest management. The findings highlight the critical role of collaborative governance involving BPDASHL Way Seputih Way Sekampung, farmer groups, community leaders, and local government. Their synergy has contributed to conflict resolution and economic empowerment through agroforestry, particularly the cultivation of Siger avocados. The study concludes that an integrated strategic management model focusing on institutional strengthening, economic innovation, transparent profit-sharing mechanisms, and participatory monitoring can enhance rehabilitation effectiveness. Practically, these insights offer a framework for policymakers and stakeholders to promote sustainable forest restoration while improving community welfare.

Keywords: *Agroforestry, Forest and land rehabilitation, Institutional strengthening, Soft System methodology strategic management.*

1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the three countries in the world with the largest tropical forests, making forests one of the assets not possessed by many other nations. According to data released by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) in 2023, Indonesia's forests cover 125.76 million hectares, or 62.97% of the country's total land area. This figure has undoubtedly declined over the past few decades due to significant exploitation and land clearing, which have reduced forested areas.

Historically, communities have utilized forests surrounding them throughout human existence. Forests not only serve an ecological function in maintaining ecosystem balance but also play economic and social roles [1]. The pattern of human-forest interaction has led to human dependence on forests in various regions [2]

In Indonesia, even before the establishment of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, traditional governance systems had already existed, regulating the social order of kingdoms and indigenous communities, similar to today's conventional governance systems. Politically, the existence of the old state or traditional governance has ended, and the Indonesian government holds authority over forests, although the state still recognizes the existence of indigenous communities.

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Indonesian communities have long utilized forests as a source of income, either for direct consumption, processing to meet their needs, or trading. Due to the importance of forests as a source of livelihood, regulations or management systems have been established to govern how communities utilize available forest resources [3].

In practice, such management systems typically involve the division of forest areas into utilization zones and conservation zones. The goal is to ensure that existing forest resources are preserved and can be utilized by future generations.

The greatest challenge facing Indonesian forests today is the significant gap between the rate of land degradation and the rate of rehabilitation. At least 4 million hectares of critical land exist in Indonesia, while forest and land rehabilitation efforts have only reached 77,103 hectares, or merely 0.019% of the total degraded land that has been successfully rehabilitated.

Forest and land rehabilitation requires innovations tailored to community conditions. This can be achieved if three conditions are met: 1) land certainty, 2) high-quality tree seedlings, and 3) cooperation among supporting stakeholders [4].

One of the regions in Indonesia with extensive forest resources is Lampung Province, covering a total of 1,004,735 hectares, which accounts for 28.47% of the province's area. The forests in Lampung Province are divided into several functions: conservation forests covering 462,030 hectares (45.99%), protected forests covering 317,615 hectares (31.61%), and production forests covering 225,090 hectares (22.40%), based on the Decree of the Minister of Forestry and Plantations No. 256/Kpts-II/2000 dated August 23, 2000.

However, an issue requiring urgent attention is the rate of deforestation in Lampung Province. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), deforestation reached 182.3 hectares per year between 2018 and 2019, increasing to 384.1 hectares per year between 2019 and 2020 [5]. This data is further confirmed by the 2023 report from the Lampung Provincial Forestry Service, which states that critical land in Lampung Province covers 400,949 hectares, with 298,794 hectares within forest areas and 101,751 hectares outside forest areas. This means that 39.90% of Lampung's forest land requires rehabilitation [6].

Interestingly, forest and land rehabilitation efforts have been carried out across various regions in Indonesia for decades, particularly in protected forests. However, only the Forest and Land Rehabilitation (RHL) program in Gunung Balak Register 38 Protected Forest has demonstrated notable success. Gunung Balak Register 38 Protected Forest remains an area affected by land conflicts [7]. According to statistical data from KPH Gunung Balak, only about 10% (or slightly more) of the initial 22,292 hectares of Gunung Balak remain forested. Geographically, Gunung Balak is located between Way Jepara, Sukadana, Labuhan Maringgai, and Jabung Districts in East Lampung Regency. Based on Resident Decision No. 664 of 1935, the Gunung Balak area in East Lampung Regency was designated as a protected forest area under Register 38, covering 19,680 hectares. However, the area faces numerous challenges [8].

Before the reformation era, illegal encroachment had already become a national issue. Since 1965, 1,200 hectares of forest owned by eight members of the local Indonesian Farmers' Front (BTI) were opened to the public. Two key figures in the forest opening, Midjo and Murdjito, lost their lives in conflicts. By 1971, more than 12,000 people had settled in the area. It is undeniable that the history of rehabilitation efforts has shown repeated failures, characterized by low survival rates of planted timber trees, unchanged forest cover, high erosion levels, increased land conflicts, and a lack of improvement in the welfare of surrounding communities.

The indication of the success of the RHL Program in Gunung Balak is proven by the high survival rate of superior Siger avocado seedlings, which has reached more than 75 percent, as well as the participation of the community in providing high-quality seedlings, meaning that the welfare of the communities around the land and forest has also improved.

The success of this RHL Program demonstrates that it is a conflict resolution solution between the interests of the protected forest communities and the state. This conflict resolution solution is in the

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form of a socio-cultural approach developed by BPDASHL Way Seputih Way Sekampung. This discovery deserves appreciation and can be replicated in other regions. Therefore, researchers are interested in conducting a study related to the role of key actors determining the program's success.

This issue is intriguing to be studied further so that the program's success can be implemented in other regions, as the implementation of RHL in various areas currently shows different performance levels. Moreover, there is a long history of failures in government programs related to land and forest rehabilitation, with one of the main reasons being the dichotomy between economics and theology.

This paper will discuss the RHL planting in Gunung Balak, covering 212 hectares in 2021 and 715 hectares in 2022. The self-management mechanism of Type 4 allows for the full implementation of RHL; this is a self-management approach carried out and supervised by the community groups responsible for implementation. This shows that the community empowerment process is crucial for sustainable forest management. BPDASHL Way Seputih Way Sekampung carried out RHL activities in the Gunung Balak Protected Forest covering 942 hectares from 2020 to 2022.

Apart from the role of actors, the issue of Land and Forest Rehabilitation is highly complex and constitutes a strategic national issue. Therefore, a strategic management model is needed to address future challenges, such as strengthening institutional capacity.

2. Method

Organizational performance is highly influenced by the management system. To function effectively, a management system requires a combination of facilities, human resources, media, technology, control processes, and human resources to establish communication channels, process routine transactions, signal management, and respond to various internal or external events. Additionally, a management system can assist in decision-making. The systems thinking approach helps identify crucial yet invisible components that may impact the problem under study. Focusing on the system as a whole enhances the understanding of what is needed to manage a complex system.

The ultimate goal of this research is not only to reveal the processes and key figures involved but also to develop a Strategic Management Model capable of addressing future challenges, such as institutional strengthening. Therefore, the Soft System Methodology (SSM) is necessary to help analyze unclear, unstructured, and undefined problems in order to resolve them. To develop a new system for forest and land rehabilitation in other areas, SSM constructs conceptual models and gathers data. One type of qualitative research methodology is the Soft System Methodology (SSM) [9-11].

As data and information are collected, qualitative research tends to expand, which presents limitations for researchers. To maximize research time and costs, focusing the study is essential. Therefore, the researcher will concentrate solely on the issue of Land Rehabilitation in the Gunung Balak Register 38 area, East Lampung Regency.

In qualitative research, written documents, photographs, or statistics can be used as data sources. Various listening and questioning actions lead to the documentation of primary data sources through interviews or observations [12]. The primary research data is obtained through interviews or in-depth interviews [13]. The role of informants is crucial in qualitative research, as they are not only respondents but also the holders of key information. For this reason, they are referred to as informants (people who provide information, sources of information, or data) or research subjects. The researcher selects informants purposively, meaning that individuals are chosen based on their sufficient knowledge and ability to explain the actual conditions of the research subject to obtain specific data [14].

The researcher will personally conduct fieldwork through grand tour questions, the focus and selection phase, data collection, analysis, and conclusion drawing. In other words, the researcher will directly observe and document phenomena in the field through firsthand observation.

3. Results and Discussion

The study on the Forest and Land Rehabilitation (RHL) program in Register 38 Gunung Balak reveals several key findings relevant to natural resource management, land conflict resolution, and

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community-based economic development. These findings indicate that the success of the RHL program is not solely dependent on the technical aspects of forest rehabilitation but also on the effectiveness of collaborative approaches, economic innovation, and local institutional strengthening. The following is the synthesis of the main research findings:

3.1. Success of the Collaborative Approach in Conflict Resolution

One of the key findings is the effectiveness of the collaborative approach, which involves all stakeholders, including the government, local communities, forest farmer groups (Gapoktanhut), and conservation institutions. This approach has successfully unified various interests, resolved long-standing conflicts, and created synergy in land management. The role of local figures as conflict mediators has proven to be highly significant in building trust between the community and the government. Engaging respected local figures has been key in reducing community resistance to government programs [15].

3.2. Agroforestry-Based Economic Innovation as a Driver of Participation

The integration of economic innovation through agroforestry schemes, particularly the development of high-value commodities such as Siger avocado, has been a major factor in encouraging local community participation. Communities that were previously skeptical about the RHL program began to actively participate once they saw direct economic benefits from the program. Short-term economic success through fast-yielding crops like Siger avocado, which can be harvested within 17 months, has motivated the community to sustain the program. This demonstrates that sustainable forest management can go hand in hand with improving community economic well-being.

3.2. The Key Role of Local Institutions and Community Capacity Building

Local institutions, such as Gapoktanhut, play a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of the program. Strengthening farmer groups through technical and management training has been proven effective in enhancing the community's ability to independently manage land. Continuous assistance from forestry extension officers has also been a key factor in ensuring that technical knowledge related to nursery practices, planting, and forest product management is effectively transferred to the community. This enables the community not only to participate in program implementation but also to develop the necessary skills for sustainable land management in the future.

3.3. Implementation Flexibility in Program Execution

Flexibility in scheduling and implementing the program, particularly in adjusting planting times based on weather conditions and community readiness, has been one of the success factors of RHL in Register 38. The program has shown that adapting to local conditions is crucial to ensuring plant survival and community involvement. The RHL program has successfully adapted to changing field conditions, including climate change-induced weather pattern shifts, which affect planting schedules. This flexibility has enhanced the program's resilience in facing environmental challenges.

3.4. Profit-Sharing Mechanisms and Economic Incentives

One of the key findings is the importance of creating a fair profit-sharing mechanism between the government and the community in the management of agroforestry products. This scheme ensures that the community receives adequate economic incentives to remain engaged in forest conservation efforts. The profit-sharing mechanism not only encourages community participation but also fosters a strong sense of ownership over the land they manage, thereby reducing potential conflicts in the future.

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3.5. The Importance of a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation System

A monitoring system that involves local communities in overseeing the success of planting and land rehabilitation has strengthened their sense of ownership over the program. This has created local accountability, which supports the sustainability of the RHL program. Regular evaluations that involve stakeholders in a participatory manner allow for quick strategy adjustments when issues or challenges arise in the field. This system also serves as a foundation to ensure that program outcomes are continuously monitored and evaluated in a sustainable manner.

The key findings indicate that the success of the RHL program in Register 38 Gunung Balak is the result of a combination of several critical factors. The collaborative approach involving the government, local communities, and various stakeholders has been the primary foundation for resolving conflicts and securing collective support for the program. Agroforestry-based economic innovations, such as the development of Siger avocado, have not only helped restore the ecosystem but also enhanced the well-being of local communities, which in turn has encouraged their active participation [16].

The strengthening of local institutions, through forest farmer groups (Gapoktanhut) and continuous technical training, has empowered communities to manage land independently, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the program. The flexibility in implementation, particularly in adjusting planting schedules and conducting field monitoring, has enabled the program to continue despite challenges such as climate change. Additionally, a fair profit-sharing system and participatory monitoring ensure that the community not only benefits economically but also develops a sense of ownership over the program. The accountability established through community-involved monitoring further strengthens the program's long-term sustainability and success. With this combination of factors, the RHL program in Register 38 Gunung Balak has achieved success not only in the technical aspects of forest rehabilitation but also as a model for the integration of sustainable economic, social, and environmental development [17].

The study on the Forest and Land Rehabilitation (RHL) program in Register 38 Gunung Balak presents several significant theoretical implications, particularly in the fields of natural resource conflict management, community-based forest management, and environmental economics. The following are some of the theoretical implications derived from the research findings:

3.6. Development of Collaborative Theory in Natural Resource Management

The finding that a collaborative approach involving the government, local communities, and various stakeholders is effective in resolving land conflicts supports the theory of collaborative management in natural resource governance. This demonstrates that active participation and shared responsibility among multiple parties can enhance the long-term sustainability of resource management. This approach contributes to the literature that emphasizes the importance of community-based management, supported by inclusive policies.

3.7. Economic Innovation as a Driver of Community Engagement in Forest Rehabilitation

The development of agroforestry based on high-economic-value commodities, such as Siger avocado, reinforces arguments in the theory of environmental economic incentives. This finding supports the theory that direct economic benefits for communities can be a key driver in encouraging their participation in conservation and environmental rehabilitation efforts. This model strengthens the literature discussing the synergistic relationship between the economy and the environment, where sustainable resource management can generate social and economic benefits for local communities.

3.8. Flexibility in Environmental Project Management

The finding that the RHL program in Register 38 Gunung Balak succeeded due to its flexibility in scheduling and adaptation to field conditions supports the theory of adaptive management. This demonstrates that complex and high-risk environmental projects require adaptive capabilities and strategic adjustments based on changing environmental, social, and economic conditions. Theoretically,

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this highlights the importance of dynamic management in projects involving ecosystems and community participation.

3.9. Strengthening Local Institutions in Resource Management

This study also contributes to the theory of institutional development in natural resource management. The strengthening of local institutional capacity through continuous training and mentoring has played a crucial role in the success of the RHL program, supporting the theory that strong and well-functioning institutions are the foundation of sustainable resource management. Thus, these findings provide further insights into how community-based natural resource management can be strengthened through local capacity building.

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this study offers several practical implications relevant to the implementation of forest rehabilitation programs and community-based land management. These implications can be applied to similar programs in various regions, both in Indonesia and internationally, that face challenges related to land rehabilitation and resource conflicts. The following are some of the key practical implications:

3.10. Collaborative Approach for Conflict Resolution

The implementation of a collaborative approach in land conflict resolution at Register 38 demonstrates that directly involving all stakeholders, particularly local communities and influential figures, can ease tensions and create mutually agreed solutions. This approach can be applied in other regions facing land conflicts between local communities and the government, fostering inclusive dialogue and negotiation spaces. This practice highlights the importance of building trust first through informal approaches and the role of respected local mediators in the community.

3.11. Agroforestry-Based Economic Innovation

The RHL program in Register 38 Gunung Balak illustrates that providing direct economic incentives through agroforestry development can increase community participation. Implementing high-value commodities that provide short-term yields, such as Siger avocado, serves as a concrete example of how environmental economics can be strengthened to support conservation efforts. This practice can be adapted to other regions by selecting locally relevant commodities that offer rapid economic benefits, encouraging communities to actively preserve forests.

3.12. Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Technical Assistance

One of the success factors of the RHL program in Register 38 is the strengthening of local institutional capacity, such as Gapoktanhut. Continuous technical assistance from forestry extension officers and intensive training for farmer groups have equipped communities with the ability to independently manage land. This model can serve as a reference for similar programs in other regions, where local capacity development is crucial for long-term success. The practical implication is the importance of providing long-term mentoring, not only in technical aspects but also in institutional management, organizational governance, and forest product marketing.

3.13. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation System

The implementation of a monitoring system involving local communities at Register 38 has demonstrated that community participation in supervision and evaluation enhances their sense of ownership and local accountability. This approach can be applied in other forest rehabilitation programs to ensure proper program implementation and detect potential issues early. This practice reinforces the importance of making communities not just program beneficiaries but also active monitors and stakeholders in ensuring program sustainability.

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3.14. Transparent and Fair Profit-Sharing Mechanism

The profit-sharing mechanism implemented in agroforestry management at Register 38 shows that establishing a transparent and fair revenue-sharing scheme can serve as an incentive for communities to continue conserving land. This scheme ensures that communities receive fair economic benefits, motivating them to remain actively involved in forest rehabilitation programs. The practical implication is that other regions adopting similar programs should design transparent incentive mechanisms, allowing community participation in decision-making regarding benefit distribution.

3.15. Flexibility in Program Implementation

Flexibility in scheduling and program execution, particularly in adjusting planting periods based on changing weather patterns, provides an example of how programs should adapt to local conditions. Other regions implementing forest rehabilitation programs should consider flexibility as a key factor in ensuring program continuity despite environmental challenges. This emphasizes the importance of swift and accurate decision-making, based on real-time environmental data and evolving social conditions.
Based on the discussion conducted by the researcher, the findings of this study are:

3.16. Adoption of an Innovative Approach Using Retrospective Soft Systems Methodology (SSM)

This study adopts an innovative approach by applying Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) retrospectively to analyze conflicts that occurred from 1965 to 2017 and their impact on the Forest and Land Rehabilitation (RHL) program implemented in the 2020-2024 period. Although SSM is generally used to analyze and improve ongoing problematic situations, this study expands its application to historical analysis. The adaptation of SSM for retrospective analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the complexity of past situations, as well as providing valuable insights for the formulation of future improvement strategies. By applying SSM retrospectively, this study successfully reveals systemic patterns that may have been overlooked in conventional historical analysis approaches, while also offering a new perspective in understanding the relationship between past conflicts and current challenges in the RHL program [18].

3.17. Multidimensional Challenges in the RHL Program in Indonesia

The RHL program in Indonesia faces multidimensional challenges that are structural, technical, and ecological in nature. The combination of these factors creates a condition where failure in the RHL program becomes highly likely if significant changes in approach are not made. This failure is not merely a technical issue in planting but also reflects systemic weaknesses in governance, planning, and program implementation. Without comprehensive reforms covering: Institutional aspects, Local capacity strengthening, Resolution of tenure conflicts, improved inter-agency coordination, Efficient use of funds, and the development of a robust monitoring and evaluation system, the RHL program will continue to face significant obstacles in achieving its objectives.

Therefore, a new approach that is more holistic, participatory, and adaptive is needed in the design and implementation of the RHL program in Indonesia. This approach must take into account the socio-ecological complexity of forest landscapes, actively involve local communities, and integrate adaptation strategies to climate change to enhance the program's chances of success in the future.

4. Conclusion

The conflict resolution process by BPDASHL Way Seputih Way Sekampung was successful due to its collaborative, inclusive, and participatory approach. By fostering trust through informal engagement, uniting stakeholders in dialogue, and introducing economic incentives like Siger avocado cultivation, the process effectively resolved land conflicts while enhancing community welfare. The success of the RHL program was driven by strong synergy among key actors: BPDASHL as a facilitator, local leaders as trust-builders, communities as active participants, and regional governments as policy supporters. Their collaboration ensured long-term commitment to land rehabilitation efforts. To address future

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challenges, a Strategic Management Model is proposed, emphasizing institutional strengthening through training and mentorship, agroforestry-based economic innovation, fair profit-sharing mechanisms, participatory monitoring, and flexible implementation strategies. This model integrates ecosystem restoration with community empowerment, ensuring the program's long-term sustainability.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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