



The Role of Indigenous Peoples in Policy Advocacy: Rejection of Nature Park Status in Bali's Alas Mertajati Forest

Afiyanti Afiyanti¹, Ahmad Nizar Hilmi², Arsih Ardivya Putra Dirgantara³, Satrio Lang Lang Buwono⁴

¹ Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia

² State University of Surabaya, Indonesia

³ University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

⁴ Glasgow University, Scotland, UK

afiyanti@mail.ugm.ac.id

Abstract. This study examines the advocacy strategy of the Indigenous Dalem Tamblingan Community (*Masyarakat Adat Dalem Tamblingan/MADT*) in opposing the change in the status of Alas Mertajati Forest to a Nature Tourism Park (*Taman Wisata Alam/TWA*) in Bali. Since 1996, MADT has consistently rejected this Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) policy, which is considered to threaten their cultural and spiritual values. Using the *Advocacy Coalition Framework* (ACF), this study analyzes the dynamics of coalition formation, belief systems, and resource utilization in *MADT* advocacy. Using comprehensive secondary data analysis, this study reveals the effectiveness of local wisdom-based advocacy strategies in influencing public policy. The results show that MADT succeeded in building a strong coalition, utilizing traditional knowledge, and involving various stakeholders in their efforts. MADT's success in thwarting several development plans shows that local wisdom-based approaches can effectively influence public policy. This research recommends that policymakers take more account of indigenous perspectives in natural resource management for more sustainable and inclusive outcomes. This study highlights the importance of integrating cultural and spiritual values in environmental advocacy, contributes to a broader understanding of the role of indigenous peoples in environmental policy advocacy and offers valuable insights for community-based ecological conservation efforts in Indonesia.

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples, Policy Advocacy, Decrease in TWA Status, Advocacy Coalition Framework.

1 Introduction

Masyarakat Adat Dalem Tamblingan (MADT) has inhabited the area around Tamblingan Lake and Alas Mertajati forest since the 10th century. Alas Mertajati Tamblingan was previously a settlement built by Dewa Behem from the 10th century to the

end of the 14th century [1]. They adhere to the values of **Piagem Gama Tirta**, which emphasizes respect for water and harmonious coexistence with nature [1]. The values embraced by MADT play an important role in environmental preservation and water sustainability in Lake Tamblingan, which drains one-third of Bali [2]. These values are reflected in the daily practices of the community, as they strive to preserve the environment and maintain the sustainability of natural resources.

In 1996, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) changed the status of Alas Mertajati Forest in Bali from Hutan Adat to Taman Wisata Alam (TWA). This status change was based on the Decree of the Minister of Forestry No. 144/Kpts-II/1996 dated April 4, 1996, with the aim of improving Bali's tourism sector, which is known as one of the main tourist destinations in Indonesia [1]. It is hoped that this TWA status can attract more domestic and international tourists, as well as increase regional income through the development of tourism infrastructure [3].

However, the change in status of customary forests to TWAs poses various problems and challenges for local MADTs. This change opens the door for investment and the development of a tourism industry that is often not in line with the values and beliefs of indigenous peoples [4]. Efforts to increase investment and the number of visitors should be accompanied by considering the carrying capacity of the environment, cultural values, and spiritual beliefs [5]. In addition, the development of tourist facilities and recreational sites is feared to pollute forest areas considered sacred by MADT. Furthermore, these changes limit the community's access to sacred sites and natural resources that are vital to their survival [1].

In the Project Multatuli report, it was explained that the change in status eventually replaced native plants in the Alas Mertajati forest with commercial plants and caused a decrease in water discharge [2]. It also changed the social and economic structure of the community, causing dependence on agrochemicals. As a result, the MADT who depend on the forest for their livelihoods are now facing economic pressure due to the loss of access and control over the natural resources they have managed for centuries.

This situation triggered MADT's resistance to the TWA status. Indigenous communities undertook various consolidations and advocacy to restore the status of customary forests as sacred forests. They argue that forest management based on their traditional values and spiritual beliefs is more effective in maintaining environmental and natural resource sustainability than profit-oriented management models [2].

So, the protection of indigenous peoples in Indonesia is very important, this is written in the 1945 Constitution Article 18B paragraph (2) which reads: *"the state recognizes and respects the unity of customary law communities and their traditional rights as long as they are still alive and in accordance with the development of society and the principles of the unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, which are regulated by law"*. Although the special law on indigenous peoples is still a *ius constituendum*, the existence and values of indigenous peoples in Indonesia still have legal standing recognized by the state. However, this recognition has not yet been fully realized in a strong legal alignment towards indigenous peoples.

As communities that existed before the state was formed, indigenous peoples have inherent rights of origin, such rights include innate rights and not granted rights that must be positioned as community groups that are autonomous from the state.

Rechtsgemeenschappen, in Indonesia, have principles that must be protected by the government in Indonesia, considering that the Alas Mertajati Customary Forest which is now being converted causes the water discharge to decrease, which also violates the principle of environmental sustainability as an important principle of indigenous peoples. Due to these problems, MADT conducts advocacy, they form coalitions and involve various parties, including non-governmental organizations, academics, and the media, to support their struggle. This research aims to explore MADT's advocacy strategy in opposing the TWA status of Alas Mertajati forest.

The authors adopted the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) developed by Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier [6]. Using the ACF framework, this research uses secondary analysis to explore the local context, community dynamics, and MADT's efforts to fight for their rights. Through in-depth analysis of existing sources, this study aims to generate a comprehensive understanding of the vital role of indigenous community involvement in natural resource management and the formulation of equitable and sustainable public policies. This secondary data analysis approach is expected to reveal the complexity of interactions between various stakeholders, as well as provide valuable insights into effective strategies for integrating MADT perspectives into decision-making processes related to the management of the Alas Mertajati Forest area.

2 Methods

The research method used in this research is secondary data analysis. Secondary data analysis is *"the study of a specific problem through the analysis of existing data originally collected for other purposes"* [7]. Secondary data analysis is also a research approach that utilizes existing quantitative or qualitative data to explore new problems or re-examine the results of previous research [8]. The data collected is then screened to ensure it is relevant to the chosen theme. In addition, secondary data analysis involves two main processes: data collection and analysis of the data [9].

The focus of this research is on MADT's policy advocacy in rejecting the change of Alas Mertajati forest status to TWA. The analysis will cover a wide range of existing data sources, such as academic literature, news, case studies, government reports, and reports from international organizations. To ensure the reliability of the data, the author strictly limits it to reputable literature. This approach minimizes the risk of flawed research by carefully considering the assumptions and interpretations underlying the data.

Data for this research was collected through search engines for scientific publications such as Google Scholar, SINTA, news articles, and international journal websites discussing MADT. By using secondary data analysis, this research aims to provide an in-depth and detailed understanding of the policy advocacy carried out by MADT in an effort to protect the Alas Mertajati forest from being designated as a nature tourism park.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) Approach to the Rejection of Tourism Park Status in Bali's Alas Mertajati Forest

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) is a framework for policy analysis that focuses on policy change, coalition behavior, and learning [10]-[12]. This framework was developed to look at the policy process in the United States and has been applied globally with more than 80 documented applications worldwide [12]. The ACF framework addresses complex policy issues characterized by conflicting objectives, technical disputes, and the involvement of multiple actors from different levels of government and interest groups [11]. The ACF also focuses on the role of belief systems and policy subsystems in shaping policy outcomes, highlighting the importance of specialized actors within these subsystems to effectively influence policy [11].

In the context of the change in status of Alas Mertajati Forest to a Nature Tourism Park (TWA), ACF was used to analyze the conflict that arose between the indigenous community and the government. This change caused deep concern among the indigenous community, as the forest that was previously sacred to them was being used to protect the forest [13] has now undergone a change in function that hinders their free access. The resistance to this change in status has led to a complex dynamic of competing interests between the MADT, who maintain their traditions and cultural values, and the investors, who are supported by the government in planning the use of the forest for economic and tourism purposes [2].

For the MADT, the forest is not just a source of livelihood, but also an entity filled with spiritual values and beliefs that are crucial to the survival of their culture [14]. MADT fights against exclusionary practices in government policy processes, hoping to influence the final decision on forest status. This resistance is a manifestation of their efforts to restore the status of the forest to customary forest, and can be seen as part of coalitional behavior within the ACF framework, where indigenous peoples and their supporters form coalitions to influence policy and defend their belief systems in the face of policy change.

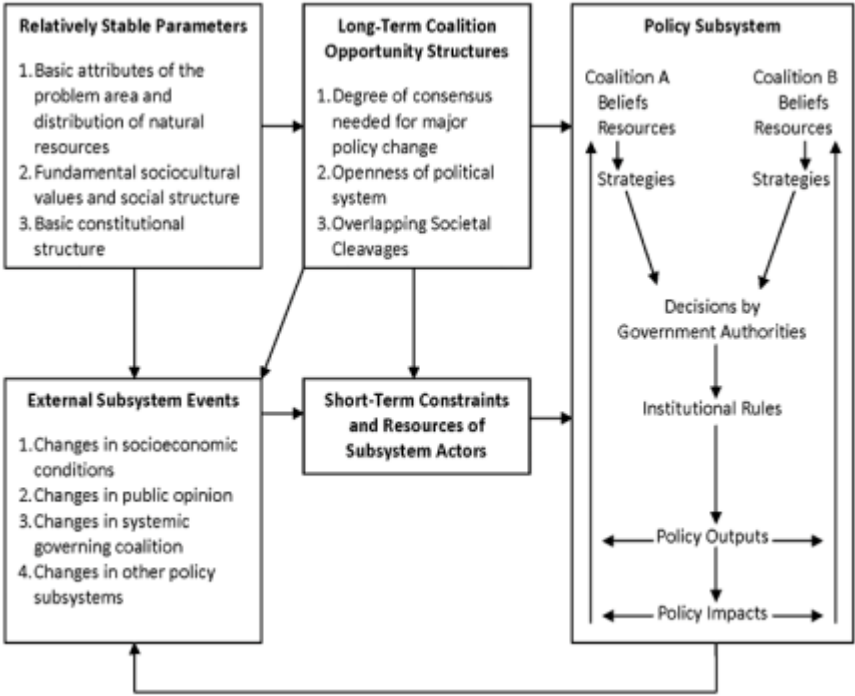


Fig. 1. Advocacy Coalition Flow Diagram Framework [15]

Coalition Building

Coalition building is the process by which individuals and organizations that share common beliefs and interests come together to influence policy outcomes [16]. These coalitions consist of actors who share deep core beliefs, core policy beliefs, or secondary aspects related to a particular policy issue [16]. Coalition formation is crucial in shaping policy debates, as they work collectively to advocate for their preferred policy solutions and influence the decision-making process. Through coalition formation, actors collaborate, strategize, and mobilize resources to achieve policy goals.

Although ACF usually involves two or more coalitions, this study focuses on one coalition. This provides an in-depth picture of the internal dynamics and advocacy strategies of MADT. The coalition shows a high level of cohesion in fighting for indigenous rights and environmental conservation. This suggests that MADT has a strong belief system and resources to support their cause.

In the coalition formation by MADT, the ACF concept was used to understand how indigenous people who maintain their traditions and cultural values came together to resist the change of status of Alas Mertajati Forest to a Nature Tourism Park (TWA). Thus, the MADT coalition can not only influence policy directly but also shape public opinion and create social pressure to support their cause. The coalition formation by MADT in fighting for their rights related to Alas Mertajati was carried out through a series of structured strategic steps. In accordance with the Constitutional Court

Decision Number 3/PUU-VIII/2010, in this decision, the Constitutional Court gave recognition to the unity of indigenous peoples and their rights to coastal areas and small islands, and emphasized the importance of considering existing rights, both individual rights and collective rights owned by indigenous peoples/ulayat rights [17].

The first step taken in the formation of the coalition was the formation of Team 9, consisting of indigenous leaders from the four traditional villages in the Catur Desa Dalem Tamblingan area (Gobleg, Munduk, Gesing, and Umajero). This team was formed in response to threats to Tamblingan's customary rights and customs, with the aim of forming a common stance in rejecting development plans that damage the environment and mobilizing strength to face external threats to the Alas Mertajati forest [18].



Fig. 2. Team 9 Fighting for Indigenous Forest Recognition (Source: Kompas)

Furthermore, in October 2020, Baga Raksa Alas Mertajati (Brasti) was formed, an organization that focuses on the younger generation of Tamblingan customs [19]. The formation of Brasti is an effort to face the challenges of modernity and capitalism that threaten the preservation of the indigenous environment, as well as to ensure regeneration and successors to the indigenous struggle. The organization aims to conduct participatory mapping and efforts to restore the status of the Alas Mertajati customary forest [20].

In its advocacy efforts, MADT involved Brasti in the mapping of the Alas Mertajati area, which included social, economic, flora and fauna conditions, as well as sites and temples in the forest [20]. They also conducted a dialog with the government regarding the relocation of residents living along the lake and overcoming environmental problems, and submitted the registration of the Dalem Tamblingan Indigenous Community to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) and the House of Representatives (DPR RI) [18], including efforts to obtain signatures from the Regent of Buleleng for spatial maps and Declarative Decrees.

The coalition also involves collaboration with various communities, including joint patrols with the Banjar District Police Office to protect the Alas Mertajati forest from illegal logging [2]. In addition, they organized a public campaign by collaborating with various communities to raise awareness of the importance of preserving Alas Mertajati

and Lake Tamblingan as important water sources in Bali [13]. With these steps, MADT has demonstrated a collective effort in defending their customary rights and preserving the environment in the Alas Mertajati region.

Identification of Belief System

In advocacy coalition theory, the belief system is divided into three levels: deep core beliefs, policy core beliefs, and secondary aspects. [6]. The identification of these belief systems is important to understand the ideological underpinnings that motivate MADT's advocacy actions.

1. Deep Core Beliefs

A fundamental belief held by MADT is a harmonious relationship with nature and respect for the environment. This belief is reflected in **Piagem Gama Tirta** which honors water and preserves nature. MADT believe that nature is an integral part of their spiritual and cultural life, which must be preserved and protected.

2. Policy Core Beliefs

MADT's core policy beliefs include the protection of indigenous rights and the sustainable management of natural resources. They reject all forms of exploitation that can damage the environment and threaten the sustainability of natural resources.

3. Secondary Aspects

Secondary aspects of MADT's beliefs include the specific strategies and tactics used in advocacy. They reject illegal logging and destructive tourism infrastructure development, and encourage community participation in decision-making regarding forest management.

Policy Subsystem of the Advocacy Coalition

The policy subsystem is influenced by a variety of institutional configurations, and the details of these arrangements are most evident in situations where coalitions seek to influence the subsystem [15]. In MADT, this subsystem consists of key actors, communication networks, interaction arenas, and structured decision-making mechanisms.

1. *Key Actors*: This subsystem includes key actors such as traditional leaders, community leaders, and indigenous youth who are members of Brasti. In addition, there is also support from NGOs, civil society organizations, as well as local and central government parties, such as the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Indonesian Parliament, and the Regent of Buleleng, as well as academics.
2. *Communication Network*: The coalition built a strong communication network with various parties, including the government, media, and international organizations. This network serves to disseminate information, garner support, and influence public policy.
3. *Arena of Interaction*: The interaction arena includes dialogue forums with the government, MADT registration processes, public and media campaigns, and participatory mapping activities. This arena is where different actors interact with each other to influence public decisions.

4. *Decision-Making Process*: This policy subsystem also includes participatory and inclusive decision-making mechanisms. Through customary deliberations and community meetings, MADT ensures that the voices of all community members are heard and considered in every step of advocacy.

3.2 Resource Identification

In addition to understanding MADT's beliefs system, the author identified its resources based on the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) which is described into six main types of resources, but the author found 5 types of resources [6]:

1. Access to Policymaking Authorities

The indigenous community has been active in efforts to register the Dalem Tamblingan Indigenous Community with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) and the Indonesian Parliament since 2021. They have also applied to the Regent of Buleleng for a signature on the spatial map since 2019, although the application has yet to receive approval.

2. Public Opinion

The indigenous community has widespread support from various parties, including the subaks who believe that their water source is rooted in Alas Mertajati. Support has also come from international organizations and activists who have visited Tamblingan and supported their customary claims.

3. Information gathering

Indigenous communities conducted participatory mapping in Alas Mertajati, collecting data related to boundaries, socio-economic conditions, flora and fauna, temple sites, and the location of water points. They also have in-depth knowledge of the history and customary values closely associated with Alas Mertajati.

4. Mobilization and Organization

To strengthen their collective stance, the Dalem Tamblingan Indigenous Community formed Team 9 consisting of customary leaders from four nearby villages. In addition, they also established the Baga Raksa Alas Mertajati (Brasti) organization that focuses on involving the younger generation in their advocacy, with a structure divided into five different working divisions.

5. Leadership

Indigenous leaders such as Putu Ardana (Chairman of Team 9) and Ketut San (an indigenous youth leader) led directly in the advocacy efforts. The elders also played a role in providing in-depth knowledge of the history and cultural values associated with Alas Mertajati.

4 Conclusion

This research examines the advocacy strategy of Masyarakat Adat Dalem Tamblingan (MADT) in opposing the status of the Nature Tourism Park in the Alas Mertajati forest using the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). The analysis shows that MADT has

developed an effective advocacy strategy by forming a strong coalition, identifying a shared belief system, and utilizing various resources.

The formation of Team 9 and Brasti demonstrates MADT's efforts to build a solid coalition and involve the younger generation. A belief system centered on harmony with nature and protection of indigenous rights became a strong foundation for their advocacy. MADT also successfully utilizes resources such as access to policy makers, public opinion support, local knowledge, and strong leadership.

The study underscores the importance of integrating cultural and spiritual values in environmental advocacy. MADT's success in thwarting several development plans shows that local wisdom-based approaches can effectively influence public policy. The study recommends that policymakers take more into account indigenous perspectives in natural resource management for more sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

5 Acknowledgement

This research would not be possible without the support of the LPDP in providing scholarships for researchers to help complete this study. As the LPDP's funding comes from the people's contribution, this study will also produce writings that return to the people's interests. The author is also grateful to the Committee of the UNESA 4th International Conference on Social Sciences and Law (ICSSL) 2024 for the opportunity to submit this paper.

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