



The Political-Economy of Community Forests in West Sumatra: Contestation of the Nagari Forests Management (1970–2024)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the management of community forests, specifically *nagari* forests, in West Sumatra. This research is vital because studies on *nagari* forests in West Sumatra tend to be descriptive and technocratic, without highlighting the historical, political, and economic dynamics that shape forestry policy. This study analyzes community adaptation and resistance strategies in conserving customary-based forests. This research uses a historical method, with heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The results show that *nagari* forest management in West Sumatra significantly impacts the local economy, ecological resilience, and social structure of the *nagari*. Forests provide economic, social, and environmental benefits to the community. However, the government's position is unclear. On the one hand, the government encourages community forest management. On the other hand, the government facilitates large-scale concessions to private companies.

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INTRODUCTION

Forests are ecosystems with dense tree cover and various tree types, sizes, and ages. In addition to trees, forests also include grasslands, small rivers, and wildlife (Helms, [1998](#)). However, forests play an essential role in life on Earth. Their role includes ecological, economic, and social benefits. Somebody can realize these benefits if they conduct forest management correctly and sustainably. The importance of forests for the socio-economic life of communities demands awareness of the need to manage forest resources from a financial perspective and as part of comprehensive forest resource management (Reksohadiprodjo, [1988](#)).

Community forest management is essential in sustainable development and natural resource management discourse. In Indonesia, various forms of community forest management have emerged under the social forestry scheme. These include community forests, tree plantations, village forests, customary forests, and forestry partnerships. Reflects the state's efforts to accommodate the role of the community in protecting forests while obtaining economic benefits (Gunawan et al., [2022](#)).

In West Sumatra, *nagari* forests, historically rooted in the Minangkabau social system, manifest a unique form of community forest management (Tanjung et al., [2017](#)). Community forests are a model of natural resource management in the form of community-based forests, where the community develops forests through self-help. The aim is to produce timber and commodities that can economically improve the income and welfare of the community. Can be seen in the existence of traditional community forests created by the community themselves without government intervention (self-reliance), whether in the form of single-species plantations or agroforestry patterns (Awang, [2002](#)).

However, people understand community forests in Law No. 41 (1999) as forests growing on land subject to ownership rights. This definition distinguishes them from state forests, which grow on land not encumbered by property rights or state land. In this context, state land includes land controlled by communities based on customary regulations or rules. The existence of community forests themselves can provide ecological and economic benefits to communities. Ecologically, forests can be beneficial in improving the water management of watersheds, soil conservation, and environmental quality. Economically, they are valuable for increasing farmers' income from

community forests and providing timber. Community forests are a source of raw materials for the timber processing industry in the region (Prabowo, [2000](#)).

Although the term community forest legally refers to forests on privately owned land that are not subject to state regulations, in West Sumatra, many forms of forest management by *nagari* contain the spirit of self-management and community forest-based management. The West Sumatra government claims that there has been an increase in community forest management every year (Kompas, [2024](#)). Therefore, this article analytically uses the term community forest to highlight management initiatives by *nagari* communities, both those that have obtained formal recognition as social forestry and those that still follow local customs. Thus, people understand Nagari Forest as a local manifestation of community forest in the Minangkabau social system, which the state legal framework institutionalizes.

In his study of forest exploitation in Sarawak, Malaysia, Victor T. King ([1993](#)) shows that people must view forest management as part of the relationship between the government, economic interests, and community initiatives. King criticizes Sarawak's forest management as a key instrument of state-controlled economic development, sidelining the community's rights. This thinking provides an essential theoretical framework for looking at community forest management in West Sumatra. This paper aims to find out how communities manage forests in the form of community forests, and how the government's presence in forest management either strengthens or hinders communities in managing forests sustainably and equitably.

Studies on *nagari* forests and social forestry in West Sumatra have been conducted extensively, especially after the issuance of various post-reform regulations, such as the Minister of Environment and Forestry Decree and West Sumatra Governor Regulation No. 52 of 2018 (Nurwansyah et al., [2024](#)). Among them is Ferdinal Asmin et al. ([2019](#)) research, which highlights the importance of mainstreaming community-based social forestry and documents various institutional supports and obstacles in implementing this policy. However, the approaches used are primarily descriptive and technocratic, without delving into the historical context and power relations in forming forestry policies. Then, the study by Syofiarti et al. ([2023](#)) shows the dynamics of *nagari* forest management by customary law communities, especially in legalization, conflicts, and relations with the state.

Similarly, the study by Chandra et al. ([2022](#)) in the Simancuang Nagari Forest traces the driving factors of community-based conservation. Although these studies provide strong empirical contributions, they have not integrated a political economy perspective, highlighting how particular interests shape forestry policies and how local communities position themselves within existing regulations. Several other studies emphasize the importance of regional social capital (Asmin et al., [2017](#)), forest product marketing practices, and *nagari* institutional forms (Trison et al., [2024](#)) support sustainable forest management. However, a striking gap is the lack of studies examining long-term dynamics and how the relationship between state policy and *nagari* community initiatives has developed historically and politically. This study fills the gap by offering a historical-political and historical-economic analysis of *nagari*-based community forest management over the long term. This article also gives insights into the processes of adaptation and contestation between the state and the community, thereby providing an understanding of the benefits of community forests.

METHOD

This study uses historical methods. The stages include heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kuntowijoyo, [2018](#)). Researchers collected data from primary sources through government policy documents, court decisions, and mass media in the heuristic stage. Researchers also gathered secondary sources from books, scientific journals, and previous research reports. The researchers selected three case studies from the collected data: Nagari Taram, South Solok, and Pagadih. These case studies were selected based on contextual variation and the dynamics of *nagari* forest management. Nagari Taram represents a locally-based management model that has received formal recognition as social forestry. Solok Selatan reflects a contestation with large-scale concession permits that has triggered prolonged conflict. Meanwhile, Nagari Pagadih represents a model of *nagari* forest management that combines customary rules with formal local government policies. During the critique stage, the researchers conducted a two-step validation process. The first is external critique, which involves assessing the authenticity of documents and the validity of information, including checking archive metadata and publication sources. Second is internal criticism, which consists of testing the credibility of the content by cross-checking various sources. Conflicting sources are handled by confirming the data through at least four types of evidence, including government policy documents,

court decisions, mass media, and previous research. The interpretation stage involves analyzing the relationship between the state and the community in managing community forests. In this case, it places the local dynamics in Taram, South Solok, and Pagadih in the context of national regulatory changes from 1970 to 2024. It is then linked to policy data to identify patterns of adaptation and contestation. The historiography stage systematically compiles a historical narrative based on the analyzed data. It combines empirical findings from the three cases to explain the development of *nagari*-based community forest management in West Sumatra.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Potential of Community Forests

Community forests in Indonesia have great potential, both in terms of tree population and the number of people involved, enabling them to provide raw materials for the forestry industry. Estimates of the potential and area of community forests compiled from forestry offices throughout Indonesia reach 39,416,557 m³ with an area of 1,568,415.64 ha. In contrast, data on the potential of community forests based on the agricultural census conducted by Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS, [2004](#)) shows that the potential of community forests reaches 39,564,003 m³ with an area of 1,560,229 ha. The number of trees reaches 226,080,019, with 78,485,993 trees ready for harvesting. However, the characteristics of community forests vary significantly across regions. In Java, the narrow land ownership leads to community forests being managed intensively on a small scale by individual farmers. Conversely, in West Sumatra, community forest management tends to be collective through *nagari* institutions rooted in the Minangkabau social system (Agustini et al., [2018](#)). Makes *nagari* forests a local manifestation of community forests.

In West Sumatra, communities often develop community forests on customary land, which tribes or clans within the *nagari* collectively own. For example, the community has transformed the 1,080-hectare Simanau customary land into a *nagari* forest. Similarly, they have turned the 650-hectare Alam Pauh Duo land into a Protected Forest (Syofiarti et al., [2023](#)). Communities subsequently manage these forests for various shared interests, including economic, social, and ecological purposes. With a relatively larger area and lower population pressure than Java, the people of West Sumatra use the available space to develop community forests as a source of sustainable livelihoods.

This management includes cultivating economically valuable species such as surian wood, teak, and mahogany, which are grown both for household needs and the market. Communities select these high-value economic plants because their demands are increasing. Thus, producing such forests effectively stimulates the growth of sustainable economic activities, both directly and indirectly (Hardjanto, [2000](#)). Despite its high potential, many unresolved issues remain, particularly the threat of oil palm plantation expansion.

In addition to providing economic functions, community-managed forests have the same functions as natural forests. They regulate water management, influence microclimate, prevent erosion, supply soil minerals, produce timber, and more. Meanwhile, the number of people living within and around forests is quite large, and they are highly familiar with tree planting. It represents a significant potential if community forests become the flagship of forestry. Furthermore, forests also provide cultural benefits to communities. People do not merely view forests as physical objects or a direct food source. Forests also influence communities' cultural and spiritual values in how they treat them. In other words, forests inspire artistic expression (Humaedi, [2014](#)). Community groups also create symbols from forests and interpret them as signs of an event or occurrence that will take place.

Therefore, nobody can overlook the potential of forests for community sustainability. As mentioned by Jaffar ([1993](#)), community forest development aims to (1) increase the productivity of critical land or areas that are not optimally and sustainably productive, (2) help diversify agricultural products needed by the community, (3) help the community in providing construction timber and industrial raw materials as well as firewood, (4) increase the income of rural farming communities while improving their welfare, (5) improve water management and the environment, particularly on community-owned land located in protected areas of the upper watershed.

Various factors have encouraged community forestry in upland areas. However, it is also possible for communities to establish community forests in other areas. Natural environmental conditions do impose limitations on human choices. However, humans can expand their knowledge, enhance their skills, utilize advanced equipment, and form social groups to adapt and seek solutions to existing limitations (Siedenburg, [2022](#)). Community forestry primarily produces timber, which people can process into household items, packaging, pulp, and other applications.

The market determines tree species, such as sengon, mahogany, teak, and African wood. Sengon wood is primarily used for packaging, household furniture, and construction materials (Awaludin & Astuti, [2016](#)). Teak wood is used mainly for household furniture and building materials for luxurious homes (Albuês et al., [2023](#)). Community forests also produce firewood, which small industries such as roof tile, brick, and food industries widely consume. The success of community forest development depends on matching tree species to the soil conditions of the cultivation site. Therefore, farmers must know which tree species suit their land conditions. Because particular species can grow well in nutrient-poor soil, farmers can cultivate them without reducing land for food crops (Pauli et al., [2012](#)).

Building community forests is one of the wisdom of agrarian communities in meeting various household needs. As the population and its needs grow, land ownership becomes increasingly limited. The role of community forests in improving community well-being becomes increasingly essential. Landowners achieve successful community forest development by combining their knowledge of soil conditions and environmental factors with knowledge of the types of trees to plant to obtain the desired results.

Forest Management Legalization and Regulation

Before the government enacted the regional regulation, *nagari* communities in West Sumatra could not manage their forests optimally. During the New Order era, the state claimed ownership of all forest areas through Forestry Law No. 5 of 1967 (Siscawati et al., [2017](#)). The central government completely controls millions of hectares of forest in Indonesia. This policy ultimately made it easier for the government to grant concessions and monopolize forest rights, thereby facilitating private companies to open plantations (Fujiwara & Onda, [2021](#)). Government policies led to numerous land conflicts in West Sumatra in later years, such as those in Pasaman Regency in the 1980s. Investors initiated large-scale oil palm plantation development. The government facilitated companies in obtaining HGU permits for oil palm plantations on land owned by customary communities (Adawiyah, [2024](#)).

This policy ultimately disregarded customary rights of indigenous communities, including the Minangkabau people, who have long managed land and forests within the *nagari* kinship system. Although customary land does not have legal legitimacy, community forest management practices continue to take place informally through customary institutions such as the Kerapatan Adat Nagari (KAN), based on the principles of collectivity and sustainability (Tresno et al., [2019](#)). Various forestry regulations mention community forests, but they define their scope as forests growing on privately owned rather than state land. Law No. 41 of 1999 on Forestry defines community forests as forests growing on land subject to ownership rights. This definition distinguishes them from state forests, which the government manages on state-owned land or land not subject to ownership rights. In practice, community forest management has been ongoing since the colonial era in Java and was continued by the Indonesian government through the Karang Kitri program (1952) and various national reforestation activities since the 1960s, including the First National Reforestation Week in 1961 (Hardjosoediro, [1980](#)).

Meanwhile, in the context of West Sumatra, practices equivalent to community forests are more based on customary land owned by the village. Customary law does not formally recognize this land as individual property rights but recognizes it as collective rights institutionalized through tradition (Agustini et al., [2018](#)). However, the government did not grant these forests full legal recognition until it enacted West Sumatra Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2007 on the Principles of Nagari Governance. This regulation states that forests are part of the *nagari*'s assets and allows communities to manage them jointly for the benefit of the *nagari* (Provinsi Sumatera Barat, [2007](#)). Collective forest management by the community was further strengthened by West Sumatra Regional Regulation No. 6 of 2008 on Customary Land and Its Utilization. However, this regulation does not explicitly mention forest utilization. Nevertheless, it reinforces ownership rights over customary land, most of which is forest (Provinsi Sumatera Barat, [2008](#)).

Before issuing these two regional regulations, the Government of Indonesia had enacted Law No. 41 of 1999 on forestry. This law strengthens the existence of indigenous peoples and provides space for customary law communities to manage forests through specific administrative recognitions. Article 2 of the law defines community forests by (a) forests that are managed independently or jointly with other individuals/legal entities, (b) located on land owned or rights that comply with laws and regulations, and (c) can be owned based on a decision by the Minister of Forestry (Pemerintah RI, [1999](#)). However, regional regulations have not reinforced this, so attention to developing community forests still lags far behind state forest areas. Forest management is still overshadowed by Article 12 of Law No. 5 (Pemerintah RI, [1967](#)), which only mentions community forests as additional material, without adequate implementing mechanisms. The Ministry of Forestry also emphasizes the position of community forests. Community

forests are areas outside state forests dominated by trees, forming a biological community and living environment. The government claims that the success of community forest development depends heavily on support for extension services, demonstration plots, and rehabilitation of critical land through various reforestation programs (Departemen Kehutanan RI, [1974](#)). However, the success or failure of community forests depends on the existence of a driving force in the form of regulations that clearly define the applicable rules.

In general, national regulations have not provided proportional recognition of the characteristics of customary community forests. Therefore, regional policy interventions such as local and village regulations are key to filling legal gaps and bridging the logic of the state with local social realities (Salomo & Rahmayanti, [2023](#)). Nagari Taram in Limapuluh Kota District provides one concrete example of this legalization process. In 2017, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry approved Nagari Taram's request to manage an 800-hectare forest area under the social forestry scheme (Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan, [2017](#)). The Taram Nagari Forest Management Institution (LPHN Taram) collectively manages this area.

Drawing lessons from Nagari Tanam, the West Sumatra Provincial Government issued regulations to support the acceleration of implementation in the preparation and development of forestry businesses (Provinsi Sumatera Barat, 2018). However, the legalization process does not always proceed smoothly. In South Solok, for example, there is an overlap in licensing between the central and local governments. In August 2024, the government issued a natural forest concession permit to PT Bumi Rangkiang Sejahtera covering an area of 43,591 hectares. The concession encroaches on the forest areas of six *nagari*s that already had social forestry permits (Mongabay, [2024](#)). This case shows the tension between the formal recognition of indigenous peoples and the interests of the state or private sector in exploiting natural resources.

On the other hand, Nagari Pagadih in Agam Regency shows an affirmative model of locally based forest legalization. Although it had experienced controversy related to land clearing in a conservation area in 2021 (Kata Sumbar, [2021](#); Mahkamah Agung RI, [2022](#)), in 2023, Pagadih Village established Village Regulation (Perna) No. 2 of 2023 on customary forest management. This regulation emphasizes the principles of deliberation, ecosystem protection, and cultural preservation as the foundation for sustainable forest management (Langgam, [2024](#)).

Overall, the legalization and regulatory politics of village forests in West Sumatra reflect the dynamics of power relations between the state and the community. The state tends to prioritize state forest areas in economic development policies, including facilitating land concessions for the interests of private companies. Meanwhile, policymakers sideline the recognition of community forests, especially those based on customary rights. As a result, communities need to engage in lengthy administrative and political struggles to obtain legal recognition for forest management. Nevertheless, these struggles are part of the contestation over forest management within the framework of local political economy.

Contested Interests and Community Strategies

The contestation over the management of *nagari* forests in West Sumatra manifests the tension between state development and the local wisdom of indigenous communities. The state has authority over forest areas legally designated as state forests through its legal instruments and regulations. On the other hand, the *nagari* community has historical and cultural legitimacy over customary lands managed for generations. The tension between these two sources of legitimacy gives rise to a relationship of interests involving the state, the private sector, and local communities.

South Solok Regency illustrates one such case of contestation. In 2024, the central government, through the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK), granted a concession for utilizing natural forests to PT Bumi Rangkiang Sejahtera (BRS) covering an area of 43,591 hectares. Six *nagari* (traditional villages) have long managed the forest areas this permit covers. These include Nagari Lubuk Ulang Aling, Lubuk Gadang, Lubuk Gadang Selatan, Lubuk Gadang Timur, Lubuk Gadang Utara, and Pakan Rabaa Tengah (Walhi, [2024](#)). The presence of companies with concession permits has triggered strong resistance from the community. The *nagari* community believes that the government granted the license to BRS without public consultation and violated the principles of community-based management they had implemented. In addition, the concession lies within a 4,282-hectare community forest management permit area (Mongabay, [2024](#)). This situation has created a sharp contestation between the state's interest in promoting investment and the local community's need to preserve its living space. In this case, the government is in an ambiguous

position. On the one hand, the government promotes social forestry as an inclusive forestry solution. On the other hand, it continues to issue large-scale concession permits that reduce the community's management space.

Faced with this situation, the *nagari* community did not remain passive. The community tried to respond to this situation with various adaptive strategies. In Nagari Taram, Limapuluh Kota Regency, the community formed a Nagari Forest Management Institution (LPHN), which administratively became a legal forum for obtaining forest management permits. The LPHN performs technical forest management functions and serves as a platform for community advocacy in negotiations with local governments and ministries. The Taram LPHN secured a management permit for 800 hectares of state forest through the social forestry scheme (Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan, [2017](#)). The community's strategy does not stop at legalization alone. The Taram LPHN has developed an ecotourism model and utilized non-timber forest products, generating tens of millions of rupiah in revenue annually. The Pesona Taram Festival highlighted the success of community-based forest management (Batam Pos, [2022](#)).

On the other hand, Nagari Pagadih, Agam Regency, also implemented community forest management strategies through the formulation of Nagari Regulations (Perna). The community formulated the Pagadih Perna as a form of local formalization of forest management. The Pagadih Nagari community responded to the tension between conservation and economic needs by drafting Perna No. 2 of 2023, which regulates customary forest management, which occurred because some community members had previously cleared land in conservation areas. The nagari chief ratified this regulation after deliberation involving *ninik mamak*, youth, and *bundo kandung*. The regulation prohibits commercial exploitation in the village's restricted and protected forests and establishes rotation-based cultivation zones for productive crops (Langgam, 2024).

The contestation over the management of *nagari* forests is not only taking place locally but has also escalated to the national level. In some cases, groups have held hearings in Jakarta to voice their objections to unfair policies. The community is seeking protection from large-scale concessions and legal protection from criminalization for defending their rights to the forest (Tempo, [2023](#)). The cases mentioned clearly show that the government's response is still biased. Although it supports forest management for the community, the state maintains a logic of centralization and exploitation of resources for economic growth, as in the case of South Solok. Aligns with Victor T. King's ([1993](#)) finding, which shows that the state's political economy often treats forests as instruments of state development, not as living spaces for indigenous peoples. Thus, the contestation over forest management in West Sumatra is not merely a physical clash over land but a manifestation of the struggle between the state's interests, private entities, and communities. Communities are not simply victims but also actors shaping survival and adaptation strategies. They utilize legal instruments, local institutions, and advocacy networks to uphold local autonomy. However, the power structures and political-economic dynamics surrounding community forests inevitably shape their management.

Social and Ecological Implications of Forest Management

The management of *nagari* forests in West Sumatra significantly impacts the local economy, ecological resilience, and the social structure of the *nagari*. As a local form of community forestry developed within the Minangkabau social system, *nagari* forests have both environmental and economic and cultural values. Community forest management, including *nagari* forests, impacts the local economy. This financial impact arises from production activities, product processing, marketing, and institutional organization. This management model creates an economic value chain involving various parties, from landowners, farmers, agricultural workers, intermediaries, to small-scale industries and local governments. According to data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry ([2020](#)), in West Sumatra, 121.118 families are involved in managing forested land as part of community forests. Indicates that *nagari* forests, as a collective form of community forests, can even absorb labor from various elements of the *nagari* community.

Although the contribution of community forests to household income is still incidental and classified as supplementary income, their existence has proven to strengthen the economic resilience of communities. It was evident during the 1998 monetary crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, where communities with access to community forests recovered economically faster than those without (Sanudin et al., 2023). Intensive management models, such as those implemented by LPHN Taram, also show tremendous potential. In addition to timber, the community also markets honey, rattan, and medicinal plants. LPHN Taram has created jobs for residents (Batam Pos, [2022](#)). Also shows that collective community forest management can serve as a local economic engine. In addition, the moratorium on primary natural forests and peatlands, which began in 2011 (Presiden Republik Indonesia, [2011](#)), has created business opportunities in the field of community forest management. With the ban on logging in primary forests, the demand

for community timber by the processing industry has increased, especially in the sawmill and furniture sectors. Many industry players have shifted to sourcing wood from communities, ultimately strengthening the bargaining position of community forest farmers.

In addition to providing economic opportunities, forests also offer ecological benefits. Community forests serve as ecosystem buffers in upstream areas and landslide-prone zones. As demonstrated by the community of Nagari Panti Pasaman, agroforestry practices contribute to forest conservation, reduce land cover loss, and prevent floods and erosion (Senia et al., [2024](#)). However, ecological challenges persist, particularly the threat of land clearing for oil palm plantations. The involvement of traditional leaders and village institutions in spatial planning is crucial to maintain ecological functions alongside local economic growth, as demonstrated by Nagari Pagadih, which established the LPHN and issued village regulations to preserve environmental balance (Langgam, [2024](#)). Reflecting on Nagari Pagadih, *nagari* forests not only strengthen economic autonomy but also social autonomy. Establishing the LPHN opens new opportunities for community participation in resource management.

Forest management in West Sumatra has made a tangible contribution to villages' social and ecological development. However, the historical-political and economic dynamics that have persisted since the New Order era continue to shape forest management in West Sumatra. Between 1970 and 1999, the state monopolized power over forest areas through a legal regime that classified forests as state resources. The state then utilized forests for national development interests, particularly in the forestry industry. However, at the same time, the *nagari* community continued to maintain customary forest management practices, which were passed down through generations and became part of the local socio-economic system. After the reform, a unique adaptation process emerged, in which communities began to integrate local values with formal state regulations, such as forming Nagari Forest Management Institutions (LPHN) or drafting Nagari Regulations. However, this process was also accompanied by contestation, especially when state policies conflicted with community customary claims, such as granting large-scale concessions to private companies. Thus, community forests demonstrate local communities resilience in defending their living spaces and serve as a battleground for ecological and economic justice. This analysis reveals that the value of community forests lies in their ability to function as a source of livelihood, a social space, and a political instrument for communities.

CONCLUSION

Community forest management in the form of community forests, particularly *nagari* forests in West Sumatra, has positioned forests as a source of livelihood, a cultural pillar, and a guarantor of environmental sustainability. Communities combine local knowledge and ecology to develop forests independently. As a result, forests provide economic, social, and ecological benefits to community life. However, the government's presence is often like two sides of a coin. On one hand, the government provides legal space for communities to manage forests through social forestry schemes and local regulations.

On the other hand, the state maintains a centralized logic and prioritizes economic development interests, including granting large-scale concessions to private companies that often overlook indigenous communities. Indirectly, the government projects forests as instruments of development. This situation has led to prolonged contestation between the state, private companies, and communities. Communities are not only affected parties but also active actors fighting and developing strategies to defend community forests. They also adapt to legal and institutional frameworks, such as the LPHN, village regulations, and advocacy networks for this struggle. Power dynamics and economic politics ultimately shape and influence community forests.

These findings imply that forest policy should prioritize fully recognizing indigenous peoples management rights and strengthening local institutional capacity. Without a paradigm shift, community forests will continue to be overshadowed by the logic of exploitative state development. There needs to be a shift from viewing forests solely as economic assets to seeing them as living spaces integral to identity, culture, and environmental sustainability.

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