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Revitalizing Sasi as a Customary Ecological Law Instrument: Strengthening Community Awareness and Environmental Conservation

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Abstract

Introduction: *Sasi governs temporary restrictions on the use of selected natural resources in Maluku. Preliminary observations and discussions in Negeri Hutumuri indicated a need to explain its ecological and legal functions to younger residents.*

Purposes of The Devotion: *The community service activity aimed to strengthen participants' understanding of Sasi as a customary mechanism for environmental conservation.*

Method of The Devotion: *The activity drew on participatory action research through field observation, participatory mapping, a legal education session, and discussion. Aggregate pre-test and post-test responses were compared descriptively.*

Results Main Findings of the Devotion: *Affirmative responses rose from 72% to 94% for both the designation of Sasi areas and the meaning of Sasi. They stayed at 94% for customary sanctions and 83% for the functions of the Kewang. General familiarity declined from 100% to 94%. One post-test item had an incomplete response distribution. Conclusion: The session provided a forum for intergenerational discussion and was followed by more affirmative responses on some topics. The results identify topics for follow-up education on customary institutions and procedures. The evaluation measured immediate self-reports.*

Keywords: Sasi; Customary Law; Kewang; Environmental Conservation; Legal Education.

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INTRODUCTION

In Negeri Hutumuri, Leitimur Selatan District, Ambon City, research on customary forest management has documented the importance of written and unwritten rules, trust, and social ties.[1] A study of traditional conservation in Leitimur Selatan, which included Hutumuri, also identified Sasi among the practices residents use to regulate access to natural resources.[2]

The needs assessment drew on field observations, participatory mapping of Sasi practices and areas, and discussions with community leaders. The team's preliminary account raised a concern that some younger residents recognized the ceremonial aspects of Sasi and had difficulty explaining its conservation purpose. In the pre-test, all respondents reported

[1] Hilery G. Silooy, Marthina Tjoa, and Iskar Iskar, "Modal Sosial dalam Pengelolaan Hutan Adat Negeri Hutumuri," *Tropical Small Island Agriculture Management* 4, no. 1 (2024): 1–8.

[2] Ernywati Badaruddin, J. F. Sahusilawane, and Jenny Anidlah, "Konservasi Tradisional terhadap Sumberdaya Alam di Kecamatan Leitimur Selatan," *Makila* 15, no. 1 (2021): 22–36.

general familiarity with Sasi. On the more specific items, 72% answered affirmatively on its meaning and 72% on how Sasi areas are designated. The available data describe respondents as a group and lack an age breakdown.

Sasi operates as customary law by defining which resource may be taken, from which area, and at what time. A closure temporarily restricts access or harvesting and can give the resource time to recover. Customary arrangements can specify who announces and lifts the restriction, who supervises compliance, and which sanctions apply. The Kewang is a customary body associated with stewardship and oversight. Studies in Central Maluku show that the allocation of these responsibilities varies across communities and can involve customary authorities, village governments, and religious institutions.[3]

Three provisions of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia frame this relationship. Article 28H (1) guarantees everyone the right to a good and healthy environment. Article 33(3) places natural resources under state control for the greatest prosperity of the people, and Article 33(4) includes sustainability and environmental soundness among the principles of the national economy. Article 18B (2) requires the state to recognize and respect customary law communities and their traditional rights, subject to their continued existence and consistency with societal development and the principles of the unitary state, as regulated by law. Recognition of customary institutions can support the exercise of community environmental responsibilities within a system in which the state retains its responsibilities for environmental protection.[4]

Law No. 32 of 2009 on Environmental Protection and Management, as amended, recognizes participation and local wisdom as governing principles under Article 2(k) and (l). Article 65(2) recognizes rights to environmental education and participation, and Article 70(3)(e) identifies the development and safeguarding of local culture and wisdom as an aim of public participation. Article 61 of the coastal management law protects the rights of customary and traditional communities in coastal areas and small islands that they have used for generations and recognizes local wisdom as a basis for sustainable management. Ambon City Regional Regulation No. 9 of 2017 lists Hutumuri as a Negeri under Article 3(2)(j), and Regional Regulation No. 8 of 2017 establishes the framework for Negeri governance in the city.

The activity used local mapping and discussion to connect familiarity with Sasi to an understanding of how its rules protect resources. It offers an initial format for ecological legal education in which customary leaders and the Kewang can explain local rules, the Negeri government can clarify the scope of village regulation, and residents, including young people, can raise questions about applying the rules. The activity aimed to strengthen participants' understanding and identify topics that require further instruction.

METHOD OF THE DEVOTION

The Faculty of Law team at Pattimura University conducted a legal education activity in Negeri Hutumuri for local residents, with an emphasis on youth and customary community leaders. The activity drew on participatory action research (PAR), which treats community

[3] Charles Zerner, "Through a Green Lens," *Law & Society Review* 28, no. 5 (1994): 1079–1122. Ingvild Harkes and Irene Novaczek, "Presence, Performance, and Institutional Resilience of Sasi," *Ocean & Coastal Management* 45, nos. 4–5 (2002): 237–60.

[4] Sudi Fahmi, "Asas Tanggung Jawab Negara sebagai Dasar Pelaksanaan Perlindungan dan Pengelolaan Lingkungan Hidup," *Jurnal Hukum IUS QUIA IUSTUM* 18, no. 2 (2011): 212–28.

members as contributors to identifying problems and developing responses.[5] The activity account identifies community members and representatives of local groups among the attendees. Preparation comprised initial observations, discussion with community leaders, and participatory mapping of Sasi practices, areas, and stakeholders. The mapping covered customary institutions, the church, and the Negeri government. The outreach session used a presentation on Sasi and environmental conservation followed by questions and discussion. The work plan included interviews and community reflection. The evidence analyzed here consists of the summary of preliminary observations and discussions, the activity photographs, and two tables of questionnaire responses. The pre-test and post-test comprised three items on general knowledge and four on specific topics. Responses were tabulated as "Yes," "Unsure" (labeled "Hesitation" in the original tabulation), or "Don't know." For each item, the analysis compares the reported share of affirmative responses in percentage points. Only aggregate percentages are available. Denominators, matched responses, the questionnaire scoring rubric, and item-specific interview accounts are unavailable. The comparison therefore describes short-term self-reported responses.[6] A comparison based on an incomplete response distribution is treated as provisional.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Sasi as Customary Law for Environmental Protection

Field observations and discussions indicated that Sasi remained recognizable in Hutumuri and that its ecological rationale warranted further explanation. The distinction matters for customary governance. Residents need to know the boundaries of a closure, the resources it covers, and the authority responsible for enforcement in order to apply the rule. A study of marine Sasi in Eti, West Seram, similarly describes restrictions on harvesting and customary sanctions for breaches.[7] The study of Sasi in the Ambon community also identifies a gap between customary regulation and the practical demands of preserving environmental functions.[8]

Harkes and Novaczek show that areas covered, governing authorities, and enforcement arrangements differ among communities in Central Maluku.[9] For the Hutumuri activity, area designation provides a concrete way to explain Sasi. A discussion of one closure can connect a defined place and resource with a period of protection, supervision, and the procedure for reopening.

B. Community Awareness through Ecological Legal Education

The outreach combined a presentation with questions from participants. Figures 1 and 2 document the activity. Tables 1 and 2 show the reported response distribution for each item before and after the session.

[5] Agus Afandi et al., *Metodologi Pengabdian Masyarakat* (Direktorat Pendidikan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, Kementerian Agama RI, 2022).
[6] Emma Marsden and Carole J. Torgerson, "Single Group, Pre- and Post-test Research Designs," *Oxford Review of Education* 38, no. 5 (2012): 583–616.
[7] Zulfikar Judge and Marissa Nurizka, "Peranan Hukum Adat Sasi Laut," *Lex Jurnalica* 6, no. 1 (2008): 30–61.
[8] Alfons Vindy and Aryo Subroto, "Efektivitas Hukum Adat Sasi dalam Pelestarian Sumber Daya Alam pada Masyarakat Ambon," *Dialogia Iuridica* 15, no. 2 (2024): 78–99.
[9] Harkes and Novaczek, "Presence, Performance, and Institutional Resilience of Sasi." I. Novaczek et al., *An Institutional Analysis of Sasi Laut in Maluku, Indonesia*, ICLARM Technical Report 59 (2001).

Table 1. Pre-test and post-test responses on general knowledge of Sasi

Indicator	Pre-test (%)			Post-test (%)		
	Yes	Unsure	Don't know	Yes	Unsure	Don't know
General familiarity with Sasi as local wisdom	100	0	0	94	0	6
How Sasi areas are designated in Hutumuri	72	17	11	94	6	0
Customary sanctions for breaches of Sasi in Hutumuri	94	6	0	94	6	0

In Table 1, affirmative responses on how Sasi areas are designated rose from 72% to 94%, a gain of 22 percentage points. The share reporting general familiarity fell by 6 percentage points, from 100% to 94%, and "Don't know" rose from 0% to 6%. The 100% baseline left no room for an increase on that item. Responses on customary sanctions were unchanged across all three categories.

Table 2. Pre-test and post-test responses on specific Sasi topics

Indicator	Pre-test (%)			Post-test (%)		
	Yes	Unsure	Don't know	Yes	Unsure	Don't know
Meaning of Sasi	72	22	6	94	0	6
What the Kewang is and what it does	83	17	0	83	6	11
Why Sasi should be preserved	89	11	0	94	0	6
Importance of regulating Sasi in a Peraturan Negeri	44	28	28	83	11	0

Note. The post-test percentages for the last item total 94% as reported. The comparison for this item is provisional pending verification against the response counts.

In Table 2, affirmative responses on the meaning of Sasi rose from 72% to 94%, while those on why Sasi should be preserved rose from 89% to 94%. On the item about the Kewang, "Yes" stayed at 83%, "Unsure" fell from 17% to 6%, and "Don't know" increased from 0% to 11%. The item on the importance of a Peraturan Negeri showed a reported rise from 44% to 83% in "Yes" responses. That comparison is provisional because the post-test percentages for the item add up to 94%.

The activity account records that residents asked questions during the discussion. It provides no item-specific accounts that would explain the decline in general familiarity or the response pattern on the Kewang item. The available totals also preclude tracing how individual responses changed. The survey identifies topics for further discussion, and the reasons for the different response patterns remain undetermined.

A systematic review of environmental education for conservation found that programs reporting direct conservation outcomes commonly focused on local issues, collaborated

with local partners, and deliberately measured outcomes.[10] Local mapping and discussion in Hutumuri offer a starting point for this approach. A subsequent session could use a locally agreed example of a closure and ask participants to explain who sets it, how its boundaries are communicated, and how it is enforced.



Figure 1. Question-and-answer session. A speaker addresses attendees during the discussion of Sasi in Negeri Hutumuri.



Figure 2. Community education session. Participants attend the Sasi outreach activity in a church setting in Negeri Hutumuri.

C. Strengthening Customary Institutions for Conservation

The unchanged affirmative response rate on the Kewang item makes customary oversight a topic for follow-up education. Article 1(19) of Ambon City Regional Regulation No. 8 of 2017 defines the Kewang's role in supervising natural resources within the customary territory (petuanan) of a Negeri. Research on Sasi in Central Maluku documents variation in which bodies administer closure rules.[11] Research in Hutumuri describes how social networks, shared norms, and trust support customary forest management.[12] These findings support an opportunity for residents to learn how customary oversight works in Hutumuri and whom to approach when a question or alleged breach arises.

A follow-up session could bring the Kewang and customary leaders together with youth and Negeri officials to work through a case of harvesting during a closure. Participants

[10] Nicole M. Ardoin, Alison W. Bowers, and Estelle Gaillard, "Environmental Education Outcomes for Conservation," *Biological Conservation* 241 (2020).

[11] Novaczek et al., *An Institutional Analysis of Sasi Laut*.

[12] Silooy, Tjoa, and Iskar, "Modal Sosial dalam Pengelolaan Hutan Adat Negeri Hutumuri."

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could identify the designated area, explain the responsibilities of each institution, and describe how a suspected breach is brought to the competent customary authority. Recording their explanations and questions would provide evidence for assessing whether the session clarifies local procedures.

D. Integrating Sasi with Environmental Policy

The questionnaire item on a Peraturan Negeri (Negeri regulation) raises the question of how customary practice can be recognized in a written instrument. Article 69(3) of Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, as amended, provides for the village head to enact a village regulation after discussion and agreement with the village consultative body. Article 69(9) requires community consultation on the draft. Article 110 requires customary village regulations to reflect the customary village's law and norms, subject to applicable legislation.

At city level, Articles 81 and 82 of Ambon City Regional Regulation No. 8 of 2017 provide for the Head of the Negeri Government and Saniri Negeri to establish a Peraturan Negeri and require consultation with residents on the draft. If Hutumuri considers a regulation, deliberation could address the notice, duration, and boundaries of a closure, the Kewang's supervisory responsibilities, and how residents can raise objections or report breaches. For coastal resources, the scope of any proposal would need to align with the applicable coastal rules and the authority of the bodies responsible for them.

CONCLUSION

The legal education activity provided a forum for discussing Sasi as customary law for environmental conservation in Negeri Hutumuri. The clearest gains in affirmative responses concerned the meaning of Sasi and how Sasi areas are designated, both of which rose by 22 percentage points. The affirmative shares for customary sanctions and the Kewang's functions stayed at their baseline levels. General familiarity declined. These results identify practical topics for continued legal education. The findings describe short-term self-reports. The available evidence lacks respondent counts, matched records, and item-specific qualitative accounts, and one post-test item has an incomplete distribution. A follow-up evaluation could verify the response counts, match the pre-test and post-test questionnaires, and document participants' explanations of the Kewang's role and the procedures for imposing and lifting a closure. Assessing changes in compliance and resource conditions would require follow-up measures.

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