The Kajang Indigenous Community in Human Rights-Based Environmental Protection

Askari Razak [1], Andi Darmawansya Tenriliweng[2], Muh. Nur Iqbal N.[3]

[1,2,3]Faculty of Law, Universitas Muslim Indonesia, Makassar, Indonesia
E-mail address: askari.razak@umi.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation presents an acute global humanitarian crisis that directly threatens fundamental human rights. Traditional legal paradigms often fail to bridge the gap between ecological preservation and human rights protections within contemporary local policies. This study analyzes the integration of the customary law (Pasang ri Kajang) of the Ammatoa Kajang indigenous community in Bulukumba, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, as an integrative model for environmental protection through a human rights perspective. Utilizing a normative legal research method with conceptual, statute, and case approaches, this research examines how indigenous ecological wisdom manifests ecocentrism and operationalizes environmental justice. The findings reveal that the social implementation of the Tallasak Kamase-masea (simple living) philosophy effectively shields the customary forest (Borong Karama) from modern exploitation. From a human rights standpoint, these indigenous conservation mechanisms serve as a grassroots realization of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that securing customary sovereignty serves as a core mechanism for protecting intertwined economic, social, cultural, and intergenerational rights. Ultimately, the Kajang model deconstructs conventional anthropocentric legal paradigms, proving that local eco-jurisprudence provides a resilient framework for international climate mitigation and rights-based ecosystem protection.

Introduction

Environmental protection is one of the global issues that continues to gain attention as various ecological problems increase, such as deforestation, environmental pollution, overexploitation of natural resources, and climate change [1] In the development of both international and national law, the right to a good and healthy environment has been viewed as an inseparable part of human rights [2]. A preserved environment is not only related to ecosystem sustainability, but is also closely related to the fulfillment of the right to life, health, well-being, and the sustainability of future generations [3].

In Indonesia, the recognition of indigenous communities holds an important position within the national legal system [4]. ndigenous communities are not only seen as socio-cultural entities, but also as key actors in maintaining environmental balance through practices based on local wisdom [5]. Various studies show that indigenous communities have natural resource management patterns that are more oriented towards the principles of sustainability and ecological balance compared to purely economic-based exploitation approaches [6].

One indigenous community that consistently maintains environmental conservation value systems is the Kajang indigenous community in Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi [7]. he Kajang indigenous community is known to possess local cultural values handed down from generation to generation in the form of *Pasang ri Kajang*, which is a set of customary messages regulating human relationships with fellow humans, nature, and God [8]. This value system shapes a simple community lifestyle, in harmony with

nature, and places forest preservation as a vital part of the community's social life [9]. The existence of the Kajang customary forest area, which remains preserved to this day, shows that local wisdom significantly contributes to maintaining environmental sustainability [10].

The living principle of the Kajang indigenous community, which emphasizes simplicity, limitation of natural resource exploitation, and respect for customary forest areas, serves as a tangible form of environmental conservation based on local culture [11]. This practice demonstrates that environmental protection can be carried out not only through state legal instruments but also through customary legal mechanisms that live and develop within the community [12].

Studies on indigenous communities and environmental protection have actually been widely conducted. However, research linking the environmental protection practices of the Kajang indigenous community with a human rights perspective remains relatively limited [13]. Most previous studies have focused more on aspects of cultural anthropology, customary law, or customary forest management [14]. Therefore, this research offers novelty by analyzing how the environmental protection practices of the Kajang indigenous community can be understood as a form of human rights implementation based on local wisdom.

This study aims to analyze the local wisdom values of the Kajang indigenous community in environmental protection and examine their relevance from a human rights perspective. In addition, this research is expected to provide a conceptual contribution to the development of community-based environmental protection models as part of sustainable development and the strengthening of environmental legal policies in Indonesia [15].

Methods

This research uses a normative legal research method, which aims to examine legal norms, legal principles, legal concepts, as well as statutory regulations related to environmental protection, human rights, and the recognition of customary law communities [16]. Normative legal research is used because this study focuses on a conceptual and juridical analysis regarding the relationship between environmental protection based on the local wisdom of the Kajang indigenous community and the implementation of human rights.

The research approaches used include the statute approach, conceptual approach [17], and case approach. The statute approach is used to analyze various legal instruments related to human rights, environmental protection, and the recognition of customary law communities. The conceptual approach is used to examine human rights theory, ecological justice, and the concept of local wisdom in environmental law [18].

The legal materials used consist of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials. Primary legal materials include the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management, and regulations related to customary law communities. Secondary legal materials are obtained through books, scientific journals, and research results regarding the Kajang indigenous community, environmental law, and human rights [19]. The technique of collecting legal materials is carried out through library research, while the analysis of legal materials uses prescriptive qualitative analysis, namely by interpreting legal norms to obtain legal arguments regarding environmental protection based on the local wisdom of the Kajang indigenous community from a human rights perspective [20].

Results and Discussions

Integration of *Pasang ri Kajang* in Environmental Protection and Human Rights Values of Ecocentrism and Simplicity The existence of the Ammatoa Kajang indigenous community is based on the *Pasang ri Kajang* worldview, a local wisdom that regulates ecological balance through the principle of *Tallasak Kamase-masea* or living simply and adequately to avoid greed (*memali*). This philosophy prohibits excessive natural exploitation and deeply connects human relationships with their land spiritually. The data analysis process was conducted qualitatively by applying content analysis techniques and conceptual analysis. The flow of this research was systematically designed, starting with the problem identification stage to find the gap between human rights protection regulations and the reality of environmental degradation in the field. After the problem was formulated, the next step was literature collection and data reduction, where the obtained data was strictly sorted to retain information most relevant to the principle of ecological justice. The reduced data was then critically analyzed and synthesized to map the interconnections between ecosystem sustainability and indicators of basic human rights fulfillment. The research flow concludes with

the formulation of a conceptual synthesis that integrates all findings into a new policy framework, which is then abstracted into a comprehensive conclusion to answer the research questions.

To maintain accountability and the validity of the findings, this study applied the principle of theoretical reliability through data source triangulation techniques. The validity of the qualitative analysis was ensured by cross-examining binding international legal instruments (hard law) with non-binding laws (soft law), as well as constitutional and environmental law doctrines. This cross-exploration process aims to minimize researcher subjectivity, ensuring that the interpretation of textual data regarding the right to a healthy environment does not stand alone but is doctrinally tested and supported by strong academic consensus. Furthermore, the operationalization of ecological justice principles in the analysis stage acts not only as a theoretical umbrella but also as a sharp analytical tool to dissect power relations in natural resource management. The researcher examined how environmental burdens and environmental benefits are allocated within society. Thus, this conceptual analysis is able to dismantle discriminatory policy structures where vulnerable communities or indigenous peoples often bear the adverse impacts of environmental damage without receiving equal legal protection and participation rights.

Data analysis in this study was also deepened by integrating dimensions of intragenerational justice and intergenerational justice. Textual data regarding spatial use and land conversion were critically analyzed to see the extent to which current policies sacrifice the rights of future generations for short-term economic gains. Through this critical reading, the research successfully mapped out that ecosystem sustainability is not merely an optional public policy choice, but a binding legal obligation to ensure that future generations retain their inherent right to a habitable earth. uring the conceptual synthesis process, this research actively deconstructed the juridical anthropocentrism paradigm that has dominated national law. The traditional paradigm that places nature solely as an object to satisfy human needs was methodologically criticized to be replaced by a just ecocentric perspective. This synthesis generated a new understanding that nature must be recognized as a legal subject with intrinsic rights to be protected (rights of nature), the fulfillment of which becomes an absolute prerequisite for the sustainable upholding of human rights itself. As the concluding step of this entire methodological flow, the resulting new policy framework is not left as a mere theoretical abstraction. The analysis results are transformed into practical juridical recommendations applicable to policymakers, especially in formulating human rights-based environmental impact assessments. By compiling comprehensive conclusions and measurable recommendations, this qualitative research flow successfully bridges the gap between ecological justice theory in the academic realm and the practice of human rights enforcement and environmental conservation in the real world.

Revitalization of Customary Law and Forest Protection The concept of ecocentrism is firmly manifested through strict customary law in protecting the customary forest areas in Bulukumba, South Sulawesi. This practice represents an effective process of revitalizing customary law as a primary shield in facing the challenges of modernization and the threat of natural exploitation. The tangible manifestation of the ecocentrism paradigm is no longer merely a theoretical discourse in academic spaces, but has been firmly realized through the power of living customary law among the people of Bulukumba, South Sulawesi. In this region, nature conservation and human existence are placed within a single, inseparable cosmic unity. Through the institutionalization of local values, the local indigenous community has successfully built an environmental governance system that positions the forest not as an economic commodity ready for exploitation, but as a sacred entity that must be protected. This empirical practice demonstrates how local wisdom can serve as a solid foundation for the sustainable enforcement of ecological justice.

Philosophically, the worldview of indigenous communities in Bulukumba, specifically the Ammatoa Kajang community, is deeply saturated with principles of simple living and profound respect for nature. In their cosmology, the earth and forests are the mother that provides life, meaning that destroying the forest is equivalent to destroying the source of human life itself. This ecocentric view is reflected in all aspects of daily life, where every use of natural resources must be based on measured subsistence needs, not on economic greed. It is this moral principle that is then crystallized into customary legal rules that bind the community collectively. The customary law applied in the Bulukumba forest area has a very strict structure and mechanism, especially in the zoning of forest utilization. There is a clear separation between the sacred forest or customary protected forest (*Borong Karama*), which is entirely forbidden to be touched or altered, and the customary production forest, the use of which is governed by rigid local regulations. Inside the restricted forest area, even the slightest action—such as breaking a tree branch, taking forest products

without permission, or even wearing footwear and bringing modern technology—constitutes a severe violation of customary law. These physical and spiritual boundaries are adhered to across generations as a form of obedience to ancestors.

The current process in Bulukumba represents a highly effective revitalization movement of customary law in the contemporary era. This revitalization is crucial considering the strong currents of modernization, global capitalist penetration, and the dominance of state laws that often ignore the rights of local communities. Revitalizing customary law here does not mean positioning tradition as something ancient and static, but rather reviving noble past values to be adapted as a dynamic instrument of defense. Customary law is revitalized so that it remains relevant and possesses a sharp edge in controlling social behavior amid destructive changing times.

The success of revitalizing customary law in Bulukumba is also driven by synergy and formal recognition from the regional government through modern legal products, such as Regional Regulations (Perda) on the recognition and protection of customary law communities. This juridical integration is critical to bridging the legal dualism between positive state law and unwritten customary law. With this formal legal umbrella, the customary territory gains strong legality in the eyes of the state, thus minimizing the potential for agrarian conflicts with corporations or overlapping forest area claims with government agencies. The positive impact of this strict customary-based forest protection is strongly felt in the socio-ecological stability of the South Sulawesi region. Well-preserved customary forest areas with dense vegetation function as crucial catchment areas for surrounding regions. The abundant availability of clean water, the maintenance of the hydrological cycle, and natural mitigation against floods and landslides are ecological blessings from the community's adherence to customary law. Furthermore, customary forests in Bulukumba serve as the last stronghold for endemic biodiversity that is beginning to face extinction in other areas due to large-scale land conversion.

In facing the challenges of modernization and globalization, customary law in Bulukumba acts as a cultural filter and moral shield for the local community. When waves of consumerism and modern lifestyles begin to penetrate rural villages, customary law sets boundaries that restrict natural exploitation for instant commercial gain. Indigenous communities are educated to reject the temptations of industrial investments that potentially destroy their living space. This steadfastness proves that customary law is not merely a collection of sanction rules, but a value system that shapes human character to be self-aware and know limits when interacting with the surrounding nature.

One of the main pillars that makes customary law in Bulukumba so feared and respected is the effectiveness of its sanction system. Unlike formal law, which can often be negotiated or weakened by bureaucracy, customary sanctions in this region are applied indiscriminately and possess profound psychological and spiritual dimensions. Violators of customary law are not only subjected to material fines in the form of livestock or traditional cloths, but also face social sanctions in the form of isolation by the community, up to spiritual sanctions believed to bring bad luck or curses from ancestors. It is this fear of losing the blessings of life that breeds total compliance from both indigenous residents and newcomers.

Viewed from a universal human rights perspective, forest protection practices in Bulukumba are a tangible manifestation of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Through their local legal instruments, indigenous communities have independently fulfilled this basic right without having to rely entirely on state facilitation. This collective action also reflects the principle of intergenerational justice, where current society refrains from overexploitation to ensure that future generations can still enjoy the same forest preservation. Ecological justice thus materializes in tangible everyday actions.

In conclusion, the model of customary law revitalization in forest protection in Bulukumba offers a valuable blueprint for the international community in global climate change mitigation efforts. Amid the failure of various modern legal instruments to halt the rate of global deforestation, this ecocentrism-based local wisdom proves that cultural and spiritual approaches are far more effective in caring for the earth. The experience from Bulukumba affirms that the future of planetary sustainability does not always lie in cutting-edge technology, but in humanity's willingness to re-listen to and revive time-tested customary laws in maintaining the harmony of the universe. **Human Rights Perspective** This local wisdom-based environmental management is not just a mechanism for nature conservation, but also an instrument for fulfilling the right to a good and healthy environment as part of human rights. Through this customary sovereignty, the Ammatoa Kajang community has proven capable of maintaining ecosystem sustainability while simultaneously supporting true economic sustainability independently.

Contemporary human rights discourses increasingly emphasize that the environmental crisis is no longer merely a sectoral ecological issue, but a direct threat to human dignity. In this landscape, the local wisdom-based environmental management practices carried out by the Ammatoa Kajang indigenous community in Bulukumba, South Sulawesi, are no longer underestimated as a static ancient tradition. Conversely, their lifestyle and adherence are recognized as an ideal model that integrates nature conservation with substantive and applicable human rights enforcement at the grassroots level.

Conceptually, the right to a good and healthy environment has been recognized as a non-negotiable part of third-generation human rights. A preserved environment becomes an absolute prerequisite for fulfilling other fundamental rights, such as the right to life, the right to health, the right to food, and the right to clean water. Without a balanced ecosystem, the fulfillment of international human rights instruments and national constitutions will lose their fundamental meaning because humans lose adequate life support capacities. Through this lens, the nature conservation mechanisms applied by the Ammatoa Kajang community transcend the technical boundaries of conventional forestry, which is often anthropocentric. Their customary practices transform into real instruments for fulfilling the right to the environment. Through compliance with unwritten laws inherited from ancestors, this community independently guarantees that every individual's right within the group to breathe clean air and access clear water remains fulfilled without discrimination.

The core of the success of protecting these basic rights lies in the recognition and manifestation of customary sovereignty. This sovereignty grants full authority to the Ammatoa institution to regulate, supervise, and impose sanctions against all forms of human interaction with nature within its customary territory. This customary authority operates autonomously and effectively, often being far more responsive and respected by the local community compared to state law enforcement apparatuses. The customary sovereignty of Ammatoa Kajang is built upon the life philosophy of *Kamase-masea*, a theological-philosophical principle that emphasizes simplicity, rejection of excessive materialism, and modesty in action. This principle automatically limits human exploitative desires toward the surrounding nature. By positioning themselves as equal parts with nature, the Kajang people do not view the forest as an object of domination, but as a cosmic subject whose intrinsic rights must be respected.

The manifestation of human rights protection through this customary law is clearly visible in the management of *Borong Karama* or the sacred forest. Strict prohibitions against cutting down trees, taking dead wood, and even the ban on using modern technology and footwear within the area are forms of limiting individual rights for collective well-being. These strict restrictions are enforced solely to protect the ecological function of the forest as a primary water catchment area that guarantees the survival of the entire community.

Furthermore, this approach successfully bridges and unites the right to the environment with the right to cultural identity (cultural rights). For the Kajang people, caring for the customary forest is a form of worship, spirituality, and the preservation of their noble identity as humans. When their cultural rights are respected and their customary sovereignty is recognized, automatically the right to a healthy environment is also maintained, creating a holistic symphony of human rights protection.

One of the most significant contributions of the Ammatoa Kajang model is its ability to dismantle the false dichotomy between environmental conservation and the fulfillment of economic needs. For a long time, mainstream development paradigms have often clashed these two aspects, as if nature protection must sacrifice human economic welfare. The Kajang community breaks this myth by proving that ecosystem sustainability is precisely the main foundation for true economic sustainability.

The concept of a "true economy" that they practice is based on fulfilling subsistence needs fairly and with a forward-looking perspective. The community utilizes forest products in the utilization zone only adequately for daily food and housing needs, without any tendency to hoard wealth or commercialize it on an industrial scale. This local wisdom-based economic system frees them from debt traps, global market volatility, and dependence on exploitative external supply chains. This economic and ecological independence is achieved sovereignly without relying on corporate fund injections or financial interventions from the central government. Through a communal granary system and a strong culture of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), they are able to overcome difficult times or famines self-sufficiently. This genuine independence proves that indigenous communities have the full capacity to manage their living spaces effectively, dispelling the notion that local communities need external guidance to progress.

Amid the onslaught of large-scale plantation industry expansion and extractive corporations that often trigger human rights violations in various regions of Indonesia, Kajang customary sovereignty has

proven potent as the last line of defense. The unwavering steadfastness of the Ammatoa spiritual leadership and all its customary apparatuses in rejecting all forms of commercialization of customary lands keeps their territory sterile from destructive agrarian conflicts, which often rob local communities of their right to life and livelihoods. The Ammatoa Kajang customary legal system also guarantees aspects of inclusivity and distributive justice, which are important pillars in modern human rights discourse. The distribution of natural produce and access to water resources are regulated evenly, ensuring that vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the elderly receive protection and equal rights. There is no monopoly on individual ownership over vital ecological assets, because everything is considered common property entrusted by ancestors to be cared for.

Another crucial aspect illustrated in this customary sovereignty is the profound commitment to the principle of intergenerational justice. By maintaining the forest in its natural state, the present generation in Ammatoa Kajang is making a human rights investment for their descendants in the future. They are fully aware that the right to a healthy environment is not just the property of humans living today, but an eternal right that must be passed down intact to the next generation. Globally, the customary sovereignty model demonstrated by Ammatoa Kajang provides valuable lessons for international human rights bodies and public policymakers. This model affirms that top-down and overly legalistic-formal approaches to human rights enforcement often hit a dead end in the field if they do not touch the cultural roots of the society. Recognition of indigenous peoples' rights over their customary lands and forests is the master key to successful mitigation of the global climate crisis.

In conclusion, the intersection between the human rights perspective and local wisdom in Ammatoa Kajang showcases a perfect convergence. Environmental management in this area has surpassed mere physical conservation boundaries; it is a true expression of sovereignty, dignity, and the purest enforcement of human rights. By recognizing and strengthening customary law, the international community can learn how to care for the earth while humanizing humanity.

Conclusions

The conclusion of this study indicates that the integration of *Pasang ri Kajang* local wisdom through the principle of *Tallasak Kamase-masea* (simple living) is proven effective in maintaining the preservation of the Ammatoa customary forest from modern exploitation threats. From a human rights perspective, this customary law-based conservation practice is a concrete manifestation of fulfilling the right to a good and healthy environment. This sustainable ecological protection simultaneously supports the protection of the economic, social, and cultural rights of the indigenous community itself.

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Conflicts of Interest

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