

Strategies for Women as Key Actors in Resolving Conflicts Over Communal Forests in Pubabu-Besipae

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ABSTRACT

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This study found that there's a conflict over customary forests between the Pubabu-Besipae community and the East Nusa Tenggara provincial government. This conflict started when the forest was made into a pilot area for livestock intensification, then the forestry department turned it into a state forest. As a result, the forest was cleared for the government's interests, and the community didn't know about it. The community naturally rejected this because they felt that under the cooperation agreement, the forest was only designated as a pilot area for livestock intensification. There was no agreement regarding the clearing of the forest or the extension of permits to use the forest. This is what led to the conflict and the struggle over the forest by the community. Using qualitative research methods, the researcher will explain the phenomenon of the Pubabu-Besipae forest conflict, with the subjects being Pubabu women, the women's community Solidaritas Perempuan, and Komnas Perempuan. Data collection techniques include document studies, which involve collecting data from various sources such as journals, newspapers, and articles. The analysis technique uses descriptive analysis, which involves analyzing and explaining the findings. The research results show that the strategies implemented by women actors have influenced the resolution of the Pubabu-Besipae forest dispute. The strategies implemented include negotiations, protests, sending recommendation letters, and filing complaints with institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Agrarian conflict is a conflict related to land and is the main cause of disputes due to ownership claims and conversion for the benefit of certain individuals. Land is the foundation on which humans stand, work, and even live their lives. Given Indonesia's status as an agrarian country, land plays an important role in various aspects of people's lives, both economically and socially (Bere and Lay 2023). Land is used for the prosperity of the people as stipulated in article 33 paragraph 3 of the constitution. However, it often happens that the community does not fully enjoy the results due to conflicts between the community and the government. These conflicts arise due to a lack of communication between the two parties and a lack of socialization in the process of land use by the government. Such conflicts occurred in Pubabu-Besipae, Timor Tengah Selatan.

Land that has been owned by indigenous peoples for generations is then transferred for use based on specific interests. This has been met with strong resistance from indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are often removed from existing forest areas due to concessions for large-scale plantations, mining, and even conservation areas (Ratnasari 2016). Customary law communities in Article 18B paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution are recognized by respecting and upholding their rights as long as they are alive, which are clearly and guaranteed in the national constitution (Setyowati 2023).

The forest has long been occupied by the community and has become a customary forest, providing land for the community to meet their daily needs. Customary forests are also legally recognized by the state and are mentioned in

Article 1 of the Forestry Law, so it can be concluded that the state acknowledges the existence of indigenous communities within state forests. It is important to note that indigenous communities have existed in the archipelago since before Indonesia's independence, living and carrying out their activities there (Pratama, Lestari, and Katari 2022). Customary forests that are part of the state and covered by law have been used by the state to take over forests based on its interests. Indigenous communities who feel threatened that their land will be taken away have resisted, ultimately leading to conflict. The land conflict in Pubabu-Besipae has been strongly rejected by the indigenous community, especially women. The land that is their lifeblood has been taken away, so they refuse to accept it. This long-running conflict has caused trauma for the Pubabu community, especially women and children. Women and children have become victims of the land occupation by the government. The agrarian conflict in TTS has become a conflict that has prompted women to take the forefront in defending and preserving their land.

When conflict arises, women emerge not only as victims. Women appear both directly and indirectly as mediators and even as agents of peace. In some situations, women become the last bastion for perpetrators and victims of problems to seek safety and protection (Ocktaviana, Santoso, and Dwi 2014).

The Pubabu-Besipae indigenous community has been victimized by the interests of certain individuals who want to control the forest. Basically, this conflict has not been properly resolved due to a lack of good communication between the conflicting parties. The government has attempted to resolve the conflict through persuasion and negotiation, but has always

reached different agreements because the community is not united in the resolution process. There are factions that reject and accept the government's resolution process (Buluamang 2023). In the end, this issue persisted and no resolution was reached. This led to acts of violence against women and children. This situation attracted the attention of researchers, who investigated the role of women, who had been the primary victims during the conflict.

In previous studies, many researchers have examined indigenous forest conflicts from various perspectives. For example, a journal article by Chrisanti Naibobe and Gusti Ayu Arya Prima Dewi describes the government's efforts to resolve the Pubabu-Besipae conflict by establishing a safe zone and providing a forum for discussion to resolve the conflict. The government also conducted mediation and ensured the fulfillment of the basic rights of the Besipae community affected by eviction by providing adequate temporary housing (Naibobe and Dewi 2025). Similarly, the journal researched by Stefanus Don Rade et al. explains that ongoing conflicts need to be resolved so that they do not drag on. The conflicts that have arisen are a form of protest against the government's inconsistent use of forests and its violation of mutually agreed agreements. Therefore, the proposed resolution efforts include litigation, which involves court proceedings and mediation. Non-litigation resolutions include arbitration, negotiation, and conciliation (Rade, Ropa, and Jawa 2023). Meanwhile, research written by Meryana Susi Paula Bere and Benediktus Peter Lay entitled *Land Disputes Between the Pubabu-Besipae Community and the East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Government* explains the conflict that occurred. This study only describes how customary forests became land used by the government through a cooperation agreement. The cooperation agreement for the use of customary forests led to a prolonged conflict that lasted until 2020. This journal also offers solutions to resolve the conflict, namely through the courts, mediation, arbitration, negotiation, and conciliation (Bere and Lay 2023). It is hoped that the proposed settlement will resolve the conflict over customary forests in Pubabu-Besipae.

Unlike previous studies, in this study, the researchers want to examine the involvement of women in the conflict resolution process. Women often experience violence and intimidation, but no one has yet researched how women strategize and what efforts they make to resolve the customary forest conflict in Pubabu-Besipae. Women are key actors in directly resolving this conflict. The female actors here are the Pubabu-Besipae indigenous community and women's communities such as Solidaritas Perempuan and Komnas Perempuan.

In the case of Pubabu-Besipae, women were not only victims. They rose up to become agents in the conflict resolution process. They became agents who were ready to participate in mitigating and resolving the prolonged conflict between the government and indigenous peoples. Therefore, researchers wanted to study the strategies used by indigenous women as key actors in resolving the land conflict in Pubabu-Besipae.

METHOD

The type of research used in this paper is qualitative research. In Eko Murdiyanto's book, Creswell (1998) states that a qualitative approach is a process of research and understanding based on a methodology that investigates social phenomena and human issues (Murdiyanto 2020). The social phenomenon that occurred was the Pubabu-Besipae forest conflict between indigenous peoples and the government. With the conflict occurring, researchers wanted to see the

strategies used by women in the resolution process. The subjects were women from Pubabu-Besipae and women's communities such as Solidaritas Perempuan and Komnas Perempuan who fought to participate in resolving the indigenous forest conflict. The researcher focuses this study on the strategies employed by women to actively participate in resolving the Pubabu-Besipae indigenous forest conflict.

The data collection technique used was document study by analyzing written materials from published records, textbooks, newspapers, magazines, letters, films, diaries, manuscripts, articles, and the like (Abdussamad 2021). According to Nazir:1988 in the journal *Natural Science*, data collection techniques involve examining books, literature, notes, and various reports related to the problem to be solved or researched (Sari and Asmendri 2020). Data analysis techniques use descriptive analysis by conducting in-depth analysis through document studies obtained by researchers from various sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Background of Indigenous Forest Conflicts

The conflict between the Pubabu-Besipae community and the government began when the community rejected the government's plan to use their land. Before the conflict between the community and the government arose, the land where the community lived was a protected forest. In 1927, the Pubabu indigenous community, consisting of Vektor Nabuasa, the amaf (traditional elders) and the Dutch colonial government, designated the Pubabu forest area, covering 2,674.4 hectares, as an indigenous forest (Tim Redaksi 2020). The aim is to protect wildlife, medicinal plants, trees, and forest ropes. The forest is a restricted forest in the Dawan language, called "*Kio*" which means "forbidden.". However, the community is allowed to hunt, cut down trees, or carry out activities in the forest after performing the ritual "*onen tfe kio*," which means "prayer to lift the prohibition" (Tim Redaksi 2020). So that the forest is used properly without damaging it. The community greatly respects nature, which has become their home.

In 1982, there was a cooperation agreement between the local government of East Nusa Tenggara Province and the Pubabu-Besipae community, which was set out in a statement and signed by traditional elders in Mio Village on April 13, 1982. In that statement, an agreement was reached to implement the Livestock Intensification Pilot Project in Besipae, involving the villages of Oe Ekam, Mio, Polo, and Linamnutu, utilizing 6,000 hectares of community forest land (Rade et al. 2023). From 1982 to 1987, the project was not implemented properly and did not comply with the joint agreement. This was because the Forestry Service implemented the National Forest Rehabilitation Movement program, which designated areas for the cultivation of commercial crops such as teak and mahogany under a cultivation rights scheme without the consent of the community from 1987 to 2008 (Raden Ariyo Wicaksono 2020).

In 1995, the Forestry Service issued forest land register number 29, which changed the status of the Pubabu-Besipae customary forest to a state forest area with a protected forest function covering 2,900 hectares. In addition, between 2003 and 2008, the South Central Timor Regency Forestry Service cleared 1,050 hectares of the forest (Venan Haryanto 2022). As a result of deforestation, the community ultimately lost access to the forest, which contained natural resources necessary for meeting their daily needs. In 2012, the Pubabu-Besipae community opposed the decision to extend the permit

for the use of customary forests. They wanted the customary forests to be returned to their original function as conversion areas (Tim Redaksi 2020). The series of forced takeovers of the Pubabu customary forest continued, with the NTT Provincial Government, through the NTT Livestock Service, issuing a right-to-use certificate in 2013 with the number 00001/2013-BP.794953 dated March 19, 2013, covering an area of 37,800,000 m³/ha (Pikoli and Pebriansyah 2024). The issuance of this letter sparked conflict between the community and the government.

Customary forests that have become state forests give government officials the freedom to intimidate and evict three families in 2017 and 2020 (Naibobe and Dewi 2025). In 2020, 30 houses were forcibly demolished and 47 families were displaced. The demolition was carried out by government officials using verbal and physical violence, targeting children and women (Rosary 2020a). Evictions certainly cause trauma for the affected communities. People have lost their homes and must find new places to live. Of course, new homes cannot be built in a day. People must relocate to other places. Those who have been displaced undoubtedly require food, clean water, medicine, and other essential supplies. The evictions carried out have provoked a strong reaction from the community and escalated the conflict further.

The following is data on actions taken by the government against the Pubabu-Besipae community from year to year:

No.	Time	Action
1.	1982	Pilot project for livestock intensification in Besipae
2.	2003-2008	Deforestation by the South Central Timor Forestry Service
3.	2012	Community opposes extension of traditional forest use permit
4.	2013	East Nusa Tenggara Livestock Service issues right-of-use certificates
5.	2020	Forced eviction of Pubabu community homes

Looking at the data listed above, it is clear that this issue has provoked reactions from the community and other actors to participate in resolving the conflict. Not only has the community attempted to protest, but women have also played an important role in addressing the conflict and attempting to resolve it so that the community can live in their homes as they should.

3.2 Women's Strategies in Conflict Resolution

Women are often perceived as weak and are not often involved in resolving various issues that arise within society. In the conflict resolution process, men contribute more directly, either as mediators, peace agents, or by providing solutions and ways to resolve various issues. In essence, women have the same rights to express themselves and actualize themselves in society. Awareness of women's power over social control drives gender inequality, particularly for women (Hajjah and Rengganis Ririe 2022). Inequality is not only about gender but also about roles in society. Women are considered capable only of working in the kitchen or taking care of the house. Meanwhile, activities outside the home, including earning a living, are considered the role of men. As a result, women are often marginalized, especially in the conflict resolution process.

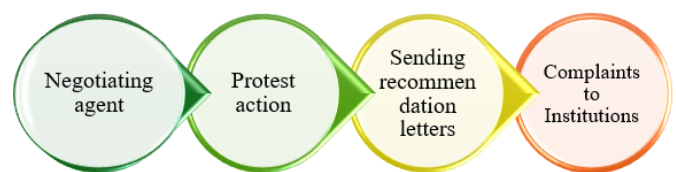
The roles of women and men can be influenced by cultural factors, resulting in women being dominated by men. In the

mid-9th century, women did not enjoy the status and rights enshrined in law and legislation. Gender discrimination, social stereotypes, limited access to education and resources, and patriarchal cultural norms can hinder women from playing a broader and more influential role in traditional culture (Abidin, Huriani, and Zulaiha 2023). However, in the modern era, when many people began to speak out about gender issues, women gained the rights they deserved, as enshrined in law (Mitamimah 2021).

The struggle of women in the 19th century was one of the steps taken to fight for women's rights, which had long been neglected. Women emerged as vocal actors, asserting that their involvement and participation in daily life must also be taken into account. They were capable of solving problems, acting as mediators, and even becoming leaders in a country. Women's participation today is not merely about demanding equal rights but also about asserting that their role holds significance for development within society (Rinaldi and Lumbaa 2024). The equality that women fight for is not easy to achieve. Many of their rights are still discriminated against and they even experience violence. Women suffer not only material losses, but also physical and psychological harm. Women in conflict zones are more likely to become victims or the heart of the conflict (Sutantri and Pratama 2023).

Amidst the prolonged conflict between the government and the people of Pubabu-Besipae, women are not only victims but also actors who participate in resolving the conflict. Women play an important role in conflict prevention, reducing violence, and negotiating for peace (Ridhuan 2017). They became an unshakeable pillar of strength amid the conflict. Amidst suffering and chaos, women showed resilience, not only facing physical threats from the conflict, but also social and economic pressures. However, amidst all this, they showed remarkable fortitude in protecting their families from the conflict (Tuanaya, Rolobessy, and Mahulauw 2024).

The conflict that occurred in Pubabu-Besipae prompted indigenous women to participate in conflict resolution. The process of resolving conflicts between villages must prioritize the involvement of women, not only for the sake of conflict resolution and gender-responsive peacebuilding, but also to fulfill women's interests in promoting peace efforts (Safithri, Anriani, and Maddukelleng 2022). The following strategies were developed by the Pubabu-Besipae indigenous women:



Picture 1. Women's strategy

3.2.1. Negotiating agent

Women affected by land conflicts finally felt the need to take action to address the issue. They actively participated in meetings and negotiations to find a good solution. Women were also given the opportunity to express their opinions and propose solutions. As a result of negotiations between Solidaritas Perempuan and Walhi NTT on May 12, 2020, the NTT Provincial Legislative Council agreed to form a fact-finding team related to the land case in Pubabu and wrote to the NTT Provincial Government to stop all demolition efforts in the Pubabu customary forest area (Solidaritas Perempuan 2020). The

negotiations were conducted as a response to the concerns of women and the community regarding the incident in Pubabu-Besipae. The negotiations were held to minimize the possibility of violence against women and children. As indigenous women living in Pubabu-Besipae, they certainly did not want the conflict to drag on and leave trauma for the community. Therefore, the first strategy implemented was to conduct negotiations with all stakeholders, from the grassroots level up to the government.

3.2.2. Protest action

In the conflict resolution process, the NTT government did not involve women, prompting them to protest. This was conveyed by one of the indigenous women, Ester Selan. She said that land conflicts must be resolved through legal channels because there was an agreement between the government and indigenous leaders that did not involve the community at all (Raden Ariyo Wicaksono 2020). In addition, indigenous women also staged a protest by taking off their clothes because they felt that their rights to indigenous land were not recognized (Rosary 2020b). Not only did the women of Pubabu-Besipae take action, but the Solidaritas Perempuan community and Komnas Perempuan also protested against the government. Several of Solidaritas Perempuan's demands included:

- a. Stop intimidation and discrimination, revoke the right-to-use certificate, and return the Pubabu customary forest and the rights of the community.
- b. Stop evictions and intimidation of residents, especially Pubabu indigenous women, and stop all forms and methods of violence, intimidation, and criminalization against the Pubabu indigenous community, especially women who are fighting for their rights.
- c. Resolve conflicts in a gender-sensitive and responsive manner, ensuring recovery efforts address the direct and indirect material and immaterial impacts experienced by women and children as a result of conflict, as well as the criminalization and violence that accompany it.
- d. Immediately form a Fact-Finding Team related to the Pubabu-Besipae land case.
- e. Impose strict sanctions in the form of dishonorable discharge on police officers who have committed violence, intimidation, sexual harassment, and sexual objectification of Pubabu-Besipae indigenous women (Solidaritas Perempuan 2020).

3.2.3. Sending recommendation letters

Recommendation letters are one of the strategies used by Komnas Perempuan in responding to various issues related to customary forests in Pubabu-Besipae. These recommendations were made to urge the Governor of NTT to immediately resolve the Pubabu-Besipae conflict. The recommendations given by Komnas Perempuan are:

- a. Ensuring that the Pubabu-Besipae customary forest conflict is resolved comprehensively and participatorily using a constitutional rights approach.
- b. Ensure the safety of the Pubabu Indigenous Community by withdrawing security forces from the Pubabu customary forest area until a mutual agreement is reached to resolve the conflict over Pubabu customary land and forests.
- c. Ensuring that residents affected by the construction of the Besipae livestock facility, especially

women, as legal subjects, are involved in the entire process, including in providing opinions and decision-making from the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of development projects (Tardi et al. 2020).

3.2.4. Complaints to Institutions

This complaint is a form of concern for conflicts that have not been resolved. Indigenous women and communities have filed complaints with Komnas HAM regarding acts of violence, intimidation, and injustice that they have experienced. This complaint is an effort to work together with Komnas HAM, Solidaritas Perempuan, and Walhi NTT to find a solution (Komnas HAM RI 2020a). Particularly in efforts to follow up on violence against children and women. Following these complaints, Komnas HAM held a meeting involving the NTT Provincial Government, the NTT Regional Police, the NTT Provincial Office of the National Land, and the Pubabu-Besipae indigenous community (Komnas HAM RI 2020b). The meeting was held to find solutions, particularly to prevent acts of violence against indigenous peoples, especially women and children, and to urge the government to immediately return the land to its original function. Complaints from indigenous peoples and women have been addressed, and the government will follow up on these aspirations for the common good, especially for the Pubabu-Besipae community.

The actions taken by women are efforts they have fought for in order to reclaim their rights. The land that serves as their home and source of livelihood has been taken for the benefit of certain individuals. Therefore, women are fighting back and reclaiming their rights. Women are often perceived as weak due to the deeply rooted patriarchal culture in society. However, the strategies developed to assist in resolving conflicts over customary forests between the government and the Pubabu-Besipae community are concrete steps. The involvement of women in efforts to resolve various conflicts must also be considered. Women are not merely victims but also agents of change within the social environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of actors who speak out about the role of women has had a tremendous impact on communities that still strongly adhere to patriarchal traditions and cultures. Women are still seen as tools confined to the home, with even their social mobility restricted. Recognizing that women play a role beyond the home opens up a wide range of opportunities for women themselves. This is evident in Pubabu-Besipae. During the forest conflict between the government and the Pubabu-Besipae community, women were given a significant platform to voice their opinions. Despite facing violence during the conflict, women and children were able to stand up and develop strategies to address the prolonged conflict. Women were able to create strategies to participate in resolving the land conflict in Pubabu-Besipae. These strategies were not only implemented by the women of Pubabu-Besipae but also by women's communities such as Solidaritas Perempuan and Komnas Perempuan. The strategies developed include acting as negotiation agents, organizing protests, submitting recommendation letters, and filing complaints with national institutions. These four strategies have helped mitigate the conflict in Pubabu-Besipae. Women have been at the forefront in defending their rights. The land, which is the source of their livelihood, has become a subject of contention between

indigenous communities and the government. Women have proven capable of acting as agents in resolving conflicts. The actions taken have succeeded in stopping acts of violence against women and children. Although the community has not yet fully regained their land, the efforts made have helped to mitigate conflicts, and the community remains settled on the land they have fought for.

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