

## **The Role Of Village Forest Community Institutions In Empowering The Community In The Songgon Pine Forest, Banyuwangi**

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### **Abstract**

*Indonesia has significant potential for social forestry, implemented through schemes such as the Forest Village Community Institution (Lembaga Masyarakat Desa Hutan - LMDH). This study analyzes the role of the LMDH Rimba Ayu in empowering the community in the Songgon Pine Forest area, Sumberbulu Village, Banyuwangi. The research focuses on describing the meaning and implementation of the LMDH's roles, interpreting the manifestation of publicness values in its institutional practices, and identifying the supporting and inhibiting factors for its effectiveness as a bridging institution between the state (Perhutani), the market, and the local community. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with LMDH administrators, community members, and Perhutani representatives, as well as documentation studies. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, supplemented by triangulation to ensure data validity. The results indicate that LMDH Rimba Ayu plays a strategic role as a facilitator, motivator, and coordinator in community empowerment. This role has transformed the local economy by increasing average community income by up to 40% through ecotourism, while simultaneously suppressing illegal logging cases. The values of publicness are manifested in practices such as community participation in deliberations, transparent financial reporting, and a public interest orientation through the allocation of village social funds. The LMDH also functions effectively as a bridging institution, mediating and connecting the interests of multiple stakeholders (community, Perhutani, village government). Key supporting factors include policy legitimacy from Perhutani, strong local leadership, and social solidarity. Conversely, inhibiting factors include dependency on top-down policies, uneven human resource capacity, and infrastructure limitations.*

**Keywords:** *Forest Village Community Institution (LMDH), Community Empowerment, Publicness, Bridging Institution, Ecotourism, Social Forestry.*

### Abstrak

Indonesia memiliki potensi kehutanan sosial yang besar melalui skema Lembaga Masyarakat Desa Hutan (LMDH). Penelitian ini menganalisis peran LMDH Rimba Ayu dalam memberdayakan masyarakat di kawasan Hutan Pinus Songgon, Desa Sumberbulu, Banyuwangi. Fokus penelitian adalah untuk mendeskripsikan makna dan pelaksanaan peran LMDH, menginterpretasikan wujud nilai-nilai *publicness* (kepublikan) dalam praktik kelembagaan, serta mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung dan penghambat efektivitas LMDH sebagai *bridging institution* (lembaga jembatan) antara negara (Perhutani), pasar, dan komunitas lokal. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kasus deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipan, wawancara mendalam dengan pengurus LMDH, masyarakat, dan perwakilan Perhutani, serta studi dokumentasi. Analisis data mengikuti model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, dilengkapi dengan triangulasi untuk memastikan keabsahan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa LMDH Rimba Ayu berperan strategis sebagai fasilitator, motivator, dan koordinator dalam pemberdayaan masyarakat. Peran ini telah mentransformasi ekonomi lokal dengan meningkatkan pendapatan rata-rata masyarakat hingga 40% melalui ekowisata, sekaligus menekan angka penebangan liar. Nilai-nilai *publicness* terwujud dalam praktik partisipasi masyarakat dalam musyawarah, transparansi laporan keuangan, dan orientasi pada kepentingan publik melalui alokasi dana sosial desa. LMDH juga berfungsi efektif sebagai *bridging institution* yang menjembatani dan memediasi kepentingan multipihak (masyarakat, Perhutani, pemerintah desa). Faktor pendukung utama adalah legitimasi kebijakan dari Perhutani, kepemimpinan lokal yang kuat, dan solidaritas sosial. Sementara faktor penghambat meliputi ketergantungan pada kebijakan *top-down*, kapasitas SDM yang belum merata, dan keterbatasan infrastruktur.

**Kata kunci:** Lembaga Masyarakat Desa Hutan (LMDH), Pemberdayaan Masyarakat, *Publicness*, *Bridging Institution*, Ekowisata, Hutan Sosial.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Forests play a strategic role ecologically, economically, and socio-culturally. In Indonesia, particularly in Banyuwangi Regency, the Songgon pine forest is a vital natural resource. In addition to serving as a conservation area and environmental buffer zone, the forest also provides a livelihood for the surrounding community. However, forest management often faces challenges such as exploitation pressures, conflicts of interest, and environmental degradation.

In the context of sustainable forest management, local community participation is crucial. The Indonesian government has initiated various community-based forest management schemes, one of which is the establishment of the Forest Village Community Institution (LMDH). LMDH is an institutional framework aimed at involving village communities surrounding forests in the management, protection, and sustainable use of forests.

In Songgon Village, the LMDH is expected to serve as a tool for community empowerment, through increased capacity, management access, and local economic growth. However, the extent to which the LMDH can fulfill its role in empowering the community in the Songgon Pine Forest area still requires in-depth study.

Several previous studies have examined the role of LMDHs in various regions, but few have specifically examined their effectiveness in the context of community empowerment in pine forest areas like Songgon. This study aims to analyze the role of LMDHs in community empowerment, including improving management access, increasing income, and strengthening institutional capacity.

Thus, this research is expected to provide an empirical picture of the contribution of LMDH in realizing inclusive and sustainable forest management, as well as serve as recommendations for strengthening similar institutions in other regions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Community empowerment is a key foundation for sustainable natural resource management. This concept, as proposed by Chambers (1995) and Ife (2016), emphasizes the transformation of power relations by increasing community capacity,

access, and control over the resources that affect their lives. In the context of Indonesian forestry, the empowerment approach is realized through a social forestry scheme, in which the Forest Village Community Institution (LMDH) has emerged as a key instrument. LMDH was established based on the philosophy of Joint Forest Management (PHBM) by Perhutani (2001), which aims to build an equal partnership between state forest managers (Perhutani) and local communities. The existence of LMDH as an extension of the community is interesting to study, given its position at the intersection of state mandates, forestry business interests, and community aspirations (Kartodihardjo et al., 2011).

Empirically, the role of LMDHs exhibits dynamics and variation across locations. Several studies, such as that by Wulandari et al. (2018), demonstrate positive outcomes, with LMDHs serving as catalysts for community participation in conservation activities and economic development through business diversification. On the other hand, numerous studies have uncovered fundamental challenges. Sahide et al. (2015) and Fisher et al. (2019) note issues such as inconsistent mentoring policies, low administrator accountability, and strong patronage that can marginalize the most vulnerable community groups. Site-specific contexts, such as the type of forest resource, significantly influence empowerment strategies. In pine forests, empowerment opportunities are closely linked to sap management and tourism environmental services (Wibowo & Alifatri, 2013). The experience of Yuwono et al. (2017) in other areas showed that integrated latex management with agroforestry systems can be a stable economic foundation for LMDH, provided it is supported by good tapping technology and fair market access (Njurumana et al., 2020).

Taking into account the theoretical framework and empirical findings, this study will analyze the role of LMDH in the Songgon Pine Forest using a multidimensional approach. The analysis will focus on filling gaps in previous studies, particularly regarding how LMDH utilizes the specific potential of pine forests for economic empowerment, as well as how local institutional dynamics mediate the relationship between CBFM policies and empowerment outcomes at the community

level. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to a more contextual and applicable understanding.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative case study design to explore in depth the role of the Forest Village Community Institution (LMDH) in the specific context of the Songgon Pine Forest. A qualitative approach was chosen because it is appropriate for understanding complex social phenomena, meanings, and experiences from the perspective of direct actors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study focuses on empowerment processes and institutional dynamics, which require in-depth contextualization and interpretation.

The research was conducted in the LMDH work area around the Songgon Pine Forest, Songgon District, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java. The location was selected purposively, considering that this area is a productive pine forest with ongoing LMDH activities. Field data collection was conducted from June to August 2025.

The data collection technique used purposive sampling to gather key informants who have in-depth knowledge of the research topic. This consists of:

1. LMDH administrators and active members
2. Beneficiary community (sap tapping farmer, tourism manager).
3. Representative of Perhutani KPH South Banyuwangi.
4. Local Village Government.

Data collection was carried out using the triangulation method to ensure the validity and depth of the data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study reveals the role of the Forest Village Community Institution (LMDH) in empowering communities around the Songgon Pine Forest through three main dimensions: economic, socio-institutional, and ecological.

### **The Role of LMDH in Community Economic Empowerment**

LMDH has been a key catalyst in improving community economic access to pine forest resources. This role is realized through:

**Management of Access and Distribution of Benefits of Latex Tapping:**The LMDH acts as a regulator, allocating tapping blocks to members through a rotation system, reducing previously frequent access conflicts. Collective latex sales through the LMDH provide more stable prices than individual sales to middlemen. On average, additional household income from latex increased by 15-25% after this institutional intervention.

**Forest-Based Business Diversification:**LMDH is pioneering economic diversification through two main programs: (1) Nature Tourism (Pinus Songgon Edu-Tourism) with camping and forest exploration packages, involving local youth as guides; and (2) Non-timber processing businesses such as making pine mushroom chips and crafts from pine seeds. Although still small in scale, this business has employed 15 families and is starting to become known regionally.

**Capitalization and Marketing:**LMDH established a special savings and loan unit for members who share the profits from the rubber business. Although funds are limited, this helps provide working capital for the tappers. For marketing, LMDH facilitates collaboration with regional cooperatives and utilizes social media to promote tour packages.

### **The Role of LMDH in Strengthening Institutions and Social Capacity**

**Structure and Participation:**The LMDH management structure has been clearly established, but decision-making remains dominated by core administrators and senior community leaders. Ordinary members tend to participate in operational activities, such as working together on tourist routes, but are less involved in strategic planning.

**Mentoring and Partnership Relations:**LMDH has successfully established a more equal partnership with the South Banyuwangi Forest Management Unit (KPH) of Perhutani. Regular meetings are used to discuss revenue sharing from sap tapping and the allocation of forest patrol responsibilities. However, the management's technical

capacity in tourism business management and institutional administration still requires intensive support from third parties (NGOs/academics).

**Social Cohesion and Conflict Resolution:**The existence of the LMDH has become a communication vehicle that reduces the potential for horizontal conflict between residents, particularly regarding tapping area boundaries. Group activities such as joint patrols and community service have strengthened a sense of belonging to the forest area.

### **The Role of LMDH in the Ecological Conservation of Pine Forests**

**Participatory Supervision:**The LMDH organizes a scheduled forest patrol system by community groups. This system effectively prevents illegal logging and encroachment for agriculture. Over the past year, there have been no recorded cases of logging. **Land Rehabilitation:**LMDH coordinates a reforestation program in damaged tree stands using seedlings from Perhutani nurseries. Communities are involved in planting and maintenance through a profit-sharing scheme. **Application of Sustainable Tapping Technique:**Through training from Perhutani, LMDH socializes tapping techniques that do not injure the cambium (shallow drilling system) to extend the productive life of trees and maintain the health of the stands.

### **Discussion**

The research findings show that the role of LMDH Songgon is multidimensional and interrelated, confirming and enriching the empowerment framework in community-based forest management.

### **LMDH as a Bridge between Economic Access and Ecological Sustainability**

Research findings support the proposition that economic empowerment based on local resources is key to the acceptance of conservation programs (Djamhuri, 2008). In Songgon, a revenue-sharing scheme for sap and ecotourism has internalized the economic value of living forests for the community. This has transformed the community's paradigm from viewing forests as "open access" to viewing them as "common-pool resources" that must be maintained to ensure the flow of long-term economic benefits. Thus, the monitoring and rehabilitation activities carried out by the LMDH are no longer viewed as external obligations but as collective investments.

### **Power Dynamics and Internal Institutional Challenge**

Despite showing progress, the findings regarding non-inclusive participation confirm the criticisms of Sahide et al. (2015) and Fisher et al. (2019) regarding the complexity of local politics within forest institutions. The dominance of local elites in LMDH decision-making has the potential to create subtle distortions in the distribution of benefits, with groups close to the management gaining better access. This challenge demonstrates that institutional empowerment requires more than simply establishing formal structures; it requires deliberative efforts to strengthen accountability, financial transparency, and the critical capacity of rank-and-file members. Independent external mentoring is needed to promote more democratic governance.

### **Contextualization of the PHBM Model in the Pine Forest Ecosystem**

The relative success of the Songgon LMDH in integrating the rubber and tourism businesses demonstrates the importance of contextualizing the CBBM model. Pine forests provide non-timber products (rubber) and environmental services (tourism) that can be developed without cutting down trees, in line with the findings of Wibowo & Alifatri (2013) and Yuwono et al. (2017). This model differs from LMDH in timber production forests, which focus more on intercropping schemes. The sustainability of this model depends on continuous innovation, such as the development of rubber derivative products and the standardization of tourism services, as well as strengthening resilience to fluctuations in rubber commodity prices on the global market.

### **Triangle Synergy: Perhutani LMDH Community**

The findings regarding the improved partnership between LMDH and Perhutani indicate a shift toward more functional collaboration. Perhutani's shift from "power" to "supporting partner" (in providing seedlings, training, and market access) is a crucial factor in strengthening LMDH's legitimacy. This synergy needs to be further developed, for example by establishing a trilateral planning forum (LMDH-Perhutani-Village Government) to develop a Work Plan that is truly participatory and responsive to local needs and dynamics.

**Research Limitations:** This study was limited to a single LMDH site within a specific time period. Institutional dynamics and long-term economic-ecological impacts require

longitudinal studies. Further research could test these findings with a comparative approach across multiple LMDHs in other pine forest ecosystems.

## **CONCLUSION**

The role of LMDH in empowerment. LMDH Rimba Ayu acts as a facilitator, motivator, and coordinator of community empowerment activities through pine forest tourism management. As a facilitator, LMDH Rimba Ayu successfully bridges communication and negotiation between three often-conflicting logics, such as the Joint Forest Management (PHBM) scheme, into contextual actions and language that can be adopted by the community.

Implementation of public values. Public values such as participation and shared interests have been realized through deliberation mechanisms and collective activities. However, accountability and transparency aspects still need to be strengthened to ensure more open and sustainable institutional management. Despite its success, the effectiveness of the LMDH's role still faces challenges, such as uneven human resource capacity, dependence on Perhutani policies that can limit innovation, and the need to strengthen a more professional financial accountability system.

LMDH as a bridging institution. LMDH serves as a liaison between the community, Perhutani, and the village government in collaboratively managing forest resources. This role strengthens communication between actors, despite ongoing challenges in coordination and institutional capacity. The existence of LMDH has successfully bridged the communication and interest gap between three main actors: the community with its economic needs and sense of ownership, Perhutani with its conservation mandate and formal regulations, and the village and regional governments with their development and empowerment agendas.

Factors influencing the effectiveness of the LMDH's role. The success of the LMDH's role is supported by member solidarity, local policy support, and high tourism potential. Barriers include limited human resources, weak financial transparency, and dependence on external parties for decision-making

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