

Collaboration as an Approach to Transforming Conflict in Community-Based Ecotourism Management in State Forest Areas in West Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

Conflicts in ecotourism management result in socioeconomic and ecological losses, including the cessation of activities and damage to social relations among communities and other stakeholders. In response to these challenges, conflict transformation through collaboration is a process of resolving disputes to achieve long-term change that involves all parties. This study employs a qualitative approach with data collection through in-depth interviews and participant observation. Qualitative data analysis includes domain analysis, taxonomy, component analysis, and analysis of specific cultural themes. The research was conducted in West Java during 2024. The research results show that collaborative initiatives between Perhutani, village communities through forest farmer groups (for ecotourism and coffee plantations), and ecotourism management investors are key elements in achieving sustainable forest resource management. The cooperation scheme for managing coffee plantations in state forest areas planted by the community applies a 75% profit sharing for the community and 25% for the company; while the cooperation scheme for managing waterfall ecotourism in state forest areas applies a 70% profit sharing for the company, 25% for the community, and 5% for the LMDH (Village Forest Community Institution). Several ecotourism-related activities also provide greater profit sharing for the community. This profit-sharing system can support efforts to preserve forests and increase rural communities' income. However, this scheme needs to be monitored and evaluated because the duration of the cooperation contract is still relatively short. Conceptually, this collaborative approach is not only beneficial for forest management but also helps transform conflicts of interest and foster cooperation for the development of rural communities whose livelihoods depend on state forest resources.

Keywords

Collaboration; conflict transformation; ecotourism; rural communities; stakeholders

Introduction

The transformation of conflict into collaboration in natural resource management in state forest areas must involve various actors with different interests. The involvement of all parties is necessary because multiple factors, including differences in economic objectives, historical dynamics, land rights, and competing legitimacy claims, drive conflicts over community-based ecotourism management in state forest areas. In this context, conflict cannot be understood merely as a disharmony between actors, but rather as a reflection of long-standing social dynamics, including the neglect of local communities' access to forest resources that constitute their living space (Apriyani, 2017; Maring, 2020).

Ecotourism in state forest areas was initially developed to combine conservation goals with improved welfare for local communities. However, in practice, management policies often do not provide meaningful opportunities for participation by indigenous peoples and villagers who have long been socially and economically dependent on forest resources (Abisono et al., 2020). In various regions of Indonesia, including Bogor, villagers are often seen as objects of development. However, communities around forest areas have the capacity and local knowledge to care for ecosystems. As a result, forest management policies implemented by state-owned enterprises or private companies often generate resistance, leading to conflict. Conflicts occur horizontally between community groups and vertically between communities, policy makers, and entrepreneurs who have been granted management permits (Yudiyanto et al., 2021).

In this context, the political ecology approach provides an essential lens for understanding the power relations and political economy behind conservation and tourism policies. Conservation political ecology highlights how practices of social exclusion often accompany nature conservation efforts, the commodification of living spaces, and the marginalization of local communities with historical ties to forest areas. In ecotourism management, the processes of conservation and tourism development become arenas for negotiation among the state, the market, and communities. Therefore, the conflicts that arise are not only rooted in economic factors but also in struggles for legitimacy, control over space, and the ecological identity of local communities (Büscher & Fletcher, 2020; Robbins, 2019).

Horizontal conflicts in ecological tourism management arise from limited economic resources and a lack of transparency in decision-making. Competition for management rights occurs within a single village or across communities. On the other hand, vertical conflicts arise when communities lack fair access to their living spaces because the area has been converted to other uses. Additionally, conflicts occur because tourism areas are managed exclusively by private companies, with inadequate involvement of local communities. Horizontal and vertical conflicts in tourism areas have implications for social losses, hinder economic activities, and disrupt the comfort of users of ecological tourism services (Apriyani, 2017; Perum Perhutani, 2023).

Conflict resolution approaches commonly used to address disputes over natural resource management tend to focus on resolving individual incidents and achieving short-term agreements. These conflict-resolution approaches do not address the structural and historical roots of conflict and do not sufficiently encourage changes in power relations and unequal social relations. In contrast, conflict transformation does not only aim to resolve disputes, but also to bring about constructive changes in social relations between parties through a long-

term process rooted in mutual trust and recognition (Lederach, 2003; Maring, 2022). Conflict transformation through collaboration shows the potential for structural change in community-based resource management. Strengthening local institutions, recognizing community management rights, and ensuring fair distribution of benefits are indicators of the success of such transformation.

In the context of ecotourism management, the approach of conflict transformation through collaboration is becoming an increasingly popular strategy. Collaboration is defined as the process of building mutual understanding, cooperation, and shared responsibility among parties that were previously in conflict to achieve common goals in a sustainable manner (Gray, 1989; Kismartini & Pujiyono, 2020; Maring, 2022; Subiyakto et al., 2025). Collaboration also takes place in state forest areas managed by Perhutani, a State-Owned Enterprise (BUMN) in the form of a Public Company (Perum), engaged in forestry, particularly on the islands of Java and Madura. Perhutani has the duty and authority to manage, protect, and utilize state forests in these areas. Several studies indicate that collaboration between Perhutani and village communities through forestry partnership programs, agroforestry, or community-based tourism management has positive impacts on environmental conservation and increased income for residents (Hamka et al., 2022; Senoaji et al., 2020).

Within an institutional framework, Ostrom's (1990) analysis of common-pool resources (CPRs) emphasized the importance of local rules, clear resource boundaries, and community participation in maintaining sustainability. Local institutions are key to ensuring that collaborative management does not stop at administrative formalities, but truly realizes fair distribution of benefits and equality of roles among actors. However, critical studies show that community participation is often symbolic, as external actors dominate policy direction. Therefore, the effectiveness of collaboration needs to be measured by the extent to which communities have deliberative space and the power to determine collective decisions in natural resource governance (Cox et al., 2010; Hamka et al., 2022).

Several studies show that successful collaboration in natural resource management depends on processes that accommodate local communities' aspirations, design fair governance mechanisms, and build equal power relations among stakeholders. Collaboration as a form of conflict transformation cannot be separated from local interpretations of space, identity, and social relations within communities. Collaboration-based conflict transformation needs to go through stages rooted in the regional context, starting with identifying needs, forming consensus among parties, joint planning, implementing collaborative activities, and evaluation based on agreement. If not managed with principles of fairness and participation, collaboration can instead become an instrument of co-optation that reinforces the dominance of powerful actors over local communities (Maring, 2022).

In this study, the state forest area in Bogor Regency served as a case study to examine the challenges and opportunities for collaboration in community-based ecotourism management. Before the 1990s, there was a prolonged conflict between the local community and companies over restrictions on community access to forest areas and companies' exclusive management practices. Communities that had historically depended on the land and its natural resources were not involved in decision-making. However, in the last decade, collaborative initiatives have emerged between companies, village communities, and local investors who manage waterfall tourist attractions and coffee cultivation under an agroforestry scheme. In the case of a cooperative scheme for managing coffee plantations planted by the community in state forest areas, a profit-sharing system of 25% for the company and 75% for the community is

applied. This is the result of a shift from state-based to community-based forest management (Perum Perhutani, 2023).

The above description illustrates the complexity of interests in ecotourism management, which needs to be examined through the following research question: How does a collaborative approach transform conflicts in community-based ecotourism management in state forest areas? These research questions show that collaboration and conflict transformation are central themes contextualized in the case of ecotourism management in state forest areas involving companies and communities. This research indicates that conflict resolution can be achieved through a process of transformation and collaboration that has long-term impacts by involving various stakeholders. Communities are positioned as actors in natural resource management. The collaborative process involves all parties in formulating shared interests, strengthening community capacity, and establishing fair and sustainable natural resource governance.

Theoretical framework

From a theoretical-conceptual perspective, several key concepts that inspire and guide this research need to be highlighted. These key concepts include natural resource conflicts, conflict transformation, collaboration, and ecotourism as the substantive basis for both. To provide contextual grounding, the first aspect to be discussed is ecotourism. Ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism that prioritizes ecological sustainability, community economic empowerment, and the preservation of local cultural values. As part of sustainable tourism, ecotourism incorporates principles of education, respect for the environment, conservation of natural resources, and social development of local communities actively involved in area management (Lisova et al, 2017; Ramos-García, 2017).

Within the framework of sustainable development, ecotourism serves as an instrument for integrating natural and cultural resources sustainably. Ecotourism management continues to focus on the economic, social, and ecological dimensions as an inseparable whole. Four main principles of responsible ecotourism serve as benchmarks for evaluating the success of ecotourism management, namely: 1) Minimizing environmental impact; 2) Respecting local culture; 3) Maximizing economic benefits for the community; 4) Enhancing tourist satisfaction (Andita & Kahfi, 2019; Cahyana, 2020; Gale & Hill, 2016).

Within the political ecology of conservation and tourism, ecotourism management is understood as the outcome of interactions among power, political economy, and environmental practices. This perspective highlights the inherent contradiction between conservation goals and the economic interests of tourism, which encourage the commodification of nature and local culture. Inequality of access to resources, marginalization of communities, and the dominance of state and private actors in conservation policy make ecotourism areas a complex political arena. As Peluso (1992) argued, forest conservation in Java is often carried out coercively, with the state expanding its control over resources at the expense of rural communities' rights and access to resources. Li (2007) added that such conservation and development practices are often carried out in the name of "empowerment," but in fact remove communities from their capacity to regulate themselves and their own living spaces. Therefore, political ecology helps us understand that ecotourism management is not merely a conservation effort, but a social process involving negotiations over space,

rights, and the identity of local communities within a market-oriented global economic system (Büscher & Fletcher, 2020; Robbins, 2019).

However, in practice, ecotourism management often creates conflicts among various actors with different interests, including local communities, the government, state-owned enterprises, and private businesses. Differences in structural positions, unequal access to resources, and unequal distribution of profits cause social jealousy and conflict. Conflicts over natural resource management not only damage social relations and weaken local institutions, but also halt conservation activities and undermine the economic potential of communities (Apriyani, 2017; Marina & Darmawan, 2011; Pujiyono et al., 2019).

Conflict resolution approaches to forest resources can be carried out through conflict resolution or conflict transformation (Maring, 2022). Conflict resolution approaches can be applied to resolve ongoing conflicts that require resolution. Conflict resolution aims to control, stop, and prevent the spread of conflict. Studies that focus solely on analyzing the anatomy of conflict cannot link the dynamics of conflict to social transformation efforts through cross-sector collaboration (Apriyani, 2017; Ramos-García, 2017). Although important for preventing escalation, conflict resolution tends to be reactive and short-term. Conflict resolution only addresses symptoms, not the underlying causes. In fact, the involvement of external actors such as the government and security forces often results in formal agreements that ignore community dialogue and meaningful participation (Jati, 2023; Jati et al., 2025; Maring, 2022).

Ecotourism management that integrates economic, social, and ecological dimensions sustainably can adapt to conflict transformation. Conflict transformation is understood as a social process oriented toward long-term structural change, rather than merely superficial resolution. This concept is based on the awareness that conflict can be a catalyst for social change if managed through dialogue, critical reflection, and joint participation (Lederach, 2003; Maring, 2022). Conflict transformation embodies the values of reducing violence, advancing social justice, and fostering healthy social relationships in complex social realities. It requires the active involvement of all parties in conflict to build a shared understanding of the root causes, create collaborative learning spaces, and openly co-design a shared future. In the context of community-based ecotourism management, conflict transformation must reconstruct power relations, recognize community capacities, and build a more equitable governance system.

In line with the principle of conflict transformation, a collaborative approach is an essential tool for bridging the interests of various parties. Collaboration, in its substantive sense, is not merely administrative cooperation but a participatory process that enables the honest articulation of interests, dialogue on differences, the establishment of shared goals, and the creation of fair control and evaluation mechanisms (Gale & Hill, 2016; Kismartini & Pujiyono, 2023). In the context of ecotourism, collaboration functions as a democratic space where local communities, governments, state-owned enterprises, and private companies negotiate and integrate interests to achieve collective sustainability (Stone, 2015). Collaboration in ecotourism management is not merely an economic activity but a social transformation process involving the reinterpretation of space, identity, and environmental, social, and financial sustainability (Sentanu et al., 2021).

Within the framework of common-pool resources (CPRs), Ostrom's (1990) institutional theory holds that the success of community governance depends on clear resource boundaries, agreed-upon local rules, and mechanisms for sanctions and collective participation. This

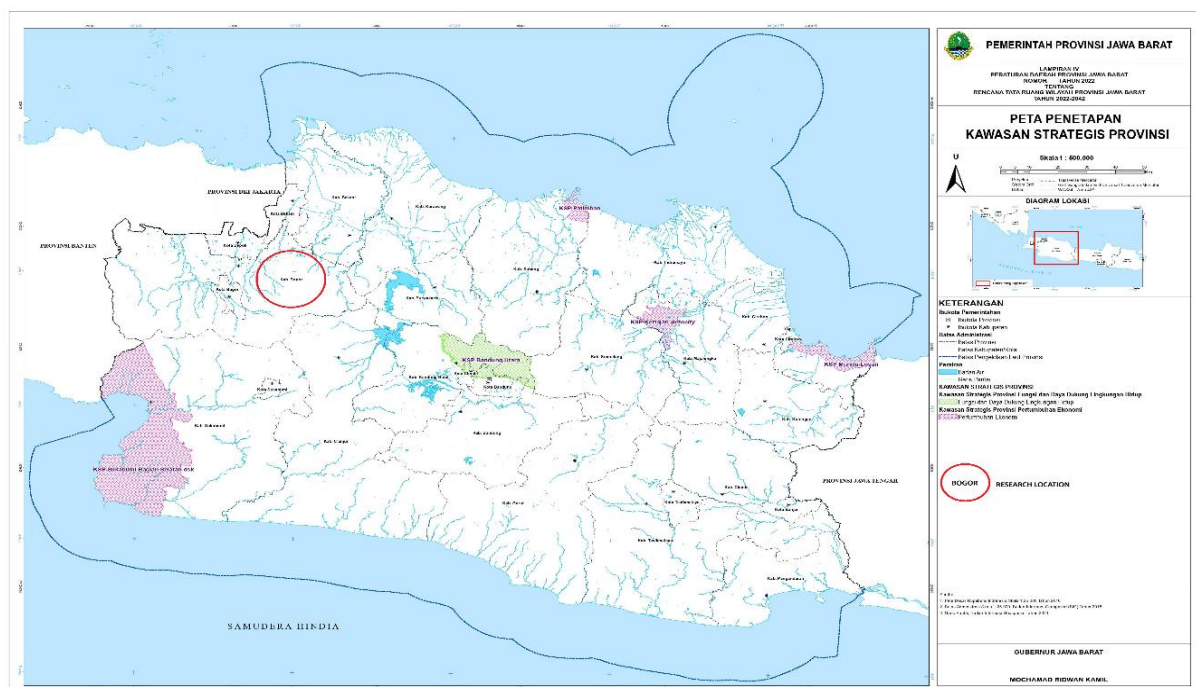
approach emphasizes that communities can manage resources independently, without relying entirely on state control or market mechanisms, provided that inclusive and adaptive social institutions are in place. However, several critical studies warn that community participation is often tokenistic, as the agendas of external actors such as the government or donor agencies dominate it. Therefore, the effectiveness of collaborative management needs to be assessed in terms of the extent to which community participation truly has deliberative power and determines policy direction and the equitable distribution of benefits (Cox et al., 2010).

Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which posits that social meaning is not objective or fixed but instead constructed through the experiences, interactions, and reflections of social actors (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Maring et al., 2024; Subedi, 2021). In this context, the reality of conflict and collaboration in ecotourism management is understood as a social construction influenced by the perspectives, positions, and experiences of the informants. Therefore, in the initial stage of this research, an effort was made to deeply understand the dynamics of conflict and collaboration at the local community level, the focus of this study. In the analysis stage, conclusions were formulated to examine the theoretical and practical implications.

This research was conducted in Kampung Tepian, Megam Village, Bogor Regency, West Java Province (See Figure 1). Kampung Tepian has a population of approximately 400, while Megam Village has a population of roughly 7,691 (BPS-Statistics of Bogor Regency, 2023). Megam Village borders a state forest, with most residents' homes located within it. The residents of Kampung Tepian rely on agriculture and ecotourism for their livelihoods, which depend on state forest resources.

Figure 1: Map of Research Location in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia



Note: Source accessible only via the West Java Provincial Government intranet (<https://wargi.jabarprov.go.id/>)

The selection of Kampung Tepian in Bogor Regency as the research location was based on the following methodological considerations: 1) This location represents a complex socioecological ecosystem, where the community lives directly adjacent to state forest areas and depends on natural resources for the local economy, such as coffee plantations, pine forests, honey, and waterfall tourism; 2) The historical dynamics between the community and Perhutani reflect an interesting transition from conflict to collaboration in community-based ecotourism management; and 3) The Kampung Tepian community's dependence on forest resources is a strategic locus for understanding social construction, interest negotiations, and collaborative practices that reflect the process of social transformation in participatory forest resource management.

Although the research was conducted in Kampung Tepian, it is necessary to note that, methodologically, this research was not only directly related to the Kampung Tepian community but also to companies engaged in the management of state forest resources. The leading company involved was Perhutani, a state-owned enterprise (BUMN) granted the right to manage state forests on the islands of Java and Madura. In the field, Perhutani established a business unit, PT Iwala, to manage ecotourism in collaboration with the community. PT Iwala's management refers to Perhutani's vision and objectives to achieve forest sustainability and the welfare of communities living around the forest. At the field level, PT Iwala partners with the Kampung Tepian community group, which manages and utilizes state forest resources.

In a broader context, Megam's economic activities in the Kampung Tepian community depend on resources in the state forest area, including coffee plantations, pine forests, horticultural land, waterfall tourism, camping areas, and honey. On the other side of the state forest area, settlements are located along the national tourist route between Bogor and Cianjur. Access to the Megam community, particularly Kampung Tepian, to state forest resources is closely tied to Perhutani's role. This state-owned enterprise holds the rights to manage the state forest area in that region.

The research was conducted through field studies in 2024. The research location was determined purposively based on socioecological characteristics relevant to the research focus, namely: first, the experiences of village communities that have conflicted with Perhutani, the holder of state forest management rights. Second, the success of the parties in initiating community-based ecotourism management collaboration. Thus, the uniqueness of the transformation from conflict to cooperation provided the academic justification for selecting this location.

As part of the methodological explanation, it should be noted that the data in this article are the results of a national competitive research program among universities funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia in 2024. Field research was conducted after obtaining recommendations and research permits from the competent and authorized parties/institutions. A complete statement of this is provided in the IRB Approval section at the end of this article.

In the initial stage, researchers identified the types and categories of data that needed to be collected from informants through interviews and observations. The types of data collected cover five main areas of focus: 1) Conditions and management systems for ecotourism, as well

as the status of ecological resources. 2) Socioeconomic aspects of the community, distribution of land ownership and resources, and the existence of village institutions and social infrastructure. 3) Dynamics of conflicts of interest that arise in ecotourism management. 4) The interests and positions of stakeholders in the context of ecotourism management. 5) Collaborative initiatives that arise from the negotiation and dialogue process between local and external actors.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with snowball sampling to add informants based on the data's type and needs. Informants were selected based on four main criteria: 1) Informants from the community must have direct experience in ecotourism activities and land use in state forest areas; 2) Informants must have experience interacting and collaborating, including community members, village government officials, company officials, and ecotourism business operators; and 3). Informants must understand local social and cultural values and be active in economic and social activities in the village; 4). Informants must be willing to share their experiences and information openly. This fourth criterion is essential for informants, as the research theme is conflict transformation and collaboration. Methodologically, for the sake of informant comfort and to fulfill qualitative research ethics, the names of informants, certain institutions, and the names of specific places at the field level are deliberately disguised.

This study involved five key informants from the village community and five key informants from the company. The key informants from the community consisted of one village government official (TR) and one business actor and informal leader at the village level (AD). Three villagers consisted of two men (SL and DD) and one woman (IS). They work as ecotourism farmers, coffee plantation owners, and pine resin tappers. The five informants from the company consisted of two people from ecotourism business management representing PT Iwala (AE and AS); one Perhutani official working in the Megam Village area (TF); one woman as a data officer at Perhutani (NI); and one representative of Perhutani leadership at the Bogor district level (EG). It should be noted that PT Iwala is a business unit established by Perhutani, so informants from PT Iwala are part of the company element. Data collection also involved two villagers and one waterfall tourist who provided relevant data/information, although they were not included in the key informant category. Thus, a total of 13 informants were involved in this study.

Data collection was conducted after the researchers determined the data requirements and necessary informants. Data collection was carried out using two main techniques, namely in-depth interviews and participatory observation (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Maring et al., 2024; Subedi, 2021). The interview process took place in various social spaces that were comfortable for the informants. Interviews with community informants were conducted at their homes, honey-processing houses [saung madu], coffee-processing houses, waterfall locations, gardens, and roadside stalls in the village. Interviews with company informants were conducted at the KPH office and the waterfall ecotourism office.

The interview explored the negotiation process and the tensions between the community and the company by delving into past stories. This technique was applied because the events or incidents had already occurred. Data exploration focused on the incident time, the parties involved, the process that happened, and the results achieved. This technique was applied to both community informants and company officials, at different places and times.

In general, interviews with community informants were conducted individually, except when residents were gathered for community service, in which case interviews were conducted in

small groups of up to four people. Interviews with company officials were conducted individually, based on their duties and functions. There were also interviews undertaken in small groups of four people to confirm company data and work programs.

Participatory observation was carried out in residential areas, waterfall ecotourism sites, coffee plantations, food stalls, motorcycle parking areas, and coffee and honey processing areas. Participatory observation focused only on routine activities in plantation management, coffee and honey processing, community interactions with waterfall ecotourism officers, interactions between motorcycle parking lot managers and visitors, and how business operators managed tourists and food stalls at the waterfall tourist site. Participatory observation was conducted as part of a series of interviews, so informants were always involved to confirm or request necessary clarifications.

To ensure the comfort of informants in social interactions at the community level and in relations between parties, all informant names and location names indicating the informants' places of residence have been disguised. Data collection is guided by the principle of informed consent, in which the purpose of the research, its benefits and risks, and the rights of informants are explained before data collection. Informants' consent is given verbally without coercion. As this was a community-based study involving actors engaged in conflict transformation and collaboration, ethical considerations and the comfort of informants were maintained throughout data collection and use. Data obtained from informants was not shared with other informants.

Interviews were conducted repeatedly to ensure that the data obtained was sufficient and fulfilled the 5W+1H formulation (what, who, when, where, why, and how). Data saturation was achieved when no new information emerged, and consistent patterns of repetition emerged across interviews. To ensure data reliability, the triangulation method was used, combining interviews and observation. Source triangulation was conducted by asking the same questions to several informants; the researcher also compared data obtained from individual and group interviews.

Data analysis inspires four stages of qualitative analysis: domain analysis, taxonomy analysis, component analysis, and cultural theme analysis (Maring et al., 2024; Sugiyono, 2021). These stages are carried out repeatedly and simultaneously, taking into account the entire dataset and the analysis's purpose. Domain analysis is evident in the identification of general data categories obtained from field research. The domain analysis process begins with transcribing all interview data and narrating field observations. This stage is followed by the clustering and coding of general data, which fall into three main categories: tensions and conflicts behind ecotourism management initiatives; real forms of community access to and utilization of forest resources (ecotourism); and the negotiation process for building cooperation.

The taxonomic analysis stage is marked by the compilation of the internal structure between elements in the three domains categorized above. At this stage, a complete narrative is provided on how tensions and conflicts arise, how communities access forest resources (ecotourism), and the negotiation processes that occur. Component analysis examines the specific characteristics of each domain and explores the meaning of the relationships between these categories. Cultural theme analysis seeks to understand the cultural values that underlie the community's and the company's social actions in managing ecotourism in state forest areas. Finally, this analysis positions collaboration as a means of transforming conflicts in community-based ecotourism management in state forest areas.

Results

This section presents three points to provide a comprehensive overview of the research results. First, it describes the tensions and conflicts that provided the background and context for the emergence of ecotourism management collaboration. Second, it represents the negotiation process among the community, Perhutani, and PT Iwala to foster cooperation in ecotourism management. Third, it discusses how collaboration can transform conflicts in ecotourism management.

Stakeholder interests and conflicts in ecotourism management

The management of state forest areas in West Java Province is under the authority of Perhutani, a State-Owned Enterprise. Ecotourism management in state forest areas brings together various interests involving the state, the private sector, and local communities. Perhutani, as the mandate holder for state forest management, has a primary interest in maintaining conservation functions while generating revenue from environmental services. On the other hand, PT Iwala, a business partner established by Perhutani, is oriented toward economic efficiency and profit optimization through nature tourism activities. Meanwhile, the community of Kampung Tepian in Megam Village, which has lived around the forest area for generations, views the forest as an ecological and social space that serves as a source of livelihood, ancestral heritage, and collective identity. These three actors are bound in a complex relationship in which the economic logic and formal legality of the state meet the social logic and moral economy of the community.

For the people of Kampung Tepian, the forest is not only a natural resource but also a living space that contains social and spiritual values. They manage the area around Curug CB (waterfall) independently to meet their basic needs, utilize water sources, cultivate crops, and then develop nature-based tourism. The forms of forest resource utilization they engage in include selling tourism tickets, renting tents and camping equipment, providing tour guide services, and managing coffee plantations under pine trees. All these activities are carried out through collective work and cooperation, without the direct involvement of formal institutions.

Meanwhile, for Perhutani, this area is a state asset that must be managed in a measured manner, in accordance with permits, and supervised by official institutions such as the Village Forest Community Institution (LMDH). PT Iwala then adopted a business approach oriented towards service standards, economic profits, and professional management based on cooperation agreements (PKS). In practice, this system has resulted in inequality, as the community that first developed the ecotourism area receives the smallest share of the economic benefits generated.

This tension stems from differing perspectives on forests. For communities, forests are living spaces that can be used sustainably, while for companies, forests are resources that must be controlled and regulated. When tourism activities began to generate significant economic profits, a struggle for authority and legitimacy over management arose. The community feels that their contributions to opening access, building trails, and maintaining the area's cleanliness are not recognized in proportion to their efforts. Meanwhile, companies argue that without formal management, community activities risk causing environmental damage and loss of revenue for the state. The meeting of these two distinct logics creates structural

tensions at the root of long-term conflicts in the Megam forest area. In summary, the stakeholders and their interests in ecotourism management are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Stakeholders and Claims of Interest

Stakeholders	Characteristics and Status	Key Interests
Perhutani	The holder of a state mandate with legal and administrative authority over forest areas.	Maintaining conservation functions, generating tourism revenue, and controlling community activities through permits and cooperation agreements.
PT Iwala	Perhutani's official business partner manages the commercial aspects of tourism.	Optimizing economic benefits, managing tickets and facilities, and strengthening the image of ecotourism businesses.
Tepian Village Community	The local community that initially managed the Curug CB waterfall, which depends on the forest.	Maintaining economic and social access, demanding fair returns, and recognition of historical contributions.
LMDH (Village Forest Community Institution)	Perhutani's official partner institution at the village level performs administrative functions but lacks representativeness.	Maintains its formal position as a liaison and receives a share of the corporation's profits.
KTHW (Forest Tourism Farmer Group)	Community-based organization managing Curug CB before the formal contract was signed.	Maintaining management autonomy and demanding legal recognition of their role.
Tepian Mandiri Farmers Group	Coffee farmers under pine trees that support the community's economy.	Demanding legal certainty regarding land and contracts so as not to disrupt the planting cycle.
Village Government	Local administrative authority and social mediator between parties.	Maintains social stability, supports the village economy, and strengthens political legitimacy.

Conflicts in ecotourism management can be traced back to the early 1980s, when residents of Kampung Tepian began clearing land around Curug CB to meet their basic household needs. This activity took place without official permission but was not prohibited because it was still considered in line with the forest's function. In the 1990s, as the Puncak-Megam area began to develop into a tourist and investment destination, outsiders took advantage of the community's lack of understanding of land law. They traded garden produce using the term "sell plants," which was then interpreted as "sell land." This change in meaning sparked horizontal conflicts among residents, especially between those who wanted to keep the land for their livelihoods and those tempted by short-term economic offers. Social solidarity began to erode, and the community's relationship with the forest shifted from a value-based to an ownership- and profit-based one.

In the early 2000s, Curug CB nature tourism began to be managed more openly by the community. Residents worked together to build simple facilities for tourists, such as footpaths, bamboo bridges, and rest areas. This success attracted the attention of Perhutani, which saw new revenue potential from environmental services. Since then, the space that was initially managed informally by the community has been regulated through licensing and cooperation mechanisms. Perhutani's entry introduced a new legal system but also limited the community's freedom of movement. Tensions rose as the community felt that the space

they had cared for was now being claimed as part of the company's assets.

The period from 2013 to 2016 was a crucial time when the conflict spread to the institutional level. The community formed the Forest Tourism Farmers Group (KTHW) to strengthen their bargaining position in the management of the tourism area. However, Perhutani formed the LMDH as an officially recognized administrative partner. This institutional dualism gave rise to internal friction. The KTHW, which was active in the field, felt it was not receiving proportional recognition. At the same time, the LMDH was considered not to represent the community's interests because it was closer to the village government and Perhutani. This clash revealed a vertical conflict between the community and Perhutani, as well as a horizontal conflict among community groups vying for legitimacy in representation.

The situation peaked in 2018–2021, when external parties claimed ownership of approximately 360 hectares of state forest land in Megam by installing concrete barriers (posts) and submitting false legal documents. Some residents who were tempted by offers of capital for coffee cultivation ended up trapped in manipulative practices that served as the basis for land ownership claims. When Perhutani and the village government intervened to reaffirm the area's status as a state forest, the community was the most disadvantaged, as their economic activities were halted. This conflict shows how the intervention of external actors with capital and legal access exacerbates the inequality between the community and the company, while also expanding the conflict from a social to a legal dimension. The community is trying to accommodate external parties who control the land near their village to provide business opportunities for the local community, as stated by AD, as follows:

"I tried to approach several parties who control large areas of land in the village so that they would be willing to allow the villagers to cultivate their land through a work agreement, but these efforts have not been successful. External parties are still trying to obtain management permits that conflict with the protective function of the forest area, so Perhutani does not allow it."

(Interview with AD, November 24, 2024)

After 2021, the open conflict did subside, but a new form of latent tension emerged. In 2022, the management of Curug CB was officially transferred to PT Iwala under Perhutani's coordination, with a 70% profit-sharing split for Perhutani, 25% for the community, and 5% for LMDH. This scheme caused disappointment among the community because they felt that their historical role and contribution had been ignored. The community's previously open forms of economic utilization are now restricted by rigid licensing and profit-sharing mechanisms. Some residents lost their sources of income because new regulations controlled access to land, kiosks, and tourist activities.

The community's weak legal position exacerbates this situation. Their efforts to form village cooperatives as more independent legal entities are not recognized by Perhutani, which continues to designate LMDH as the sole representative institution. This creates a social and administrative distance between managers in the field and formally recognized state institutions. It is difficult for the community to voice its aspirations, and every negotiation tends to end in unilateral decisions that favor the company's interests. As a result, there is a sense of frustration among the community towards a partnership system that appears participatory but, in practice, reinforces the dominance of external parties.

By 2025, the conflict in Megam had not been fully resolved. Tensions shifted from

confrontation to hidden social resistance. The community began to realize that local values such as cooperation and traditional wisdom were no longer sufficient to protect their rights amid increasingly dominant bureaucratic and market forces. They demand a new collaboration scheme that is more transparent and provides space for the community to become the leading actors in management. However, the unequal shift in power has slowed down negotiations. This conflict, which has lasted for more than four decades, ultimately shows one consistent pattern: structural inequality between the state, the market, and the community continues to be reproduced in various forms, whether through policies, institutions, or economic mechanisms.

This long experience also demonstrates the social resilience of the Tepian Village community. Amid structural pressures, they have maintained their relationship with the forest and preserved solidarity-based social mechanisms. Awareness of the importance of local institutions, equitable distribution of benefits, and recognition of their contributions has now grown into a new agenda in the discourse on equitable ecotourism management. Megam is not merely a reflection of local conflict, but a representation of the tug-of-war between interests that occurs in many state forest areas in Indonesia – between efforts to preserve, utilize, and fight for a fair living space for all parties. The forms of conflict and their impacts are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Ecotourism Management Conflicts in Kampung Tepian

Year	Form of Conflict	Parties Involved and Impact
1980–1985	The beginning of unauthorized land clearing for basic needs, such as agriculture and water.	The community versus Perhutani (potential for latent conflict). Relations remained tolerant, but marked the beginning of differing perceptions of forest management rights.
1990–2000	The practice of ‘selling plants’ emerged, which was interpreted as ‘selling land’, causing disputes over boundaries and ownership.	Horizontal conflicts between residents due to manipulation by outside parties. Social solidarity declined, and mutual suspicion arose among residents.
2000–2010	Development of Curug CB tourism by the community without official permission. Perhutani began to restrict activities.	The community vs Perhutani. Tensions rose over claims to authority and legality over the tourist area, which had been developed independently.
2013–2016	The establishment of KTHW by the community and LMDH by Perhutani led to institutional dualism.	Vertical and horizontal conflicts: KTHW vs LMDH vs Perhutani. Competition for legitimacy and access to tourism revenue. Internal community relations were divided.
2018–2021	Illegal claims on approximately 360 hectares of state forest by external parties using forged documents and concrete markers.	Perhutani & Village Government vs. External Parties and Affected Communities. Agricultural and tourism activities halted, reducing local income.
2022	Formal transfer of management of Curug CB to PT Iwala under the coordination of Perhutani, with an unbalanced profit-sharing system.	Community vs PT Iwala–Perhutani. Dissatisfaction arises due to the 25% profit share for the community. Socioeconomic conflict begins to intensify.

Year	Form of Conflict	Parties Involved and Impact
2023–2025	Latent tensions related to transparency, residents' business permits, and control of tourism activities.	Community vs. companies and formal institutions. Non-physical tensions in the form of social resistance, declining trust, and weakening community participation.

Negotiation of interests and collaboration in ecotourism management

The negotiation process in ecotourism management in the state forest area in Megam Village is the result of an initiative by Perhutani, a state-owned enterprise (SOE) that holds control rights and a conservation mandate for the forest area. All collaboration schemes that have emerged over time are the result of Perhutani's strategy to reorganize community involvement in the Curug CB area, while integrating economic, social, and conservation aspects into a single formal institutional framework. Negotiations from the 1980s to 2025 show the evolution of the relationship among the state, the private sector, and the local community: from informal tolerance to a legal cooperation framework, while still placing Perhutani as the primary regulator.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Tepian community began to open up and use parts of the state forest for basic needs, including agriculture, water sources, and bathing areas. These activities did not have formal permission from Perhutani, but were still tolerated because they were not considered to be damaging to the forest's function. As the economic value of the Puncak–Megam area increased in the late 1990s, outsiders and land brokers began to exploit residents' ignorance of the area's legal status. The shift in meaning from "selling plants" to "selling land" sparked horizontal conflicts among residents, while Perhutani began tightening its supervision. This period marked the beginning of latent tensions between the community's economic needs and the state's claim to the forest area.

In the early 2000s, when the tourism potential of Curug CB began to attract visitors, the community managed the area independently by building hiking trails, rest areas, and simple ticket booths. These activities boosted the local economy, but from Perhutani's perspective, they violated the legal boundaries of state forest management. In this situation, Perhutani took the first step toward negotiation: holding meetings with village heads and community leaders to reorganize tourism activities in accordance with company regulations. The talks were informal and persuasive, with the community being asked to comply with basic conservation rules without losing their livelihoods. This understanding served as the basis for the idea of formal cooperation, which later gave rise to a partnership model grounded in agreements.

During the period 2013–2016, Perhutani strengthened its position by establishing the Village Forest Community Institution (LMDH) as an official partnership forum. This step was taken to channel all cooperation through a legally recognized structure. On the other hand, communities that had been actively managing the area formed KTHW as local institutions with deep roots in the field. When these two structures operated simultaneously, sharp differences in opinion emerged: the communities refused to join the LMDH, which they considered unrepresentative. At the same time, Perhutani insisted that only official institutions recognized by the state forestry system would be accepted. A tug-of-war between interests marked negotiations at this stage—the community sought legitimacy for its decades of work. In contrast, Perhutani sought to return all management to the company's formal control.

Tensions escalated in the 2018–2021 period when outside parties claimed ownership of approximately 360 hectares of state forest in Megam. Perhutani responded by strengthening partnerships with village governments and communities to maintain area boundaries and prevent land conversion. In the field, communities served as guardians and reporters of violations, but they viewed this role as more of a “supervisor without authority.” Perhutani considered this measure a form of conservative collaboration, while the community viewed it as a new form of subordination. The negotiation process during this period showed that, although Perhutani began using the term “partnership,” the practice remained top-down and emphasized compliance rather than equality.

The peak of the negotiation process occurred in 2022, when Perhutani formulated and signed a new Cooperation Agreement (PKS) for the management of Curug CB ecotourism. Under this scheme, PT Iwala was appointed as a business partner responsible for operational and commercial aspects, such as ticketing, promotion, and management of tourist facilities. The community serves as field implementers accountable for cleanliness, security, and tourist services. The profit-sharing scheme is set at 70% for Perhutani, 25% for the community, and 5% for LMDH. Additionally, parking management is entirely delegated to community groups. The proceeds from parking management are utilized for social purposes in the village, such as purchasing ambulances and repairing village roads. This was mentioned by TR, an informant who serves as a village leader, as follows:

“To guard the parking lot, there are 40 young people in the village who are ready to work in shifts. They can register with the administrators to be assigned shifts. Every day, two people can be on duty, and on weekends, four people can be on duty because the number of motorcycles can exceed 400. Those on duty receive 50% of the motorcycle parking fee of INR 5,000 per unit and the car parking fee of INR 20,000 per unit. The remainder is handed over to the committee to be allocated for community use.”

(Interview with TR, November 24, 2024)

This decision was initiated entirely by Perhutani, as the holder of state forest management rights, to organize tourism activities in a legally and financially orderly manner. However, the new policy sparked sharp debate. Some members of the community believed that PT Iwala’s involvement would strengthen the bureaucracy and increase the distance between residents and decision makers. Residents consider the 25% profit-sharing to be disproportionate to their contributions in opening and maintaining the area since the early 1980s. In addition, restrictions on economic activities such as tent rentals, food stalls, and tour guide services are considered to stifle creativity and reduce household income. Rejection has come from KTHW members who believe that the negotiations were one-sided and did not fully involve community representatives. On the other hand, Perhutani explained that the new system was necessary for more transparent management, while PT Iwala emphasized the need for private involvement to ensure efficiency and promote professional tourism.

In the 2022–2023 negotiations, several key issues were addressed, including profit sharing, the validity period of the cooperation agreement, institutional legality, and land use under forest stands. The community proposed extending the cooperation period from five to twenty years to ensure investment certainty, but Perhutani agreed only to a five-year periodic evaluation system. The community also proposed recognition of village cooperatives as legitimate economic institutions, but Perhutani rejected this because only LMDH is recognized in the forestry administration system. PT Iwala's position here is ambivalent: on the one hand, the company acts as a mediator between residents and Perhutani; on the other

hand, it has an interest in maintaining business stability and therefore tends to follow Perhutani's decisions.

The next phase, which began in 2022, shows a shift from protection-based collaboration to a more concrete economic partnership. Through a Cooperation Agreement (PKS) between PT Palawi, Perhutani, and the community, a more measurable profit-sharing system emerged: IDR 3,000 per tourist ticket for LMDH and IDR 12,000 for PT Palawi, totaling IDR 15,000. Although it has sparked debate over the fairness of benefit distribution, the existence of the PKS marks the birth of a collaborative economic model grounded in formal legality. In practice, the community, through KTHW, remains the leading actor in the field in managing tickets, cleanliness, security, and tourism promotion. From 2023 to 2025, this form of collaboration will be expanded to other sectors, such as coffee and forest honey, strengthening the community's economic dimension while reinforcing its position as an active subject in forest resource management.

From 2023 to 2025, the implementation of the negotiation results will proceed with various adjustments. Perhutani remains the primary regulator, PT Iwala focuses on commercial and promotional aspects, while the community carries out operational roles in the field. Formally, this collaboration appears stable, but at the grassroots level, social and economic tensions persist. Some residents feel that the results they receive are not commensurate with their workload and contribution to the preservation of the area. Meanwhile, Perhutani considers that the existence of the PKS has created legal certainty and that the community now has a more precise position as a legitimate partner of the state.

Despite facing structural inequality, the Tepian community continues to negotiate its position through informal and adaptive channels. The Tepian community has sufficient social capital to mitigate the potential for open conflict. Local values such as mutual assistance, deliberation, and avoidance of physical confrontation serve as informal mechanisms that maintain social stability despite structural pressures. Disputes related to resource distribution or operational tasks are resolved through deliberation or informal mediation among the head of the farmer group, community leaders, and Perhutani field officers. Local cultural factors such as cooperation, deliberation, and the equal division of labor serve as informal mechanisms in the community's conflict transformation process. Such practices demonstrate that communities have culturally-based conflict transformation mechanisms that are still practiced at the grassroots level, as stated by informant AE below:

"Differences of opinion often arise in terms of profit sharing or assignment, but they tend to be resolved collectively without escalating the conflict. If there is a problem, it is usually resolved on the same day; after work, we talk again to find a solution."

(Interview with AE, September 14, 2024)

Empirically, the entire negotiation and collaboration scheme that has developed in Megam from the 1980s to 2025 is a direct product of Perhutani's initiatives and policies, as the holder of the mandate to manage state forest areas (Table 3). The establishment of LMDH, the appointment of PT Iwala, and the enactment of PKS are all part of the state corporation's strategy to regulate access to and benefits from forests through legal cooperation mechanisms. Meanwhile, the community continues to negotiate for participation so that the collaboration is not only administrative in nature, but also reflects social justice and recognition of their history of involvement in protecting the forest area.

Table 3: Negotiation Agenda Between the Community and Perhutani

Period/Time	Negotiation Agenda	Dynamics and Achievements
1980–2000	Community access to forests and confirmation of area boundaries.	Unauthorized land use was still tolerated; misinterpretation of “selling plants” as “selling land” arose; tensions between traditional rights and state authority increased; Perhutani began to tighten control.
2000–2016	Initial negotiations and establishment of tourism institutions.	Perhutani opened informal communication; LMDH (official) and KTHW (community initiative) were formed; institutional dualism and power asymmetry emerged; the first formal negotiations were not yet equal.
2018–2021	Consolidation of the area and handling of external conflicts.	Illegal claims of approximately 360 hectares triggered cross-party coordination; the community was involved as guardians of the area without direct economic benefits; collaboration grew out of security needs, not equality.
2022–2023	Institutionalization of collaboration through a cooperation agreement (Perhutani–PT Iwala–community).	The formal cooperation agreement was reached on a 70/25/5 profit-sharing scheme; the community rejected the proportions as one-sided. PT Iwala became the technical mediator; community resistance grew stronger through village forums.
2024–2025	Adjustments to collaboration and strengthening of multi-stakeholder dialogue.	Communication forums expanded; community cooperatives formed to strengthen bargaining position; residents involved in annual planning; collaboration more stable, but participatory equality not yet fully achieved.

Discussion

Collaboration as an approach to conflict transformation

Conflict transformation in ecotourism management in the Megam state forest area shows that collaboration is not only the result of an agreement but also a dynamic process continuously negotiated among the state, the private sector, and local communities. As emphasized by Lederach (2003), conflict transformation is not merely about stopping disputes but changing the underlying social relations and power distribution structures. In this context, Perhutani uses a collaborative approach to reorganize forest management relations from unilateral control practices towards limited recognition of community involvement. However, this collaboration remains a partial transformation, as it has not eliminated historical inequalities in access, participation, and profit-sharing.

Perhutani’s collaborative approach since the early 2000s represents an institutional adaptation to local social complexity. Gray (1989) emphasized that collaboration arises when problems cannot be solved unilaterally and require pursuing common goals through negotiation. In the case of Megam, administrative control over forest areas proved ineffective amid economic pressures from the community and rising demand for living space. Through the establishment of the Village Forest Community Institution (LMDH) and the signing of a Cooperation Agreement (PKS) with PT Iwala, Perhutani sought to formalize multi-

stakeholder involvement. However, field results show that this collaboration still maintains the old hierarchy, in which Perhutani acts as the central controller, PT Iwala as the technical implementer, and the community as the field operator. These conditions show that collaboration has only reached a transitional stage towards proper participatory governance.

From the perspective of socioecological conflict transformation, as explained by Maring (2015), changes in forest management relations require a shift from a culture of control to a culture of negotiation. In the context of Megam, community resistance to the 70%–25%–5% profit-sharing scheme is not merely an economic demand, but a form of social articulation of historical inequalities in state forest control. This rejection reflects a new awareness that recognition of community contributions must be commensurate with their decades-long role in protecting and managing the area. Collaboration then becomes a new political space in which communities renegotiate their social position, legitimacy, and rights to resources previously controlled by the state. In line with Lederach's (2003) view, conflict transformation can only be achieved when power relations are transformed into partnerships grounded in interdependence and justice.

The negotiation process between 2022 and 2025 revealed two paths of collaboration: formal and informal. The formal path was realized through an institutional framework regulated by Perhutani. In contrast, the informal path developed through community forums, cooperative initiatives, and village meetings, enabling communities to negotiate their aspirations outside the official structure. This approach aligns with the theory of multi-stakeholder collaboration (Pujiyono et al., 2019), which emphasises the importance of non-formal deliberative spaces in balancing power relations among actors. The existence of PT Iwala strengthens the technical functions of tourism management, but, at the same time, narrows the space for community economic autonomy. This ambivalent position gives rise to a procedural form of collaboration in which conflicts are not eliminated but managed within state-regulated administrative mechanisms.

When viewed from the perspective of collaborative governance theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008), collaboration in Megam is still in its early stages (initial collaboration), characterised by a process of trust-building and the formation of shared understanding after a long period of conflict. Since 2023, there has been a trend towards greater openness as PT Iwala and the village government have begun involving the community in the preparation of annual tourism plans. However, the imbalance in access to information and decision-making shows that this collaboration has not yet reached the stage of institutionalization. Ramos-García et al. (2017) emphasized that the success of ecotourism collaboration depends on a balance between economic benefits and social capacity building. In this case, the Megam community still plays a technical role, with little to no knowledge transfer from the company.

Furthermore, collaboration in Megam reflects an adaptive strategy for addressing socioecological pressures, as explained by Senoaji et al. (2020), in which tenure conflicts can be mitigated through locally agreed environmental services. Profit-sharing mechanisms and community involvement in area monitoring are forms of structural adaptation that maintain social stability. However, from the perspective of transformative learning, the community's experience in the negotiation process also serves as a space for social learning, where it builds critical awareness of the importance of fair and transparent governance. This shows that collaboration is not only technocratic in nature but also a process of social education that changes perspectives on power and rights to natural resources.

The dimension of communication is also an essential factor in conflict transformation.

Referring to Maring et al. (2024), collaboration in Megam is a practice of intercultural communication in which three value systems — state, private, and local community — meet in the same arena. Perhutani views forests as economic assets and administrative spaces; PT Iwala sees them as tourism commodities, while communities view them as living spaces and cultural heritage. These differences in meaning often create epistemic tensions but also open up opportunities for mutual understanding. Reflective and empathetic communication between actors is key to avoiding the reproduction of old conflicts in new forms. Thus, collaboration also serves as an arena for intercultural negotiation, where conservation, economic, and social values are balanced.

Conceptually, collaboration in conflict transformation in Megam can be understood as a process of co-evolution between social and institutional systems. Perhutani, PT Iwala, and the community are all adapting to changes in the evolving economic and regulatory context. This aligns with Nistyantara et al. (2011), who viewed collaboration as evolving from a control system to a power-sharing system. Although not yet fully equal, collaboration in Megam has opened space for more adaptive and participatory patterns of relations, in which social stability is no longer maintained through unilateral control but through the negotiation of common interests.

The theoretical and practical implications of this study indicate that a collaborative approach to ecotourism conflict transformation can be applied in other regions, taking into account local social and institutional contexts. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on collaborative governance by showing that collaboration is only effective when supported by social learning and cross-value communication. In practice, implementation in other locations needs to pay attention to three aspects: first, inclusive institutional design to avoid reinforcing the dominance of certain actors; second, increasing the community's capacity for negotiation and economic management; and third, communication mechanisms that value local knowledge in decision-making.

However, this study has limitations in scope and generalizability. Findings from a single case study cannot be applied universally without adaptation to the social characteristics, tenure history, and institutional capacity in other regions. In addition, some empirical data describe the post-2020 situation, which remains dynamic, so the sustainability of the collaboration cannot yet be assessed in the long term. Therefore, further longitudinal research is needed to determine the extent to which the partnership can be transformed into truly equitable and socially just governance.

Conclusion

This study confirms that ecotourism management in the Megam state forest area reflects the long dynamic of conflict transformation towards multi-stakeholder collaboration. The conflict, which has its roots in the 1980s, stemmed from differences in views on access rights and forest land ownership between local communities, Perhutani, and the private sector. Tensions developed due to economic inequality, state administrative claims, and weak community institutions in dealing with modern forestry regulations. However, social change, financial pressures, and demands for environmental sustainability have encouraged collaborative efforts to find a more equitable and adaptive form of co-governance that is responsive to local realities.

The results of the study show that collaboration in Megam did not proceed linearly but rather through a long, multi-layered negotiation process. Perhutani, as the holder of the mandate to control state forests, initiated a series of partnership schemes from the early 2000s until the formal cooperation agreement with PT Iwala in 2022. These schemes became essential milestones in the transformation of inter-actor relations, although they still showed imbalances in the distribution of benefits and participation. On the other hand, the community demonstrated adaptive capacity by forming cooperatives and village forums, thereby strengthening their bargaining position and expanding the scope of negotiation.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the view that collaboration is a practical approach to transforming natural resource conflicts, as it can shift social relations from domination to dialogue and from tension to interdependence. Drawing on perspectives in conflict transformation and collaborative governance, collaboration in Megam functions as a social arena that enables the building of trust, shared learning, and critical awareness of the values of justice and sustainability.

In practical terms, these findings emphasize that successful collaboration depends on three main factors: (1) institutional inclusivity that ensures community representation; (2) transparency in the distribution of economic benefits; and (3) cross-value communication that respects local perspectives. Its application in other regions requires adaptation to the local socioecological context. However, the limitations of studies focusing on a single location underscore the need for further cross-regional and long-term research to test the sustainability of collaboration amid social, economic, and national forestry policy changes.

Ethics approval

The Directorate of Research and Community Service at Budi Luhur University reviewed and declared this research to be ethically sound and not harmful to humans and other living creatures as research subjects, as evidenced by the Research Ethics Approval Letter No. S/UBL/DRPM/000/007/07/24 issued on July 31, 2024. This statement is supported by research permits from competent and authorized parties/institutions, namely the Bogor Regency Government No. 000.9.2/538.Bakesbangpol dated July 30, 2024, the Megam Village Government No. 140.189.Pem dated July 29, 2024, and Perhutani KPH Bogor No. 0356/016.5/BGR/2024 dated July 23, 2024.

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