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Contested Waters: Power, Access, and Struggles over the Cipasauran River in Serang Regency, Banten

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Abstract

This study examines the mechanisms of community access to water from the Cipasauran River, Serang Regency, Banten, which has been disrupted by damming activities carried out by PT Krakatau Tirta Industri (PT KTI). Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, this research maps the distribution of water resource benefits, identifies the mechanisms used by various actors to obtain, control, and sustain access, and analyses the power dynamics that shape these mechanisms. Findings reveal that companies predominantly benefit from the river's water resources through multiple access mechanisms, thereby restricting local communities' access. Additionally, ecological changes caused by the dam have further exacerbated these restrictions. The study concludes that the allocation of Cipasauran River's water resources is largely skewed in favour of the company's interests, facilitated by legal and relational-structural mechanisms. Furthermore, asymmetric power relations among actors have reinforced disparities in water access.

Keywords: *Access, Social Movements, Ecological Changes, Water River*

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Introduction

Water resources management, in practice, certainly involves various actors and unequal power dynamics (Bakker, 2005). One example is the management of the Cipasauran River, a vital water source for local communities in Serang Regency, Banten. This study examines inequalities in local communities' access to water resources from the Cipasauran River, which has triggered a social movement to fight for their right to access the river's water. The river serves as a crucial resource for the community, providing water for bathing, washing, and supporting agricultural and fishing activities. However, the construction of a dam by PT Krakatau Tirta Industri (PT KTI) has disrupted the community's access to river water and restricted various activities that depend on these water resources. Consequently, the struggle for access to the Cipasauran River water flow, which is an important part of the community, is actualized through social movements to get the benefits they should get. This study seeks to investigate how access mechanisms are controlled, the role of corporate and state actors, and how local communities mobilise in response.

Previous research has shown that water resources are vital factors that trigger conflict, inequality, and social, economic, and political impacts. Based on prior studies on the socio-ecological impacts of water management, we classify this topic into three main categories. *First*, studies on water resources management through the perspective of policy implementation (Hadipuro & Putri, 2020; Anand, 2017; Benedikter, 2014) highlights the state's vital role

in governing and distributing water resources. The lack of transparency, accountability, and public participation in water management has resulted in inequalities in water distribution experienced by communities.

Second, river water management issues that involve private actors (Strauß, 2011; Wardana, 2017; Bakker, 2005). Previous research shows that water resources management often involves the private sector. The neoliberalisation process in water resources management tends to only benefit large investors who have capital, technology, knowledge, and market capacity, resulting in negative impacts on society and the environment, including pollution.

Third, the social impacts of water resources conflicts involving informal actors (Sultana, 2011; Crow & Sultana, 2002; Pouramin et al., 2020; Syafi'i & Gayatri, 2019). These studies explain how informal actors, with gender, religious and cultural backgrounds, shape access to water resources. Although they often have limited access to adequate water resources, informal actors can form a significant collective force to gain access to water resources.

While existing studies have explored the roles of policy frameworks, private sector involvement, and informal actors in water resources management, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these elements interact and collectively influence access to water resources, particularly in contested regions such as Cipasauran. This study addresses this gap by examining the interplay between these actors—government policies, corporate practices, and informal networks—and analysing

how their interactions shape access to and control over the Cipasauran River's water resources.

Through a political ecology lens, this research examines the power dynamics, governance structures, and socio-economic inequalities that underpin water resource distribution in contested areas. Furthermore, it explores the role of local communities, particularly marginalised groups, in resisting and negotiating water access, providing a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of water governance. The unequal distribution of Cipasauran River's water flow, shaped by the differing capacities of actors to secure access, has triggered a social movement among local communities striving to reclaim their rights and benefits from the river's water.

Access, Power, and Contentious Politics in Water Governance

This section outlines the theoretical framework, discussing the concept of access and power dynamics in natural resource governance. Ribot and Peluso (2003) explain comprehensively distinguish between 'property' or property rights and 'access'. 'Property' refers to ownership and control relationships over resources that are legitimately recognised by institutions. Meanwhile, access analysis examines individuals' ability to utilise and benefit from resources, whether through legitimate or illegitimate means. Ribot and Peluso (2003) highlight two key aspects of access. First, access can be either legal (rights-based) or illegal. Second, access is structural and relational, encompassing

access to technology, capital, labor, knowledge, authority, identity, and social relations. This implies that an actor's ability to benefit from natural resources can be obtained from various mechanisms carried out by the actor.

In Cipasauran, this framework examines how actors such as the provincial government, PT KTI, and local communities navigate water access. PT KTI secures legal access through state permits, whereas local communities rely on informal mechanisms such as social networks and traditional practices. Power imbalances are evident, as corporate actors leverage capital and political influence, whereas marginalised groups rely on collective action and local knowledge. This reveals how access mechanisms, shaped by power dynamics and governance structures, determine who benefits from the river and who is excluded.

Contentious Politics as an Access Mechanism

The unequal access to Cipasauran River water has sparked a social resistance among dependent communities, challenging the dominance of powerful actors such as PT KTI and the provincial government. This collective effort, termed 'contentious politics', involves organised actions—such as protests, advocacy, and legal challenges—to contest resource distribution and advocate for equitable access. Communities seek to hold powerholders accountable and reshape water governance to prioritise public interests over corporate control (Tarrow & Tilly, 2009).

In Cipasauran, contentious politics arises from the exclusion of local communities in decision-making and the prioritisation of corporate interests over communal needs. The government plays a dual role, serving as an arbiter, a target, or a plaintiff, depending on its alignment with corporate or community demands. While the provincial government grants permits to PT KTI, it also faces community claims for justice and equitable water access. Through campaigns, collective action, and advocacy, communities mobilise to challenge corporate control, leveraging legal and political opportunities to defend public interests (Tarrow & Tilly, 2009). This highlights contentious politics as a tool to address inequities in water governance.

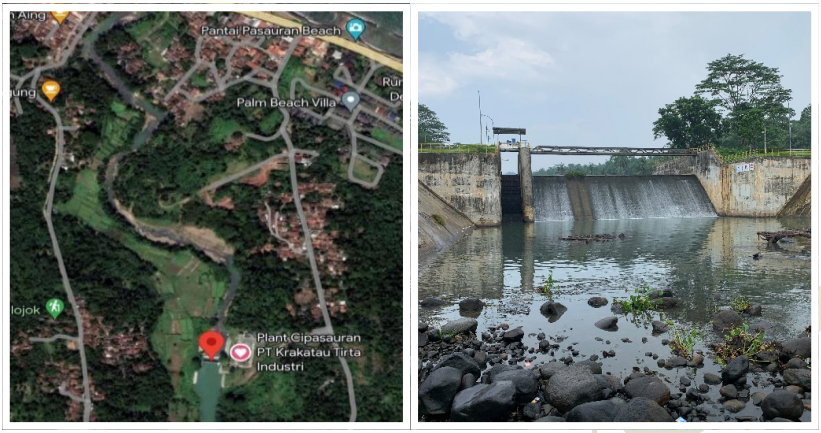
A political economy analysis is essential for understanding water conflicts in contested areas such as the Cipasauran River, as it connects economic power structures to water governance, revealing how these structures perpetuate unequal access. First, it identifies and maps the flow of benefits from the river, showing which actors—state institutions, private entities, or informal networks—capture the most value. Second, it uncovers the mechanisms these actors use to secure and maintain access—such as legal frameworks, financial investments, or coercive practices— which often marginalise weaker groups. Third, it examines the power relations behind these mechanisms, exposing how economic and political asymmetries determine who benefits and who is excluded. For example, powerful actors may shape policies or exploit informal systems to secure water access, leaving marginalised communities with little recourse. By connecting these dynamics

to broader economic structures, political economy analysis offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the roots of water conflicts and provides insights for fostering more equitable and sustainable water governance (Ribot & Peluso, 2003: 160-161).

Research Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews, direct field observations, and document analysis to examine the governance of Cipasauran River water resources and their socio-ecological implications. The Cipasauran River is an interesting thing to selected as the case study due to its critical role in local livelihoods and the ongoing conflicts over access to its water resources. Examining this case provides valuable insights into the broader challenges of water governance, environmental justice, and resource inequality.

Figure 1. River Flow Map and Pasauran Dam Point



Source: Google Earth, 2024; Author, 2023

The case study approach in this research aims to provide an in-depth analysis of incidents, relationships, experiences, or processes that occur from various points of view. Case studies generally prioritise depth over breadth, as they focus on specific events (Gerring, 2004: 352).

This research adopts a case study approach to examine the power relations and mechanisms that shape access to the Cipasauran River, a vital resource for local communities. It enables in-depth data exploration, detailed event analysis, and a nuanced understanding of water access dynamics. The study explores the intersection of economic, political, and social factors in shaping disparities in water governance, while also revealing strategies employed by various actors to control resources. By focusing on Cipasauran, this study provides micro-level insights into broader water conflicts, informing equitable and sustainable water management practices (Denscombe, 2017: 38; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Findings and Discussion

Access Domination by Company

This study examines the distribution of access to Cipasauran River water resources, focusing on the mechanisms through which different actors, particularly corporations, secure and control these benefits. To identify each actor's capacity to obtain benefits, it is essential to examine the mechanisms they employ. First, each actor's capacity is assessed based on legal access, including regulations, arrangements, and licences granted by the competent authority. Second,

access is shaped by actors through relational and structural mechanisms (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). This section outlines how the dominance of access owned by companies causes inequality of access for local communities, which then gives rise to social movements.

Field findings show that the company (PT KTI) is the dominant entity in controlling the flow of benefits from the Cipasauran River water resources through various mechanisms, both legal and structural-relational-based access. Through cooperation with the government, the company can expand its operations and exploit Cipasauran River water for utilisation, extraction, and commercial processing as a traded commodity. *First*, the legality-based access mechanism highlights how PT KTI's utilisation of raw water is considered legal or legitimate based on a permit issued by the Public Works and Spatial Planning Office, specifically *Surat Izin Penggunaan dan/atau Pemanfaatan Air* (SIPPA) No. 570/4/SIPPA-DPMPTSP/II/2018 (Water Usage and/or Utilisation Permit Letter). The government plays a central role in reinforcing corporate water access through licensing mechanisms that prioritise industrial needs over community access. The issuance of the Permit Letter reflects a broader trend of resource privatisation, in which regulatory frameworks favour corporate actors over local communities. This enables companies like PT KTI to freely manage, utilise, and extract benefits from the Cipasauran River's water flow, often at the expense of local access and equity. This dynamic illustrates how state policies and legal instruments institutionalise inequalities in water governance, granting

corporations significant control over vital resources while marginalising the water needs of local communities (PT KTI, 2023).

Second, structural-relational-based access. As part of PT Krakatau Steel which has various subsidiaries, PT KTI collaborates with PT Chandra Asri Petrochemical (CAP) Group to ensure the availability of raw water for the industry and Cilegon City. In terms of structural-relational access mechanisms, this study outlines PT KTI's technological capabilities and its ability to secure government licences. First, this water industry company prossesses the capacity and access to advanced technology for managing and utilising Cipasauran River water.

Figure 2. Krenceng and Cidanau Water Treatment Plants

Source: krakatautirta.co.id, 2023

PT KTI has Water Treatment Plants (IPA) in various water source areas, one of which is the Krenceng IPA, with an installed capacity of 2,000 litres per second. Krenceng IPA operates by treating water from the Cidanau River using four pump units with a capacity of 1,000-3,500 m^3 per hour. The water is channelled through a 1,400 mm transmission pipe with a length of approximately 27.2 km to the water treatment plant in Krenceng. The Cidanau Water Treatment Plant, which began operating in 2018, processes raw water sourced from the Cipasauran Dam. Water is delivered using three intake pump units with a capacity of 400 litres per second each. The Cipasauran Dam, operational since 2017, is 30 metres wide and 6.5 metres high (PT KTI, 2023; Bayuadji et al., 2020; Rau et al., 2015; Septiani, 2012).

Figure 3. Diameter Transmitter Pipe Line (1.4 metres) and Pump House (Pump Station)

Source: Krakatau.co.id, 2023

Second, access to authority or government is instrumental in facilitating the expansion of raw water industrialisation as a commodity. Through PT KTI, planning is carried out to ensure the availability of water for the people of Cilegon City and the industries in the area, which are the main pillars of the regional economy of Banten Province.

The management of water resources by PT KTI is legally valid, as it holds a licence from the relevant government. Legal legitimacy also refers to Law Number 17 of 2019 concerning Water Resources, which was approved on October 15, 2019, and later replaced by the Job Creation Law/Government Regulation in Lieu of Law (Perppu Number 2 of 2022) on December 30, 2022. This regulation explains that the state guarantees people's rights to water and regulates licensing for the use of water resources. However, in reality, the permit issued by the government to PT KTI has resulted in inequality, with the community facing difficulties in accessing and benefiting from the water of the Cipasauran River (PT Krakatau Steel, 2023).

As a legal entity, the company has significant power to influence the governance of Cipasauran River water resources. Government regulations and permits create opportunities for companies to extract and utilise Cipasauran River water resources. With the support of adequate capital, technology, and knowledge, companies have strong access to intervene in the utilisation and management of Cipasauran River water resources.

The dominance and presence of companies controlling the Cipasauran River have disrupted local communities' access to the resource, while also triggering negative impacts on

the river's ecology. This situation reflects inequality in water resource management, where communities surrounding the river face challenges in accessing the benefits that should be fairly accessible.

Access Mechanisms by Local People

The configuration of actors involved in the management of Cipasauran River's water resources illustrates how the benefits of these resources are distributed (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). The local people of Pasauran Village, with their diverse gender, economic backgrounds, and daily activities, demonstrate the importance of access to water. The social-ecological conditions of the community illustrate their long-standing dependence on and attachment to the river's water resources.

PT KTI, as a legal entity with significant power, capital, and knowledge capacity, has great influence in the governance of Cipasauran River water resources. Regulations and licences from the government open up opportunities for the company to utilise these resources, supported by adequate capital, technology, and knowledge. The political-economic approach serves as the primary basis for decision-making, prioritising economic aspects, particularly the industrial sector in Banten Province. However, this approach ignores the social impact on local communities who rely heavily on the availability of Cipasauran River water for their economic activities and lives.

River water is a vital resource in human life, as it reflects how civilisations are built, shaping social and cultural identities,

trade and economic routes, and serving as a source of life for the daily needs of the community (Gialis et al., 2011). The Cipasauran River plays an important role in supporting the daily activities of the people of Pasauran Village, such as bathing, washing, serving as a resting place for fishing boats, irrigating fish farming ponds, and supporting the agricultural sector.

The ability to benefit from natural resources is determined by structural-relational factors through politico-economic and cultural frameworks (Ribot & Peluso, 2003: 164). The access mechanism in this case is carried out by the community around the Cipasauran River in benefiting from river water resources by using water pump technology. This technology-based access is owned by a small part of the community by collecting water using a pump machine that is channeled through a small pipe. However, due to financial constraints, not all communities have access to water pump technology. Consequently, they rely on river water for activities such as washing, bathing, and other activities related to the water usages.

Most communities still access river water directly from the stream. However, they are facing a significant reduction in water discharge due to the PT KTI dam damming the Cipasauran River. This has disrupted community access as the amount of water has decreased and the water quality has become increasingly polluted with silt due to siltation.

Figure 4. Pasauran Village Community Access Using Pipes and Pumping Machines and Pumping Machine

Source: Field Observations and River Cruising, December 6, 2023

The disruption of the local community's access to river water resources triggered the surrounding community to hold hearings and request mediation from the Pasauran Village Government to realise the commitments promised by PT KTI.

Figure 5. Protest of Pasauran People

Source: Journalist of Fakta Banten, 2023

Access to the village government authority is an effort made by the community considering that the village government is a policy maker that plays a role in determining how Cipasauran River water resources are managed.

However, an interview with the Head of Pasauran Village Government on January 5, 2024, showed that the village government is faced with a dilemma, as it lacks a strong position in determining how the Cipasauran River water management should impact the welfare of the people of Pasauran Village. The management policy of Cipasauran River water resources falls under the authority of the provincial government, limiting the role of the village government.

Unequal Power Relations

The relational dynamics and networks formed in the struggle for access to Cipasauran River water resources reveal how local communities contest the domination of both corporate actors and the state over this vital resource (Bakker, 2005; Tarrow & Tilly, 2009). Central to this struggle is the fragmented governance structure, where power asymmetries between different levels of government—provincial, district, and village—play a critical role in shaping access. The provincial government, as the highest authority, holds exclusive power to grant permits, such as the one issued to PT KTI, enabling the company to utilise the river's water resources under the guise of contributing to regional economic growth.

This top-down licensing mechanism effectively sidelines the district and village governments, which lack the authority to influence or regulate the management and utilisation of the river's resources. As a result, the provincial government's prioritisation of corporate interests through its permitting authority undermines the ability of district and village governments to protect

community water rights, creating a governance gap that exacerbates inequalities. This fragmentation not only reinforces corporate control over the river but also weakens the capacity of local governments to advocate for the needs of the Pasauran Village community, leaving them vulnerable to displacement and marginalisation in the allocation of water resources.

Historically, field data obtained from an interview with the Protest Action Coordinator on December 4, 2023, described the condition of the river water before the raw water industry activities. At that time, the community carried out many activities in the river with good water quality and sufficient quantity, even during the long dry season, because the Cipasauran River flow came from several springs in Banten.

The inherent cultural values between the environment and society are important considerations to ensure that the distribution of benefits over natural resources, both economically and in terms of the materiality of the natural resources themselves, takes place fairly without disrupting community activities on river water (Escobar, 2006: 9). In the conflict over the water resources of the Cipasauran River, both the government and companies prioritise economic growth, while overlooking the cultural aspects of the communities that depend on river's water.

The socio-ecological relationship between humans and the environment is an important aspects in describing how ecological change can occur (Escobar, 2006). In ecological change, power relations always exist between those who have the capacity to take and utilise natural resources from the environment. In addition, the social conditions of society often

illustrate the unequal power relations between capitalists, who have capital, knowledge, technology, and communities facing limited resources.

Women in Pasauran Village have a strong identity and cultural attachment to the Cipasauran River water. Their awareness of access to the benefits of river water reflects the socio-ecological impacts of PT KTI's water treatment, which has led to ecological changes and unequal access for women. This awareness shows that natural resource governance not only affects the environment and economy, but also impacts cultural values in the community (Escobar, 2006).

Figure 6. Women Activities on The Cipasauran River

Source: Author, 2023

The picture illustrates the daily activities of women in Pasauran Village, who rely on the Cipasauran River for water. The availability and quality of water greatly affects their lives, as most people still do not have toilets at home and often use river water for bathing, washing, and other activities. After the dam operated, women became one of the groups most affected by the ecological changes in Cipasauran River water. According to data from the Serang Regency Government, there are 4,032 women living in villages surrounding the Cipasauran River, making them a critical demographic affected by these changes.

Beyond being victims of ecological disruption, women in Pasauran Village have also emerged as active participants in resistance efforts. They have organised direct protests, voiced their grievances, and engaged in direct advocacy to raise awareness and mobilise other women in the community. Through these actions, women are not only challenging the inequities imposed by the dam's operation but also asserting their agency in the broader struggle for equitable access to water. Their involvement highlights the intersection of gender, ecology, and social justice, underscoring the vital role women play in advocating for sustainable and inclusive water governance in Pasauran Village.

Table 1. Data on the Number of Women in Affected 2023

Data on the Number of Women 2023	
Pasauran Village	**Umbul Tanjung Village**
1,616 People	2,416 People
Total: 4,032 People	

Source: Data Proccesed by Author from Sub-district Government of Cinangka, 2023

People Responses to Unequal Access

The disrupted access to water resources in Pasauran Village, caused by the activities of the raw water industry, triggered the formation of a social movement aimed at regaining the benefits of the Cipasauran River water. This movement is collective in nature, emerging from the community's awareness of the injustices caused by the operation of power, which results in inequality in the management of Cipasauran River water resources. This social movement involves various actors, referred to as 'agencies' and 'structures', who participate in determining strategies (Savirani & Wardhani, 2022: 492).

The local community protests demanded several things, including: 1) the availability of clean water for daily needs due to the disruption of access to river water, 2) coordination regarding the risks associated with opening the dam gates, 3) compensation and assistance for affected communities, and 4) employment opportunities for local communities in industries that extract, utilise, and trade their water resources (Banten Top, 2022).

The social movement of the Pasauran Village community is carried out by gathering ideas from the surrounding community with various occupational backgrounds and the community in general. Then, this collective effort led to the formation of the Community Care for the Environment (KOMPLIN), a forum that critiques the ecological changes in Cipasauran River water. It serves as a public platform for the community to protest against PT KTI, as they are affected by the operation of the Cipasauran dam. Community social movements are also carried out by paying attention to political opportunities in the network formed by the community to measure the strength of the movement, given the unequal relational relations between the community and the government and the company.

It is this unequal access to natural resources that triggers collective efforts from the community to make claims on resources through protests, which Tarrow refers to as Contentious Politics and Social Movements (Tarrow, 2009). The narrative that developed in the community was that access to Cipasauran River water was considered important to support their daily and economic activities. This builds the community's awareness of the importance of Cipasauran River's water resources to their livelihoods.

Ecological changes to the Cipasauran River due to PT KTI's use of river water through a dam and pump station, have disrupted the community's access to their only water resource. Awareness of the importance of maintaining such access extended to various levels of society, including youth, women, farmers, fishermen, and some local leaders. The idea

emerged as an attempt by the community to lay claim to their river's water resources. Despite the relational weakness of the community, they continue to push the government and protest against the company to ensure the management of river water for the benefit of the surrounding community.

Farmers are one of the other actors whose economic activities cannot be separated from the Cipasauran River water resources. An interview with one of the farmers in Pasauran Village on December 7, 2023, revealed that although there are not many farmers in Pasauran and Umbul Tanjung Villages—because the agricultural sector is no longer attractive and promising for the younger generation and the conversion of agricultural land into settlements—agriculture remains the main source of income in the village. Rice farming is highly dependent on weather conditions, as the recent dry season has greatly affected agricultural yields. As a result, other initiatives have been undertaken, such as planting commodities like chili.

In addition, agriculture is one of the sectors that is widely practiced by the people of Pasauran and Umbul Tanjung Villages, with 10 farmer groups consisting of around 823 farmers. To support the productivity of this sector, Cipasauran River water is essential for irrigating agricultural land. Farmers' access to river water, which is used to manage their land, is an important aspect in understanding how farmers are able to utilise and benefit from the water resources of the Cipasauran River.

Table 2. Data on the Number of Farmers in the Affected 2023

Total Farmer Data 2023	
Pasauran Village	**Umbul Tanjung Village**
451 People	372 People
Total: 823 People	

Source: Data Processed by Author from Sub-district Government of Cinangka, 2023

Figure 7. Overview of Irrigation and Farmer Activities Around Cipasauran River

Source: Author, 2023

The weakness of the farmers' network in organising a collective struggle to gain access to the Cipasauran River water causes farmers around the river to have difficulties in obtaining adequate irrigation for their land. The company's intervention in river water utilisation did not encourage farmers to realise the importance of collective efforts, unlike rural communities in the Andes who managed to form farmer communities to maintain their access to water resources. In these communities, local autonomy and collective action are critical to sustaining water management practices. Community-based water rights systems have historically allowed individuals to access water collectively, thus fostering a sense of community identity. These findings highlight the need for grassroots organisations to engage in multi-scale politics to effectively advocate for their rights. The success of grassroots movements often depends on their ability to form alliances and navigate different levels of governance (Hoogesteger & Verzijl, 2015).

The utilisation of Cipasauran River water by PT KTI triggered the struggle of fishermen to maintain their access to the river, which they rely on as a place to rest their boats. Fishermen are one of the occupational choices taken by most of the people of Pasauran Village and around the Cipasauran River, because there are 270 fishermen and geographically, the village is located close to the coastline and the boat route in and out of the Cipasauran River. This river is a downstream area that becomes a boat route and a place for fishermen to anchor their boats.

Figure 8. Firhermen Activities on The Cipasauran River

Source: Author, 2023

The fishermen in Pasauran Village use the Cipasauran River as a docking area for their boats. However, after the construction of the dam, their activities have been disrupted due to the blocking of the river water as the water level has decreased. In addition, the opening of the dam gates often released mud and large rocks and damaged several fishing boats, even causing some boats to drift away and disappear.

Table 3. Data on the Number of Fishermen in Affected

Data on the Number of Fishermen 2023	
Pasauran Village	**Umbul Tanjung Village**
63 People	217 People
Total: 270 People	

Source: Data Processed by Author from Sub-district Government of Cinangka, 2023

The protest action carried out by the community around the Cipasauran River by blocking the company's entrance was the culmination of various efforts made without sufficient results. They refused to allow the company's workers to enter and opposed the company's activities of extracting, processing, and utilising river water. The protest movement aims to question the disruption of the community's access to river water due to the company's dam that changes the ecological conditions of the river.

The response of the people of Pasauran Village, who contested their ideas against the authority of policymakers and companies regarding the disruption of their access to Cipasauran River water, illustrates how community social relations shape environmental governance and influence each other. The people of Pasauran Village, who have limited access to river water resources, are excluded from the flow of benefits. This condition has triggered the community to protest and implement various strategies to regain access to, or benefits from, these water resources.

The community protests faced various obstacles and challenges. First, the company employed repressive actions, including mobilising a retired law enforcement officer to obstruct and prevent the community from protesting and blocking the company's entrance. Secondly, the community's limited knowledge in organising the movement led to disorganisation and fragmentation. For example, farmers and fishermen were reluctant to join the action, as they considered it dangerous and potentially harmful to the community. Thirdly, this action did not involve experienced organisations such as WALHI. To strengthen the social

movement led by the community, collaboration and networking with broader, more competent NGOs are necessary to advocate for issues related to the unequal access to water for the people of Pasauran village. This could also encourage the government to form policies that are more equitable in water governance.

To enhance the analysis, lessons from similar cases in other regions can offer valuable insights. For example, in the case of the Citarum River in West Java, communities were able to successfully pressure policymakers through well-organised coalitions, including local NGOs, environmental groups, and international organisations. These coalitions leveraged media campaigns, legal advocacy, and grassroots mobilisation to draw national and international attention to the river's pollution and mismanagement. As a result, the government initiated the Citarum Harum programme, a comprehensive effort to rehabilitate the river and address community grievances (Solekhan, 2023). Similarly, in Bolivia, the Cochabamba Water War demonstrated the power of organised social movements in reversing water privatisation policies. Through mass protests, strategic alliances with labor unions, and international solidarity networks, the movement forced the government to cancel its contract with a private water company and restore public control over water resources (Olivera & Lewis, 2004; Assies, 2003).

Drawing from these examples, the Pasauran community could adopt several strategies to strengthen their movement. First, they should prioritise building a broad coalition that includes farmers, fishermen, women's groups, and local leaders to

ensure a unified and inclusive front. Second, partnering with experienced NGOs and advocacy organisations can provide the necessary resources, expertise, and networks to amplify their demands. Third, leveraging media and social platforms to raise awareness about their struggle can attract broader public support and put pressure on the stakeholders.

Impact of Access Mechanisms for Community

The community protest around the Cipasauran River against PT KTI aimed to demand the equitable distribution of clean water for their daily needs. This demand successfully prompted the company to provide eight water containers (*toren*) with a capacity of around 3000 litres. Water distribution is typically carried out three times a day: at 10 am, 4 pm, and 8 pm. This demand became the community's primary response to the ecological changes in the Cipasauran River, as well as their strategy to ensure continued benefit from the river's water resources.

Figure 9. Pipes and Water Storage Provided by PT KTI After the Protest Action

Source: Field Observations on December 4, 2023

Communities around the Cipasauran River also demanded coordination regarding the opening and closing of the dam gate by PT KTI. The dam's activities have raised concerns about potential dangers for the community. The opening of the dam gates without coordination could jeopardise the safety of residents who do activities on the river every day. In addition, it also poses a risk washing away and damaging fishing boats moored along the river. Based on interviews conducted on December 6 and 7, 2023, with the Chief Fisherman and fishermen in the downstream area of the Cipasauran River, it was explained that at least two boats had been damaged due to the unannounced opening of the dam.

Another demand from the community around the Cipasauran River is compensation for the impact of

the changes in river water caused by its utilisation by PT KTI. The company uses Cipasauran River water as a commodity that is traded to meet the raw water needs of industries in Cilegon City. The community considers that the utilisation of Cipasauran River water by PT KTI benefits the company more than the local community. One of the demands that has not been optimally realised is the employment of workers from Pasauran Village. Considering that their river water resources have been taken and traded, the community feels that they have the right to get direct benefits from the management, including the opportunity to work in the PT KTI company, for example as an office boy or security.

Conclusion

The community's efforts to reclaim access to the water resources of the Cipasauran River were driven by collective action, challenging dominant narratives and asserting the critical importance of equitable water access for local livelihoods. These efforts are exemplified in the protests against PT KTI, which can be understood as a form of contentious politics and a broader social movement aimed at resisting corporate control over the river.

The importance of maintaining access to water in the Cipasauran River has become a unifying factor for the community in carrying out social movements. For women, access to water is crucial to support their daily activities and maintain their health. For farmers, water is the primary source for irrigating agricultural land and plantations, while for fishermen, the sustainability of river's water flow is important to maintain water discharge to avoid damage to fishing boats. These three

groups only realised the urgency of their access to Cipasauran River water after company's activities dammed and diverted the water flow.

As the dominant entity, PT KTI accesses the water resources of the Cipasauran River through various mechanisms that primarily benefit the company. This domination has disrupted the daily activities of the community, especially farmers and fishermen, and created unequal power relations between the community, the government, and the company. The community lacks a strong enough position to influence the management of the Cipasauran River's water resources or ensure the fair distribution of its benefits.

The provincial government's centralised authority to issue water permits restricts district and village governments from regulating or advocating for local water rights, thereby marginalising them in decision-making. This fragmented governance reinforces corporate dominance over the Cipasauran River, further sidelining local governments despite their proximity to the affected communities. Communities continue to resist, emphasising systemic challenges and advocating for equitable access to water. This struggle underscores how governance structures that favour provincial and corporate interests exacerbate inequalities. Decentralising authority and empowering local governments are essential for fair and sustainable water management, enabling them to defend community rights and address resource disparities effectively.

The findings of this study share similarities with global cases, such as those presented by Benedikter (2014) and Bakker (2005), which illustrate

how political and economic policies shape water resource management. In these contexts, state-backed privatisation models and neoliberal governance frameworks prioritise corporate interests and market-driven approaches, often at the expense of social and ecological considerations. For instance, in Vietnam, the commodification of water resources under neoliberal policies has marginalised small-scale farmers and rural communities. Similarly, in England and Wales, the privatisation of water services has led to rising costs and reduced accountability, disproportionately affecting low-income households. In the case of Cipasauran, the provincial government's licensing mechanisms and cooperation with PT KTI reflect a neoliberal approach that prioritises economic growth and corporate profits over equitable water access. This has resulted in a stark disparity where the company reaps the benefits of the Cipasauran River's resources, while surrounding communities face increasing difficulties in accessing the water they depend on for their daily needs. These parallels highlight how neoliberal water governance—characterised by privatisation and state-corporate alliances—consistently deepens inequalities in water access and distribution across diverse geographical and political contexts.

This research highlights the important role of the government in determining how the governance of Cipasauran River water resources is carried out. Therefore, the recommendation from this research is that natural resource governance should prioritise inclusivity and social justice by implementing specific mechanisms and policies that

ensure equitable water access for all parties. For instance, governments could establish participatory decision-making frameworks that actively involve local communities, particularly marginalised groups such as women and small-scale farmers, in water management planning and policy formulation. Legal frameworks should be strengthened to mandate transparent and accountable licensing processes, ensuring that water use permits are not disproportionately allocated to corporate actors at the expense of local needs. Additionally, policies such as water user associations or community-based water governance models could be introduced to empower local stakeholders and distribute benefits more equitably. By embedding these mechanisms into governance structures, states can address power imbalances, protect community rights, and foster sustainable and just water resource management.

While this research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of water resource governance in contested areas such as Cipasauran, it has limitations in exploring deeper, more nuanced issues among communities, companies, and the government. Future research should aim to address these gaps by delving into specific areas that remain underexplored. For instance, further research could investigate the role of governance structures at different levels—provincial, district, and village—and how their interactions shape water access and distribution. Additionally, a more in-depth analysis of gender dynamics is necessary to understanding how women—who are disproportionately affected by water scarcity—

engage in resistance efforts and participate in decision-making processes. The environmental impacts of water extraction and management practices—particularly on river ecosystems and biodiversity—warrant closer scrutiny. Finally, exploring the effectiveness of alternative governance models, such as community-based water management or co-management frameworks, could provide practical pathways for achieving more equitable and sustainable water governance. By addressing these areas, future research can provide a more comprehensive and in-depth perspective on the political ecology of water resource governance, contributing to both academic discourse and policy development.

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