

## The Impacts of Commercial Logging on Social-Economy of Communities in Mentawai Islands

*Dampak Penebangan Kayu Komersial terhadap Sosial Ekonomi Masyarakat di Kepulauan Mentawai*

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### ABSTRACT

This research aimed to analyze the effects of commercial logging on the indigenous communities of the Mentawai Islands. Over the past five decades, inhabitants, particularly those residing on Siberut Island, were entangled in a conflict of interest concerning small and large-scale commercial logging activities. The results showed that despite the implementation of regional autonomy in the early 2000s, delegating decision-making authority over natural resource use, local communities and government actively promoted sustainable practices. In the context of the Mentawai Islands, the anticipated outcomes still needed to materialize.

### INTISARI

Studi ini menganalisis bagaimana penebangan kayu komersial di Kepulauan Mentawai telah mempengaruhi dan terus merusak kehidupan masyarakat adat Mentawai di kepulauan tersebut. Penduduk lokal, khususnya yang tinggal di Pulau Siberut, telah terlibat dalam konflik kepentingan terkait penebangan kayu komersial skala kecil dan besar selama lima dekade terakhir. Otonomi daerah, yang menempatkan kekuasaan pengambilan keputusan atas pemanfaatan sumber daya alam di tangan masyarakat lokal dan pemerintah daerah pada awal tahun 2000an, diperkirakan mengarah pada pemanfaatan sumber daya alam yang berkelanjutan. Namun demikian, penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hal tersebut belum terjadi di Kepulauan Mentawai.

## Introduction

The Mentawai Islands, located about 100 km off the west coast of West Sumatra, consist of four main islands, namely Siberut, Sipora, North Pagai, and South Pagai, as well as tens of smaller islands, totalling a little more than 6,011 km<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1). Initially, primary dipterocarp forest, mixed and freshwater swamp, and mangrove forest on the east coast bedecked the entire archipelago (WWF 1980; Walujo et al. 1997). The islands have a high degree of plant and animal endemism due to the geographical isolation from the Sumatran peninsula.

Mentawai Archipelago indigenous inhabitants, known by other Indonesian communities as orang Mentawai, are about 85,000 individuals (BPSKMM 2016). About 200 exogamous, patrilineal clans known as *uma* organize the society (Tulius 2017). Perpetual division, amalgamation, and dissolution processes subject the clans to a constant flux of numerical composition. Initially, the *uma* functioned as economically and politically self-governing

communities without any traditional law-enforcing framework. Every *uma* maintained economic self-sufficiency and intentionally abstained from generating surplus resources. The unit represented an egalitarian structure without strict political hierarchy or organized leadership (Schefold 1988).

Mentawaians traditionally perceive the forest as 'a world beyond,' the habitat of ancestral spirits, an ambiguous realm where maintaining a cosmological balance is most important (Schefold 1988; Tulius & Burman-Hall 2022). Therefore, a large set of regulations, rituals, and taboos accompanied human activity in the forest, such as hunting and collecting forest products, such as timber, fruits, and medicinal plants (Schefold 1988; Ave & Sunito 1990; Tulius & Burman-Hall 2022). Despite the abundance of forest resources and the perception that surplus production was undesirable, traditional Mentawaians extracted only the products and amounts needed for daily personal consumption. Periodic surpluses, occurring seasonally or on specific occasions, served for barter transactions with mainland traders. Additionally, the

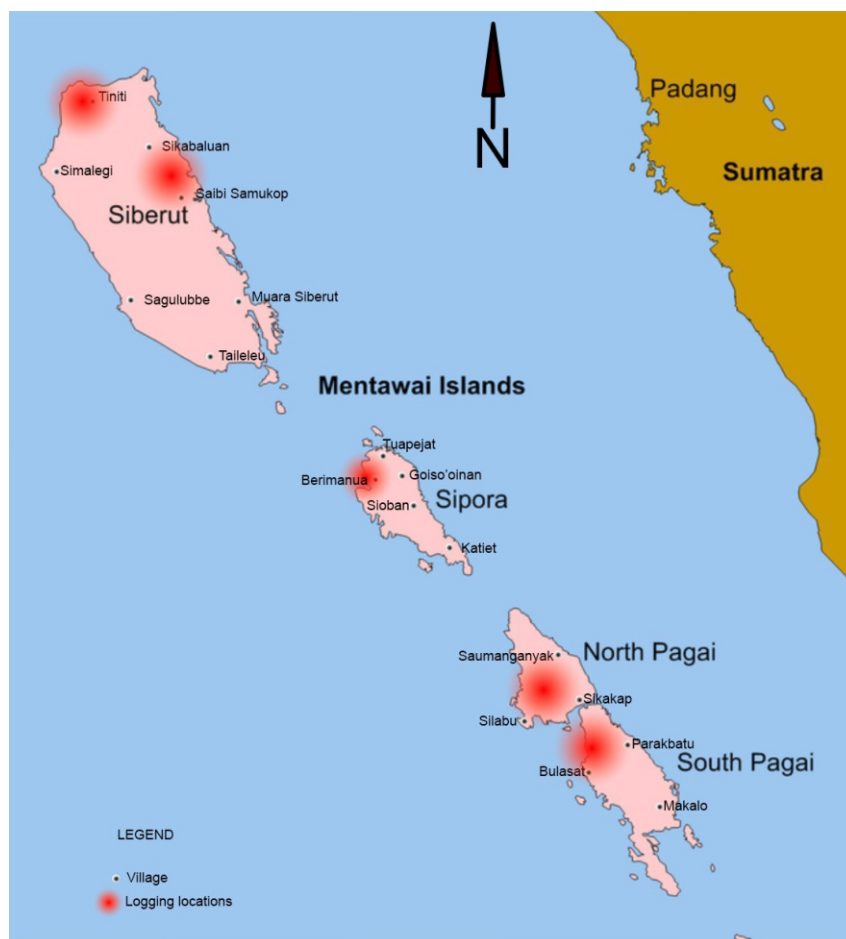


Figure 1. Map of the study site

cultivation of specific cash crops like nutmeg, coconut, and clove aimed to produce final goods destined for trade within local markets.

Around 2000 years ago, first-comers claimed and verified ownership of a particular parcel of land in Mentawai by planting fruit trees. The land is known as *porak punuteteu* (ancestral land) and consists of various pieces of property, such as land with cultivated gardens near the homes and huge unspoiled forests (Tulius 2012). Clans control ancestral estates in the Mentawai Islands, spread over the archipelago. Mentawaians have long practiced swidden agriculture to cultivate areas of land. An extensive literature on shifting cultivation has shown that the practice has a great approach to reducing soil erosion and ecosystem depletion (Conklin 1961; Dove 1983).

Schieffelin (1975) described the technique of felling the trees on top of the crop for a region in Papua. Using a method characterized as 'felling the trees on top of the crop' while deliberately avoiding fire, the agricultural practices adopted are distinctive and one of the most sustainable systems. Mentawaians do not cultivate every parcel of the ancestral land but intentionally maintain sizable portions with undisturbed primary forests. In these pristine forests, diverse varieties and dimensions of timber flourish, constituting an essential element of Mentawaians' cultural heritage. People recognize the forests as essential to the ancestral legacy, showing the profound significance of preserving natural habitats.

From the early 1970s onwards, the Indonesian central government, through the Ministry of Forestry, instigated the issuing of different concessions for commercial logging by dividing the archipelago into different zones and granting permits for commencing logging activities mainly to foreign logging companies. Furthermore, logging activities seriously affected the forests on all the Islands, Sipora and Pagai Islands (Persoon & Schefold 1985; Darmanto 2011). Without considering other values of the forests, commercial logging closely related to national development considerably grew in scale and intensity from the 1970s onwards. Various international conservation efforts have prevented large-scale commercial logging in the forests of Siberut. In 1992, the logging permits expired, and President Soeharto decided to subject the remaining forest patches on

Siberut to conservation (Bachyuleta et al. 2015).

Siberut has long been the focus of international attention, aiming at conservation. Amongst others, several organizations such as Survival International, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), UNESCO, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and Conservation International (CI) have been active in Siberut from the late 1970s onwards. Siberut Island became a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1981. In 1993, the government introduced a total log ban regulated by presidential decree. Nearly half of Siberut became a national park, and these efforts discouraged the further exploitation of Siberut's natural resources (Persoon & Eindhoven 2006). Therefore, large patches of relatively undisturbed forest are still standing on Siberut.

Despite numerous international conservation efforts, large-scale forest exploitation has yet to remove commercial logging from Siberut Island's agenda entirely. This situation has created social conflict over landownership and control, resulting in violence between clans and uprooting the fundamental foundation of civilization until the present day (Van der Muur 2019, for example, in Sulawesi). The social impact significantly affects Mentawai communities. According to Goldman and Baum (2020), people's well-being or a change in an aspect of communities' concern following some interventionist program, project, or scheme defines social impact as a significant improvement or deterioration. Therefore, the primary objective is to address the inquiry regarding the extent to which commercial logging concessions impact Mentawai communities.

## Methods

The data was part of large sets gathered during extensive periods of ethnographic field research (Hammersley & Atkinson 2019; Okely 2020), literature, the review of policy reports, and local and social media. The first research explained how oral tradition, migration, and contemporary conflicts over land in Mentawai were interconnected (Tulius 2012). Furthermore, a focus group conducted the process through family gatherings (Figure 2), combining ethnography and survey research (Nyumba et al. 2018). The netnography practice was rooted in participant



**Figure 2.** Focus group discussion with local communities during fieldwork on Siberut Island (Tulius 2014)

observation and focused on reflections and data provided by online communities. Netnography was a research method to investigate communities and cultures by analyzing data from online sources, such as forums, social media, and blogs (Kozinets 2015; Costello et al. 2017).

Another field research team studied all four Mentawai islands from 1997 to 2000 to explore a generation of formally educated and politically engaged Mentawaians (Eindhoven 2019). The presented results relied on long-term participant observation (Faulkner & Becker 2008). This paper relied on on-site, reactive observation, and unstructured qualitative interviews conducted with residents across all four Mentawai Islands, Mentawaians residing in Padang, representatives from local, national, and international civil society organizations, and local and provincial government personnel. The methods constituted the primary means of data collection for the core content of the paper.

Scientific publications, policies, and local and social media, such as Facebook and Instagram, played crucial roles in data collection and analysis. Since May 1999, a local non-governmental organization, *Yayasan Citra Mandiri* (NGO YCM), has produced *Puailigoubat*, a printed local newspaper. In late 2015, the printed version changed to an online news portal known as *MentawaiKita.com*. Local journalists of both media were always on top of the latest developments. These journalists were tremendously helpful

in gathering data, pinpointing social developments, and crosschecking the general contentment presented. Some respondents shared information that was secretive and sensitive but not disclosed.

## Results and Discussion

### Large-scale Logging Concessions, Protests, and Regional Autonomy

The Indonesian Ministry of Forestry attributed the agricultural practices of the Mentawaians population to be a concern (Dove 1983). The government believed this practice led to a severe loss of precious timber expected to contribute to national revenues. The state considered land under swidden agriculture as not being appropriately cultivated, labeling it *tanah kosong* (empty land) and landownerless. Despite customary laws, the state must manage and organize this land, denying acknowledgment of local people's ownership (Tulius 2017). The most effective way to relieve Mentawaians from their backward-branded forest-based lifestyle was to alter the environment and their belief that the forest-based lifestyle was unworthy of a modern, progressive nation-state. *Masyarakat terasing* became the label for communities detached from the mainstream of progress. Therefore, Mentawaians became subject to various civilization programs, consisting of general development, cultural policies, and unbridled exploitation of the natural resources in the Mentawai



Archipelago (Persoon & Schefold 1985).

The forest exploitation would provide high-quality export timber for the state and contribute to the swift modification of Mentawaians' lifestyle. The clearance would force inhabitants to take up ways of life considered more modern outside the forests. The cleared forest areas by commercial logging activities exposed arable land suitable for cash crops and rice cultivation, which was considered a more suitable agricultural practice for modern nation-state inhabitants (Persoon & Eindhoven 2006).

Apart from the apparent negative ecological influence, loss of biodiversity, disturbance of the hydrological system, and an increase of sedimentation in coastal waters (Walujo et al. 1997; Darmanto & Setyowati 2012), commercial logging in Mentawai led to a set of social and cultural effects (Persoon & Schefold 1985). In the early 1970s, PT Minas Pagai Lumber Corporation (MPLC), the second-largest logging firm in Indonesia, obtained a 90,000-acre concession for the Pagai Islands. The MPLC, which was still in operation, transformed the coastal settlement of Sikakap into the Mentawai Islands logging center over the last five decades (Figure 3).

Mentawaians high school and university students gathered in Padang in a student organization called *Ikatan Pemuda dan Pelajar Mentawai* (IPPMEN) to

speak out against the harmful effects of commercial logging, such as losing land rights in the ancestral communities' regions. Subsequently, several existing Mentawai associations joined forces to form the *Forum Komunikasi Masyarakat Mentawai* (FKMM) or Mentawai Community Communication Forum. Authorities asked MPLC and PT Mudam Sati (a logging firm functioning on Sipora Island at the time) to consider the rights of local communities living in their concession area regarding the use of forest products. Instead of showing more interest in local communities, MPLC and PT Mudam Sati busied themselves with muting the vocal youngsters in Padang. Logging companies offered individual scholarships to youngsters, and IPPMEN received a sum of money to cease ventilating negative publicity concerning the activities of logging companies (Bachyul et al. 2015). IPPMEN vanished from the public sphere, apparently unable to continue activities without the financial support of the logging companies when MPLC stopped payments in early 2000.

The appearance of the forests on Siberut after 20 years of commercial logging differed slightly from Sipora and the Pagai Islands. While the southern islands had cleared entirely, the logged-over area on Siberut had comparatively substantial sections of



Figure 3. MPLC log pond in North Pagai (Tulius 2015)

undamaged forests. In the early 1970s, the entire Siberut Island was under concession. Despite infrastructure challenges, four logging companies reduced Siberut primary forests to an estimated 30% of the original extent in less than 20 years (Eindhoven 2009). Similar to the situation in the Pagai Islands, the base camps of logging companies drew the interest of residents. Mentawaians found opportunities to earn cash through employment with the logging companies, and the base camps became significant buyers of locally produced food items. The appeal of these opportunities led to the establishment of various local settlements near the base camps. These spontaneous settlements leveraged the advantages provided by the logging companies, such as trade opportunities and access to newly cleared land for cultivating gardens. The government also offered local communities an alternative to official resettlement programs.

After the fall of President Soeharto in May 1998, the introduction of democratization and decentralization caused a gripping power shift in the Mentawai Archipelago. Due to intense lobbying by various local civil society organizations, Mentawaians took over political and administrative power from the mainland Minangkabau ruling Mentawai Archipelago for decades (Eindhoven 2007; Bachyul et al. 2015). Mentawaians had long been on the subjugated end of the political spectrum when President Habibie granted a new status to Mentawai Archipelago to be an administratively independent regency (*kabupaten*) in the era of regional autonomy in October 1999.

The power shift, transferring decision-making authority over natural resources from the political center to the regency level, would be a powerful incentive for local communities to care for and use natural resources more sustainably. Instead of heading for conservation and sustainable resource management, entrepreneurs, including local communities, stumbled over each other to be included in exploiting Mentawai's natural resources. Some elites established the companies and cooperative unions in an open opportunity of logging concessions issued by the local government. These developments have led to the withdrawal of the last international conservation agencies still active on Siberut in the early 2000s (Eindhoven 2019).

### **The Case of Izin Pemanfaatan Kayu (IPK)**

Apart from the large-scale commercial logging operations, regional autonomy also increased the issuing of *Izin Pemanfaatan Kayu* (IPK) concessions. The *Bupati* (head of regency) issued the use permits for this relatively small timber concession (about 100 ha). Therefore, individuals on good terms with the Bupati could obtain IPK logging concessions. A local tabloid known as *Puailiggoubat* reported dizzying 86 newly registered cooperatives for four Mentawaians regencies in December 2003. There were registered 47 cooperatives for the Pagai Islands, 27 for Siberut, and 17 for Sipora. Eighty-one cooperatives actively participated in bidding for the IPK logging concessions in the market, while the remaining five were entities with other objectives, mainly agriculture. Bupati Edison Saleleubaja issued multiple of these concessions from 2001 to 2005.

IPK issued in Mentawai was often connected to government construction projects, clearing land for roads, and governmental infrastructure. In the early years of the new *kabupaten*, there were multiple governmental construction projects because there was no infrastructure in Mentawai when the archipelago became an independent regency in 1999 (Eindhoven 2019). Even though these concessions were relatively small, they caused considerable damage and affected the environment. The IPK concessions were scattered all over the islands and had little monitoring, leading to frequent illegal logging outside the concession areas (Bachyul et al. 2015). The authority officials often condoned these illegal practices due to their inclusion in the logging sector.

The IPK concessions were supposed to contribute significantly to *Pendapatan Asli Daerah* (PAD), locally generated income an essential item in the regency budget for constructing regional infrastructures. New *kabupaten* received considerable financial support from the central government to get started and would slowly abate. After the downsizing, the new regencies must rely on locally generated income as their foundation. The issuance of IPK concessions caused considerable struggle between the local government and communities as the IPKs generated little PAD and vanished into thin air (Bachyul et al. 2015).

Unlike the large concessionaires, which were always outsiders, IPK were people with whom local communities were familiar. These concessionaires were fathers, sons, brothers, nephews, or cousins from whom something could be expected based on kinship ties. Bribery and corruption were already ordinary business practices in dealing with large concessionaires, and these practices took bizarre shapes in negotiations with the IPK concessionaires. Local communities wished to share the immediate profits anticipated from the prevailing situation. Lands were relinquished to IPK concessions holders, disregarding future considerations related to security. Therefore, conflicts arose as differing perspectives on land ownership developed among the parties. In 2005, the central government revoked the authority of regency heads due to recurrent misconduct. In 2012, the Padang regional court found Regent Edison Salelebaja guilty of criminal corruption in collecting forest resource provision funds, resulting in a four-year prison sentence. IPK concessions remained closed for more than a decade following these developments.

After accomplishing detention time in prison, Edison Salelebaja (former Mentawai regent) established a *Koperasi Atsiri Mentawai* (Mentawai Essential Oil Cooperative) to endorse the economy of North Pagai Island communities in 2018. The cooperative activities aimed to cultivate fragrant lemongrass plants and distill their leaves to yield essential oil. From 2017 to 2022, the new Mentawai regent, Yudas Sabaggalet, prioritized large-scale economic development to transform the archipelago from a less developed region into one with opportunities. In pursuit of this objective, Yudas Sabaggalet granted a permit in 2019 for the Edison Salelebaja cooperative to establish a fragrant lemongrass plantation. In 2021, Mentawai Essential Oil Cooperative submitted a proposal to the Head of the West Sumatra Forestry Service seeking approval for the *Pemanfaatan Kayu Kegiatan Non-Kayu – PKKKNK* (Utilization of Non-Forestry Timber) in Silabu Village, North Pagai, Mentawai Islands Regency, covering a 1,500-ha area. The Mentawai Islands Regency government recommended Edison Salelebaja's application for a plantation permit, leading to the official grant on August 26, 2021. Following the issuance, the cooperative initiated land

clearing and timber extraction activities. However, 150 residents of Silabu Village, whose lands fell in the Essential Oil Cooperative area, had provided no consent for the cooperative to exploit their land for timber or manage the land as a cooperative-owned plantation.

In 2021, the Regional III of the Production Forest Centre in Pekanbaru issued two new forest logging permits on Sipora Island. Jasa Samangililai was the local logging permit of a 438.68-ha area in Saurenuik Village, South Sipora. Another logging permit was held by Aser Sababalat, covering 243 ha in Tuapejat Village, North Sipora. The holders commenced the logging activities in the same year. The issuance prompted protests from Mentawai students, local communities, and environmental activists, leading to calls for the regency government to withdraw the logging permits. The objections from stakeholders were grounded in the observation that these areas overlapped with the application for customary forest areas proposed by the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry.

#### **The case of Koperasi Andalas Madani (KAM)**

Amidst the intense turmoil from introducing regional autonomy, Padang-based state Universitas Andalas (UNAND), or Andalas University, obtained a controversial logging permit covering 49,650 ha immediately adjacent to Siberut National Park. After a start-up phase of less than two years, the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, without an official recommendation by the local government, issued an HPHA permit for UNAND on 15 March 2001 (Eindhoven 2019).

Koperasi Andalas Mandani (KAM), the logging cooperative operating under the supervision of Marlis Rahman, the rector of Andalas University, started sharing the plans among communities on Siberut immediately after the permit was issued. Stirred by UNESCO fieldworkers' guidance and local NGO Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM), local communities in the Rereiket and Saibi area chased KAM *tim sosialisasi* (socialization team) off the lands. Village communities were unwilling to negotiate the terms (Bachyul et al. 2015). Despite this apparent togetherness, the ranks did not fully close. The promise of fast cash made some willing to negotiate terms, while others remained





Figure 4. Heavy machinery KAM Base camp (Tulius 2002)

vehemently opposed to KAM's presence. The egalitarian structure of the clan allowed no one to speak on behalf of the brother or the clan (Schefold 1988; Tulius 2012). However, some individuals kept making appointments with KAM in their personal capacity and interest, regardless of this social code.

The construction of a base camp some 15 km north of the Saibi Muara village caused severe horizontal conflict between and in the various clans in the area. The conflict escalated when unknown individuals burned down the base camp in May 2001. Meanwhile, Andalas University was also under fire from protests by Mentawaians residing in Padang. Assembled in various local NGOs, these opponents demanded the immediate withdrawal of KAM heavy machinery from Siberut (Figure 4) and the cessation of the operations. During an enforced meeting with the governor of West Sumatra and the deputy rector of Andalas University, the attendees did not regard representatives from local NGOs as authentic representatives reflecting the sentiments of the Siberut communities. Acknowledging the divided opinions in Siberut communities regarding the presence of KAM, Andalas University justified its decision to dismiss the protesting NGOs on campus. The protests at the entrances of several provincial offices proved unproductive, and the opposition against KAM in Padang lost momentum.

Despite the protests and the prevailing social unrest, KAM initiated logging activities in September 2001 (Bachyul et al. 2015).

Under the allegations of bribery and corruption, societal conflict in Mentawai communities continued to linger, creating a reasonably unworkable situation for the logging company. After seven years of operation, the excessive overhead costs forced KAM to stop logging operations on Siberut (Figure 5). In July 2009, the KAM concession area transformed into an ecosystem restoration area under the supervision of Global Green. This private national company specializes in ecosystem restoration, showing its commitment to environmentally sustainable practices ([www.globalgreen.co.id](http://www.globalgreen.co.id)) (Trinaldi & Purwaningsih 2019). So far, Global Green has no field activity.

In 2016, the Indonesian Investment Coordinating Board agreed with logging company PT. *Biomass Andalan Energi* (PT.BAE) to turn nearly half of the former KAM concession area into an Industrial Plantation Forest until 2051. The planned Industrial Plantation Forest would cover 20,110 ha, including the ancestral lands of 52 clans, and affect the livelihoods of some 15,000 people. Despite protest letters from local communities written directly to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, in late 2018, the Ministry



issued a permit for an Industrial Plantation Forest (*Hutan Tanaman Industri*) license for 60 years with a possible extension of another 35 years. Beyond sporadic meetings with individual clan members, local communities were uninformed about the unfolding developments. The critical question concerning the compensation for the loss of the gardens remained unanswered. Due to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, landclearing activities have yet to commence.

**The Case of PT. Salaki Summa Sejahtera (PT. SSS)**

PT. Cirebon Agung was a former entity known to Siberut communities as a logging company that opera-

ted on Siberut from the 1970s until 1992. In 2001, it operated under the name PT. Salaki Summa Sejahtera (PT. SSS) secured a preliminary permit for a logging concession spanning 49,440 ha. Local communities and NGOs raised objections, challenging the conducted environmental impact assessment and the circumvention of the local government. These protests led to the suspension of the permit for nearly two years. Under mounting pressure from an international lobby led by UNESCO and Conservation International Indonesia (CII), the Ministry of Forestry rescinded the permit in May 2003. However, the Mentawai Regency government reinstated the permit in December 2003 due to indications expressing the



**Figure 5.** Logs from KAM concession loaded for international transport (Eindhoven 2005)



Figure 6. Protest 22 December 2021 in front of forestry department office in Padang (FORMMA 2021)

need for additional regional revenue through timber production.

The Ministry of Forestry requested CII to determine which area, totalling approximately 20,000 ha, should remain for conservation purposes in the granted concession of PT. SSS. According to this proposal, CII and PT. SSS should collaborate in managing the designated 20,000 ha of biodiversity-rich sites and the concession operations strictly and sustainably. However, CII held on to the conviction that large-scale commercial logging should leave entirely from Siberut. These negotiations kept the permit pending for another three years. PT. SSS threatened to take the Ministry of Forestry to court for the inconsistent policy before the Ministry issued a license to operate in early 2007, but the actual logging operation started in 2008.

Some of the local communities residing in the concession area had different opinions on the presence of the logging company. The majority of local communities were opposed to logging as it hindered farming and agricultural activities. Furthermore, timber fees rarely reached households. In addition, the logging company offered few labor opportunities and was reluctant to contribute to social and physical development activities. Some clans of Malancan Village refused to surrender the lands in the

concession area. Four clans within the Malancan area mapped their ancestral lands with the aid of local NGO *Yayasan Citra Mandiri*. They attempted to exclude their lands from the concession on a legal basis (Trinaldi & Purwaningsih 2019). Residents occasionally blocked the roads and protested at PT. SSS base camp. The protests and obstacles raised by local communities against PT. SSS was not merely a resistance against logging activities but a means to notify the logging company to get some share of the revenues.

#### The Case of PT. Bumi Alam Sikerei (PT. BAS)

In November 2021, during a village meeting in Padang, five village heads from three districts (*Kecamatan*) on Siberut were challenged with a map projecting a 44,907 ha concession area over their villages. PT. Bumi Alam Sikerei (PT. BAS), the concessionaire, informed the meeting that the HPH logging permit was under consideration with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. The village head of Matotonan had said that the proposed logging did not cause a problem for him, but PT. BAS expected resistance from the owners of the ancestral lands included in the concession area.

On 22 December 2021, the organization of university students, *Forum Mahasiswa Mentawai*



Sumatra Barat (FORMMA), and several other local NGOs gathered a large crowd in front of the provincial forestry agency to protest the latest developments on logging permits in the Mentawai Islands (Figure 6). The protesters claimed that various forms of licensing should stop expropriating and looting the rights of indigenous Mentawaians. They should recognize and respect the rights of indigenous communities as stated in the constitution by refraining from handing out permission on the lands and the destruction of the natural and cultural balance, which forms the basis of Mentawai communities.

In response to concerns, PT. BAS's spokesperson suggested that the company would formally document further negotiations on revenue distribution after issuing the permit. At that moment, the company sought community support to gain access and commence operations. Obtaining approval from communities, as landowners, serves as the gateway for timber companies to initiate exploitation of Siberut Island forest. During negotiations with residents, logging companies engaged with individuals willing to cooperate. To win the favor, concessionaires invite these individuals to Padang, covering their travel expenses, accommodations, and meals, and facilitating visits to entertainment establishments. After a week of these efforts, the company obtained the signatures relatively effortlessly.

### **Impact of Commercial Logging**

Commercial logging with prestigious development plans was an essential item on the development agenda of the Mentawai Archipelago. Companies cut off forests, and the government received revenues to develop regional infrastructures. Despite being bypassed in issuing large-scale concessions, the regency government did not resist the presence of the large concessionaires. The presence of large-scale commercial logging concessions caused severe horizontal conflicts amongst constituencies. A student organization called FORMMA and several other local NGOs gathered a large crowd to protest the latest developments in logging. The regency government did not move but added to the volatile situation by issuing small-scale concessions on the archipelago.

Mentawai communities that dared to act against

state-instigated logging automatically gained stigma as anti-modernisation and anti-development. Therefore, part of Mentawaians against deforestation did not protest against the commercial logging activities on their islands. Neither did they revolt against the civilization and development programs partially financed from logging industry revenues and legally supported by the provincial and central governments. With feigned cooperation, Mentawai communities learned to take advantage of the benefits and ignore the adverse side effects of commercial logging and the civilization and development programs.

At the community level, the fast cash prospect was highly tempting to local communities in Mentawai to purchase consumer goods (expensive sunglasses, branded shoes, surf shorts, motorcycles, smartphones, cemented floors in their houses, ceramic tiles in the bathrooms, and tin roof plates). Compensations and a fee for the timber extracted paid to individuals who act as leaders of a particular clan and as rightful owners of the lands have developed distrust among clan members. The construction of logging roads connecting some main villages allowed the introduction of motorized vehicles, easing travel over land. This situation caused a dichotomy within society between those with and without access to the revenues of the logging company, causing envy and jealousy.

Women were responsible for daily food provision and complained most about the impact of the log pond on the natural environment. The mangrove forests, where women collected fish, shrimp, crab, and shellfish, face significant disruption from the presence of the log pond. This interference hampers the fishing activities considerably. Many women harbored a solid aversion to the base camp as their spouses and children were preoccupied. Some individuals linger around the base camp, hoping to secure a day job and some cash income, while others pass the time smoking and commenting on the ongoing activities. Workers at the base camp often promptly spend the meager income on cigarettes, alcoholic drinks, and canned food from the local store.

Local communities were challenged repeatedly with logging activities that were never their idea. The challenges increased by the absence of consultation

leading up to the arrival of heavy machinery and a need for more information about agreed terms regarding compensation, the duration of the deal, and access to the fields and gardens. Local communities acknowledged that discussing with concession holders is an uphill battle. The reliance on the local government diminished, and regional autonomy significantly undermined civil society organizations (Eindhoven 2019). In general, Mentawaians tended to dispute the desirability of logging first, followed by fairly unresolvable disagreements regarding land ownership and quarrels over compensation fees. These events increased horizontal conflict between and among clans, eroding social cohesiveness and uprooting the basic foundation of Mentawaiian civilization. Due to the presence and activity of logging corporations, some Mentawaiian activists had become opportunistic, grasping their benefits and interests.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, reports indicated that regional autonomy increased the exploitation of natural resources in Mentawai. The regency government was only concerned about the archipelago's development and proved extremely weary and suspicious of outsider interference, such as conservation agencies. Government officials, primarily focused on personal political and financial continuity, actively engaged in relations with the logging sector where they could make easy money. Decentralizing decision-making to regency governments also shifted corruption to the local level. The corruption, favoritism, and exclusivism disappointed local communities, which had high expectations of the new government during the onset of regional autonomy. Therefore, trust in local government and fellow Mentawaians eroded severely with hardened intra-ethnic relations, and the clan became a politicized institute.

The ethnographic data on past, ongoing, and planned logging operations in the Mentawai Islands showed social and cultural changes in lifestyle and livelihood, intra-ethnic social relations, and the relationship with the state and local government. Regional autonomy legislation required consultation with local communities in theory, rendering decision-making power over natural resources.

The uncoordinated sprawl of logging and development initiatives, with concession area projected over the other, was often unknown. The elusive initiators left Mentawai communities vulnerable with exceedingly unclear legislation, the absence of a robust rule of law, and an apparent lack of government presence. Even though some individuals might have secured benefits through cunning and agility, most Mentawaians were at risk of losing control over the lands and forests. The intricate landscape of land ownership compelled concessions to negotiate with village heads and willing individuals who asserted authority without a clear institutional framework. Customary law did not allow the village head to contribute to decisions over land. This restriction existed because the authority frequently associated with concessionaires, who consulted only a few landowners. Meanwhile, the negotiations sparked hefty conflict and hostility among and within clans.

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