



LAND ACCESS MECHANISMS AND AGRARIAN CONFLICTS IN A COMMUNITY PLANTATION FOREST: CASE STUDY FROM NAGARI AIR BANGIS, WEST PASAMAN REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts over forest resource control often stem from discrepancies between state policies and local land tenure practices. In West Pasaman Regency, West Sumatra, the government granted a 1,590-hectare concession to a cooperative under the Community Plantation Forest (HTR) scheme, with a legal permit valid for 35 years. However, the land has long been occupied and managed by local communities through *Siliah Jariah*. Tensions emerged due to the absence of formal recognition of socially legitimate claims made by these communities. This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method in Pigogah Patibubur. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 11 purposively selected informants and direct field observations. The informants included farmers, the head of the Nagari Customary Council (KAN), a former employee of the ex-timber concession PT SSS, and forestry officials. Secondary data were obtained through the review of official documents. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of land access and control based on legal and social aspects of the community. The findings reveal that local communities' social legitimacy conflicts with state-backed legal claims, exacerbated by asymmetrical power relations among actors. This study recommends a more inclusive approach to land conflict resolution, one that considers both formal legal frameworks and the rights of indigenous communities.

INTRODUCTION

Former Forest Concession areas (ex-HPH) that have been left unmanaged often give the impression of being ownerless, which in turn triggers various forms of

encroachment by surrounding communities (Purnomo et al., 2019; Quizon, 2013; Siscawati et al., 2017). Without clear land tenure or defined management status, local communities often perceive these areas as open-access lands that they can utilize (Andrianto et al., 2019; Senoaji et al., 2020). Gradually, they began to occupy and convert these lands by cultivating various crops, including oil palms, which hold high economic value (Borras & Franco, 2024; Dharmawan et al., 2019; Sayer et al., 2012; Yulian et al., 2018).

Over time, local communities have transformed these neglected lands into independently managed plantations. However, when the government attempts to reassert control over these areas, social conflict becomes inevitable, as the communities have come to view the land as their own and depend on it for their livelihoods (Nilasari et al., 2017; Sardjo et al., 2022b; Suryadi et al., 2020). In such cases, the government often faces strong resistance to any new investment initiatives on land that has long been cultivated by local communities (Halomoan et al., 2024; Hidayati et al., 2017; Napitu et al., 2017; Putra et al., 2015). The issue becomes more complex when discrepancies emerge between formal legal claims and long-standing customary land tenure rooted in customary land occupation and practices (Golar, 2022; Rutten et al., 2017; Satria, 2025). Without a fair approach and open dialogue between the government and local communities, such land conflicts are likely to persist (Borras et al., 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2024; Maring, 2022; Sembiring, 2018). Conflicts primarily occur in former concession areas that have been left open (Amalia et al., 2019; Peluso & Vandergeest, 2020; Sardjo et al., 2022a).

In Pigogah Patibubur, the land formerly managed by PT SSS was abandoned, leaving behind a forest area of 16,463 ha. In 2013, 1,590 hectares of this area were officially transferred to KSU AB as the new concession holder under the Community Plantation Forest (HTR) program. Simultaneously, local communities had already occupied and utilized parts of the concession area for farming and settlement. This community primarily consists of long-settled migrants who believe they have full rights to the land based on local customary legitimacy. Based on this belief, they claim the right to cultivate the land and choose which crops to grow, including oil palms. Some community members assert that customary recognition grants them the right to sell their land to others.

The issuance of the HTR permit triggered a conflict between the cooperative, which gained formal legal legitimacy from the state, and the local community, which claimed rights based on social legitimacy and a long history of land management. The HTR program disregards the long-established system of customary land tenure. The community rejected the land mapping process, and the cooperative's dominance in land control intensified the tensions on the ground. In some cases, incidents of verbal intimidation and the criminalization of residents were observed, labeling them as illegal harvesters of forest products. As of 2024, when this research was conducted, the land ownership conflict remains unresolved and is ongoing. The local community continues to defend the *Siliah Jariah* system, while the HTR concession holder demands that all community-managed lands be fully integrated into the HTR scheme.

The theory of access proposed by Ribot & Peluso (2003), is used to examine how actors maintain access to resources through "bundles of powers" such as authority and social relations. From the perspective of Hall et al., (2011) it serves as

an analytical tool to understand how formal mechanisms obtained by cooperative actors are used to prevent alternative forms of land use. These two conceptual frameworks are applied to analyze how communities experience exclusion, even though they hold socially recognized legitimacy over land.

This study contributes to broader discussions on forest governance, legal pluralism, and agrarian justice by demonstrating how customary systems continue to play a role in land control in the face of formal legal pressures. Accordingly, this research raises the following question: How have the mechanisms of access and land control evolved over time in Pigogah Patibubur?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm that views social reality as a product of joint construction between the researcher and the participants. This paradigm influences research design, data collection, and interpretation processes, with an emphasis on meanings generated within the local context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Neuman, 2014).

Fieldwork was conducted from April to July 2024 in Kejorong of Pigogah Patibubur, located in Nagari Air Bangis, Sungai Beremas Subdistrict, West Pasaman Regency. The settlement covers an area of 1,590 hectares and is inhabited by 603 households. Pigogah Patibubur consists of three hamlets: Lubuk Buaya, Lubuk Bontar, and Gunung Bungkok. These hamlets are predominantly inhabited by Mandailing and Javanese ethnic groups, whose primary livelihood comes from independently managed oil palm cultivation.

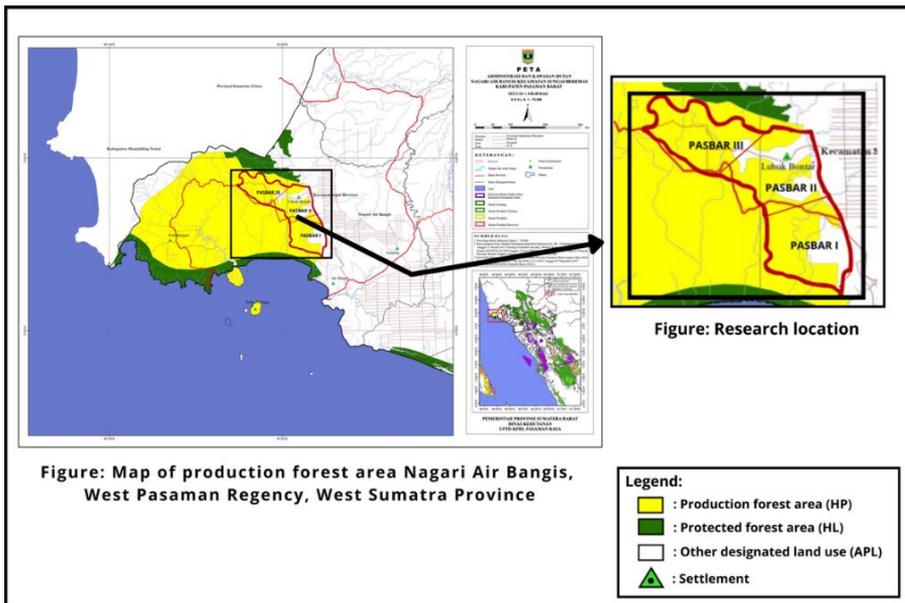


Figure: Map of production forest area Nagari Air Bangis, West Pasaman Regency, West Sumatra Province

Figure 1.

Research Location

Source: KPHL Pasaman Raya and West Sumatra Provincial Forestry Service, 2016

The data used in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through direct observations and in-depth interviews. Key informants were purposively selected based on the research objectives. A total of 11 key informants were identified, which was considered sufficient as data saturation began to occur between the 10th and 11th interviews. Informants included community leaders, members of the Nagari Customary Council (KAN), the Wali Nagari (village government), representatives of the HTR concession management, a former employee of PT SSS (the previous HPH concession holder), the local Regent, and officials from village office archives, official ministerial decrees, forestry service reports, forest area maps, and the researcher's documentation—both directly and indirectly related to the study.

The data analysis in this study involved three key stages: reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. In reduction, the researcher focuses on vital information regarding power relations, resource access, and resistance. The refined data were then presented descriptively to reveal social patterns and actor relations. Conclusions were drawn inductively with reference to relevant theories and validated for accuracy. Data triangulation is also applied by comparing findings across these stages to ensure validity and deepen understanding of social dynamics and forest resource conflicts in Pigogah Patibubur.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Nagari and the Community of Air Bangis

Nagari Air Bangis is a coastal region in West Pasaman Regency, West Sumatra, which has played a significant role in the Minangkabau customary governance structure since the 18th century. Following the national policy shift in 1979 that transformed local governance into the village (*desa*) system, the *Baliak Ka Nagari* (return to Nagari) policy of 1999 reinstated the authority of customary institutions in local administration (Hayati, 2020; Vel, 2017; Zubir, 2016).

According to forestry and local administrative records, Nagari comprises 15 Kejorong (hamlets), three of which—Parlontiang, Pulau Panjang, and Pigogah Patibubur—are situated within state-designated production forest areas. "Those who were in the Kejorong of Parlontiang were specifically placed as woodworkers (HTI), initially around 300 households. Meanwhile, the Kejorong of Pigogah Patibubur is a self-reliant settlement" (Mr. NW, 50 years, Official of the Wali Nagari of Air Bangis).

From an administrative perspective, the settlements located within the forest area of Pigogah Patibubur are officially recognized by the Wali Nagari (village government), as evidenced by the issuance of Identity Cards (KTP) and Family Cards (KK). Several public and social facilities are available to local residents, including a school, mosque, market, cemetery, cell tower, community-based drinking water and sanitation program (PAMSIMAS), and village midwife.

These social values then lead to marriages between migrant and local populations, forming a local community that is not only characterized by Minangkabau ethnicity but also by Mandailing and Javanese, living together in harmony. The majority of livelihood sources in Nagari Air Bangis are fishing and farming (Yulisman, 2016). Fishing is primarily practiced by the Minangkabau ethnic

community, whereas farming is practiced by the Javanese and Mandailing communities. These two livelihood sources complement each other in the subsistence system of Nagari Air Bangis (Hayati, 2020).

Before state intervention, the communities in Kejorongan Pigogah Patibubur freely cleared land and relied almost entirely on oil palm cultivation for their livelihoods. However, as land clearing expanded and the area was designated as a Community Plantation Forest (HTR) concession, tensions began to emerge, affecting both the livelihood systems and socio-economic conditions of migrant communities, particularly those of Mandailing and Javanese ethnic backgrounds.

Trajectory of Forest Area Changes in Pigogah Patibubur, Nagari Air Bangis, West Pasaman

Change in Forest Area Status

The change in the status of the forest area has a direct impact on the legitimacy of land control, which was previously obtained by the community through customary structures, particularly through the authority of the Datuk. This shift forced the community to adapt to the formal permitting system established by forestry authorities, causing their land rights, which were rooted in cultural and historical values, to lose recognition within the state's legal framework. From the perspective of Ribot & Peluso (2003) theory of access, this marks a transformation in the "bundle of powers" used to access and control land. Whereas access was once mediated through social relations and customary authority, it is now determined by concession holders and state forestry institutions. When viewed through the lens of Hall et al., (2011) theory of exclusion, this transformation not only reallocates access but also actively excludes former land users by blocking their ability to benefit from the land through legal and institutional mechanisms. In response, affected communities have mobilized resistance against the injustices caused by forest reclassification.

Access and Land Control via Customary Law

In 1993, farmers obtained land access through direct interaction with the local community and the landholder, the Datuk. This process is governed by customary mechanisms known as *Siliah Jariah*, which involve traditional agreements between the Datuk and local residents. During this phase, access to land began with a structured land-clearing process conducted in accordance with customary norms. Early migrants practiced traditional farming systems with crop rotation, including peanuts and rice, and were oriented toward subsistence agriculture.

A major transformation occurred in 2010, marking a significant shift in the local livelihoods. In that year, subsistence farming systems were replaced by commercial oil palm plantations, which were managed according to industrial principles. The story of this agricultural transition, driven by demographic dynamics in Pigogah Patibubur, is illustrated in Case Box 1 below.

Case Box “Migrant Farmers in Pigogah Patibubur”

In 1993, a group of 40 people decided to leave their hometown in North Sumatra. According to Mr. ZH, the area where they came from no longer promised a sufficient livelihood. This group was named “Tani Saroha.” Upon their arrival in Pigogah Patibubur, Mr. ZH stated that the community's primary livelihood was traditional farming, which included upland rice and peanuts cultivation. However, this form of agriculture did not last long because of the challenges posed by the monetary crisis and pest attacks. Facing these challenges, some members of the group abandoned their land, while others stayed and sought alternative sources of livelihood, such as switching crops and becoming illegal timber workers. Mr. ZH explained that the process of land transfer began when the group held a customary ceremony, referred to as “*adat diisi limbago dituang*.” The invited guests included customary leaders from the Nagari Customary Council (KAN), ninik mamak (traditional leaders), the Subdistrict Leadership Consultation, and the Military Regional Command 07 from Nagari Air Bangis. During this meeting, a land transfer ceremony was held, and the members of the group were granted the right to control and cultivate two hectares of land per household. Greed for land control was not permitted. This was the message from the *Datuk* and invited guests to the former migrants. (Mr. ZH, 66 years old, early migrant).

Mr. RSD shared a similar story. He is a migrant from Java. In 2010, Mr. RSD arrived at Pigogah Patibubur. He acquired cleared land. Mr. RSD bought the land through a sale at a price of IDR 7,000,000 per hectare. He purchased two hectares of land from an individual farmer. One and a half hectares of this land were used for oil palm plantation, while the rest was used for other crops such as chili, corn, and hybrid coconuts. To date, his oil palm plantation has produced between 700 and 900 kg per harvest per month. According to Mr. RSD, chili is a unique crop because the harvest time varies depending on the planting process. Mr. RSD stated that the land he cultivates is his only source of livelihood. If this issue is not resolved fairly, it will disrupt the family's life. (Mr. RSD, 48 years old, migrant from Java).

In the cases of ZH and RSD, access to land is determined not only by formal rights but also by the actors' ability to mobilize their respective “bundles of powers” (Ribot & Peluso, 2003), such as social legitimacy, networks, and economic resources. Two primary mechanisms of land access are evident in the study area. The first is inheritance or customary recognition based on the principle of *adat diisi limbago dituang*, which draws upon customary norms, kinship systems, and collective recognition within the *kaum* (lineage group). The second is through market mechanisms, namely land transactions conducted directly between individuals, which operate outside customary structures and follow economic logic.

Ethnicity also plays a significant role in shaping access strategies. For example, Mandailing migrants from North Sumatra acquire land through customary acknowledgment known as *Siliah Jariah*, relying on cultural affinity and social relationships with customary leaders (*Datuk*). This form of access is typically limited in scope, as land use is governed by customary norms. In contrast, Javanese migrants tend to acquire land through purchases from earlier Mandailing settlers, without

customary or genealogical ties to local communities. Their access is market-based and thus unrestricted by traditional limitations on landholding sizes.

Furthermore, the differences in cropping patterns between Mandailing and Javanese migrants indicate that agricultural practices are deeply shaped by the ethnic background of the farmers. Several factors have emerged in this context. First, the preferences for agricultural development in Pigogah Patibubur follow ethnic origins and cultural heritage. Different ethnic groups have distinct agricultural traditions. Javanese migrants tend to adopt plantation-based agriculture, aligning with modern market-oriented economies, whereas Mandailing migrants are more inclined toward traditional subsistence farming. Second, patterns of land control originate from the differing access mechanisms of the two ethnic groups. It is estimated that customary access is more readily granted to Mandailing migrants because of their shared regional and cultural roots. In contrast, Javanese migrants – who are from different islands – are limited in their ability to access land through customary means, leading to land purchases as the dominant strategy for securing land.

This reflects the broader reality that land access is shaped by actors' social positions and power networks, not merely by formal legality. Customary-based access is less costly and socially legitimate but remains vulnerable under state legal frameworks. Conversely, market-based access (via buying and selling) may be transactionally valid but still legally insecure, especially if the land's status is reclassified. These findings reinforce the idea that access must be understood as a complex socio-political process in which power, ethnic identity, and multiple forms of legitimacy intersect.

Access and Control of Land for Oil Palm Plantations VS Forest Management

Since the 1990s, land access in Pigogah Patibubur has been marked by unequal power between migrant communities and mainly Mandailing and the state, as follows. Customary claims were not legally recognized, and the state forest designation in 1992 shifted control to formal concessions. Although inactive, these concessions overlapped with community use, sparking conflicts rooted in the tension between legality and local legitimacy. This conflict represents a clash between legality and legitimacy and reflects the exclusion of local communities from rightful access to land (Hall et al., 2011).

When the HPH concession expired, the government reaffirmed the area's status as a state forest and issued a Community Plantation Forest (HTR) scheme in 2013. The HTR concession was granted to a cooperative rather than to the original land cultivators. Within the framework of Ribot & Peluso (2003) theory of access, this reflects how access to resources is shaped not solely by legal entitlements, but by actors' proximity to sources of power – whether through political, economic, or institutional relations. Communities that relied on customary legitimacy and independently managed oil palm cultivation remained unrecognized, while the cooperative was granted legal rights to lands that had long been developed by local residents.

The designation of Pigogah Patibubur as a forest concession triggered land tenure conflicts, especially with migrant farmers who had established oil palm plantations based on customary law sanctioned by the local Datuk. The trajectory of

changing access and land control in Pigogah Patibubur is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

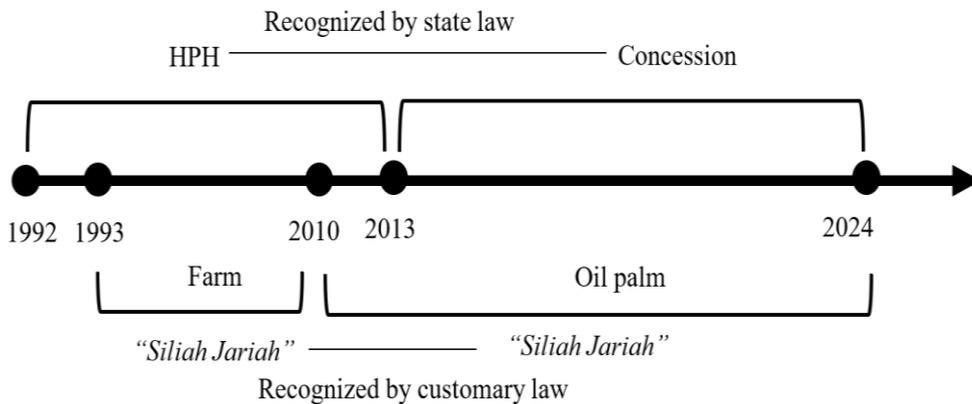


Figure 2.

Trajectory of Forest Control and Utilization in Pigogah Patibubur 1992–2024

Figure 2 illustrates the competing interests over land control: the state seeks to preserve the area as forest, while local farmers depend on it for agricultural purposes. This reflects a dilemma in resource governance (Dharmawan et al., 2020, 2021; Juniyanti, 2020; Mutiara et al., 2020). Policy shifts in forest management influenced the stance of the Wali Nagari, who gradually aligned with central directives, signaling how state law and discourse reconfigured local authority, sidelining customary legitimacy.

In 2013, 1,590 hectares in Pigogah Patibubur were legally designated as an HTR concession under a large business entity (SK.518/Menhut-II/2013; BUP-PASBAR/2013). This intensified tensions with migrant communities—mainly oil palm farmers—who had long claimed and cultivated the land under customary norms. The concession holder sought to reforest the area, whereas the communities defended their livelihoods.

Analyzed through Ribot and Peluso’s (2003) theory of access, this conflict demonstrates how formal legal tools are used to create exclusive access while excluding historically grounded and socially legitimate claims from the conversation. It reflects a broader structural struggle between state-sanctioned legality and local legitimacy in forest governance.

Land Control and Bundle of Power: Legal versus Legitimate Claims

Ribot & Peluso (2003) explain that land control refers to the right to benefit from something, while land access refers to an actor's ability to benefit from something. The key distinction between the two lies in how resource control is acquired. Access mechanisms emphasize social relations that enable individuals or groups to utilize resources, making access more aligned with the concept of a bundle of power rather than a bundle of rights. An actor’s ability to benefit is shaped by how and when (under what conditions) access is exercised. Actors may construct a bundle of power through webs derived from material, cultural, and political-economic sources.

In the context of the Pigogah Patibubur, the overlapping authority of the state and the Nagari government has created a complex dynamic. On the one hand, the state grants power to private entities for forest management and rehabilitation, in accordance with Articles 40 and 43 of Law No. 41 of 1999 on Forestry. On the other hand, the Village Law (Law No. 6 of 2014) provides space for village or Nagari governments to manage their territories and serve the interests of local communities based on customary authority exercised by the Datuk (Citrawan, 2020; Hafidh & Krisdyatmiko, 2020). These two resource governance regimes operate in parallel, creating contradictions in land access and control.

Two access mechanisms operate simultaneously in this area. The state and cooperatives rely on formal rights legitimized by forestry authorities, while local communities maintain access through power rooted in customary authority, such as inheritance claims from the Datuk, land sale documents, and social relations among farmers. A comparison of the actors’ access strategies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Access and Control Mechanisms of Forest Resources in the Pigogah Patibubur Area, Nagari Air Bangis, West Pasaman Regency, 2024

Actor	Actor’s interests	Ways of acquiring land	Strategies to defend Access	Factors affecting actors in accessing and controlling land
The cooperative is the holder of the HTR concession.	Reforestation of the community's agricultural land.	Land control is through the authority of the central government.	Using the discourse of formal state law.	Main: stay and police authorities. Supporting: Identity, labor.
Citizens of the Mandailing ethnic group.	Defending oil palm cultivation	Gaining land control from the local authority of the Datuk.	Using discourse as part of the <i>Datuk's</i> role as the ruler of customary land (inheritance).	Main: Proximity to the Datuk's customary authority Supporting: Social relations, social identity, and local knowledge.
The citizens of Javanese ethnicity.	Defending oil palm cultivation	Purchasing land from the local Mandailing ethnic community.	Using evidence from land purchase agreements and land transfer letters.	Main: Capital and existence of a land market. Supporting: Social relations and technology.

As shown in Table 1, each actor employs distinct strategies to access and control forest resources in Pigogah Patibubur. These differences reflect how power – manifested through authority, capital, discourse, and social networks – operates simultaneously to shape and sustain access for each actor in the field. The state and cooperatives consolidate land control through formal legal regulations and coercive power (security forces). Meanwhile, migrant communities (particularly Mandailing and Javanese ethnic groups) maintain access through customary mechanisms (*Siliah Jariah*), market transactions, and social ties with the Datuk and other members of the

migrant community. This illustrates that access mechanisms are not solely dependent on legality but also on actors' positions in relation to sources of power.

Within the framework of Ribot & Peluso (2003) theory of access, local communities rely on selected "bundles of power," such as customary legitimacy and local knowledge, to maintain land access. However, access grounded in customary or informal means remains highly vulnerable in the absence of legal recognition, leaving communities unable to exclude other actors or protect their claims from external appropriation. In such settings, social solidarity and community cohesion are vital tools for defending access, especially for structurally disadvantaged groups.

Ultimately, these dynamics reveal that access in Pigogah Patibubur is not just about who has formal rights but also about who has power and how they mobilize it. Therefore, interventions such as the HTR scheme, although designed to resolve tenure issues, may exacerbate exclusion when they fail to account for existing local practices and power relations.

The Dynamics and Challenges of Conflict Resolution in Pigogah Patibubur

The agrarian conflict in Pigogah Patibubur stems from dual claims of legitimacy over the same land: the community claims customary rights through *Siliah Jariah* granted by the Datuk, while the state asserts formal authority under the forestry law. Tensions arise when both sides fail to acknowledge each other's claims, leading to a clash between customary and formal systems. This dualism results in the exclusion of community land control, as the state only recognizes formal legal ownership, thereby limiting local access and legitimacy. Consequently, the community faces limitations and a lack of legitimacy in accessing land resources because the state does not recognize control that is not supported by formal proof of ownership.

In this case, a study based on the exclusion framework by Hall et al (2011) found that local migrant communities of Mandailing and Javanese ethnicities, who cultivate oil palm in Pigogah Patibubur, are excluded by four forces simultaneously: (1) regulation (permits); (2) force (pressure from authorities); (3) market (capital inequality); and (4) legitimacy (legal-illegal discourse). This exclusion not only limits physical access to land but also marginalizes the community socially and economically in the areas where they have resided for decades. Various forms of resistance and the dynamics of conflict resolution can be further observed in table 2, which records the conflict patterns and the community's efforts to maintain access to forest resources.

The explanation provided in Table 2 indicates that administrative solutions through the issuance of formal permits are insufficient to resolve conflicts. Policies that emphasize regulation and legal certainty do not necessarily succeed in alleviating social tension. Legal-formal approaches often trigger resistance from migrant communities, as they tend to ignore the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of land tenure ownership. Therefore, a just resolution requires a multi-stakeholder dialogue forum involving Indigenous communities, migrants, government authorities, and concession holders as a space for negotiation that can mitigate power domination. Such an approach enables the equitable recognition of living spaces and helps bridge the interests of both the state and customary systems, paving the way for more inclusive and sustainable resource governance.

Table 2. Land Disputes and Possible Conflict Resolutions in Pigogah Patibubur, Nagari Air Bangis, West Pasaman Regency, 2024

Aspect	Society vs State			Society vs Cooperative	
	1993-2010	2010-2016	2016-2024	2013-2021	2021-2024
Main causes of conflict	The state views illegal access as the occupation of state forest areas by the local community. Meanwhile, the local community views their access as legal according to tradition.	The state views illegal access as the cultivation of oil palms on disputed land by the local community.	The state grants concessions or legal access by giving management authority of the area to a large business entity to manage land that has been previously managed by the local community.	The cooperative obtains legal access in the form of an HTR concession from the government on land that has long been controlled by the local community, based on <i>Siliah Jariah</i> (family ties) and purchase.	The involvement of the cooperative is accompanied by security forces to pressure the local community.
Actors involved in the conflict.	The local community and the <i>Datuk</i> . There is relatively no conflict currently.	The local Mandailing and Javanese ethnic communities versus the government	The Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK), the West Sumatra Provincial Forestry Agency, and the Pasaman Raya Forest Management Unit (KPHL) versus the local community, primarily composed of migrants of Mandailing and Javanese ethnicity.	The Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) and the <i>Wali Nagari</i> (village government) versus the local community of former migrants of Mandailing and Javanese ethnicity.	The Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK), the Pasaman Raya Forest Management Unit (KPHL), the police, the regency government, the provincial government, and the <i>Wali Nagari</i> (village government) versus the local community of former migrants of Mandailing and Javanese ethnicity.

Aspect	Society vs State			Society vs Cooperative	
	1993-2010	2010-2016	2016-2024	2013-2021	2021-2024
Duration of the conflict	17 years	6 years	8 years	8 years	3 years
Depth of the conflict	There is no conflict.	The degree of conflict is shallow, consisting of rumors related to the Pigogah Patibubur forest area, which is occupied by local community who are former migrants of Mandailing and Javanese ethnicity.	The degree of conflict is moderate, where the local community has begun to move to destroy the cooperative signs and forestry signs located on the land and palm oil platform.	The degree of conflict is superficial, where rumors about attempts at land confiscation by the cooperative have begun to surface.	The degree of conflict is deep (strong), where there are signs of organizing groups that feel threatened by the restrictions on buying and selling, and staging protests. The community engaged in protest actions that escalated into violent clashes between the public and authorities, resulting in the destruction of a vehicle belonging to the authorities who were securing the protest.
Conflict resolution	No process	No resolution	Formal legal access by the state/cooperative has not led to conflict resolution, as it was met with resistance from local communities who claim customary tenure rights.	No action initiated	No action taken

CONCLUSION

This study successfully addressed its research objective by tracing how land access and control mechanisms in Pigogah Patibubur have evolved over time, shaped by tensions between customary legitimacy and formal legal regimes. The agrarian conflict in this area stems from overlapping tenure claims between the state's legal authority—implemented through the HTR scheme—and the socially embedded legitimacy upheld by local communities. Migrant communities from Mandailing and Javanese ethnic backgrounds accessed land through customary mechanisms such as *Siliah Jariah* and informal land markets (buying and selling) but were later excluded due to the absence of formal legal recognition. In contrast, cooperatives with institutional access to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) were granted management rights despite having no prior history of land use in the area. This study contributes to agrarian socio-economic scholarship by illustrating how power relations—manifested through access to market mechanisms, ethnic identity, social legitimacy, police enforcement, and state authority—shape the dynamics of access and exclusion in the struggle for forest resources.

Resolving the land conflict in Pigogah Patibubur requires an inclusive approach through multistakeholder dialogue, which goes beyond legal instruments and recognizes local tenure legitimacy rooted in customary institutions. Policy interventions, especially by local governments and forestry agencies, should consider revising the HTR scheme by granting concessions to community groups that have historically cultivated the land. Introducing a rehabilitation period (*Jangka Benah*) for current land use may serve as a policy compromise to formalize and guide existing practices.

In the long term, the Agrarian Reform Object Land (TORA) program should be pursued. The fact that migrant communities—particularly Mandailing and Javanese settlers—have cultivated the land for decades reflects the strong social legitimacy that deserves formal recognition. Given that the area lies within state forest zones (especially production forests under the HTR scheme), the TORA mechanism could facilitate the release of land from forest designation and its reclassification as Areas for Other Uses (APL), supporting more just and sustainable forest governance.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

[Author 1]: Designed the research, conducted fieldwork, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted the initial manuscript. [Author 2]: Provided conceptual guidance, methodological support, research supervision, and critically reviewed and edited the manuscript. [Author 3]: Provided conceptual guidance, analytical input, and strategic suggestions related to site adjustment and situational dynamics in the field. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the article.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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ETHIC STATEMENT

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study as it did not involve any intervention and posed minimal risk to participants. Nevertheless, informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to participation, and all data were anonymized and kept confidential.

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