

Haruku Village, Maluku Province, Indonesia: Conservation embedded in tradition and culture

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Key Messages

- Haruku village is a coastal community that uses *sasi laut* a local knowledge and culture-based practice of coastal resource conservation.
- *Sasi laut* was weakened in the 1980s and the early part of the 2000s, due to a lack of government concern about destructive fishing activities as well as the Maluku conflict in 1999-2002. Subsequently, starting in early 2004, through the cooperation of multiple stakeholders, the *sasi laut* system has strengthened, helping local fishing communities to consider global issues related to conservation practices
- Cooperation of multiple parties at multiple levels is the best approach for sustainable *sasi laut* practices

Community Profile

Haruku Village is located in the island of the same name, in Maluku Province, Indonesia (Figure 1). Most of the island is hilly terrain and nearly all of the population is along the coast. The island consists of four Muslim villages and seven Christian villages (Central Bureau of Statistics of Central Maluku Regency, 2015). The people of Haruku Island depend on the plantation sector as their main livelihood. Marine resources are not yet used as the main support system for livelihoods due to limitations on local utilisation of fishery commodities.

In the island, an indigenous practice of coastal resource protection, called *sasi laut*, has been used for hundreds of years. *Sasi laut* is a form of traditional institution regulating the management of coastal resources based on the knowledge, norms and value systems of the Indigenous people of Maluku. This system regulates the rights and obligations of the indigenous peoples in utilising and protecting coastal resources. As defined by Harkes and Novaczek (2000, pp.1-3), *sasi laut* "...prohibits the use of destructive and intensive

gear (poisonous plants and chemicals, explosives, small mesh lift-nets), but also defines seasonal rules of entry, harvest and activities allowed in specific parts of the sea. The regulations are guarded and enforced by an institution known as the *kewang*, which functions as a local police force. Their legitimacy, as well as that of the *sasi* institution itself, is based on *adat* or customary law".



Figure 1: Location of Haruku Island

Sasi laut has been implemented by the Harukunese for over 400 years. This practice is related to the



establishment of Haruku Village and their motivation to save lompas fish (*Thrissima balema*), a sacred fish species relating to the history of the founding of the village (Figure 2) (Mony, 2015).



Figure 2: Harvesting Lompas Fish
Photo: Jack Manuputty

Climate change in these coastal areas, which is characterised by ecological and seasonal changes, has provided an understanding for indigenous peoples about the importance of maintaining *sasi laut* as a local institution to protect coastal areas. Maintaining *sasi laut*, amidst the impacts of climate change and social transformation, will have an important impact on the preservation of coastal and inland resources, the preservation of culture, and ensuring the availability of fish in the waters.

Conservation and Livelihood Challenges

Recently, the practice of *sasi laut* has weakened due to external and internal pressures of the actors involved. The external factors that threatened the existence of the legal practice of *sasi laut* were modernisation and commercialisation, which resulted in the erosion of traditional values (Harkes & Novaczek, 2001). Within the Haruku society, *sasi laut* practices were faced with challenges, such as internal political conflicts, competition in the local economy, regeneration of *kewang* and the power of outsiders who did not consider the social and cultural conditions of the Indigenous community. In addition, locals spoke of such factors as access to fishery commodity markets, capital limitation and

lack of human resources as the main constraints to switch the orientation of their livelihood income from plantation to fishery systems (i.e. fishing/aquaculture).

The actors involved in the development of *sasi laut* had three main interests, economic, ecological and cultural. The economic interests were normally represented by communities, businesses and local governments. The ecological interests were represented by the traditional leaders, NGOs, universities, donor agencies, environmentalists and researchers. Cultural interests were represented by the Indigenous communities, universities and government. This mixture of interests created uncertainty about the implementation of *sasi laut*, as *kewang* were unsure of which motivations to follow, thus weakening *sasi laut* practices.

Community Initiatives

The Indigenous community of Haruku, which had been more moderate and adaptive to the issues of coastal resource management, drew on cooperation among actors to further develop *sasi laut*. Advocacy of relationships with outside parties aroused a new awareness to expand the scope of *sasi laut* and the adaptation of new values in *sasi laut* gained the support of the community. Furthermore, the people were actively involved in such programmes as a mangrove nursery and rehabilitation of mangrove areas in the estuary of the Learisa Kayeli River, one of the lompas fish habitats. The importance of mangrove rehabilitation had been increasingly recognised after the occurrence of coastal erosion in the last few years, which directly threatens human settlements and other public infrastructure.

Practical Outcomes

Due to both external and internal pressures, changes in the political, governance, natural resources and societal livelihood systems have affected the orientation of the *sasi laut* management system in Maluku, resulting in some positive and negative changes:



First, there has been an increasing awareness of efforts to protect coastal areas and the natural resources therein. This awareness encouraged the emergence of the *kewang*, assisted by outside parties, such as NGOs and donor agencies, to widen the area protection of the *sasi laut* system on other resources.

Second, the emergence of gender awareness has encouraged women's involvement in the *sasi laut* institution. The involvement of women in the institution was based on the consideration that one of the dimensions of indigenous *sasi* is female, providing a certain space for the presence of women in the *sasi* institution pertaining to the processes of law enforcement against woman offenders on *sasi*.



Figure 3: Village Leaders of Haruku

Third, as a social institution, *sasi* is vulnerable to family economic problems during its implementation. To overcome this problem, *kewang* have been provided a business unit in the form of economic management of marine tourism. *Kewang* have some guest houses with some units rented to researchers and tourists (local and foreign) visiting the Haruku Island, thereby providing additional income locally.

Fourth, there has been a decline in involvement in *kewang* that is needed to perform surveillance on resources. Some NGOs and donors have noticed



Figure 4: Gosong Bird Conservation

problems of *kewang* regeneration through education and training.

Fifth, the rise of awareness of *kewang*, and their experience in dealing with outside parties (NGOs, universities and donors), has encouraged *kewang* empowerment. *Kewang* of Negeri Haruku have established the Foundation of Haru-Ukui Kalesang to empower *kewang* in Maluku and coordinate implementation of inter-*kewang* of *sasi laut* in Haruku Island. Through this foundation, the *kewang* in Haruku Island have facilitated some *kewang* leaders from other villages to attend national seminars on coastal conservation and empowerment of Indigenous people (Figure 3).

Recently *sasi laut* has been developed by expanding the objects of conservation, including mangrove ecosystems, the Gosong bird (*Eulipoa wallacei*, or Moloccan scrubfowl), turtles, and other coastal resources (Figure 4). In addition, *sasi laut* is supporting marine tourism through a *sasi laut* festival in Haruku Village (Figure 5). Gender discourse has also been adopted through the representation of women in the local police corps, *kewang*. This was facilitated through the efforts made by such external parties as NGOs, donor agencies and universities.



Figure 5: Sasi Laut Festival of Haruku Village

In terms of legislation, the practice of local wisdom in Indonesia, such as *sasi laut*, has been recognized by the state through various laws and regulations. Political and natural resource governance changes, coupled with the strengthening of marine conservation discourse in Indonesia, make *sasi laut* more effective for coastal area protection and resources therein.

In Maluku, the strengthening of *sasi laut* practices is able to address the challenges of sustainability in the local system, particularly in implementing traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), amid global efforts to develop marine conservation networks. Therefore, the authority of *sasi laut* management must be responsive to the dynamics of the political system, economy, law, governance, science and technology. In conclusion, the transformation of *sasi laut* should be aimed at strengthening the capacity of human and institutional resources that are adaptive and responsive to external changes.

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