



Full Length Research Article

The Wetu Telu Community's Customary Chief Influence on the Management of Indigenous Forests in Bayan, North Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara

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ABSTRACT

The existence of an institution system and customary chief is very important for the sustainability of customary forest management. This study attempts to explain the function of the traditional chief of Wetu Telu community in the management of indigenous forests in the Bayan Sub-District, North Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, as well as the institutional framework and changes in that function. Observation, interviews, and documentation were used to collect data. The data obtained was analyzed thematically using Nvivo 12 Software, while a descriptive analysis used the Milles and Huberman Model. The results show that customary chiefs have the following roles: raise public awareness, spearhead conservation efforts, convey moral and spiritual messages, guide and oversee conservation efforts, mediate conflicts of interest related to nature, lead religious activities related to nature, and establish communication and collaboration. The institutional system of the Wetu Telu community's customary chief consists of several components, including special requirements, an appointment mechanism, personnel, a term of office, a source of income, and a dismissal mechanism. The role of the customary chief in indigenous forest management continues to be strengthened from time to time. The reasons for strengthening the role of the customary chief are the issuance of the Constitutional Court Decision Number 35 of 2012 concerning the status of indigenous forests, the recognition of the success of local wisdom-based forest management patterns, increasing public awareness of the importance of environmental conservation, global warming, and, the development of ecotourism.

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1. Introduction

An indigenous or customary forest is a forest within the legal territory of indigenous peoples (Putri et al. 2019; Simarmata 2018). After the Constitutional Court Decision Number 35 of 2012, the definition of indigenous forest refers to the status of the forest area itself, as well as customary rights or traditional rights that have a unique position (*lex specialis*), and customary law applies Article 5 of the Basic Agrarian Law Number 5 of 1960, which states, "The right to control the state does not apply in the jurisdiction of customary law community rights along with *ulayat* rights

or other traditional rights, even though the functional relationship between the two is still possible and can be regulated independently” (Gaol and Hartono 2021; Putri et al. 2019).

The number of customary forests the government designated is still relatively small. Data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of Indonesia shows that from 2016 to 2023, the Indonesian Government established 131 Customary Forest Decrees spread across 18 provinces and 40 districts with a total area of around 244,195 ha (Supriyanto 2023). The existence of indigenous forests is significant for customary communities. Apart from being a source of livelihood, these forests are also a social and cultural identity for indigenous peoples (Brondizio et al. 2021; Dawson et al. 2021; Ichikawa 2017). Forest management is prone to conflict in terms of control, management, utilization, or use of forest areas because of the many conflicts of interest involved at the national and local levels (Demchuk et al. 2021; Maier and Abrams 2018; Purnomo et al. 2020). The National Commission on Human Rights has recorded conflict data; the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago and Sawit Watch have reached 500–800 cases of land conflicts between investors and indigenous and tribal peoples (Joesoef 2021). Conflicts in forest management generally occur because the communities around the forest area are not involved in the management plan or strategy, so they do not benefit from the forest’s existence. Therefore, to suppress potential conflicts, communities must equitably gain access to forest resources (Froese and Schilling 2019). One model that can reduce potential conflicts is the indigenous people-based forest management, as practiced by the *Wetu Telu* Community in the Bayan area, North Lombok (Mandala 2021; Rachmansyah and Nizar 2018).

The *Wetu Telu* community is an example of indigenous people in Indonesia who manage their indigenous forests with local wisdom. These indigenous peoples live in the Bayan area, an easternmost sub-district in North Lombok Regency, ± 80 km from the provincial capital of West Nusa Tenggara, managing customary forests based on local wisdom by applying customary rules, namely, *awig-awig*. In managing indigenous forests, they believe in the philosophy of *Wetu Telu* (*wet* = territory/power, *tau* = party/element, *telu* = three). This concept is generally a “triad system” because three parties handle forest management activities jointly, namely customary elements, religious elements, and customary government elements (Jayadi et al. 2014a; Jayadi et al. 2014b; Rahman and Arba 2020).

Cases of loss of customary forests in the Bayan area and in the North Lombok area occurred during the New Order era of Indonesia. This was due to the strong dominance of the country over indigenous peoples at that time. On behalf of the country, village officials backed by the military are free to exploit customary forests for personal and group interests. The impact is a massive conversion of indigenous forest functions to fulfilling human needs. Approximately 17 indigenous forests in North Lombok have been converted into residential areas, rice fields, and agricultural fields (West Lombok Research and Review Team 2006). By applying the *Wetu Telu* concept, indigenous peoples in the Bayan area can preserve and save their forests from massive forest conversion. As a result, of a total of 17 indigenous forests that were lost in North Lombok District in the past, the Bayan Sub-District only lost 3 (17.65%), compared with the other two sub-districts, which were 4 (23.53%) in Gangga Sub-District, and 10 (58.82%) in Kayangan Sub-District. In addition, Bayan currently manages 251.2 ha (65.28%) of the total area, 384.81 ha in the same district still in North Lombok Regency (Jayadi 2015; West Lombok Research and Review Team 2006).

Considering the many challenges in managing customary forests in the Bayan District, local actors with strong leadership are needed to reduce conflicts of interest. The customary chief is one of the three key figures in conserving indigenous forests in the Bayan area. The other two figures are the head of the traditional institution, with the task of organizing and resolving various life problems related to applicable customs and customary laws (*awig-awig*), and the village head, with the task of running a government and empowering village communities. The customary chief figure represents the elements of the Islamic religion in the *Wetu Telu* system. They have a strategic position because, together with traditional leaders and government figures, they are the main pillars in preserving indigenous forests, both in the early days of independence, during the New Order era, and in the post-reform era.

Research on the role of religious leaders in environmental management is not something new because several previous studies have been conducted, including that of [Hekmatpour et al. \(2017\)](#), [Torabi and Noori \(2019\)](#), and [Yang and Huang \(2018\)](#). A previous study by [Hekmatpour \(2017\)](#) focused on the diversity of Islamic literacy and thought on the environment. Their findings show that the concept of “human dominion over the earth” and “human privilege” shown by authoritarian governments, which emphasize economic development, tends to be anti-environmental. On the other hand, Sufism is more compatible with environmental management because it can provide a spiritual context for environmentally conscious actions. A study by [Yang and Huang \(2018\)](#) that focused on the influence of religious beliefs on environmental behavior in China showed that most religious beliefs hurt private environmental behavior but positively affect public environmental behavior. Thus, an interactive religion–political mechanism is needed to increase pro-environmental behavior in China. The study by [Torabi and Noori \(2019\)](#) on the perspectives of Muftis from the Middle East and North Africa on climate change and global warming shows that the Muftis believe that climate change and global warming cannot be changed, which shows religious leaders’ lack of knowledge about environmental changes. Given that the Muftis’ role is very strategic, increasing their awareness of the environmental crisis and its solution is necessary.

This research has similarities with previous studies in terms of the role of religious leaders in environmental management ([Torabi and Noori 2019](#); [Yang and Huang 2018](#)). However, there are differences in the characteristics of the study, the object of the study, and the time and location of the research. Thus, this research is not a repetition of previous studies. The reason is that the study will focus on the existence of a customary chief in customary forest management in Bayan District, including roles, institutional systems, changes in roles in the future, and reasons for changes. As a representation of religious elements, the role of customary chiefs in the Bayan area’s indigenous peoples is very important. His role is not only limited to being a leader at *urip* ceremonies (birth, circumcision, and marriage) and death, but he is also a religious leader in traditional ceremonies related to nature ([Jayadi et al. 2014a, b](#)).

The role of the customary chief as a key figure in the management of indigenous forests in Bayan is well known. However, his role, institutions, and dynamics are still unknown. Based on this, this research aims to describe the role, the institutional system, and the changes in the role of the *Wetu Telu* community’s customary chief in managing indigenous forests in the Bayan Sub-District, North Lombok, in the future. It is hoped that the results of this study can be used as a guide to be adopted by other regions in increasing the role of religious leaders to raise awareness and collective action for the surrounding community to conserve the environment.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Sites and Places

This research was conducted in the Bayan Sub-District, North Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province (**Fig. 1**). There are several reasons for choosing Bayan Sub-District as a research location, including it has the most extensive customary forest in North Lombok Regency, the least loss of customary forest in the past, as the center of the Wetu Telu Community, and where the Ancient Bayan Mosque and Bayan Traditional House are located, as well as a place where various rituals related to forest management are carried out (Jayadi et al. 2014a).

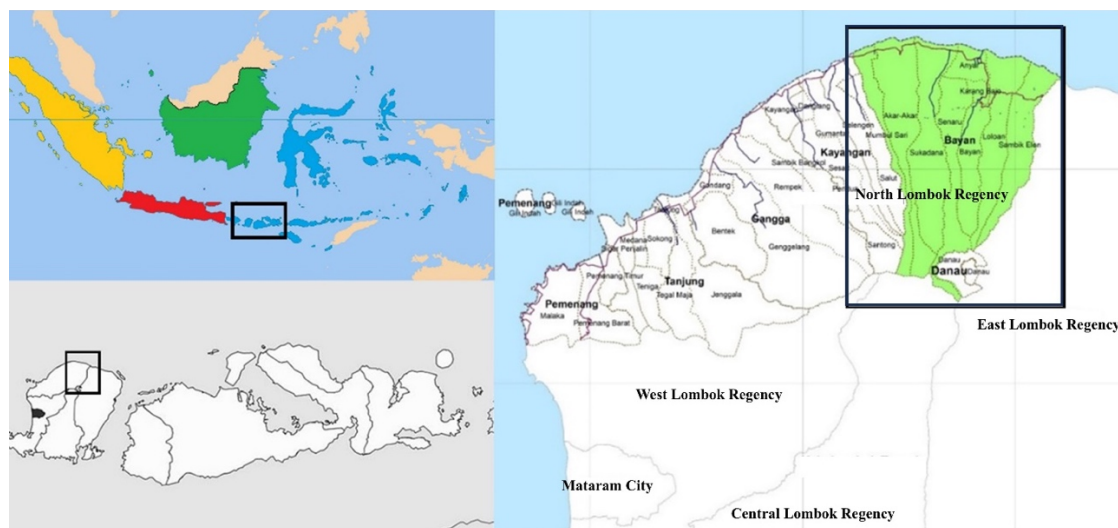


Fig. 1. Bayan Sub-District location (marked in black).

2.2. Experimental Design

This study was designed using a descriptive–qualitative approach. The argument for using this approach is that we want to understand the object of research in-depth and holistically to reveal the meaning behind the role of the customary chief in indigenous forest management.

2.3. Data Collection

Data collection is done through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation techniques are used to obtain data on environmental conditions in the study area. The interviews were conducted in the form of unstructured interviews to obtain in-depth information on the role of the customary chief in indigenous forest management. The documentation method was used to obtain supporting data originating from agency reports or the results of research of certain institutions, for example, those relating to geographical conditions, demographic conditions, economic conditions, and socio-cultural conditions of the people at the research location.

The data source comes from primary and secondary data. The primary data was obtained directly from the first source, namely data related to the leading roles and functions of the customary chief in forest management, the institutional system of the customary chief, and the dynamics of the role of the customary chief in the future. This data was obtained directly from the key informants, namely the customary chief and *kyai santri*, who were domiciled at the research location. Other informants are stakeholders, including Heads of Traditional Institutions, Village Heads, and other customary leaders (**Table 1**). Secondary data was obtained from research reports,

literature, photo documents, and other references. They were all interviewed individually. To determine the number of representative informants using the Snowball sampling method, according to Miller et al. (2024), when information saturation has been reached, that is, when informants successively repeat the same explanation.

Table 1. Number of key informants interviewed

Key informant	Number (person)	Description
Customary chief	1	Individual
Head of the Traditional Institution	1	Individual
<i>Kyai santri</i>	6	Focused group discussion
Traditional elders (<i>sesepuh adat</i>)	2	Individual
Village head	1	Individual
Village secretary	1	Individual

For interviews via focused group discussion (FGD), 6 persons (30%) were randomly selected from 20 *kyai santri* at the research location. The research results of Nyumba et al. (2018) show that the number of participants per focus group ranged from 2 to 21 people, with a median of 10 people. There are four stages in FGD activities: research design, data collection, analysis, results and reporting (Morgan et al. 1998). At the research design stage, we determined 4 question themes by the research objectives, the number of participants, and the location for the FGD, namely at the Bayan Village Office. Data collection stage: provide an introduction to the *kyai santri* regarding the discussion that will be held, conduct the discussion, and conclude the results. Data analysis stage: listing, coding, then analyzing content and conversations. Reporting results: completing the data obtained with the results of previous research.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained was analyzed thematically with the help of Nvivo.12 Software, then continued with descriptive analysis using the Milles and Huberman model. The qualitative analysis consists of three activities simultaneously: data reduction, data presentation, and concluding (verification) (Bahtiar 2013). Testing the validity of the data was carried out through source triangulation techniques by interviewing various sources (customary chief, heads of traditional institutions, traditional elders, *kyai santri*, village heads and village secretaries) to check the credibility of the data and triangulation techniques, through interviews (individuals and FGDs), and observations to ensure which data is considered correct because it is from different observation angles. Extend the data collection period and consult with colleagues accustomed to conducting studies on environmental conservation topics (Hayashi et al. 2019; Jenkins 2018; Setyasih 2022; Sugiyono 2019; Susanto and Jailani 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Customary Chief's Role in Managing Indigenous Forests of Bayan Sub-District

There are various roles carried out by the customary chief and their institutions related to their duties and functions in managing the Bayan indigenous forest. According to Learned (2015),

religious leaders have seven roles related to environmental conservation, and the customary chief has applied for all those roles in the Bayan Sub-District (**Fig. 2**)

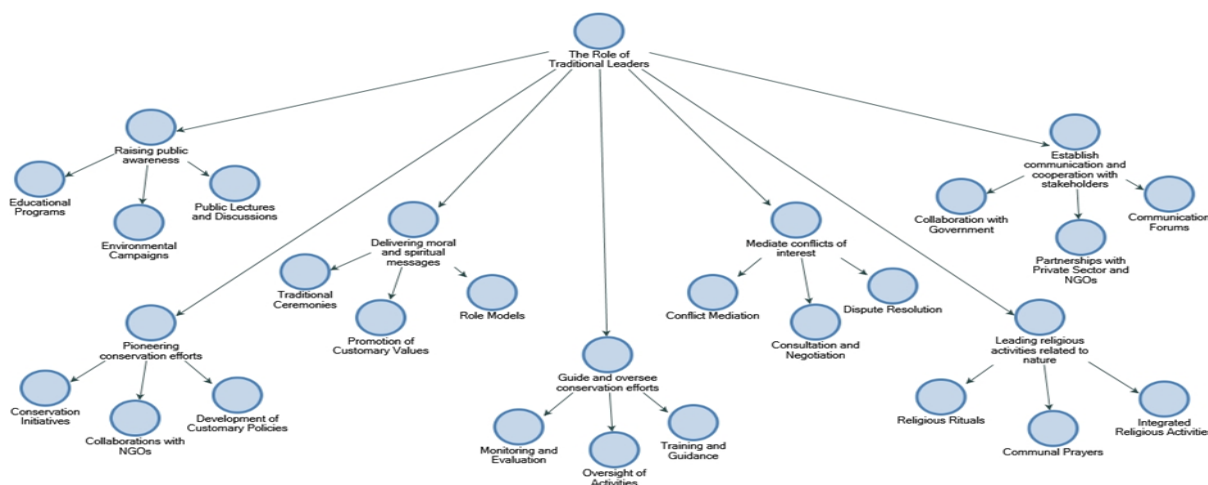


Fig. 2. The various roles carried out by the customary chief in managing the Bayan indigenous forest.

Based on the focus group discussion results and information obtained from interviews with the customary chief and several key informants, the following describes the customary chief's role in managing the forest of the Bayan Sub-District.

3.1.1. Raising public awareness

Customary chiefs and all other customary rulers carry out various cultural rituals in the indigenous forest. The traditional ritual procession is attended by the indigenous community and broadcasted by various mass media, both print and electronic (television), so viewers can witness it nationwide. One of the impacts is that it can raise public awareness that we must conserve environmental resources because all the needs of human life come from nature. Raden Gedarip, one of the Bayan customary chiefs, stated, *"If nature is damaged, then human life will be disrupted because all human needs are taken from nature; therefore, we must always protect and care for this indigenous forest as a source of our life"*. Safira et al. (2017) stated that experience and habit of managing forests form a system of knowledge of ecological knowledge of communities to manage and use resources wisely.

3.1.2. Pioneering conservation efforts

The customary chief and the community routinely conduct reforestation, maintaining indigenous forests, cleaning irrigation canals, or other activities around the Bayan customary forest. According to Raden Gedarip, *"Replanting or reforestation is done if a tree dies or is uprooted by the wind so the people would not lose the native plant species in indigenous forests. Sources of seeds for embroidery can come from self-help or the Forestry and Environment Agency"*.

As one of the traditional leaders who oversee the implementation of customary law, Customary chiefs do have an essential role in conservation efforts. Salampessy et al. (2024) report that applying customary rules can increase the community's active role in managing resources and supporting village management. Mangunjaya et al. (2015) and Schaefer (2020) stated that religious

leaders and organizations have a strategic role in society and government. They have strong funding sources and organizational networks to mobilize the masses for environmental conservation.

3.1.3. *Delivering moral and spiritual messages*

The worship rituals at the Bayan Ancient Mosque attempt to convey moral and spiritual messages to emphasize the relationship between God, nature, and humans. The Old Bayan Mosque, a building based on a river stone with walls made of woven bamboo and roofed with rope bamboo slats, with geographical conditions at the foot of Mount Rinjani, is an impressive symbol of harmony between three interrelated entities: God–nature–human. All of the building materials of the Bayan Traditional House, a symbol of human habitation, are of natural origin: thatch roofs, fences made of woven bamboo, building frames made of forest wood, and foundations made of natural stones. According to the Head of the Bayan Traditional Institution, Raden Kertomono, *“The existence of the Bayan Ancient Mosque, as a symbol of a house of worship, and the Bayan Traditional House as a symbol of a place to live for humans, cannot be separated from nature so that it requires us as humans always to preserve the indigenous forest because all the building’s materials come from the forest”*. According to [Romdloni and Djazilan \(2019\)](#), the *kyai*, one of the non-formal leaders in society, is considered a spiritual leader or leader in the religious field and at almost every special event, the indigenous community would be asked for a recommendation from the *kyai*. This is why the figure of the *kyai* in society is highly respected and reckoned with. Even though not many *kyai* fought for the preservation of the earth, the concepts they conveyed are still very relevant for humans to apply in the present or future.

3.1.4. *Guide and oversee conservation efforts*

The customary chief has always been active in monitoring the Bayan indigenous forest. If violators or parties who want to destroy the forests are found, the customary chiefs always try to explain that the forests are protected, so they will be subject to sanctions if they are violated. According to the Bayan Customary Institution Chairperson, Raden Kertamono, *“Educational efforts like that are intended to prevent as early as possible the desire to destroy indigenous forests, both from within and outside the Bayan indigenous people”*.

3.1.5. *Mediate conflicts of interest*

The customary chief always mediates conflicts in the community related to land ownership around the Bayan indigenous forest or the use of Bayan customary forest products. Fencing is the solution to minimize attempts to expropriate indigenous forest land.

According to Amaq Riajim, a customary chief, *“The use of non-timber forest products is prone to conflict due to the insistence on fulfilling personal needs, even though indigenous forests are collective property. We also mediated with various parties at the plan’s start to build a swimming pool in the Mandala Customary Forest”*. [Putri \(2014\)](#) stated that the *kyai* in the community has many roles, including advocating a village government policy and acting as a connector between the government and the community.

3.1.6. Leading religious activities related to nature

The customary chief is in the highest position among all of the *kyai*. They lead the congregational prayers at the Bayan Ancient Mosque, with the *Lebe* and *Ketip* standing to his right and all the *kyai* standing behind him.

In traditional rituals held in indigenous forests, for example, *Selamatan Mata Air*, according to Raden Gedarip, “*The customary chief is in charge of leading the prayer as a form of gratitude for the water bestowed by Allah SWT and wishes to fulfill water needs for the following year*”.

Traditional rituals have two goals: preserve natural resources and culture. Thus, two things are achieved at once. According to Aggata (2021), the same thing also happened to the ceremonial activities carried out by the indigenous peoples of Penabung Hill, Pelangas Village, Simpang Teritip District, and West Bangka (Babar) Regency. The value of preservation in forest management by the *Jerieng* people is divided into nature conservation and cultural preservation. The value of nature conservation is reflected in the efforts of the community to protect flora and fauna in the Bukit Penyabung indigenous forest area. In this case, the community and the Village Government release endemic wild animals and plant trees. This activity is also the moral responsibility of the community to maintain forest resources. Cultural preservation can be seen in the efforts of the *Jerieng* Tribe community to establish the *Ceriakgunong* ritual as an annual cultural event. This is done so that the outside community becomes aware of the cultural richness of the *Jerieng* tribe. In addition, by establishing this annual event, the community is aware not to damage nature. The importance of preserving nature is also embedded in everyday life: if the community protects the forest, it protects life.

3.1.7. Establish communication and cooperation with stakeholders

The customary chief is one of the three main pillars that maintain the sustainability of the Bayan customary forest. For this reason, the customary chief is always involved in all activities related to managing indigenous forests. Communication and collaboration are always made, both internally and externally. This is stated by the Customary Leader, Amaq Riajim, as follows:

“We maintain communication with internal parties with the Head of the Bayan Customary Institution and Village leader, as well as other Bayan indigenous people, As well as communication with external parties, for example, with government officials, both at the regional and central government levels, NGOs, and academics/universities, and foreign parties. In addition, most of the communication with the higher educational institutions is related to research activities”.

3.2. Bayan’s Customary Chief Institutional System in Managing the Indigenous Forest

Various aspects of the institutional system of Bayan’s customary chief in forest management must be described. These aspects are special requirements, appointment mechanism, personnel, term of office, source of income, and mechanism of dismissal (**Fig. 3**). Based on the focus group discussion with the six representatives of the *kyai santri*, the Customary Chief, the following describes the institutional aspects of indigenous forest. Specific requirements are described in the following sections.

3.2.1. Age restriction

Already married and is middle-aged, an age believed to be able to carry out tasks physically and psychologically. If the age is too young, it is feared that they will not be able to carry out their duties because their life experience is still relatively lacking, and their emotions are not yet stable.

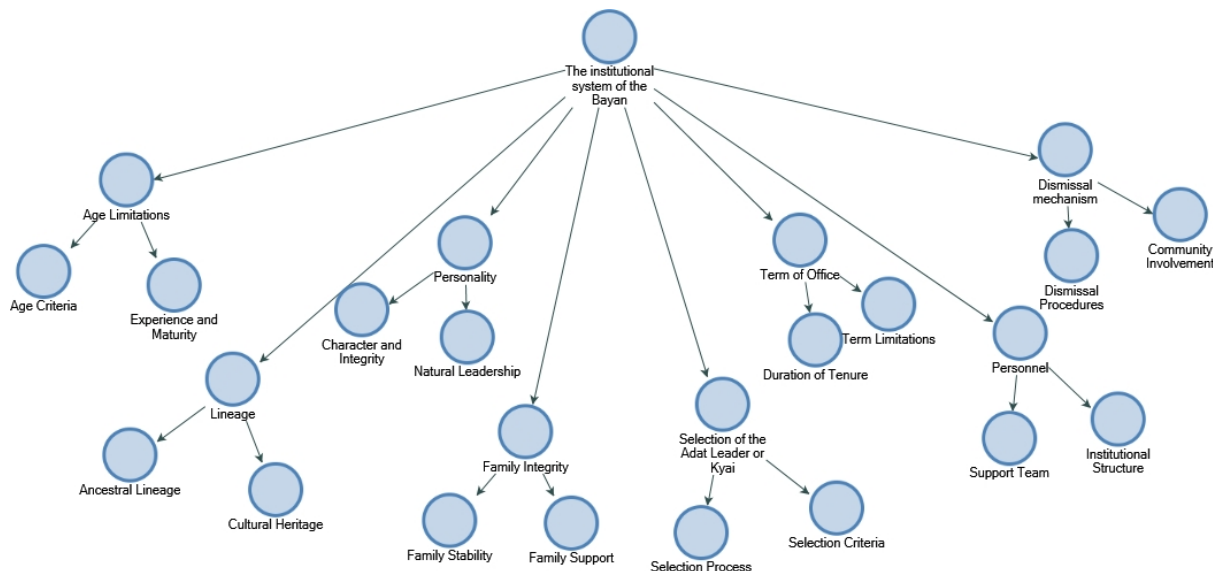


Fig. 3. Bayan’s customary chief institutional system in managing the indigenous forest.

3.2.2. Genealogy

With a descendant from a patrilineal line (*pruse*) of customary chiefs or *kyai*. Descendants from the matrilineal line (mother’s side) are not entitled to be appointed as customary chief or *kyai*.

3.2.3. Personality

The personality of the candidate who will be appointed as customary chief or *kyai* is one aspect that is used as an element of assessment. To be elected and appointed as a customary chief, this person must have a wise attitude in speech and behavior, be willing to carry out traditional rules, avoid customary prohibitions, and never commit a disgraceful act.

3.2.4. Family wholeness

Family integrity means having a complete partner (wife). The reason is that for every traditional ritual, the wife prepares all the equipment needed for the event. If his wife dies during his term of office, the customary chief or *kyai* must be replaced by appointing a new customary chief through a customary meeting (*gundem*).

3.2.5. Selecting customary chief or kyai

Indigenous peoples select prospective candidates from several candidates who meet predetermined criteria. The candidate will not be selected if any specific requirements are not met. After the elected candidates have been obtained and are willing to be elected, the indigenous peoples appoint them through a *gundem* led by the Head of the Customary Institution.

3.2.6. Length of service

The term of office of the leader is eight years. The previous customary chief can be re-elected through customary meetings for the next term of office, provided that (1) the person concerned states his willingness, (2) he is considered successful during the previous tenure, and (3) he is believed to be capable of carrying out the duties for the next term of office.

3.2.7. Personnel

To conduct their role, the customary chief is assisted by the *ketip*, *lebe*, *modin*, and 20 *kyai santri*. *Kyai santri* has an area at the hamlet level. However, not all hamlets have *kyai santri*. Hamlets that do not have *kyai santri* can ask *kyai* for help from the nearest/surrounding hamlet. The customary chief is given the authority to cultivate the *pecatu* land to fulfill their needs. In agrarian terms, *pecatu* land is called *ulayat* land, which is land shared by the members of the concerned customary law community. The income derived from the *pecatu* land, apart from being used to meet the necessities of life during the customary chief's tenure, is also set aside for the needs of traditional rituals.

3.2.8. Dismissal mechanism

Dismissal is conducted not only because the term of office has ended but also because special requirements are not met; for example, the wife dies, or the person concerned is untrustworthy or commits a disgraceful act. Dismissal is carried out through a *gundem* led by the Chairperson of the Customary Institution.

3.3. Changes in the Role of the Customary Chief in the Future

Changes in the role of the Customary Chief in customary forest management in the future are presented in Fig. 4.

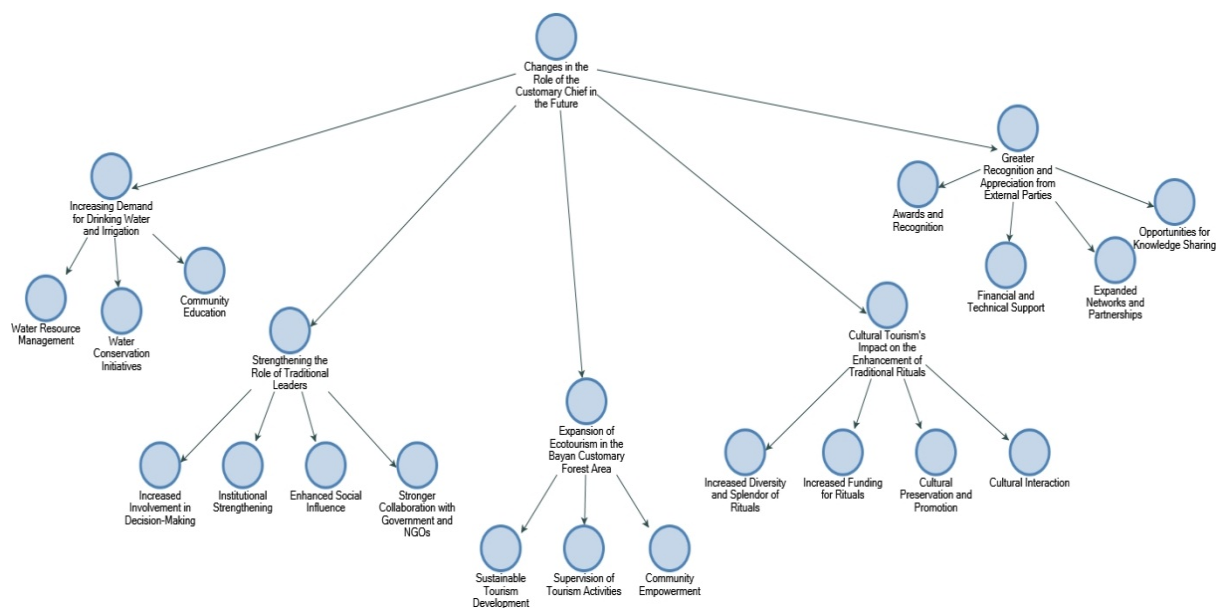


Fig. 4. Changes in the role of the customary chief in the future.

3.3.1. Indicators of strengthening the role of customary chief

The role of the customary chief continues to be strengthened in line with increasing public awareness of the importance of environmental conservation. According to information from the Secretary of Bayan Village, Hasan Basri: *“The customary chief’s busy schedule only allowed meetings or interviews to be conducted at night”*.

The busyness experienced by the chiefs is certainly natural when viewed from the changes in all aspects, including the physical environment and the social, cultural, and economic that are currently happening. In general, the dynamics of increasing the role of the customary chief can be seen from various indicators, as stated below: *“There are more and more activities related to traditional rituals and information and communication services with stakeholders outside the traditional community”*. Romdloni and Djazilan (2019) stated that *kyai* have various roles for society, including preventing the ecological crisis because they can construct society’s perspective on the environment from an ideological perspective so that society will be responsible for caring for and preserving the environment.

3.3.2. The increasing need for drinking water and irrigation

The increasing need for drinking water and irrigation water is in line with the increase in population and the intensification of agriculture. One of the indigenous forests used as a source of both needs is the Mandala Customary Forest, located in Mandala Hamlet, Bayan Sub-District. In the customary forest, there are several springs, such as *Lokoq Jawa*, *Lokoq Ampel Duri*, and *Baroq Tiok*. These three springs are never dry and flow all year round.

The water sourced from these springs is used for irrigation and drinking water. Information obtained from the village secretary of Bayan stated that the water that comes out of the springs in the Mandala Forest could irrigate 112 ha of rice fields in Bayan Village and become a source of clean water for at least 390 families in Bayan and 1,826 families in three other villages in the vicinity, namely Loloan, Karang Bajo, and Anyar village.

3.3.3. The growing development of ecotourism in the Bayan indigenous forest area

One form of ecotourism development in the customary forest in Bayan is constructing a swimming pool in the Mandala Customary Forest. The funds for constructing this swimming pool came from the British Council-Bank Mandiri, and its use was inaugurated on December 06, 2013. At first, this pool is only limited by rocks. However, after receiving financial aid, it has tiled floors and walls. The adult pool measures 12 m × 5 m and 5 m × 7 m for children. Apart from providing parking space around the swimming pool, local stalls provide a variety of culinary delights that visitors can enjoy at affordable prices. According to the Head of the Bayan Village, Satradi:

“The proceeds from the incoming fees from the swimming pool in the Mandala customary forest are divided into the following percentages: 70% for Village-Owned Enterprises (Bumdes) administrators, 15% for Mandala Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), and 15% for Village Original Income (PADes)”.

The water for this swimming pool comes from a spring found in the Mandala indigenous forest. According to Raden Gedarip, one of the Bayan traditional leaders:

“The existence of this swimming pool is a manifestation of the conservation of indigenous forests and springs because in the Mandala indigenous forest where several of these springs are located, there are also various trees, such as Bajur (Pterospermum javanicum Jungh),

Kenari (Canarium indicum L.), Koak (Ficus carica L.), Sugar palm (Arenga pinnata Merr), and Pulai (Alstonia scholaris (L.) R.Br.)”.

3.3.4. *Its association with cultural tourism causes more festive cultural rituals*

Many traditional rituals, which are related to forest management and water springs must be conducted by the customary chiefs. One is *Selamatan Mata Air* or *Roah Pengembulan*, held annually in the Mandala indigenous forest. The customary leader, along with his institutions and customary institutions, is responsible for the success of this traditional ritual. According to Amaq Riajim, a traditional leader:

“Selamatan Mata Air ritual is a form of community gratitude for preserving the forest and the abundance of water available in the Mandala indigenous forest. This customary ritual is attended by all farmers who use water from the local spring. Each of them voluntarily brought one chicken; some even brought buffalo to be slaughtered in the spring and as a dish to enjoy. The event of salvation was closed by the kyai with a prayer as gratitude for the grace of Allah SWT”.

In addition to all water-using farmers, the traditional ritual was attended by relatives or the extended families of the Bayan indigenous peoples, both those around the Bayan Sub-District and close relatives living outside the Bayan Sub-District. Those who live outside the sub-district deliberately return to their villages to gather and stay in touch with their families in Bayan. The ritual was even more lively because the North Lombok Regency Government packaged it as a cultural ritual to attract local and foreign tourists.

3.3.5. *More recognition and appreciation from outsiders*

The efforts of the Bayan indigenous peoples to preserve their indigenous forests and springs have received recognition and appreciation from various parties. The various awards and accolades include: 1) The Mandala Indigenous Forest Spring won first place in the West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) Provincial Spring Protection Competition in 2011, so it was appointed to represent NTB at the 2012 national level *Permata*; 2) The Mandala Indigenous Forest Spring won First Place in the National Level Water Springs (*Permata*) Protection Competition in 2012. For this success, the Deputy Minister of Forestry and the Environment made the Mandala and Akar-Akar indigenous forests, both in North Lombok Regency, become a pilot project, namely as a national community-based environmental preservation model; 3) In 2013, the Farmer Group “*Bangkit Bayan*” of Teras Genit Hamlet, Bayan Sub-District, won second place in the Village Competition for Spring Protection at the NTB Provincial Level. From this *Bangkit Bayan* indigenous forest, two waterfalls in their neighboring village, Senaru, namely Sendang Gile and Tiu Kelep, continue to flow swiftly all year round; and 4) In the 80s and 90s, when it was still a district of West Lombok and after becoming North Lombok Regency, the Bayan Forest farmers Group has repeatedly won the championship at both the district and NTB provincial levels.

Apart from being a source of irrigation water, springs originating from customary forests in Bayan Village are also a source of drinking water for Municipal Waterworks (PDAM) in 4 villages, namely Bayan Village, Karang Bajo Village, Loloan Village, and Anyar Village, with a total of 1,964 families (Masrillurhaman 2021).

In 2023, Bayan Village was 1 of 5 villages in Indonesia that received an award as a 2023 Cultural Village. According to the Director of Cultural Development and Utilization (PPK) of the

Directorate General of Culture, Ministry of Education and Research and Technology, Iriani Dewi Wanti, this success is because Bayan Village traditional leaders continue to maintain customary law (*awig-awig*) as the foundation of its culture. They can unite traditional traditions, religion, and village government to build community control over managing natural resources (customary forests), which are vital for sustainably fulfilling daily life (Putra 2023).

3.4. *The Reason for the Strengthening of the Role of the Customary Chief*

Local institutions, including the customary chief, are increasingly taking on a role in natural resource management due to internal and external factors in the local community. In general, the strengthening of the role of local institutions is due to several things, including (1) the issuance of the Constitutional Court Decision Number 35 of 2012, which stipulates that indigenous forests are no longer state forests, (2) the recognition of the success of local wisdom-based forest management patterns (Roza 2022), (3) increasing public awareness of the importance of environmental conservation, (4) global warming, and (5) the development of ecotourism (Heni et al. 2023; Lasaiba 2022).

The role of the customary chief in indigenous forest management continues to be strengthened from time to time because the pattern of forest management they carry out is in harmony with the principles of sustainable forest management. Isnandar (2021) stated that the policy pursued by the government is to implement a sustainable forestry development paradigm, which relies on a balance between the sustainability of economic, ecological and socio-cultural functions from non-centralized forest resource management and building community independence.

4. Conclusions

Customary chiefs have the following roles: raise public awareness, spearhead conservation efforts, convey moral and spiritual messages, guide and oversee conservation efforts, mediate conflicts of interest related to nature, lead religious activities, and establish communication and collaboration. Bayan's customary chief's institutional system consists of several components, including special requirements, an appointment mechanism, personnel, a term of office, a source of income, and a dismissal mechanism. This institutional system is expected to continue to be strengthened to avoid the appearance of subjective attitudes that can degrade the legitimacy of the elected figures. The role of the customary chief in indigenous forest management continues to be strengthened from time to time. It is because the pattern of forest management they carry out is in harmony with the principles of sustainable forest management. The reasons for strengthening the role of the customary chief are the issuance of the constitutional court decision Number 35 of 2012 concerning the status of indigenous forests, the recognition of the success of local wisdom-based forest management patterns, increasing public awareness of the importance of environmental conservation, global warming, and, the development of ecotourism.

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