



***Kaombo*: Local wisdom regarding forest conservation system among the Rongi indigenous people in South Buton**

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a local wisdom regarding forest conservation system called *kaombo* in the Rongi indigenous people in South Buton Regency, Indonesia. This is qualitative research with an ethnographic design. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Data analysis was carried out in a descriptive-qualitative ways using data reduction, presentation, and verification. The results of the research show that *kaombo* is a cultural institution that contains instrumental values to prevent forests from threats such as human overexploitation. The *kaombo* forest conservation system is reflected in the local knowledge of the Rongi indigenous people about forests and agricultural land use patterns. The principles of *kaombo* include forest sustainability, enforcement of customary sanctions for violations, and utilization of *kaombo* forest resources. *Kaombo* allows the carrying capacity of forest areas to be maintained.

1. Introduction

In Indonesia, the study of local wisdom regarding forest management is an important and interesting topic of discussion amid the rate of deforestation and forest environmental conservation programs. Forest management through a state-based approach (State-based forestry) that was once implemented during the New Order era has failed because it has proven to have a significant impact on ecological damage, poverty, and even the destruction of the cultural system of local communities in many

places. Learning from this experience, the forest management approach had a paradigm shift, from state-based forestry to a community-based forestry approach. If the first approach places forest management as the domain of the state in which forest areas are divided according to the will and definition of the state, then the second approach is more oriented towards providing space for the empowerment of local communities in conserving and utilizing forest resources. The latter approach is relevant considering that local communities, especially those living around forest, generally have conservation-oriented wisdom.

Based on this fact, efforts to explore and re-internalize local wisdom in forest conservation and management systems are important and strategic. This is reasonable because local wisdom based on cultural values is a functional instrument in maintaining and developing forest potential ecologically, economically and socio-culturally, as well as being a filter against outside influences that have the potential to threaten the sustainability of forest areas. The forest conservation system by indigenous peoples based on local wisdom is believed to be relevant to a sustainable forest management system (Jayadi, 2020: 148).

Communities living around forest generally have a traditional conservation system that allows forest resources to be preserved. This traditional conservation system is reflected through local wisdom in the form of systems of knowledge, technology, beliefs, and institutions that are practiced and developed by the community in managing and utilizing forest resources (UNESCO, 2007; Khongsdier, 2007). Local wisdom, thus, is the main capital of the community in developing itself without destroying the social order that is adaptive to the surrounding environment. Local wisdom itself is built from social values that are upheld in the social structure and has a function as a guide, controller, and signs for behaving in life, including behaving with the forest environment (Salam, in Sulistianingsih, 2021: 11). In the forest conservation practices of the Rongi indigenous people in South Buton Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, there is a form of local wisdom called *kaombo*. For the local community, *kaombo* is understood as a forbidden forest or forest protected by *adat* (custom). Ecologically, the forest designated as *kaombo* is a medium for the conservation of the resources contained therein. As a protected forest area, in *kaombo*, prohibitions apply to exploiting forest resources. Violation of this prohibition is subject to strict customary sanctions. The *kaombo* local wisdom-based forest conservation system is intended to prevent forests from threats to sustainability due to resource logging. This traditional conservation system also reflects the concept of shared ownership of forest resources as well as the institutionalization of shared ownership as communal property of local indigenous peoples. The concept of forest resources as shared property is governed institutionally by Sara Kadie Rongi as the local customary council.

The link between human (culture) and nature has been studied especially in tropical countries, such as Indonesia (Elands, et. al 2015; Maffi and Woodley, 2010; and Maffi, 2005). There is a convergence of cultural and biological diversity scattered around this region, where several indigenous and traditional communities live in harmony with different species such as plants, mammals, birds, etc. In this region also, we can find what is called as 'sacred nature areas' (specifically 'sacred forest') where the biodiversity

and the environment as a whole are protected and maintained (Pretty et al., 2009 & 2008; Loh and Harmon, 2005; Stepp, et al, 2004). This kind of area sometimes refers as the 'oldest form of conservation' (Elands, et. al 2015: 3348. See also, Wild and McLeod, 2008)

Studies regarding relationship between human (culture) and nature have been conducted by several researchers (Elands, et. al 2015; Khongsdier, 2007; Loh and Harmon, 2005; Hruschka, Lende, Worthman, 2005). In addition, studies on *kaombo* as a traditional environmental conservation system in Buton have been carried out by several researchers. In the study of Mustari et al, (2019) they describe the pattern of utilization of marine resources based on local *kaombo* wisdom. The conservation of coastal and marine ecosystems based on *kaombo* is also presented in the studies of Tenri et al, (2019) and Malim (2022). In contrast to a number of these studies which focus on marine and coastal environmental conservation systems, this study describes the local wisdom of *kaombo* as a forest environmental conservation system. A study of *kaombo* as a form of local wisdom in a forest conservation system in South Buton Regency was conducted by Risnawati, Alamiu, and La Janu (2019), as well as Mardan and Ramadan (2021). However, the last two studies were not specifically carried out on the Rongi indigenous community. The Rongi indigenous people are the setting for this study because the principles of forest conservation based on *kaombo* are still upheld in their communal life. This study aims to reveal a forest conservation system based on local wisdom of *kaombo* as an effort to understand the humanist side of indigenous peoples to maintain the carrying capacity of the forest environment.

2. Method

This is qualitative research with an ethnographic design. Ethnographic research is a type of research oriented to describe a culture. Operationally, this research covers literature study and field research. While the literature study aims to collect secondary data, field research is intended to collect primary data through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation. The using of several data collection techniques aims to minimalize bias and to see the strenghts and weaknesses of each technique (Denzin dan Lincoln 2009:495-499). This research was conducted on the Rongi indigenous community who are administratively live in Sandang Pangan Village, Sampolawa District, South Buton Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province. The setting of the research location was chosen because the *kaombo*-based forest conservation system is still firmly adhered to and practiced by the indigenous community which allows the forest area in their residential environment to be preserved. Analysis of research data was carried out through activities that occurred simultaneously, namely data reduction, data presentation, and verification (drawing conclusions).

3. Result and discussion

- **Characteristics of Rongi Indigenous Community**

The Rongi indigenous people are a social group that inhabits the mountainous area in the south of Buton Island. As a group of people who depend on the dry-land agricultural sector to fulfill their economic needs (farmers-cultivators), since the time of the Buton Sultanate, they have played a role as one of the suppliers of the sultanate's food stocks.

Because of these characteristics, after the independence of Indonesia, when villages and sub-districts were formed in Buton Regency in the late 1960s, the Rongi indigenous people were organized in a village called Sandang Pangan Village. The designation of Sandang Pangan Village as an administrative area for the residence of the Rongi indigenous community is associated with their character as farmers. In fact, the term *rongi* which is the identification of this indigenous group comes from the word *rongo* which means "basket", and also the name of "Sandang Pangan" in Bahasa Indonesia means "food and clothing". These idioms also emphasize their character as a farming community.

Sandang Pangan Village as an administrative area Where the Rongi indigenous community lives is one of the villages that is currently included in the administrative area of Sampolawa District, South Buton Regency. This village is ± 7 km from Mambulu, the main city of Sampolawa District, or ± 25 km from Batauga, the main city of South Buton Regency. This village can be reached by land, both from north to south, namely from Kaongke-Ongkea (Buton Regency area), as well as from south to north, via Mambulu.

As an agrarian community that depends on the management of dry-land agricultural resources (swift-agriculture), the Rongi indigenous people cultivate a number of types of short-term and long-term crops. The types of short-term crops that they generally cultivate are corn, cassava, sweet potatoes, rice, and vegetables. Apart from being used to meet household consumption needs, the agricultural products are also traded. Paddy-field agricultural produce (*bhaena gunu*) is a superior type of commodity produced by Rongi farmers. This commodity is very popular in Buton as *bhaena rongi* (Rongi rice). While the cultivation of long-term types of plants include coconut, coffee, bananas, and cashew nuts. In addition, some of them are also have poultry as well as goat and cattle farming.

The style of the agrarian economic system which is the character of the Rongi indigenous people as mentioned above is further strengthened by several customary rules that are still firmly adhered to in their communal life. The customary rules also include an orientation system for the protection of forest areas. For local indigenous people, forests are an invaluable environmental resource. Therefore, the forest area is highly conserved. Efforts to maintain forest sustainability are reflected in their local wisdom called *kaombo*.

As a part of the large alliance of the Buton people, the Rongi indigenous people are devout adherents of Islam. However, from several ritual practices that are still traditional in their communal life, it can be seen that elements of the pre-Islamic belief system experience syncretism with the Islamic belief system. Traditional religious institutions that have existed since the time of the Buton Sultanate and are still maintained today are called *sarana agama*. This traditional religious institution consists of: (a) one imam, (b) two preachers (*khatib*), (c) three *moji langgara*, (d) one *tunggunaganda*, and (e) two *mokimu*. Apart from carrying out worship rituals at the village mosque, these traditional religious institutions also carry out the function of leading the implementation of religious ceremonies carried out by members of the community in their village.

During the Buton Sultanate era, Rongi's position in the sultanate organization was contained in the Buton constitution called the Dignity of Seven Acts (*Martabat Tujuh*). This law states that the jurisdiction of the Sultanate of Buton consists of 72 *kadie* (autonomous villages) and 4 *barata* (autonomous regions). Of the 72 existing *kadie*, there were 40 *kadies* supervised by officials called *lakina* or *bobato* (officials from Kaomu), while the other 30 *kadies* were supervised by officials called *bonto* (officials from Walaka). Meanwhile, the other two *kadie* are symbolic *kadie* which signify the position of the two clans, namely Kaomu and Walaka, as rulers in the Sultanate of Buton (Munafi et al, 2020). In the system of power in the Sultanate of Buton, each *kadie* has an autonomous local government apparatus whose task is to take care of the local interests of the *kadie* community. This local government apparatus is called *sara kadie* (Malim, 2022). As one of the *kadie* in the Sultanate of Buton, Rongi has a *sara kadie* called *Sara Kadie Rongi*. The members of *Sara Kadie Rongi* consist of *Parabela*, *Moji Caseu*, *Pande Batata*, *Wati*, *Kinia*, *Mancuana Liwu*, *Pande Nkaole*, *Pande Rubu*, and *Akanamia*. Even though *Sara Kadie Rongi* today is no longer in charge of *kadie* local governance matters as its position and function was in the past, its existence is still maintained as a traditional institution. In the position as a traditional institution, *Sara Kadie Rongi* has authority in customary life, including controlling the management and utilization of forest resources covered in the former *Kadie* area. With this function, *Sara Kadie Rongi* has a central position in the life of the local indigenous people.

- **Kaombo: Forest Environment Traditional Conservation Institutions**

In general, the South Buton Regency has abundant forest resource potential. One of the potentials referred to is the distribution of teak wood and other types of commercial wood that grow in forest areas within the Lakompa forest management unit area (*Kesatuan Pengelolaan Hutan* or KPH) (Mardan and Syaril Ramadan, 2021: 78). The distribution of various types of wood that form forest areas in the region dominates most of the community plantation areas, including the plantation area of the Rongi indigenous people.

The sustainability of forest areas is largely determined by the level of human awareness of the importance of forest use and management. Amid the trend of shrinking forest areas that are occurring in many places today, the forest areas located in the residential areas of the Rongi indigenous people can be relatively preserved. This is possible because the Rongi indigenous people still uphold values, norms, and several customary rules related to the traditional forest environment conservation system. This traditional conservation system is called *kaombo*. *Kaombo* is basically a cultural instrument that functions to maintain a harmonious relationship between humans and the forest environment. Through *kaombo*, efforts to maintain harmony in the relationship between humans and the forest environment based on interdependence between the two will not only allow for the maintenance of the carrying capacity of the forest environment but also become a vehicle for community self-development. For the Rongi indigenous people, efforts to maintain harmony in the relationship between humans and the forest environment as reflected in the local wisdom of *kaombo* can be explained through local knowledge systems about forests, land use patterns for farming that consider aspects of forest environmental sustainability, and enforcement of customary sanctions for

violations in the management and utilization of forest resources. These three aspects are explained in the description below.

Local Knowledge about Forest

Various efforts to maintain environmental balance based on norms, values, or rules that have been practiced for generations reflect local wisdom which aims to protect and manage the environment in a sustainable manner (Sulistianingsih, 2021: 13). The environment and the resources contained have a significant influence on the formation of culture. This means that the culture of a society is formed because of the reciprocal relationship between humans and their environment. One element of culture is a knowledge system which is also formed from the reciprocal relationship between humans and their environment (Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

As part of the culture, the knowledge system of the Rongi indigenous people about the forest is reflected through myths about the places where the ancestral spirits of the Rongi people live. This myth (like other myths) becomes a source of value in their communal life related to the forest environmental conservation system (Susanto, 1987 and Danandjaja, 1997). An informant explained that in Rongi mythology, the ancestral spirits of the Rongi people are believed to live in a forest area. In the conception of the local community, such forest areas are then seen as sacred places. The sacred forest area is hereinafter referred to as the *kaombo* forest. In general terminology, *kaombo* is also commonly referred to as forbidden forest or *hutan tutupan* (covered forest) protected by *adat*. *Adat* in this sense is understood as a habit that is passed down from generation to generation by members of society and functions to organize social relations to create and maintain functional relationships among communities, including reciprocal relationships between humans and the environment (Naping, in Mustari et al., 2019:58).

As a form of respect for the ancestral spirits that inhabit the *kaombo* forest area, in the life of the Rongi indigenous people, a prohibition applies to inappropriate behavior towards the *kaombo* forest. In the local knowledge system, inappropriate behavior can be in the form of cutting down trees (timber theft) or clearing fields in the *kaombo* forest area. Another form of prohibition is to say dirty words, to be arrogant, or to speak inappropriately while in the *kaombo* forest.

Prohibition of inappropriate behavior in the *kaombo* forest area is a value that is highly respected in the communal life of the Rongi indigenous people. They believe that individuals or groups who violate the prohibition will receive misfortune or bad luck. This was the result of the ancestor's wrath for the inappropriate behavior they did in the *kaombo* area. It is believed that the ancestor's wrath for violating a number of these prohibitions not only had an impact on the individual who committed the violation but also on the local community. Disasters that befall, such as floods, landslides, droughts, disease outbreaks, crop failures, are believed to be the result of ancestral wrath because of the violation of a number of these prohibitions. Given the adverse impacts, both for individuals and especially for the community, the sustainability of the *kaombo* forest area is protected by local customs. *Sara Kadie Rongi* is a local institution that has authority in enforcing local customary law. Therefore, to remind the public of the importance of preserving the *kaombo* forest, in a *rompua* (traditional meeting), *pande bhatata* officials (one

of the traditional instruments in *Sara Kadie Rongi*) customarily pronounce words of oath containing curses to the destroyers of *kaombo*. An informant explained that anyone who deliberately cut down trees or stole wood in the *kaombo* forest for personal gain without *sara's* consent would be followed by reinforcements and their life would never be calm. Likewise, for those who try to cultivate land in *kaombo* for gardening, then the plants will be destroyed by pests (harvest failure).

Even so, the resources in the *kaombo* forest are not entirely unusable by the local community. As an agrarian society that depends on forest environmental resources, the Rongi indigenous people can take advantage of *kaombo* forest resources, such as taking firewood, forest cassava, vegetables, fruits, natural medicines, as well as for livestock feed. Hunting wild animals, such as partridges, bees, or birds in the *kaombo* forest to a certain extent is also permitted. Traditionally, this concession is given if it does not damage the trees or even break a single branch in the *kaombo* area. Apart from that, other resources within the Kaombo forest area, such as timber, may also be used as long as they meet the collective needs of the local community. Regarding this, an informant explained that according to custom, the use of wood in the *kaombo* forest is permissible. However, the wood is only used for the mutual benefit of the local community, such as building a village mosque, building a *baruga* (traditional meeting hall), or other types of common needs. In practice, when wood is collected for the collective needs of the community, a series of traditional rituals are first held. The ritual is intended as a medium to ask permission from the ancestral spirits to use the wood in the *kaombo* forest for the common interests of the local community. Meanwhile, the use of wood for the benefit of a few people in the *kaombo* area is strictly prohibited by custom. Therefore, those who violate are subject to strict customary sanctions.

Human behavior towards the environment through actions that are mystical and magical in nature as reflected in the knowledge system of the rongi indigenous people about the *kaombo* forest can be understood as a cultural strategy. In this case, we can see culture and nature are intertwined (Loh and Harmon, 2005; Hruschka, Lende, Worthman, 2005; Khongsdier, 2007). Each culture contains a value system that functions to specifically regulate sets of human actions, both individuals and groups based on the views and cultural values adopted by Lampe (in Mustari et al, 2019: 59). As a traditional forest environment conservation institution, the prohibition on the use of resources in the *kaombo* forest area is understood as a cultural strategy that functionally aims to: (a) protect the forest area from human behavior that is not environmentally friendly; (b) protect the sustainability of forest resources, both land and water, as well as the availability of oxygen; and (c) protecting forest biota, both trees and animals from the threat of population decline. The local knowledge system of the Rongi indigenous people regarding forest conservation based on the local wisdom of *kaombo* has proven to be effective in supporting forest environmental sustainability. It means that there is a close connection between human and nature resulting in the protection of the forest (Loh and Harmon, 2005; Hruschka, Lende, Worthman, 2005; Khongsdier, 2007; Cheng, et. al, 2020). This also means that *pranata kaombo* as a product of local wisdom supports a sustainable forest management system.

Land Use for Cultivation

One of the characteristics of local wisdom in communities living around forest areas is reflected in the close relationship between the community's survival processes and efforts to conserve the forest environment. The physical and emotional closeness to the forest environment as well as the process of interaction that gives and takes mutual benefits over a long period of time gave birth to the community's understanding and knowledge of the forest environment. The result of the interaction process which is based on interdependence encourages the community to find forms of attitude towards the forest environment.

For the Rongi indigenous people, the form of attitude towards the forest environment is reflected in the pattern of land use for farming which considers aspects of forest environmental sustainability. As a group of people who depend on the dry-land agricultural sector, the availability of land for farming is the main need for the Rongi indigenous people to maintain their survival. Even so, the pattern of land use for farming is always associated with the principles of *kaombo* conservation. Efforts to maintain the sustainability of *kaombo* are always a common concern for community members when they want to open land for farming. Because of these considerations, community members should not clear land for farming individually. In practice, the land to be used as a farming area and the types of plants to be cultivated in one growing season are decided by *parabela* as the top leader of *Sara Kadie Rongi*. The *parabela* decision was taken based on the results of the *rompua* (traditional consultation) which was attended by members of *Sara Kadie Rongi* with local residents. It was in the *rompua* forum that everything related to the readiness of the residents to cultivate crops was discussed. In addition to land use and types of plants to be cultivated in one growing season, in *rompua*, matters related to the importance of preserving the *kaombo* forest are also discussed. This is so that the land that will be used as a farming area that season does not erode the sustainability of the *kaombo* forest.

The forest area within the residential area of the Rongi indigenous people which has long been designated as *kaombo* is an area that is in the upper reaches of the Rano River, a large river that flows through the residential area of the local community. The *kaombo* or customary protected forest area extends following the watershed with a radius of up to ±300 m on the left and right sides of the river. This is a forest area that has received customary protection for generations because of its status as *kaombo*. This means that the use of land for farming purposes should not be carried out around the area. The position of the forest which has long been designated as *kaombo* is now surrounded by community gardens. This supports the ecological functions of the *kaombo* forest, including maintaining soil fertility, water availability, and creating a microclimate.

The *kaombo* local wisdom-based forest conservation system that is still maintained in the communal life of the Rongi indigenous people to this day is a legacy of wisdom from the time of the Buton Sultanate. In the constitution of Buton, which is called the Dignity of Seven Laws, it is stated that each *kadie* is obliged to maintain and protect a forest area (*kaombo*). Furthermore, all resources in the *kaombo* forest area, in the form of land, water, trees, animals, and mineral materials must be protected by the community in the relevant *kadie*. Thus, the use of land for farming purposes by taking into account the

principles of forest environmental conservation as practiced in the communal life of the Rongi indigenous people also functionally supports the carrying capacity of the forest environment sustainability.

Customary Sanctions

Customary sanctions are one of the instruments that reflect the cultural commitment of the Rongi indigenous people in an effort to preserve the *kaombo* forest. The institution that has the authority to enforce the sanctions is *Sara Kadie Rongi*. Customary sanctions are imposed after a person or group of people is proven to have violated the forest environmental conservation principles that have been designated as *kaombo*. In practice, these customary sanctions can be classified into “light” sanctions and strong sanctions.

Klasifikasi sanksi ringan dijatuhkan untuk jenis pelanggaran seperti menebang dahan pohon yang masih hidup dalam kawasan *kaombo*. Terhadap jenis pelanggaran seperti ini, maka yang bersangkutan akan mendapatkan peringatan dari *parabela* agar tidak mengulangi perbuatannya dikemudian hari. Yang bersangkutan juga mendapatkan nasehat akan pentingnya menjaga kelestarian *kaombo* sebagai cadangan pemenuhan kebutuhan kolektif masyarakat setempat. Tentang kasus seperti ini, La Jua (nama disamarkan) menceritakan pengalamannya ketika ia mendapatkan peringatan dari *parabela* karena menebang dahan pohon yang masih hidup dalam *kaombo*. Informan ini bertutur:

The “light” sanction is imposed for “light” violations such as cutting down tree branches that are still alive in the *kaombo* area. For this kind of violation, the person concerned will receive a warning from the *parabela* not to repeat their actions in the future. They also received advice on the importance of preserving *kaombo* as a reserve for meeting the collective needs of the local community. Regarding cases like this, La Jua (pseudonym) told his experience when he received a warning from *parabela* for cutting down a tree branch that was still alive in *kaombo*. The informant said:

“About five years ago, the *parabela* scolded me for cutting down tree branches in *kaombo*. At that time, I was building my house again. When I came home from the garden, it was late in the evening, I passed by *kaombo*. I saw that there were good branches for *kaso* (a place to tie thatched roofs). I cut down some branches. When I was cleaning it, someone passed by. I don't know, maybe he reported me to *parabela*. At that night, I was called at *parabela*'s house. I was asked if I cut down any living tree branches in *kaombo*. At first, I said just take the dead branches. But *parabela* kept asking. Finally, I confessed to take some branches for the *kaso*. The *parabela* said that don't repeat your actions again because it's *pepali* (taboo). If the tree in the *kaombo* dies, it will be detrimental to all of us.”

The case experienced by La Jua as described above is a reflection of the enforcement of customary sanctions for violating the principles of *kaombo* conservation. Even though the enforcement of sanctions was relatively light, receiving a stern warning from the local customary authority is a quite serious problem. Nevertheless, the case reflects the wisdom of the community by trying to maintain forest sustainability. La Waru (pseudonym), another informant, told his experience when he was caught red-handed while cutting down trees in a *kaombo*.

“When I was young, I was punished by *sara*. At that time, I cut down teak trees to build a *wale* (huts). But I guess that tree is not in *kaombo*. I was on trial by *sara*. I said, ‘the tree is outside the *kaombo*’. Some oldmen said ‘no, that tree is in *kaombo*’. I finally shut up and admit I was wrong. In the end, *sara* confiscated my ax and the tree I cut down. But then I realized my fortune that only the ax and trees I cut down were confiscated. I was not sentenced *tumaikaliku*”

The customary sanctions experienced by the informant above, in the form of confiscation are included in the classification of strong sanctions. The confiscation sanction was imposed because the person concerned admitted his mistake and apologized to *sara*. However, it is different when the person concerned insists on not admitting his guilt. In such cases, if a person denies their actions while witnesses testify against them, then, the punishment will be social ostracism. In the local customary language, sanctions like this are called *tumaikaliku*. La Wadi (pseudonym) an informant who was sentenced to be *tumaikaliku* by *sara*, shared his experience.

“Around the 1980s, I got *tumaikaliku*. The reason is that at that time. I took the wood in *kaombo* to sell it as a material for home. Then, someone wanted to buy. I took an ax then went looking for wood. On that day, I cut down three *wola* trees. A few days after that, I was summoned to the *baruga* where *parabela* and other figures were waiting. I was asked where the wood I got from. I replied that I was cutting in my garden. But some people in *baruga* said I cut it in *kaombo*. I said, it was the wood from my garden. Because I kept holding on, finally, *parabela* said that tomorrow it would be inspected in my garden. The next day, several elders came to check on the garden. They said this is the *kaombo* location. But I said this is my garden. The next day I was called back at the *baruga*. I still said that the wood is in my garden location. Finally, I was sentenced to *tumaikaliku*. During the sanction, I was like a foreigner in the village, no one wanted to talk to me. Maybe one year later, I realized that I was wrong and apologized to *sara*. Only after that, the villagers wanted to talk to me.”

The customary sanction in the form of *tumaikaliku* as a result of violating the principles of *kaombo* forest conservation as told by the informant above is the exclusion of a person from the social environment. Consequently, local residents are prohibited from interacting with him in any arena. Apart from being ostracized from the social environment, those who got *tumaikaliku* are also believed to have received bad luck or misfortune. In order to institutionalize efforts to protect the *kaombo* area by enforcing customary sanctions, at present, the types of sanctions imposed are also coupled with a fine in the form of an amount of money in addition to the confiscation of evidence by the local customary institution.

The enforcement of customary sanctions in relation to the traditional conservation system of the forest environment in the Rongi indigenous people reflects the existence of a legal system that applies in the life of the local community in order to maintain the preservation of the forest environment. Friedman (2018) argues that the legal system of the Rongi indigenous people regarding forest environmental conservation includes: (i)

substance of the law, (ii) structure of law, and (iii) culture of laws. Whether or not, the forest environment conservation system is effective will depend heavily on these three elements of the legal system. The element of legal substance (substance of the law) in the forest environment conservation practice referred to is shown through the *kaombo* system as a justification for forest areas receiving customary protection. Thus, a forest that is given the status of *kaombo* is a legal substance that becomes an orientation for local community members in behaving towards the forest environment.

Furthermore, the elements of the structure of law in forest environmental conservation practices are demonstrated through the existence of *Sara Kadie Rongi* who has customary authority to control the management and utilization of forest resources. As a local institution, *Sara Kadie Rongi* has customary authority in imposing sanctions on violations of utilization of protected forest resources. Meanwhile, the legal culture (culture of law) in forest environmental conservation practices is the attitude of the community in the utilization of forest resources. No matter how good the quality of legal substance and legal structure is, if it is not supported by a legal culture, customary sanctions (law enforcement) will not be effective. In the forest environment conservation practice of the Rongi indigenous people, the three elements of the legal system are still operating effectively which allows the forest environment to be preserved.

4. Conclusion

The sustainability of the forest environment is strongly influenced by the local wisdom of a community in managing and utilizing forest resources. *Kaombo* is a reflection of local wisdom in the forest environment conservation system of the Rongi indigenous people. Through *kaombo*, harmony in the relationship between humans and the forest environment can be maintained. This also means that the preservation of the forest environment can be maintained in a sustainable manner. It means that there is a close connection between nature and culture, resulting in the protection of the forest (Loh and Harmon, 2005; Hruschka, Lende, Worthman, 2005; Khongsdier, 2007; Cheng, et. al, 2020). This also means that *pranata kaombo* as a product of local wisdom supports a sustainable forest management system.

As a traditional forest environment conservation institution, *kaombo* reflects instrumental values aimed at limiting human movement in exploiting forest resources. These instrumental values are reflected in the knowledge system of the Rongi indigenous people regarding the existence of forests, consideration of the sustainability of forest ecosystems in land use patterns for farming, and enforcement of customary actions for violating the principles of traditional conservation of the forest environment. The *kaombo* local wisdom-based forest conservation system that manifests in the lives of the Rongi indigenous people provides valuable lessons on the importance of preserving forests while at the same time reducing human exploitative attitudes towards natural resources.

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