

The Six Principles of Belom Bahadat: Decolonizing Sustainable Food Governance in Central Kalimantan

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ABSTRACT

The National Strategic Food Estate Program in Central Kalimantan (2020–2024) failed to achieve its objectives not solely due to technical agricultural issues, but because state policy lost its footing in local institutions, knowledge, and community values. This article addresses one central question: how can indigenous values be translated into governance mechanisms that restore the legitimacy and effectiveness of state food policy? Using qualitative case studies in Pulang Pisau, Kapuas, and Gunung Mas Regencies (May 2022–July 2025) through in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, and document review, this research identified five consistent patterns of failure: centralized knowledge and one-way socialization, a ban on land burning without alternatives, technological assistance inappropriate to field conditions, a lack of community involvement in planning, and the neglect of ecological knowledge and customary institutions (Damang). This article then proposes six principles of Belom Bahadat of the Dayak Ngaju community as a procedural framework that links local values with public administration functions: Pambelom (planning), Imbelom (coordination), Mambelom (implementation), Hakam (supervision), Kabelom (accountability), and Kabalumam Belom (social justice). Its theoretical contribution is bridging the study of collaborative governance and policy implementation with customary institutions; its practical contribution is an instrument that can be adopted by the bureaucracy through regional regulations, equal coordination forums, and customary law-based supervision. This article emphasizes that decolonizing food governance is essentially an effort to restore the coherence of state institutions so that policies are rooted in the values, culture, and needs of local communities.

Introduction

Within three decades, the state twice attempted to turn Central Kalimantan's peatlands into a national granary, and twice failed in nearly identical ways. The One Million Hectare Peatland Project (1995–1999) left thousands of kilometers of canals that drained the peat, fueled annual fires, and consumed trillions of rupiah for nothing. Twenty-one years later, the National Strategic Program *Food Estate* (2020–2024) was launched in almost the same area and again faced low productivity, land conflict, and ecological damage. This repetition raises the analytical puzzle at the center of this article: why do large-scale food policies keep losing effectiveness and legitimacy in Central Kalimantan, and how can the values and institutions of local communities be translated into governance mechanisms that restore both?

The question places this article within public administration debates, not merely cultural studies. The failure of the *Food Estate* is, at bottom, a failure of policy implementation: a centrally drafted design that found no footing in ecological and institutional conditions on the ground. It is also a problem of institutional legitimacy: a program unrecognized by its citizens loses voluntary compliance, leaving the state reliant on costly yet fragile instruction and surveillance. At the same time, it is a problem of accountability: large-scale failure is recorded only as a technical error in performance reports, with no party answerable to the communities that bear the consequences. Through these three lenses, the article reads the *Food Estate* as a mirror of a broader problem: the loosening bond between state institutions and the communities they serve.

Empirically, food development in Central Kalimantan is caught in three interrelated problems. First, the drive for national food security through large-scale programs collides with the ecological character of peatlands, which are fragile, flammable, and hydrologically vital for the climate. Second, public acceptance is not uniform ranging from conditional acceptance to outright rejection depending on how well policies align with subsistence needs, community values, and local ecological rhythms. Third, institutional fragmentation worsens the situation: peat conservation, spatial planning, agribusiness, and social welfare are handled in separate silos, producing overlapping authority and accountability gaps. This pattern matches the challenges of food policy integration identified by Candel and Pereira (2017): institutional fragmentation, power imbalances among actors, and weak cross-sectoral coordination.

Beneath these three problems lies a more fundamental one: the position of local knowledge in public decision-making. Many policy documents mention local wisdom, but only as rhetorical decoration rather than substantive guidance. The state trusts hydrological maps and computer models more than communities' inherited experience in reading natural signs. When local knowledge is ignored, the gap between policy and practice widens; recurring land disputes are its tangible manifestation.

The literature offers three ways of understanding this problem, each with limits. The techno-managerial approach that dominated post-2015 peat restoration policy prioritized infrastructure, canal blocking, rewetting, early warning systems (Astuti, 2020; Thorburn & Kull, 2015) but could not answer why people keep

burning despite prohibition. Participatory approaches emphasize village-based collective governance (Abdurrahim et al., 2025), but often stop at invitations to attend without a real shift in authority, so participation becomes a pseudo-procedure (Mistry et al., 2020). Critical political ecology sharply exposes the economic-political interests behind environmental policy (Astuti, 2020; Padfield et al., 2023), but is stronger in critique than in offering a framework bureaucrats can adopt. What remains is one clear gap: no framework yet translates local values and institutions into workable public administration procedures.

This article fills that gap by advancing the six principles of Belom Bahadat the life philosophy of the Dayak Ngaju community as a framework for sustainable food governance. Its nature should be stated at the outset: it is an analytical study that simultaneously builds a framework from field evidence, not a normative critique of the state. Its aim is to restore the relevance and coherence of state institutions, so that policies and programs are again rooted in the values, culture, and needs of local communities. Its novelty is threefold. Theoretically, it bridges collaborative governance and policy implementation scholarship (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012) with customary institutions that have so far been discussed separately. Empirically, it presents field evidence from three regencies during 2022–2025 on the mechanisms of *Food Estate* failure. Practically, it offers procedural instruments not mere appeals that the bureaucracy can adopt through regional regulations, coordination forums, and oversight mechanisms.

The main question is elaborated into three sub-questions. First, what mechanisms caused the *Food Estate* to fail at the implementation level? Second, how can the six principles of Belom Bahadat be operationalized in each function of the policy cycle, from planning to accountability? Third, what institutionalization pathways would allow the bureaucracy to adopt these principles, and what are their risks and limits? The article argues that the failure of the *Food Estate* stems from a broken chain linking knowledge, legitimacy, and accountability in the policy process, and that the six principles provide a way to procedurally reconnect that chain. The next section builds the conceptual framework, followed by methods, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

Literature Review

Food Governance and the Challenges of Knowledge Integration

The conceptual starting point is food governance scholarship. Duncan (2025) explains that food governance spans a complex network of actors, rules, and processes, and that successful food policies are generally those that bridge diverse knowledge systems and engage grassroots communities from the start. Candel and Pereira (2017) sharpen this through the concept of integrated food policy and identify three central challenges: institutional fragmentation, when agriculture, environment, trade, and health are handled separately; power imbalances among global, national, and local actors; and weak cross-sectoral coordination. All three are evident in the *Food Estate*: coordinated by the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, with the Ministry of Defense as the main driver, alongside the

Ministries of Agriculture, Environment and Forestry, and Public Works and Housing, and local governments each carrying different targets and success indicators.

International experience shows a similar pattern. Peatland governance in Finland (Ratamäki et al., 2019), Germany (Ewert & Hartung, 2020), and Malaysia (Padfield et al., 2023) all display recurring clashes between climate-protection claims and agrarian-political interests. Yet such studies rarely place indigenous knowledge systems at the foundation of policy. The problem, then, is integration not only across sectors but across knowledge systems between state science and the experience of people who live on the land itself.

From Participation to Collaborative Governance

How the public is involved in policy has long concerned public administration. Arnstein (1969) reminded us that participation has rungs: from mere informing and token consultation up to partnership and delegated power. Fung (2006) added that the value of participation depends on who is involved, how communication occurs, and how much influence it carries over decisions.

Collaborative governance scholarship goes further by specifying the conditions for genuine cooperation between state and non-state actors. Ansell and Gash (2008) show that collaboration succeeds only with sincere face-to-face dialogue, trust building, commitment to the process, and shared understanding and that prior conflict and initial power imbalances must be consciously managed, not ignored. Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) complement this with a framework emphasizing drivers of collaboration, principled engagement, and shared capacity for joint action. The knowledge co-production literature warns that collaboration without a shift in authority over knowledge produces only rhetoric: Latulippe and Klenk (2020) call for making room and moving over so that indigenous knowledge sovereignty is genuinely recognized in decision-making. Mistry et al. (2020) add an important caution: participatory approaches often treat local knowledge as uniform and sacred, detached from state and market power a simplification that ultimately weakens communities.

Common-Pool Resource Institutions and Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The third pillar is common-pool resource theory. Ostrom (1990) demonstrated that local communities, through institutions of their own making, can manage natural resources sustainably without privatization or nationalization. Her design principles clear boundaries, congruence between rules and local conditions, collective choice, monitoring by resource users, and graduated sanctions show that local rules-in-use are social capital, not obstacles to development. Ostrom (2010) further argued that complex problems are best governed polycentrically, through many mutually adjusting centers of decision-making rather than a single central command. Cleaver (2017) adds nuance through institutional bricolage: field institutions are never purely modern or purely traditional, but creative assemblages of both, a view that frees analysis from a rigid state-versus-custom dichotomy.

At the level of knowledge, Berkes, Colding, and Folke (2000) introduced Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as an adaptive system tested across generations: not a collection of facts about nature, but a resource-management framework that evolves through long experience. Folke, Hahn, Olsson, and Norberg (2005) link such knowledge to adaptive governance, the capacity of social-ecological systems to learn amid uncertainty. Empirical evidence supports this: community authorship of management drives compliance (Aryal et al., 2023); clear community rights matter (McGinley et al., 2022); social capital underpins community forestry in Wonosobo (Herdananta et al., 2024); community spatial models often beat formal maps (Brown, 2022); and Mappurondo customary rules govern use zones and sanctions (Irwansyah et al., 2025). A similar pattern lives among the Dayak Ngaju through the Huma Betang system and customary peatland rules-yet, as the Sámi experienced (Löfmarck & Lidskog, 2019), such knowledge is rarely treated as valid in national policymaking.

Knowledge Justice and Decolonial Perspectives

To explain why local knowledge is sidelined, the article draws in measured fashion on knowledge-justice scholarship. Fricker (2007) names epistemic injustice: not being trusted as a knower merely because of identity. Franco Daza (2022) and Carvalho de Mello (2026) document how states and legal systems dismiss indigenous testimony and ways of knowing. Datta (2015) and Parsons and Fisher (2020) offer a way out through a relational framework seeing land, nature, and people as a web of life-sustaining relationships rather than separate commodities whose practical consequence Sheremata (2018) calls relational accountability. Recent decolonial work (Irene et al., 2025; Sarmiento et al., 2025) affirms that sustainability cannot be achieved without dismantling the hierarchy that places formal knowledge above community knowledge. This article uses the perspective not as ideological indictment but as diagnosis: it explains the root of the problem, while the operational answer is sought in the institutional and collaborative governance theories above.

Belom Bahadat as a Governance Framework

Belom Bahadat is the life philosophy of the Dayak Ngaju. Literally, belom means life and bahadat means being of good custom law-abiding and upholding ethics. Treating it merely as cultural value, however, would repeat the old mistake of turning it into document ornamentation. This article theorizes Belom Bahadat as a governance framework because it meets three institutional elements in Ostrom's sense. First, it has rules-in-use: when, where, and how land may be cleared, planted, and rested. Second, it has a clear institutional structure and actors: the Damang as customary head, the Mantir as its officers, customary deliberation as the decision forum, and Handep (mutual labor) as the cooperation mechanism. Third, it has enforcement through graduated customary sanctions (Singer) recognized by its members. Its six core principles: Pambelom (sustaining life), Imbelom (mutual nurturing), Mambelom (productive, life-giving effort), Hakam (customary rules and law), Kabelom (responsibility for the order of life), and Kabalumam Belom (social justice and shared well-being), map directly onto public administration

functions: planning, coordination, implementation, oversight, accountability, and the aim of justice.

The framework is built with full awareness of its limits, to avoid romanticization. Customary knowledge and institutions are neither homogeneous nor free of problems: communities have internal dynamics, risks of elite capture, generational value shifts, and market pressures that reshape the local political economy (Cleaver, 2017; Mistry et al., 2020). Belom Bahadat is therefore positioned not as a replacement for the state but as an institutional partner in a relationship of mutual checks: the state provides recognition and resources, custom provides legitimacy and knowledge, and each watches the other.

Conceptual Framework and Research Position

The conceptual framework can be stated in one line: local values (the six principles) are translated into institutional mechanisms (forums, rules, procedures, sanctions) at each function of the policy cycle, producing three governance outcomes, implementation suited to field conditions, legitimacy that restores voluntary compliance, and accountability that reaches affected communities. Three literature gaps are thereby addressed. Food governance scholarship has discussed integration across sectors but not across knowledge systems at the level of procedure. Collaborative governance has specified the conditions of collaboration but rarely treats customary institutions as equal parties within it. Decolonial scholarship has diagnosed the problem sharply but offers few instruments the bureaucracy can adopt. By operationalizing the six principles across the whole policy cycle, this article stands at the intersection of the three.

Results and Discussion

History and Implementation of Food Estate in Central Kalimantan (2020–2024)

The Food Estate in Central Kalimantan is not an entirely new project but an attempt to revive an old dream that once failed. In 1995, the New Order government launched the One Million Hectare Peatland Project (PLG) in the same area chiefly Kapuas and Pulang Pisau with a target of 5.1 million additional tons of rice per year. The project ended in failure: thousands of kilometers of canals drained the peat, fueled severe annual fires, and consumed trillions of rupiah with no meaningful yield. Twenty-one years later, in 2020, the government reactivated the same area as the Food Estate, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and FAO warnings of a potential global food crisis. Three regencies became the main sites: Kapuas and Pulang Pisau for rice on peatlands, and Gunung Mas for cassava and maize on upstream drylands.

The program ran from 2020 to 2024. Cultivated land in Kapuas and Pulang Pisau reached about 165,000 hectares, mostly former PLG land with existing canal networks, while in Gunung Mas land clearing centered on Tewai Baru Village and surroundings, previously production forest. The institutional arrangement was cross-ministerial: the Ministry of Defense coordinated cassava in Gunung Mas,

while the Ministries of Agriculture and of Public Works and Housing handled cultivation and infrastructure in Kapuas and Pulang Pisau. Each ministry brought its own targets, budgets, and success indicators, while no single forum brought them together with local governments and customary institutions on an equal footing. The program was also very costly the allocation for Central Kalimantan in 2021–2022 alone reached about IDR 1.5 trillion- yet its effectiveness remained questionable.

Field findings from interviews, observation, and FGDs in the three regencies show serious obstacles. In Kapuas and Pulang Pisau, highly acidic peat soils prevented rice from growing optimally; average productivity was only 2.7–3.2 tons per hectare, far below the national average of 5 tons. Farmers used heavy chemical fertilizer to neutralize acidity, yet many lost money as costs exceeded yields. In Gunung Mas the failure was starker: land cleared for cassava turned out to be nutrient-poor sandy soil. The cassava grew only to the size of carrots and tasted bitter from high cyanide content. A farmer there said, “We told them this land wasn't suitable for cassava, but the project went ahead anyway. The result was total failure.” Equipment assistance was often mismatched: in Pulang Pisau, heavy tractors brought from Java sank in swampy areas, not being designed for soft, wet peat, and were left abandoned in the fields.

Beyond agronomy, the program generated social conflict, land Dayak communities had managed for generations including customary forests and rattan and rubber grounds, was suddenly designated Food Estate territory without clear deliberation. In Tewai Baru, a resident reported three hectares of his land taken into the program without compensation: “*We never agreed, but the heavy equipment had already arrived.*” The Ministry of Defense's coordinating role in Gunung Mas drew particular criticism, farmers and customary leaders found the approach rigid and militaristic, socialization resembled orders, and several informants admitted feeling intimidated by security personnel at every meeting.

The field picture, however, is not uniformly dark, and this variation matters for the analysis. Some transmigrant farmers in Pulang Pisau saw incomes rise thanks to access to fertilizer, seeds, and machinery; some indigenous residents accepted the program conditionally, for instance if commodities and locations were adjusted; and within the customary community itself, older generations holding to established ways differed from younger ones more open to new technology. This variation confirms two things at once: the core problem is not community rejection of development but the mismatch between program design and local conditions; and indigenous communities are not a homogeneous bloc a reminder that keeps the framework built here from sliding into romanticization.

Five Mechanisms of Failure

The *Food Estate's* failure was not caused solely by technical factors such as unsuitable land or limited infrastructure. The root problem is a broken chain linking knowledge, legitimacy, and accountability in the policy process. Five findings appeared consistently across the study areas; for each, the causal mechanism is spelled out.

First, centralized knowledge and one-way socialization. In all regencies, program socialization was instructional: communities were merely informed that their land was included in a centrally determined program, with no room for input or objection. A farmer in Kapuas explained, *"We were simply gathered and told our land was in the program. There was no question and answer. We didn't dare ask, for fear of being seen as defiant."* The Damang's involvement was mere formality: *"We were invited, fed, then informed. That was it. There was never any discussion of whether the land was suitable for rice fields"* (K. Tarung, personal communication, March 5, 2024). The mechanism is clear: because information flowed one way, design errors in siting, commodities, technology were never corrected by field knowledge, and residents who felt no ownership of the program had no reason to look after it.

Second, the burning ban without alternatives. The zero-burning policy became the most visible source of conflict. Farmers in all three regencies reported that highly acidic peat cannot be cultivated productively without prior light burning, whose ash acts as a natural acid neutralizer and fertilizer. *"We know this land is only fertile if lightly burned before planting, but now it's banned. As a result the land is unproductive, and we get the blame"* (M. Maryono, personal communication, Agustus 2023; Peladang, Mantangai Hulu, personal communication, June 7, 2024) Following the ban, some farmers burned secretly precisely without the customary supervision that once kept fire from spreading while others abandoned their land; several farmers in Gunung Mas had not farmed for two to three years. The loss of controlled burning also wiped out local rice varieties such as *parei garagai* and *kawong*, suited only to traditional cultivation. The mechanism here is characteristic: a ban meant to prevent fires shifted the practice from customarily regulated to clandestine, enlarging the very risk it sought to prevent.

Third, mismatched technology and equipment. Government assistance often did not suit peatland conditions. In Pulang Pisau, centrally supplied heavy tractors sank in swamps; farmers needed only simple hand tractors, yet what arrived was machinery that could not be operated. In Kapuas, high-yield seed assistance proved intolerant of acidic peat seedlings wilted and died before harvest while local seeds proven resistant to peat conditions were no longer available because traditional farming had been banned. The failure mechanism is layered: centrally designed procurement ignored field specifications, while another policy (the burning ban) severed the local knowledge and seed supply chain that had served as a buffer.

Fourth, the absence of community involvement in planning. Nearly all informants stated they were never involved at the planning stage; planning was done entirely by the central bureaucracy in Jakarta without consultation with indigenous communities. Farmers in Kapuas and village officials in Gunung Mas protested, *"We were never consulted from the start. They came with a map and said this is land for the food zone. Yet the land has been managed for generations and is our customary forest"* (Alung, personal communication, July 29, 2025; S. Eldawatie, personal communication, Mei 2024). In Pulang Pisau, farmers complained they were not told how the program would affect their land access: *"We didn't know that land we had farmed for decades would be taken over. There was no honest communication"* (FGD Petani Pulang Pisau (Pandih Batu, Belanti Siam, Pantik), personal communication, March 22,

2023). On Arnstein's (1969) ladder, this practice sits on the bottom rung, mere informing and theory predicts the consequence without a sense of authorship over management (Aryal et al., 2023), voluntary compliance collapses and is replaced by quiet resistance.

Fifth, the neglect of local knowledge of natural signs and ecological rhythms. The Dayak Ngaju inherit the ability to read natural signs to determine planting times, suitable crops, and when land must rest knowledge the program wholly ignored. Informants explained that planting seasons were once set by the appearance of particular stars or the behavior of birds: *"Now we are told to plant in a certain month without regard for natural signs. The results often fail"* ((D. Ratna, personal communication, June 9, 2024). In Kapuas, knowledge of soil types read from the plants growing on them *galam signaling infertile soil, bajakah fertile soil was never considered in site selection* (K. Tarung, personal communication, March 5, 2024). As a result, much genuinely unproductive land was forced into cultivation. What was lost was not cultural input but a functioning ecological information system precisely what Berkes et al. (2000) describe as traditional ecological knowledge operating as adaptive management.

Discussion: Translating the Six Principles of Belom Bahadat into Governance Functions

The five mechanisms above converge on a single knot: the state lost its connection to the knowledge, institutions, and values of the communities where the program landed. Because the root problem is institutional, the answer must be institutional too not an appeal for the state to be more culturally sensitive. This section translates the six principles into working mechanisms at each function of the policy cycle. For each principle, its meaning, the field problem it answers, the proposed institutional mechanism, and concrete policy instruments are set out in turn. Table 1 summarizes the operationalization; Figure 1 presents the framework as a cycle.

Pambelom: planning aligned with carrying capacity

Pambelom means sustaining the continuity of life; in the policy cycle it occupies the planning function. Findings show Food Estate planning was drafted entirely in Jakarta, with harvest targets that ignored the peat's carrying capacity, so that technologies such as large-scale canalization dried the peat and triggered fires. Pambelom demands that planning begin from an understanding of nature's rhythms: not a blueprint from the capital but a participatory map drawn up with the Damang and farmers, combining government hydrological maps with local indicators of soil fertility such as bajakah and galam. The institutional mechanism is joint mapping as a precondition for site designation, with customary institutions holding the right to object to sites judged unfit. The instruments already exist within the system: integrating joint-mapping results into regional spatial plans and program planning documents, and seating the Damang as a standing participant in development planning deliberations from village to regency level. This accords with Datta's (2015) relational framework recognizing land as a living entity and, in administrative terms, it improves the information on which decisions rest.

Imbelom: coordination among mutually nurturing actors

Imbelom means mutual nurturing, and it grounds the coordination function. In the field, coordination among ministries Agriculture, Public Works, Environment and Forestry, Defense ran unevenly with strong sectoral egos: equipment assistance was out of sync with land readiness, and socialization took the form of orders. Imbelom takes its model from the Dayak Handep tradition of mutual labor, in which parties strengthen rather than compete with one another. Translated into policy, it requires an equal coordination forum in which the voices of the Damang, extension workers, farmers, and bureaucrats carry the same weight in technical decisions. Its conditions of success are those of Ansell and Gash (2008) repeated face-to-face dialogue, early trust building, conscious management of power imbalances embracing customary leaders as equal partners rather than formalities, as co-production demands (Latulippe & Klenk, 2020). The institutional instrument can be a regional food program coordination forum established by regent or governor regulation, with standing customary membership and authority to agree on schedules, sites, and assistance specifications before budgets are executed so that synchronization no longer depends on each sector's goodwill.

Mambelom: implementation that gives life

Mambelom means productive, life-giving effort, and it guides implementation. The findings show that a zero-burning policy imposed without technological alternatives stripped farmers of their adaptive capacity and pushed burning from customary regulation into secrecy. Mambelom offers an operational middle path: the state recognizes and legalizes controlled burning with community-managed firebreaks, alongside crop rotation historically proven to reduce peat acidity without triggering large fires. The mechanism is a jointly drafted field protocol: humidity thresholds, wind direction, maximum extent, notification to the Mantir, and mutual supervision during burning. The Dayak community's position thereby shifts from lawbreakers to lead ecological agents consistent with Berkes et al. (2000) on traditional ecological knowledge as an adaptive system on par with modern science in complex, uncertain ecosystems. Mambelom also answers what techno-managerial approaches cannot: why farmers keep burning despite the ban because for them it is the only agronomically and economically sensible method. The legal instrument exists: a regional regulation on controlled land clearing based on local wisdom, sheltered by the recognition of local wisdom in environmental protection legislation.

Hakam: customary-law-based oversight

Hakam refers to customary rules and law, and it anchors monitoring and evaluation. Modern bureaucratic oversight relies on inspectorates and formal law enforcement, which are often slow and carry little authority locally. Interviews show that customary sanctions such as Singer (customary fines or ostracism) deter more strongly at the grassroots than the threat of prison; a Damang explained that people fear being ostracized by their community more than incarceration. Hakam shifts oversight toward a participatory, customary-law-based model involving the

Mantir and Damang in supervising food projects – both residents' compliance with environmental protocols and implementers' compliance with agreements made with the community. The arrangement is productive legal pluralism: customary law works alongside state law with clear domains, in line with Ostrom's (1990) user monitoring and graduated sanctions and with polycentric (Ostrom, 2010). Layered oversight also narrows the space for irregularities, because the watching eyes belong to a community present every day.

Kabelom: moral and ecological accountability

Kabelom means responsibility for maintaining the order of life, and it strengthens accountability. At present, public accountability is measured almost entirely through administrative performance reports; a failure the size of the Gunung Mas cassava project is recorded merely as a technical error, despite its enormous impact on ecosystems and livelihoods. A farmer in Gunung Mas lamented, *"Our land is damaged, but no one takes responsibility. Who will apologize?"* (R. Rangkap, personal communication, Agustus 2023). Kabelom demands dual accountability: not only upward to superiors and auditors, but downward and outward to nature, to local communities, and, in Dayak cosmology, to the Creator. Sheremata (2018) calls this relational accountability, beyond formal procedure. Its institutional mechanisms can be very concrete, annual public accountability forums at the sub-district level where implementers present achievements and failures before residents and customary institutions; social-ecological audits accompanying financial audits; and an obligation of restoration not merely reporting or damage caused by the program. Every project failure must then be answered for morally and ecologically, not only in writing.

Kabalumam Belom: social justice and shared well-being

Kabalumam Belom means social justice and shared prosperity, and it is the aim that governs the entire administrative process. Findings show residents losing access to communally managed land without adequate compensation, and families who once ate their own rice now buying it dearly: *"We used to eat our own rice. Now we must buy expensive rice,"* said a farmer in Pulang Pisau. The principle requires transparent benefit-sharing, recognition of customary rights, and assurance that national food programs do not create new local poverty. Rawls (2017) holds that inequality is justified only if it most benefits the least advantaged; for the Food Estate, that standard means success cannot be measured by planted area or harvest tonnage alone, but by the fate of the customary households whose land is used. Instruments include social impact assessment before site designation, compensation and benefit-sharing schemes agreed through customary deliberation, and local well-being indicators household food security, land access, the integrity of customary forests attached to program evaluation.

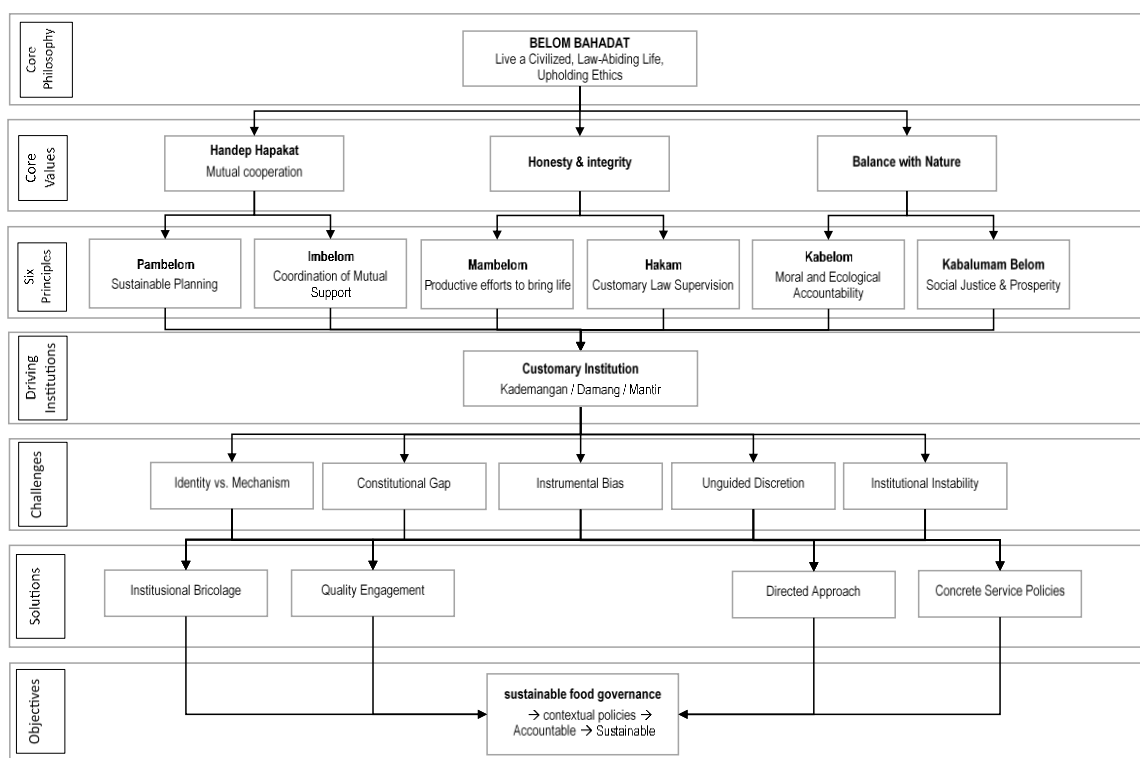
Table 1. Operationalizing the Six Principles of Belom Bahadat in the Policy Cycle

Principle (meaning)	Policy function	Field problem addressed	Institutional mechanism	Example policy instruments
Pambelom (sustaining life)	Planning	Sites and targets set centrally, ignoring peat carrying capacity	Participatory mapping with Damang and farmers; customary right to object to unfit sites	Joint maps integrated into spatial plans; Damang as standing participant in planning deliberations
Imbelom (mutual nurturing)	Coordination	Sectoral egos; assistance out of sync with land readiness	Equal coordination forum of bureaucrats, extension workers, farmers, and customary members (modeled on Handep)	Regional-head regulation establishing a food program forum with authority over schedules, sites, and specifications
Mambelom (life-giving productive effort)	Implementation	Burning ban without alternatives; technology unsuited to the field	Jointly drafted controlled-burning protocol (humidity, wind, extent, firebreaks, mutual supervision)	Regional regulation on controlled land clearing based on local wisdom; procurement matched to field specifications
Hakam (customary rules and law)	Oversight and evaluation	Formal oversight slow and lacking local authority	Layered oversight by Mantir and Damang over residents and implementers; graduated customary sanctions (Singer)	Joint oversight agreement between local government and customary institutions; recognition of customary sanctions
Kabelom (responsibility for the order of life)	Accountability	Large failures recorded only as technical errors in reports	Dual accountability, upward and downward; obligation to restore damage	Annual public accountability forums; social-ecological audits alongside financial audits
Kabalumam Belom (social justice and shared well- being)	Aim and justice	Loss of communal land access without compensation; new local poverty	Social impact assessment before siting; benefit- sharing agreed in customary deliberation	Local well-being indicators (household food security, land access, customary forest integrity) in evaluation

Source: compiled by the authors from field findings (2022–2025)

Figure 1 presents the procedural decolonial framework produced by this study: the six principles arranged as a continuous cycle, each occupying its relevant policy function from planning to social justice. More than a conceptual mapping, it marks a shift from a centralized techno-managerial approach toward governance grounded in local knowledge, customary law, and ecological accountability at every stage.

Figure 1. A Procedural Decolonial Framework: Operationalizing the Six Principles of Belom Bahadat in the Sustainable Food Governance Policy Cycle



Source: by author

Institutionalization Pathways, Political Economy, and Feasibility

A framework is useful only if it can be adopted, so this section sets out its institutionalization pathways and realistic obstacles. The first pathway is regulation: recognition of customary law communities already has footing in village legislation and ministerial guidelines, while protection of local wisdom is recognized in environmental law. Provincial and regency governments can follow through with two key legal products: a regional regulation recognizing the Dayak Ngaju customary community, its territory, and its institutions; and a regional regulation on controlled land clearing based on local wisdom containing the *Mambelom* protocol. The second pathway is structure and procedure: seating the Damang as a standing participant in development planning deliberations, establishing the equal coordination forum (*Imbelom*), and institutionalizing the annual public accountability forum (*Kabelom*). The third is budget and capacity: joint mapping, strengthening the Damang and Mantir institutions, and social-ecological audits require regional budget and village fund support, along with training so that

bureaucrats can work in an equal forum a change of working culture that does not happen by itself.

Analytical honesty requires acknowledging that the greatest obstacles are political-economic, not technical. Food governance conflicts in Central Kalimantan are entangled with corporate interests in land, land commodification, local patronage networks, and electoral calculation; sectoral bureaucracies also have stakes in retaining control over programs and budgets. The framework will collide with those interests: joint mapping can obstruct land releases that profit a few, and equal forums reduce sectoral discretion. Institutionalization is therefore realistically gradual beginning with pilot sites where customary institutions remain strong and with the political backing of regional heads rather than a simultaneous overhaul. Risks from the community side must also be anticipated: recognizing customary institutions opens opportunities for elite capture and for co-optation of the Damang by outside interests. The framework answers not by denying these risks but through the mutual-checks design already described: *Hakam* watches both state and residents, *Kabelom* demands account from every party including customary institutions, and *Kabalumam Belom* provides a standard of justice ordinary residents can use to hold any elite state or customary to account.

Decolonization as Restoring the Coherence of State Institutions

With the above in place, the meaning of decolonization in this article becomes clear. Sarmento, Baptista, and Santos (2025) stress that sustainability cannot be achieved without dismantling the hierarchy that places formal knowledge above community knowledge, and Irene et al.(2025) show how Global South states remain trapped in development models transferred from the North without regard for local social-ecological contexts. The *Food Estate* is a plain example of that hierarchy: hydrological models were deemed more valid than the inherited experience of Dayak farmers. Yet the decolonization offered here is not a rejection of the state or of science; it is the restoration of state institutional coherence recovering the state's ability to make policy rooted in the values, culture, and needs of the communities it serves. A state that ignores its citizens' knowledge is not only unjust; it is also ineffective, as two large failures on the same land attest. Unlike critical political ecology, which stops at exposure, the six-principle framework offers procedure: planning grounded in carrying capacity, coordination among equals, adaptive implementation, authoritative oversight, accountability that reaches citizens, and justice as the final measure. Integrating Belom Bahadat into the policy cycle is therefore not a romanticization of local wisdom but a procedural necessity for food governance that is sustainable, just, and genuinely on the people's side.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Research Agenda

The six principles show that Belom Bahadat is not an abstract value system but a rational, structured, and adaptive governance instrument for the peatland context. Its neglect damages cultural identity and squanders Central Kalimantan's greatest social capital. The policy implication is to revise the *Food Estate* approach by integrating the six principles at every stage of the policy cycle through the pathways described above.

Several limitations must be acknowledged openly. First, the geographic scope covers three regencies in Central Kalimantan, so the results cannot simply be generalized to regions with different ecological and cultural conditions; the framework travels as a logic local values translated into policy functions but its content must be drawn from each region's own values. Second, as qualitative research, the study does not numerically measure the effect of integrating Belom Bahadat on productivity or fire risk. Third, although fieldwork was long (2022–2025) and ran alongside the program (2020–2024), fast-changing policy dynamics are hard to capture fully without a long-term longitudinal design. Fourth, the researchers' closeness to the community carries a risk of partiality, managed through negative case analysis and member checking but never fully removable. Future research should use mixed methods or longitudinal designs, extend to neighboring provinces such as West and South Kalimantan, pilot the framework at demonstration sites with systematic evaluation, and involve customary leaders as research partners so that understandings of Belom Bahadat grow more balanced and locally grounded.

Conclusion

This study set out from one puzzle: why state food policy keeps losing effectiveness and legitimacy in Central Kalimantan, and how local values and institutions can be translated into governance mechanisms that restore both. Through a qualitative case study in Kapuas, Pulang Pisau, and Gunung Mas, it found that the Food Estate's failure was driven not merely by technical factors but by five mutually reinforcing mechanisms: centralized knowledge and one-way socialization, a burning ban without alternatives, technological assistance unsuited to field conditions, the absence of community involvement in planning, and the neglect of ecological knowledge and customary institutions. All five converge on a broken chain linking knowledge, legitimacy, and accountability with farmers impoverished, land damaged, and social conflict rising.

In answer, the study formulates the six principles of Belom Bahadat as a governance framework: Pambelom (planning aligned with carrying capacity), Imbelom (equal, mutually nurturing coordination), Mambelom (adaptive, life-giving implementation), Hakam (customary-law-based oversight), Kabelom (moral and ecological accountability), and Kabalumam Belom (social justice and shared well-being). Its contributions are threefold. Theoretically, it extends collaborative governance and policy implementation scholarship by showing that customary institutions can be equal parties not objects of participation in every function of the policy cycle, and it gives procedural content to decolonial calls that have so far stopped at critique. Methodologically, it demonstrates how a decolonial commitment is honored in research practice: customary permission, validation of meanings with customary authorities, and negative case analysis to preserve balance. Practically, it provides instruments the bureaucracy can adopt: joint mapping, equal coordination forums, controlled land-clearing protocols, customary oversight, public accountability forums, and local well-being indicators.

Two main recommendations follow. First, government should shift community involvement from mere informing toward delegated power, making the Damang a structural partner in planning and decision-making. Second, the total burning ban should be revised through regional regulation recognizing controlled burning based on local wisdom under a clear protocol. Both must proceed with full awareness of political-economic obstacles and elite-capture risks, so institutionalization is best staged through openly evaluated pilot sites. Ultimately, mainstreaming Belom Bahadat into food governance does not replace the state with custom; it restores the coherence of the state itself: a state whose policies are rooted in the values, culture, and needs of its communities is not only more just it is, as this study shows, more effective.

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